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To Obtain Our Heart's Desire: the Seduction of the Imagination through the Experience of Story in The Lord of the Rings

by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my daughter, Gabrielle, who has taught me about the motions of the heart and the necessity of its desire being met.

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This thesis could not have been written without the love and support of my husband Dean, who has put up with a harried and at times unendurable spouse these past few years. My gratitude goes to his "teammates" who also kept me going: my "sisters," Katherine and Margaret, my father, and my mother--for looking after our daughter, speaking words of encouragement, and providing financial and moral support throughout this process.

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CHAPTER I

THE WORLDS THAT WE IMAGINE: POSITIVISM, FANTASY LITERATURE AND THE IMAGINATION

It is a truism of this century that the authority of the religious traditions of western civilization have been eclipsed by the new authority, science, with its mean offspring--positivism.[1] The effect of positivism, with its emphasis on objective facts and empirical evidence, has been to erode the currency of all that is non-empirical and non-verifiable, of much that eludes these categories and yet is apprehended through the imagination. Coevally, those engaged in the practical application of the scientific method have perceived through their experiments in quantum mechanics and micro-biology that once we attempt to describe the constitution of sub-atomic particles, the relevance of simple empirical observation diminishes, for these particles have no substance as we conceive it in time-space. The very nomenclature of quantum mechanics can be recognized as metaphor--as an attempt to bridge the gap between the phenomena (the things that appear in light), the presumed physical "stuff" represented in these appearances, and the essential processes which constitute these appearances but which are not identical with them, for the perceiving mind. In the case of sub-atomic particles, there are no appearances at all; only the imaginative constructs of the scientist who is attempting to penetrate the essential component of matter. Ironically, the main discovery has been that the particle, like an onion, has no centre, no essence in the material

sense. In order to think about these things at all, the scientist must make conscious use of the imagination. The implication of this is that if, at the most profound level of modern physics' experimentation, comprehension can be had only through the deliberate employment of the imagination, then this must apply to all things, to the comprehension of those things that "appear in light" and those that do not.

The recognition by critical scientists of the operation of the imagination in their field may eventually help to restore the conscious appreciation and employment of it by society at large. But in the meantime a reductive positivism holds the field and we must live with the implications of this.

Positivism gained force through the erosion of the western religious traditions, and the languages and texts in which these were expressed. When the western world gradually discarded the Judeo-Christian tradition in favour of the proclamations of the sciences and the drive to technological mastery, it did so in the first instance because the language of the religious traditions accorded less and less with the experience of society and its individuals of the world, an experience influenced if not controlled by the presuppositions of each era. When the biblical story of creation was deemed unsatisfactory in light of Darwin's theory of evolution, the bible became increasingly unacceptable as a whole. Those parts of the biblical story that were interpreted as literal statements about the material world were abandoned as deficient, and those parts pertaining to the non-empirical were ignored, being irrelevant to the agenda of positivism. When the traditional account of the world and its creatures was replaced by positivism, it was a partial replacement. In its search for a clear and absolute

criteria for truth, positivism does not concern itself with the cogency and integrity the old stories granted to society. Instead it merely provides its own fragmented description of the world without producing and articulating the necessary implications of it for the religious, metaphysical and social constituents of human life. So the modern person is faced with two unacceptable situations. On the one hand, she cannot subscribe uncritically to the Judeo-Christian story, for beyond the positivistic criticism of the biblical tradition lies the problem that the peculiar self-consciousness of the modern mind reveals about the biblical vision and all visions: that they are horizons a particular society subscribes to, but that they are not absolute.[2]

On the other hand, because the integrity and continued existence of a society is a function of the extent to which its myths accord with the experience of the society, positivism is gravely deficient: it does not tell the whole story.[3] By rejecting or ignoring the experience and recognition of the non-verifiable in human existence, positivism denies the insights of the humanity that spawned it. The stuff that constitutes what we call reality is apprehended by and through the imagination. The positivistic view, denying the imagination while using a truncated form of it, does not even hope to provide a cogent account of what we term reality at all. Yet if the vitality of story in modern life is to be restored, it will require thought, labour, and above all a new and self-conscious hermeneutic, an enterprise undertaken only by the few.

The traditional stories that shaped our perceptions of world and provided the societal bond of shared meaning are no longer directly

accessible to the critical self-conscious person, while the prevailing myth of positivism is so deficient and removed from "reality" that it is not fit to live with. A tension arises between the need to experience accord between oneself, society, the universe, and "that from which words turn back,"[4] a need satisfied through communally held myth, and the absence in the positivistic view of a meaningful and coherent account of world for human beings to live by. This tension is made more extreme by the tendency of the modern mind to dichotomize that which we call reality into "subject" and "object." In dividing the world into two distinct components, the perceiving subject completely separated from the object "out there," the prevailing modern view fosters at the social level the espousal of individualism, privatization, and the mastery of subject over object as contemporary virtues. We not only lack a shared and coherent mythos; we actively seek its opposite with our proclivity for fragmentation and pluralism in all aspects of our lives. The accord that might be called our heart's desire, an accord nourished by an account of world that marries the society and each member of it to the world they are part of, further eludes us because of our peculiar self-consciousness. Once it has been admitted that our attempts at articulating the nature of "reality" are always determined by the particular assumptions and perspectives of our cultural and historical situation, then all attempts become suspect. There can be no certainty about our universe or our place in it any longer, only the recognition that all our myths, our stories, including those emerging from the scientific community, are at best metaphors that point to the unspeakable wholeness. And at worst they are nothing.

The recognition that all our religious traditions are ultimately metaphors that hope to approximate truth is alarming to those who crave assurance. The response of some to this disquieting perception is to reject it utterly and to retreat to the authoritarian assurances of fundamentalism or a wooden orthodoxy. The authoritarians insist on their view being exclusively true, ignoring what the historical sense teaches us, that our horizons are not statements about the truth, but rather they "express the values that our tortured instincts will to create."[5] Even if their insistence that it is still possible to live with the horizon of the Judeo-Christian tradition is acceptable, their rejection of the historical-critical approach to that tradition leaves it debased and impotent.

Others have found solace in existential postures, affirming life as it presents itself in an effort to endure the possibility of a universe that has no meaning, or else succumbing to the demonic face of existentialism, nihilism. The latter are the "last men" and "nihilists" foreseen by Nietzsche, who either "go on willing for the sake of willing . . . mastery for its own sake," or else who "simply use the fruits of technique for the bored pursuit of their trivial vision of happiness."[6] The existentialists are aware that our horizons are of our own creation, but they are either indifferent to this awareness, or it leads them to a despairing relativism that often denies that any of our horizons might approach truth, in an effort to prevent themselves from hearing the familiar hollow sound made by the idol one has tapped.[7]

For those who can neither deny the historical, perspectival nature of our existence nor reject the possibility that the metaphors

that constitute our traditions may approach truth, an alternative response is to reconsider the operation of the imagination. In this view, a uniquely modern one, the imagination is not some special and distinct activity of the mind. Rather, to borrow Coleridge's description, it is "the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and . . . a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM."[8] The shape and content of what we call "reality" is determined by the form of the imagination applied to the unrepresented "stuff" that the imagination renders into appearances or phenomena. The form taken by the imagination is influenced by social, economic, political and personal factors. Sometimes the form taken is daemonic and antithetical to life, such as that which resulted in the Third Reich. At other times, the form of the imagination has been integral and life affirming, leading forth a shared tradition that provides accord for the individual, the community, and their cosmos, as in the biblical experience.

In an era of individualism, privatization and pluralism, there is little potential for a shared, life-affirming imagination to emerge. In the ancient and medieval worlds, a shared imagination and corresponding myth came forth from the protracted process of a community held memory and oral tradition. Our diverse and isolated modes of living tend to prohibit this development for our time, and the continuing influence of positivism erodes the potency of those traditions that still survive by denying the foundations of those traditions, the operation of the imagination. Despite this, the desire for an integral and cohesive vision of the cosmos and the place of human beings in it is still urgent. In fact, for the modern more urgent. We need to experience accord "within" and "without," between the imagination that informs our

perceptions and the "reality" that we perceive. Our desire for integrity must be met, despite the increasing difficulty of achieving this in our daily lives, despite the critical awareness that meaning does not exist independently of our imagination.

Although it is not possible for the modern critical thinker to retreat to the eroded traditions of the past, the ways in which these traditions satisfied the human need for order and integrity is instructive. The biblical imagination in particular is a potent example of one that effects accord both "within" and "without." According to their ancient sensibility, the heart was the location of thought, will, memory, and above all the place where God addresses his creatures, "where religious experience has its root, which determines conduct."[9] God reveals his purposes for his creatures through the heart, granting them comprehension of their world and their place in it. The heart, as it operated for the ancients, emerges for us as a metaphor for what we call the imagination. Through the motions of the biblical heart evolved a perception of world that permitted no divorce between the historical and the transcendent, between the body and spirit, nor between the individual and the group. At the heart of this perception is God's ongoing disclosure of his purposes, a disclosure which declares human beings at home in the world.[10] The biblical imagination, expressed and sustained through narrative, tells the whole story of the community's existence, their cosmos and their place in it. The holism and richness of this imagination is such that the expectations of the heart, of the biblical imagination, are met in the biblical experience. This reciprocity is necessary and inevitable for a people who imagine their existence to be one of covenantal relationship with the transcendent living God,

whose ongoing disclosure of himself in the realm of the mundane is uttered in their testimony. In this dialogue, the heart's desire for wholeness and integrity is met.

In an implicit response to the difficult situation the modern imagination faces, there has emerged a kind of literature dubbed "mythopoeic." It is mythopoeic in that it involves the conscious intention of an artist to employ the language and structure of traditionally generated myths in a contemporary work. Northrop Frye has called literature "the direct descendent of mythology,"[11] recreating the mode of thinking and imagining that first manifests itself in the metaphorical use of language and poetry. Coleridge offers a potent account of the operation of the imagination in creative endeavor. He regards the imagination as either primary or secondary. The primary imagination is the organ of all our perception, one that operates whether we are conscious of it or not. The secondary imagination is "identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation."[12] Unlike the primary imagination, the secondary operates as a result of the conscious will. The modes in which the secondary imagination operates include the arts, and of course literature. By insisting on the identical agency of the primary and secondary imagination, Coleridge is saying that the creative results issuing from the operation of the secondary imagination are as vital and significant in their import as those things we perceive through the primary imagination. The primary and secondary imaginations both shape the phenomena from the "unrepresented,"[13] and are then, in turn, re-engaged by the phenomena in a special unending dialogical process. Therefore our creations in the arts are powerful informants of

our lives, as are our other creations, historical, social, political.

Granting that the secondary imagination operates in such a manner that our literary creations may be found to throw light upon the rest of the world we perceive, then mythopoeic literature, in deliberately and self-consciously employing the style, language, and structure of the ancient integral worldviews, may seek to satisfy our desire for an existence that permits accord between the expectations of the heart and the experience of the world. And literature, working from imagination to imagination, mind to mind, provides a theatre where the sharing of this accord becomes possible. With each reader who has experienced a piece of literature that satisfies our desire for an integral vision, within the confines of the story, a community of shared story is formed, and an increasingly lost experience is recovered. The enjoyment of mythopoeic literature may not be a panacea for the tensions that prohibit us from sharing a vital and integral worldview, but such literature can help to create a situation where the possibility of shared meaning is remembered, and the hope that our metaphors can approach truth may be kept alive.

The Lord of the Rings trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien is such a work.[14] At the most superficial narrative level, the trilogy's structure recalls many of the motifs of traditionally generated myth, such as the quest-hero, descent into the labyrinth, trial by ordeal, and the homecoming.[15] Within this larger narrative framework, the inhabitants of the world in which the narrative takes place have been given their own myths by the artist. In these myths, the civilizational memory of this region, Middle-earth, is preserved, and the meaning of current events for the inhabitants is derived from the lessons implicit in

their ancient traditions. The style and content of these stories are diverse and tend to reflect the character and concerns of the various Middle-earthian races who tell them, although there is a great amount of overlapping. In providing such a potent detail for his fictional world, Tolkien has rendered it rich, substantial, and inviting, a vital story-shaped world that compels the reader to believe in it.

The true significance of this feature of Middle-earthian existence emerges when we consider Tolkien's expectations for his trilogy, and the method by which he tried to achieve them. Tolkien made the case in one of his critical essays[16] for fantasy literature as a legitimate artistic mode for the disclosure of truth. He argues there that the best fantasy literature operates in a manner similar to fairy tales and myths: that it offers comprehension and insight to the reader when taken unanalyzed, as a whole, through its cumulative effects. The mark of the true fairy story is the inclusion of the sudden joyous turn of events, the happy ending. At the moment of such a turn it is possible for the reader or auditor to glimpse truth, to glimpse that which denies death and defeat.

The glimpse of truth Tolkien wants to offer his reader is resonant of the kind of joy offered through the gospel story. Yet he attempts to stir this experience in his reader in a thoroughly pagan setting. The crucial element in rendering this experience successfully is that the fictional world possess "the inner consistency of reality." That is, the imaginary world must command the reader's fictional belief by being true to its own inner laws. The more dense and complex the world imagined in this way, the more compelling it will be for the reader.

The imaginary construction of Middle-earth involves the creation of a body of myths reflecting the civilizational memory of the inhabitants, so that the reader who fully enters the story is at the same time being persuaded to appropriate their myths. Tolkien's aim in labouring to create such a believable secondary world is to provide the necessary context for the effect of his happy turns in the story. Yet in the process of leading forth this world for the reader,[17] he allows the reader to experience imaginatively a story-shaped world.

In attempting to make an imaginary world with the requisite inner consistency of reality for the modern reader, Tolkien overcomes two latent difficulties. One is the resistance to fantasy literature that the positivistic prejudices we assume the general reader to possess fosters. The second problem is that of commanding the reader's secondary belief, that is, the belief appropriate to the creations of the secondary imagination. Tolkien overcomes these problems by conceptualizing and detailing his imaginary world as fully as possible at the outset, while presenting the world in a manner whereby the reader can lay claim to it.

In the trilogy these problems are overcome by Tolkien employing an ironic strategy analogous to that of the ancient Greek writers.[18] He first seduces the reader into entertaining the imaginative and the fantastic in the preliminary sections, eliciting provisional commitment to his fictional world. He then applies a strategy to the story that literally produces--leads forth--the dense and complex world of Middle-earth. The strategy Tolkien employs to accomplish this operates at the level of what I designate here as the "sub-text," the sequence by which Middle-earth is presented to the reader, and the specific content of

that sequence. Middle-earth is made to unfold before the reader in such a way that the reader is led from the contemplation of one's own to the contemplation of the good, as these things are held in Middle-earth. This slow, careful and deliberate construction of world in the trilogy is accomplished as much through the stories told by the Middle-earthians as it is through the narrative events that form the plot. The cumulative understanding of world in Middle-earth attained by the reader through the deliberately organized interplay between the stories of the Middle-earthians and narrative events offers the reader an experience of a coherent and integral story-shaped world, an experience that may in some brief measure satisfies the heart's desire for accord between the world we imagine and our living experience of it. Once we have left the trilogy, the memory of that experience may be sustaining at those times when the clutter and deficiency of what is given in the modern leaves us empty.

The use of irony and the importance of Tolkien's strategy for the successful evocation of Middle-earth has been little considered by his critics. However a small critical literature has relevance to these aspects of the trilogy, and these will be discussed in Chapter Two, followed by a discussion of Tolkien's agenda for fantasy literature as developed in "On Fairy Stories." Chapter Three will describe the strategy of the classical authors, and the ways in which Tolkien's strategy is analogous to this, followed by an explication of it in the Foreword and Prologue of the trilogy. Chapter Four will focus on the strategy of the sub-text, the interplay between narrative event and the presentation of myth, with some commentary on the character of the Middle-earthian imagination.

Throughout his life, Tolkien remained a passionate and devoted Catholic. He was also one of the finest linguists of his day in the field of Old and Middle English, and had more than a passing acquaintance with the classics. It is significant that in The Lord of the Rings the same great streams that culminated in Christianity, the Hebraic and the Hellenistic, meet again as Tolkien attempts to orchestrate a sudden joyous turn for the reader. Tolkien sets forth a world where the imagination of the inhabitants perceives the totality of their cosmos and their place in it. It is an imagination that takes account of pain, suffering and defeat, while preserving the memory of that which gives cause for hope. As in the biblical tradition, the Middle-earthian imagination tells the whole story, so that the aspirations and expectations of the heart correspond to the experience of that world. Tolkien leads the reader to this compelling world by a strategy informed by the wisdom of the Greek thinkers, a wisdom that has continued to influence western thought. The extent to which Tolkien succeeds in granting his reader a significant experience of a story-shaped world is due to his employing these two seminal modes of imagination for western civilization. Tolkien's trilogy satisfies a need peculiar to western society because its structure echoes that of the Greek and biblical imaginations that shaped us in the beginning.

CHAPTER II

TOLKIEN AND THE CRITICS: THE ARTIST'S INTENTIONS FOR THE LORD OF THE RINGS

The early reviews of The Lord of the Rings oscillated between the exuberant eulogies of C. S. Lewis and W. H. Auden, and the scathing rebuttal of Edmund Wilson. "Here are beauties which pierce like swords or burn like cold iron; here is a book that will break your heart . . . good beyond hope," said Lewis in his review in Time and Tide.[1] It was this sort of statement that led Wilson to launch his attack on Tolkien's reviewers in "Oo Those Awful Orcs."[2] Wilson's review sparked a debate that was to last over a decade on whether the trilogy qualified as "literature." In his review, Wilson does not attack Tolkien, who he claims never put forth any pretensions concerning the trilogy, but rather those reviewers who compared the trilogy to Malory, Spenser, and Ariosto. In Wilson's opinion, the trilogy is nothing more than an overgrown fairy-tale (read "not literature") and a philological curiosity.[3] He complains that its terrors do not evoke "one trace of concrete reality," while at the same time it suffers from an "impotence of imagination."[4] Clearly disliking fantasy literature, Wilson concludes by saying that people who take the trilogy seriously suffer from a "life-long appetite for juvenile trash."[5]

Over a decade later, Burton Raffel continues to question whether the trilogy should be regarded seriously as "literature." He rejects the heart of Wilson's criticism, finding the trilogy eminently worth taking seriously, but he argues that it is not "literature" per se.

Raffel never defines literature in his essay, but in the course of comparing Tolkien's prose with that of D. H. Lawrence, Scott Fitzgerald, and Henry Miller, it is apparent that by "literature" he means modern twentieth century novels. Such a comparison is inappropriate since the trilogy does not belong to these genres nor does it aspire to, and literature surely encompasses more than these forms. Raffel admits this, concluding his essay by saying that "in broader terms than I have here employed, accordingly, there is small doubt that the trilogy is literature and very fine literature,"[6] leaving the reader to question the point of the essay.

The common element in both these reviews is that neither critic considered the role of Tolkien's intentions for his story in their assessment. The friendlier side of this debate assumed that The Lord of the Rings is "very fine literature" but recognized that because it appropriated many elements from the western literary tradition, it may not be possible to assign it to any particular genre. Instead, several critics, such as Robert Reilly, Gunnar Urang, Daniel Hughes, and W. D. Norwood, share the view that a more legitimate way to approach the trilogy is in light of the author's own intentions for it, and that this can be ascertained by examining his essay "On Fairy Stories."

Daniel Hughes says that the essay serves "as an apologia and program of work of the most ambitious kind"[7] for the trilogy. The essay is concerned with legitimating the genre of fairy stories or fantasy literature by first dissociating them from the many negative connotations attached to them, and then by showing that it is their potency as stories, rather than their derivation from myth-ritual patterns or historical event, that makes them worth reading.

In his essay, Tolkien argues that the mark of the true fairy story is the degree to which it can stir joy in the heart of the reader or auditor through the device of the "eucatastrophe," the sudden happy turn of events. He suggests that the joy one experiences through this imaginative encounter may point beyond itself and offer a sudden glimpse of "underlying reality or truth."[8] Tolkien never denies that other forms of literature can offer such glimpses, but he does insist that fantasy literature does this "supremely well,"[9] leading him to conclude that it is the highest form of "Art."[10]

In countering the many negative charges made against fairy stories, that they exist mainly for children, or are illogical and "escapist," Tolkien invokes his larger view of the world of story, which includes both the on-going process of storymaking as well as the enduring stories that consitute our traditions. In this essay, his view of story as it operates in human experience is conveyed through several metaphors, likening the world of story to a Cauldron of soup; a great Web; and a Tree of Tales. The metaphor of the tree in particular suggests that storymaking is an ancient and continuous human activity, and that all stories are linked through the continuity of the process itself. In view of how ancient and prolific this activity is, Tolkien says one might feel

> It seems vain to add to the litter. Who can design a new leaf? The patterns from bud to unfolding, and the colours from spring to autumn were all discovered long ago. But that is not really true. The Spring is, of course, not really less beautiful because we have seen or heard of other like events: like events, never from world's beginning to end the same events. Each leaf of oak and ash and thorn, is a unique embodiment of the pattern, and from some this very year may be <u>the</u> embodiment . . . though countless oaks have put forth leaves for countless generations.[11]

The image of the Tree of Tales suggests the deep roots of storymaking, which reach down deeply into our collective history. As well it suggests the continuity and integrity of all stories, and how each generation lays claim to the tradition as it re-encounters and recasts it that it may be heard and appropriated. In preserving and reworking old stories as well as in creating new embodiments of the pattern, it is never "vain to add to the litter"; on the contrary, the multiplication of stories "may actually assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation."[12]

Tolkien's understanding of story recalls that understanding of story given through the insights of redaction criticism in biblical studies.[13] This concept of story as "traditions in process" is manifested in The Lord of the Rings through the inclusion of a mythos for the Middle-earthians that is reworked in the "present" narrative events by the hobbits.[14]

For Tolkien, storymaking is distinct from other creative activities in its capacity to suggest rather than impose images upon the audience, thereby respecting the freedom of the audience to a greater extent:

> Literature works from mind to mind and is thus more progenitive. It is at once more universal and more poignant. If it speaks of bread or wine or stone or tree, it appeals to the whole of these things, to their ideas; yet each hearer will give to them a peculiar personal embodiment in his imagination.[15]

By speaking to the whole of things, literature brings about a unique communion between the artist and the listener, allowing the listener to bring something of her own experience to the images suggested by the artist. In its universal aspect, a story invites a sharing of images

by providing a common element, something available to all who enter a given work. In its particular aspect, a story elicits some degree of personal investment from both the artist and the listener, allowing each to make it their own and so deepening, ultimately, the import of the story. At its finest, literature generates such semantic richness through its suggested images that these cannot be rivalled by the dramatic or visual arts. By suggesting rather than imposing images, literature demands more of its audience and yet yields more. In characterizing the operation of literature in this manner, Tolkien implies that at any level, story involves a sharing of meaning that at the same time transcends an attempt to capture that meaning with definitive precision.

When compared to other creative endeavors, literature possesses an apparently limitless scope for invention. Tolkien cites the redistribution of nouns and adjectives as an example. In literature, the words light, heavy, yellow and grey can be subjected to a "magic" that can make heavy things light and turn grey stone into yellow gold. When literature is used to create the fantastic, the improbable and the marvelous, "new form is made; Faerie begins; Man becomes a sub-creator."[16]

The heart of Tolkien's literary aesthetic is his doctrine of sub-creation. Tolkien speaks as a Christian who understands all things as God's creation, and that therefore even at their finest, human creative endeavors are more properly called "sub-creations," since they are dependent on our prior knowledge and experience of the primary creation: "we make in our measure and derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker."[17] He says that the mark of true fantasy literature is that it

must possess the "inner consistency of reality."[18]

> Anyone inheriting the fantastic device of human language can say the green sun. Many can then imagine or picture it. But that is not enough. . . . To make a world in which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft.[19]

In creating an imaginary world that remains consistently true to itself the artist most nearly approaches the status of the primary creator. While all human creations can be termed "sub-creation," taking place within the auspices of the primary creation, Tolkien prefers to reserve the term sub-creation for works of fantasy because fantasy worlds are more difficult to render credible, and are, therefore, a greater achievement when successful.

Tolkien emphasizes the necessity of a fantastic or Secondary world being richly portrayed, evocative, and consistent, commanding the literary belief of the reader. Yet the setting forth of such a compelling world is only a preliminary for Tolkien's true agenda, which is to provide an experience for the reader that offers a glimpse of underlying reality or truth, through what he calls the joyous happy turn.[20] The well wrought fantasy will arrest the reader through its strangeness while at the same time whetting her desire. It will recover through its inventiveness, and through presenting the familiar in luminous settings, a clear view of things usually seen through the drab blur of familiarity: the freshness of colour, the potency of words, the wonder of living things.[21] It can also offer a kind of escape for the reader, from all that is raw, ugly and narrowly defined in modern life as well as from more literal ills such as hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, injustice and death.[22] According to Tolkien, fairy

stories provide a kind of consolation for these, such as the satisfaction of certain primordial desires, such as talking with trees and animals, or travelling to the stars unaided by device. But the greatest consolation offered in fairy stories is the consolation for death and defeat signified in the eucatastrophic turn. The joy offered at the moment of this turn is "one of the things fairy stories produce extremely well."[23] It is swift, unexpected, and miraculous. Tolkien calls it grace.

> It does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is evangelium, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.[24]

He goes on to say that any story that can produce a happy turn has not altogether failed, but the potency of the turn, the peculiar lifting of the heart is most intense in a work of fantasy. In sub-creative art lies an occasion for experiencing "piercing glimpses of joy, and heart's desire, that for a moment passes outside the frame, rends indeed the very web of story and lets a gleam come through."[25]

The Epilogue to the essay reveals the impulse behind Tolkien's doctrine of sub-creation. In it he says that he has entertained the notion of approaching the gospel story as an example of a successful fairy story. He says the gospels

> contain many marvels--peculiarly artistic, beautiful and moving: 'mythical' in their perfect self-contained significance; and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe. But this story has entered History and the primary world; the desire and aspiration of sub-creation has been raised to the Fulfilment of Creation. The birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation.[26]

This moving and artistic story is as well "true" for Tolkien in the

sense of taking place in time and history. He finds it fitting that God has redeemed his fallen "making" creatures by means of a story that contains all the essences of a fairy story. The Christian story stands for Tolkien as the supreme paradigm for storymaking. It is a confirmation that in creating a work of sub-creation, offering a potent eucatastrophe for the reader, the artist is emulating not only the creative activity of the primary creator, but his redemptive activity as well. The joy stirred in the reader by the happy turn has some echo of the good news of the gospel. "The Evangelium has not abrogated legends; it has hallowed them, especially the 'happy ending'."[27] The successful sub-creator is the creature who most nearly approaches the status of the Creator in whose image he is made, through engaging in a creative activity analogous to that of the Creator.

This rehearsal of Tolkien's views on story and the proper end of fantastic literature clarifies his intentions for The Lord of the Rings, if we accept the assertion that the essay serves as an apologia for the trilogy. However, when we consider the aesthetic implicit in "On Fairy Stories," a tension emerges between Tolkien's attempt to justify the efficacy of "fairy stories" and the critical assumptions of modernity regarding the value and efficacy of literary art. Since it is a central assertion of this thesis that the trilogy offers a literary experience that responds to an urgent critical modern need, the fact that the author's aesthetic does not respect the critical assumptions of modernity demands some attention.

Tolkien himself begs investigation into his assumptions by taking issue with Coleridge's account of the operation of the imagination and "the willing suspension of disbelief." Some of Tolkien's critics

have interpreted Tolkien's aesthetic position to be identical to that of Coleridge. The following discussion will demonstrate that this is not the case. Yet in demonstrating the fundamental difference between Tolkien and Coleridge, the intention is not to find Tolkien wanting as a theorist. Rather, it is out of respect for the critical assumptions of modernity and for The Lord of the Rings that Tolkien's aesthetic must be scrutinized. It will be argued below that Tolkien did not provide a theoretically adequate account of why fantasy literature is worth reading, yet he wrote a text that is eminently worthwhile. It is to redeem the trilogy for modernity that the following critique must be included.

Norwood and Reilly[28] have identified the aesthetic implicit in "On Fairy Stories" as Romantic, and have linked it in particular to Coleridge. Tolkien's discussion of the operation of the imagination employs the Coleridgian terms "Primary" and "Secondary," and he regards the artist as being involved in a process analogous to divine creation that echoes Coleridge in the Biographia. This resemblance is quite superficial when we examine the views of both writers on the imagination.

Coleridge defines the imagination as "the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM."[29] The imagination is either Primary or Secondary, the latter "co-existing with the conscious will, yet still identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. . . . It is essentially vital, even as objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead."[30] Coleridge was among the first post-enlightenment thinkers to recognize the imagination as the organ of perception.[31]

He called it esemplastic, that is, it shapes and unifies all that is perceived. The phenomena, the appearances, are shaped by the imagination, which activity itself is a repetition of the eternal act of creation of the I AM. The Primary imagination performs this operation unconsciously most of the time, whereas the Secondary imagination is an echo of the Primary, "co-existing with the conscious will." Both Primary and Secondary imagination are "the soul that is everywhere, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole."[32] What issues forth from the imagination is real in that it repeats the act of creation of "the infinite I AM." Fancy, on the other hand, is "a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space."[33] It plays with the "fixities and definites" already constructed by the Primary imagination. It does not create, as this is the operation that properly belongs to the imagination.

Tolkien takes issue with Coleridge's distinction when Tolkien says that imagination is "the power of mental image-making."[34] He argues that

> in recent times, in technical not normal language, Imagination has often been held to be something higher than the mere image-making, ascribed to the operations of Fancy (a reduced and depreciatory form of the older word Fantasy); an attempt is thus made to restrict, I should say misapply Imagination to "the power of giving to ideal creations the inner consistency of reality."[35]

Tolkien has "revised" Coleridge. Tolkien does not regard the imagination as the "prime agent of human perception" but rather as a particular kind of mental activity. He reserves the use of the term imagination for "the mental power of image-making," and implies that it is an activity distinct from, although related to, ordinary perception of reality. In artistic activity, the imagination invents images and it is Art that gives them the "inner consistency of reality."[36] According

to Tolkien's view, fantasy is the capacity of the imagination to invent images of things "not actually present" or else "not to be found" in the primary world. He therefore ascribes to fantasy a mode of creativity Coleridge would hold properly belongs to the imagination.

Like Coleridge, Tolkien desired to show that the creations of the artist are predicated on the seminal creative activity of God--Coleridge's I AM. Tolkien speaks of how every creator of a secondary world "wishes in some measure to be a real maker, or hopes that he is drawing on reality: hopes that the peculiar quality of this secondary world (if not all the details) are derived from Reality, or are flowing into it."[37] But Tolkien's view of the imagination conceives of the imagination making images out of a prior experience of a reality that is given. He says that "creative Fantasy is founded upon the recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun, on a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it."[38] He does not recognize the role of the imagination in shaping and creating that "fact," as Coleridge, fully modern, does; and so he does not account for the very thing that provides the most legitimate link between the "reality" of the primary world and that of the secondary world. For Coleridge, both the "reality" of the primary world and that of secondary worlds are legitimate and meaningful because both are the "creations" of the imagination, a finite imagination that repeats the infinite creative activity the I AM.[39] Tolkien sees that the creative imagination in some way emulates the activity of the divine Creation, but his attempts to establish the validity of the "truths" that issue forth from the imagination is not entirely satisfactory, because he tries to establish the significance of a "secondary world" on questionable premises: the "facts" of the "primary world."[40]

Perhaps the devoted Roman Catholic could not accept the Coleridgian understanding of the esemplastic imagination because in doing so, he would have to recognize the extent to which the world, for good or evil, is our fiction, and one we should approach critically. Tolkien remained devoted to the authority of the Roman Catholic church throughout his lifetime, and accepted its teachings without any of the skepticism so characteristic of modernity.[41] Instead, his life was characterized by unquestioning faith, and that attitude spilled over into his views on literature, where he prefers to characterize the state of mind of the reader who enters a literary fiction as "Secondary Belief."[42] He asserts this characterization over and against Coleridge's description of this state, "the willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith."[43] For Tolkien, the truth, whether found in the primary or secondary realm, does not permit disbelief or skepticism. One recognizes it when one encounters it. The "truth" remains the "truth," whether it is found in historical existence or in the best literature, because both instances of "truth" are derived from "Underlying Reality." The proper response to "truth" is belief, whether primary or secondary.

Coleridge, significantly, chooses to include "disbelief" in his account of "poetic faith." Coleridge's description suggests that in approaching the creations of the secondary imagination, we take to them a proper spirit of criticism, which when they warrant it can give way to a spirit of poetic faith. The attitude of disbelief cautions the reader against making no distinction at all between the primary and secondary realities or between fancy and imagination. But this is a side issue, since for Coleridge, the real issue is whether images work

by their own force, rather than if they are grounded in "Reality." Because Tolkien does not agree with Coleridge's distinction between the latter two, he denies the import of Coleridge's statement on the suspension of disbelief.

Tolkien's aesthetic does not adequately support the significance of his own literary work with respect to the critical assumptions of modernity. This necessitates this lengthy discussion comparing Tolkien's aesthetic with that of Coleridge, a thoroughly modern thinker. In certain respects, Tolkien regarded "reality" in much the same way that popular positivism does; the primary world is given "fact" which we perceive directly. Yet unlike popular positivism, Tolkien held that underlying the world "as it appears under the sun" was a "Reality," infinite and gracious, that gave significance to the world of time/space. Tolkien resented the more extreme ramifications of positivism, such that an Oxford colleague of his could declare that motorcars are more "real" than horses.[44] His grasp of the "real" clearly went beyond the empirical, yet the positivistic habit of dividing the ordinary perception of reality and the perceptions of the secondary imagination into two distinct and separate classes led him to an aesthetic that undermines his own intentions. He tried to affirm that the "Reality" underlying the primary world flows into our literary worlds and back again into the primary world. Yet for Tolkien, the "Reality" that grants significance to both the primary and secondary world is in fact a highly sophisticated version of positivistic "reality," that is, a "fact" that exists independent of our perception. The Coleridgian view holds that such a "fact" is an unreliable guide (an idol) until we are self-conscious about the dynamic constitution of "facts": that they exist in the

tension that is produced between the perceiver and the "object."

Although Tolkien's formulation of the imagination is partial and so inadequate, The Lord of the Rings stands as an achievement of what Coleridge termed the Secondary Imagination. Despite Tolkien's theoretical protest against the "higher" conception of the imagination espoused by Coleridge, in The Lord of the Rings we encounter a literary reality that is convincing because it is integral and coherent. There is a thread running throughout the trilogy, throughout its triumphs and defeats, its villains and heroes, that ties the world of Middle-earth "into one graceful and intelligent whole." Owen Barfield has said of Coleridge and Wordsworth: "It was the dejected author of the Ancient Mariner who grasped the theory; but it was Wordsworth who actually wrote the nature poetry"[45] which exemplified the Romantic theory of the creative imagination. Tolkien does not grasp the theory, and yet, like Wordsworth, he writes in a way that exemplifies it, for The Lord of the Rings is imbued with the "inner consistency of reality" that it is the office of the imagination, primary or secondary, to create. Therefore, while Tolkien lacks the critical acumen in his aesthetic theory that could support why his fantasy literature is worth reading, it is nevertheless still worth reading, since it issues forth from the "living power and prime agent" of the artist's perception, despite his own inadequate formulation of this operation.

Although Tolkien misconstrued the function of the imagination in his aesthetic, he saw clearly enough that the end of great literature is to intimate some glimpse of truth that can throw light upon our primary experience. When we apply this agenda to the trilogy, it is apparent that Tolkien hoped that it might offer the reader a glimpse of

truth through an experience analogous to the joy of the evangelium. As the reader enters The Lord of the Rings and proceeds through the carefully constructed densely layered world of Middle-earth, she is seduced into a state of "poetic faith." The imaginative experience of the end of the Third Age of Middle-earth is intense. When Gandalf falls into the abyss with the Balrog, the reader is shocked and grief-stricken. When two hundred pages later he reappears in Fangorn, she has "a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart."[46] At the moment of the unexpected and improbable turn, the reader, arrested and disarmed, comprehends that in Middle-earth there is a power at work that denies death and apparent defeat, giving rise to hope.

Although Tolkien understands "truth" in specifically Christian terms, he does not insist that the reader identify the joy offered in the trilogy with the Christian view. The trilogy lacks any reference to organized religion or theology at all. Instead, he orchestrates an experience for the reader that predisposes her to be receptive to what Urang calls "the motions of grace."[47] Urang suggests that the trilogy is an eschatological work, addressing the question of "what is it like to face the approaching end and yet experience hope."[48] Urang focusses on the structure of events in the narrative, on the particular sequence by which events are presented. He has observed that the trilogy answers this question by providing an imaginary framework for the Christian experience of hope, in a non-specifically Christian, in fact a pagan setting. The trilogy is constituted by a series of crises that are resolved by "turns" in the narrative, "turns" that serve as signs, as epiphanies, that insinuate the possibility of the climactic "eucatastrophe" at Mount Doom into the reader's mindscape, granting it maximum

potency when it does occur. The process of leading the reader through the smaller "turns" to the climax at Orodruin is what Urang terms a "phenomenology of hope."[49] Urang recognizes that Tolkien intended the experience of hope that he builds into the trilogy to provide a window onto underlying reality for the reader. If the experience of hope is to intimate a greater power underlying it, it must be encountered in a sufficiently convincing context. Urang raises the question: does the trilogy set forth a convincing context for the series of turns in the story? Urang answers both yes and no.[50] For him, there are times when the trilogy fails to sustain his "poetic faith," diminishing the potency of the hope the narrative inspires. But Urang insists that despite these occasional faults, the trilogy is worth reading in that it succeeds most of the time in presenting a thoroughly realized and credible fictional world.

Urang's conclusion regarding the credibility of Middle-earth is ambiguous and unsatisfactory, since he will not finally judge whether Middle-earth is a believable world. Yet his perception of a literary strategy operating with the structure of the trilogy is a useful method for discussing the success with which Middle-earth is invoked. When we apply the concept of such a strategy to the question of whether Middle-earth is convincing, and if so then how so, the importance of this strategy looms large.

In the epilogue to "On Fairy Stories" Tolkien describes the gospel story as "mythical in its perfect self-contained significance." The description, "self-contained significance," recalls Tolkien's discussion in his Beowulf essay, where he claims "myth is alive at once and in all its parts and dies before it can be dissected."[51] He objects

to the over-emphasis on analysis in literary criticsm, claiming that the analytical approach too often forgets to consider the effects of a story when taken as a whole because it is more concerned with tracing origins and making comparisons.[52] "It finds out much about things that occur in stories, but little or nothing about their effects in a given story."[53] Norwood comments that this insistence by Tolkien that stories be regarded as a whole implies that for him, imagery itself can bring about a comprehension that eludes abstraction.[54] Tolkien remarks that "myth is at its best when presented by a poet who feels rather than makes explicit what his theme portends."[55] Tolkien's use of the term "feel" in this context suggests "intuit," to know by apprehending immediately without the intervention of any process of reasoning. When this is applied to fantasy literature, it appears that it attempts to bring the reader an intuitive comprehension of "what his theme portends." As a work of fantasy, The Lord of the Rings is Tolkien's attempt to offer an immediate intuitive comprehension to his reader of what Tolkien's theme portends. He hoped to offer his reader an experience of joy and hope that potentially intimates truth, a truth that illumines the primary world as well as the fictional, and he hoped to accomplish this for the reader almost effortlessly.

Ironcially, the artist who so disliked analysis, "vivesection," in literary criticism was compelled to lead his reader into his fictional world through a process that only critical analysis can reveal. As Urang discovered, there is a strategy operating within the trilogy's narrative structure, a strategy that undergirds the meaning of the narrative events themselves. The strategic structure of the trilogy is what I call the sub-text: a level of literary meaning that lies beneath the

superficial narrative events. Tolkien not only provides a "phenomenology of hope" through a strategy operating under the narrative proper: he leads the reader to "poetic faith" in the credibility of Middle-earth through the same subtle device.

The carefully constructed process through which the reader is brought to know Middle-earth is analogous to the strategic writing techniques used by the classical Greeks. Whether this is intentional on the part of Tolkien is doubtful. There is no evidence in his letters or critical essays that he consciously sought to employ a classical technique in his own fiction. Yet as a linguist and one thoroughly conversant with the Classics, it is not unlikely that he imported to his own creative process some of the wisdom he intuitively appropriated from his foray into ancient literature. The evidence remains, as the next chapter will demonstrate, that an analogy can be made between Tolkien's strategy and that of the Greeks, especially Plato.

The other key to the credibility of Middle-earth is the predominance of stories, and thinking about stories, in the narrative proper. Tolkien's essay "On Fairy Stories" suggests his views on stories in general. He regards storymaking as an ancient and continuous activity, one essential to human existence. He sees stories as subject to the processes of preservation and re-appropriation, implying that stories must sound a deep chord in the hearts of each generation, or else be recast until they do. He asserts that in the process of making stories, human beings come closest to fulfilling their true nature, by emulating the activity of the One, in whose image Tolkien believes we are made. His view of the process of storymaking is remarkably like those given in critical biblical scholarship, and the stories of the Middle-earthians

have a biblical holism and coherence to them that the western imagination recognizes. Moreover, the Middle-earthians understand the role of story in locating themselves in the universe. It is the stories that preserve the civilizational memory of Middle-earth. They are portentous for the current events taking place in the narrative, through the patterns of victory, defeat and respite that they reveal.

These terms "story" and "current events" require explication, for they represent two different levels or aspects of functioning reality in Middle-earth. The stories of the Middle-earthians are their historical myths, preserving their memory of past events and distilling the wisdom of the memory. Their stories speak of events that have occurred and that may take shape again, "like events but never the same," and they inform the Middle-earthians who find themselves suffering events similar to those in their stories as the end of the Third Age approaches. Thus, the Fellowship hears the tale of the Fall of Isildur while they are in Rivendell (I, 319) and it emerges as a cautionary tale by the time Boromir has met his fate, disclosing to Frodo the awful danger the Ring presents to all in close proximity to it. The characters in the narrative proper articulate at several points the idea that life and the stories that inform life are interpenetrated; that each individual life is a "story" that partakes of all stories. Hear Sam expressing this at the foot of Cirith Ungol, where he recalls an ancient legend: "Why, to think of it, we're in the same tale still! Don't the great tales never end?" (II, 408). Sam is recognizing that the great tales do not exist merely from habit and for entertainment, but that they actually inform the fabric of existence. Tolkien has given his literary world not only a mythos that indicates the place of all things in the cosmos; he has his creatures articulating a critical understanding of

myth, of story and its relation to primary existence, an understanding that ironically transcends Tolkien's theoretical attempt to articulate the relationship between art and life. In Middle-earth, the "stories" not only "tell all," they are understood to operate for that purpose. The "current events," on the other hand, constitute the present-day mundane level of reality, which intersects with the "story" level, and perhaps becomes the "story" level that will intersect with future "current events." Thus the dialogue between these two levels proceeds.

Tolkien's intention for the trilogy was that it might offer the reader some glimpse of truth through the joy of the eucatastrophe. The effort he poured into making Middle-earth a credible literary world was generated for the sake of providing a worthy context for his eucatastrophic effects. And yet, it is in that process of leading forth a world imbued with shared meaning, one whose "current events" create and are created by "story," that the greatest and most worthy achievement of The Lord of the Rings can be discovered. He leads the reader into the realm of the secondary imagination through Greek irony and reticence. Once there, he sets forth a world that in its integrity, honesty, beauty, and coherence, formed and informed by story, fulfills the modern heart's desire for a voice that tells all.

The next section explicates some of the ways in which the classical authors conceived the art of writing, followed by a detailed reconstruction of how Tolkien employs a strategy analogous to that of the classics in the preliminary sections of the trilogy. Although there is no explicit evidence that demonstrates that Tolkien deliberately used a classical strategy, the situation in which he found himself as a writer of fiction and an enemy of modernity was very similar in some

ways to the stiuation of the "reticent" classical writers. Although Tolkien approached primary reality in a way similar to popular positivism, he was not an empiricist. He clearly regarded fictional worlds and particularly fantastic fictional worlds as valid, even the most worthy, art forms. He recognized that in the modern mindset there existed a hostility to the non-empirical that at its worst became a hostility to all that was not technological in origin. At the time of the trilogy's early composition, popular positivism manifested itself in such an extreme way, in the form of uncritical faith in "progress," e.g. the drive to mastery through science and technology. Tolkien had to account for the probability of a hostile readership, and the necessity of persuading such readers to entertain a work of fantasy. The problem, and the method of overcoming it is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

THE SEDUCTION OF THE IMAGINATION

The political philosopher Leo Strauss has written at length on the art of writing in the classical period of ancient Greece. He has observed that the ancient writers understood that in seeking truth, it is often necessary to write "between the lines." This is because it is often the case that the public truths that lend order and coherence to society conflict with the eternal truth, one that transcends culturally conditioned inflections of it. The wise person who wishes to point beyond the popular truths of the public realm has recourse to the art of strategic reticence, intimating through silence and ambiguity wisdom for those who have the capacity to perceive it.[1]

The art of strategic reticence involves the recognition of the tension that exists between knowing and loving "one's own" and knowing and loving the good. Since both are necessary to human existence, this tension can be resolved somewhat through the use of irony. In his commentary on Plato's Republic, Strauss describes how Plato's Socrates employs irony to dissemble his wisdom, pretending to know nothing while constantly raising questions. In Book I, Socrates is portrayed as attempting to describe justice. He knows that the wisdom that is truly worth having cannot be taught directly; neither can it be learned by everyone. Only some are by nature fit to learn that which is worth knowing. Socrates' task, therefore, is to "arouse to thinking those who are fit for it."[2] At the same time, Socrates must not disturb the public order by subverting the public truths that sustain it. He must

speak ironically, subtly intimating to those who are fit for it the wisdom worth knowing. Plato's Socrates accomplishes this less by speech than by his silent action, "which is not identical with his speech."[3] The silent action in Book I is the taming of Thrasymachus:

> When Thrasymachus begins to speak, he behaves, according to Socrates' lively description, like a raving beast; by the end of the first book he has become completely tame. He has been tamed by Socrates: the action of the first book consists in a marvelous victory for Socrates. As we have seen, that action is also a disgraceful defeat of Socrates as a defender of justice.[4]

Socrates' defeat as a defender of justice is an example of his dissembling: he has pretended to defend justice by a bad argument. However, in the course of this dissembling, Socrates has acted justly: he has brought Thrasymachus to listen, to be what he is fitted for, a listener and a thinker. Plato's Socrates has pointed ironically beyond his words to a kind of wisdom, the wisdom of how to act justly.[5]

In portraying the art of strategic reticence thus, Strauss is saying that the expectations of ancient philosophy in the public realm were limited. The wise person, the philosopher, must respect the public order to the extent that it is order, and so must impart his wisdom cautiously and ironically. The impact of the philosopher is therefore minimal. But the wise person can hope to arouse to thought those fit for it through irony and silent action. The thinker can then be led from the contemplation of the public things, of "one's own," to the recognition and contemplation of the good, which is wisdom.

Tolkien shares with the ancient writers the problem of how to communicate his wisdom, a wisdom that eludes empirical verification, to a public that idolized empirical fact and was unwilling to give alternative views a hearing. Thus, Tolkien begins, like Plato's Socrates, by

bringing his reader to be a willing listener. To achieve this, he needed to overcome the tension that exists between the public truth of modernity, popular positivism, and the truth that transcends the limits of the particular.

In the preliminary sections of the trilogy, Tolkien effectively removes the barrier of skepticism the modern reader brings to a "fairy-story" by persuading her first that she and the narrator share an advantageous perspective on the story, one that acknowledges a distinction between "fact" and "fiction" while permitting her to enjoy the story. Through the ironic posture Tolkien assumes in the Prologue, he disaffirms the notion of the "real" being that which is empirically verifiable in order to make a space where the reader can entertain an alternative view. By the end of the Prologue, she is brought to desire more knowledge about this imaginary world, with its alternative perspective on the "real," just as Thrasymachus was brought to think instead of rave by the end of Book I of the Republic.

Once Tolkien's ironic dissembling has succeeded in persuading the reader to entertain the reality of Middle-earth, he begins his task of leading forth the world that must serve as a context for his eucatastrophic effects. In attempting this, Tolkien continues to employ a strategy analogous to that of the classical writers.

It is worth spending a little more time on the literary strategy of the classical authors. For them, the attempt to recognize and contemplate the good involves irony in its capacity to disaffirm one actuality in order to reveal another. In Plato's writing, this meant disaffirming the good of one's own, the immediate and initial good we encounter that is opinion, in order to make a space where the eternal good

that is wisdom might make itself known. In order to effect such an empty space, the ironist must hover somewhere between the realm of opinion and the realm of wisdom. This is also how Aristophanes portrayed Socrates, in Clouds, hovering in a basket between heaven and earth.[6] Socrates requires the ordinary actuality of earthly existence to disaffirm, in order to permit the eternal truth to be evident.

His ironic posture requires that he be detached from the earthly, reflective, striving to rise up to the realm of the ideas, while at the same time finding that the eternal eludes his grasp. He is left to hover between inadequate opinion and a knowledge that cannot be directly grasped, only pointed to. Aristophanes is himself ironic here, for while he is ridiculing the inability of Socrates to reach the eternal, he has rendered a precise description of the nature and limits of philosophy. Philosophy begins with one's own. The immediate and ordinary are the foil that reveal the light of the eternal truth, although that eternal truth cannot be possessed, only pointed to. And yet it may be pointed to.

In the classical scheme, the attempt to disaffirm the realm of opinion in order to point to the eternal truth assumes that human beings are essentially erotic creatures whose deepest desire is for wholeness and integrity.[7] The pursuit of wisdom begins at the level of those things we first encounter and love: this body, this land, this family. The recognition of the good in these is the pre-requisite for the recognition of the higher good. In the Symposium, Plato describes how the lover proceeds from the love of beautiful bodies to the contemplation and love of the idea of beauty.[8] Leo Strauss concludes from his meditations on the classics that for them, all philosophy begins as a

political philosophy: the contemplation of the public things, of one's own, which leads to the contemplation of the elusive true things.

Tolkien initially uses irony in the Foreword to disaffirm a view of the "real" that prohibits any serious entertainment of a literary world. Once he has engaged the readers provisional commitment, he introduces her to the public things of the Shire in the Prologue. The Shire is presented in a way designed to make it operate as the reader's "own" within the story. In a way reminiscent of discovering "one's own" in the primary world, the reader first encounters Middle-earth as this apparently autochthonic community that draws her gaze to the homely and immediate things of life there, finding them good. Yet the "good" of the Shire is revealed, as the narrative progresses, as incomplete and deficient, and this early "good" is eventually disaffirmed in favour of a more comprehensive and integral "good." In this process, the reader is led through narrative events and by the stories told by the Middle-earthians to a cumulative understanding of "world" in Middle-earth.

A significant aspect of this process is that the reader sees and experiences the expanding world of Middle-earth through the perceptions of the Hobbits. At the outset, the Hobbits and the reader are in roughly the same state of naivete and ignorance concerning the wider world of Middle-earth. As the narrative progresses to its climax and extended denouement, the Hobbits have grown in wisdom, perceiving the inadequacy of their "own" in the face of higher things, and yet recognizing that they aren't meant to grasp those things, only to be aware of them. This acquired wisdom in which the reader shares is analogous to the ironic wisdom of Socrates, who disaffirms the inadequate things of the public realm to reveal the eternal things, ones he cannot grasp

but only hover near.

Tolkien begins his task of luring the skeptical reader into his literary world by employing irony in its capacity to effect a bond of complicity between the ironist and the audience. He convinces the reader that together they know something that the characters in the story do not. The artist always knows more than the reader about a particular literary world. He dissembles, pretending to know more or less than the reader, and so is in control of what the reader is permitted to know. For this reason, he functions as an "authority" for the reader, and the reader is encouraged to adopt his posture.

The Foreword to the authorized version of the trilogy begins with a voice that clearly belongs to J. R. R. Tolkien, author. Yet he begins to tease his reader at once with his ambiguous tone while describing the composition of The Lord of the Rings. He begins with the apparently direct sentence, "This tale grew in the telling, until it became a history of the Great War of the Ring and included many glimpses of the yet more ancient history that preceded it (I, viii). At the obvious level, he is saying nothing more than his story became a larger and larger entity as he went along. But his reference to the "glimpse of the yet more ancient history that preceded it" leaves the reader certain that he is speaking about a history that exists. A few lines later he says that the trilogy is primarily linguistic in inspiration, begun "in order to provide the necessary background of 'history' for the Elvish tongues" (I, viii). His placement of the term history in inverted commas suggests that he is using it to refer to something that is pure literary invention, contradicting his earlier suggestion that the history of the War of the Ring exists outside the pages of this

epic. His ambiguity regarding the costitution of this history is purposeful. It establishes a bond of ironic complicity with the reader by suggesting: let us treat this history as though it happened in the primary world, although we both know it is a secondary history and not one that originates in primary events.

Having commenced this ironic understanding, Tolkien continues to dissemble about the reality of this history, even to the point of confusing the reader in the matter. He says that the process of writing this history had already begun in The Hobbit, where glimpses had

> arisen unbidden of things higher or deeper or darker than its surface: Durin, Moira, Gandalf, the Necromancer, the Ring. The discovery of the significance of these glimpses and of their relation to the ancient histories revealed the Third Age and its culmination in the War of the Ring (I, viii).

Here, the reader is apparently encouraged to continue the joke. The author is using allusions to his literary characters and situations as a clever means of expressing, metaphorically, his own creative process. Expressions like "glimpses that had arisen unbidden" and the "revealing" of the Third Age are dramatic ways of describing his own creative experience. Yet these expressions suggest a disquieting autonomy at work in the imaginative realm of Middle-earth. By insisting, subtly and ironically, that Middle-earth exists and operates in some way independent of the author, Tolkien is helping his reader into a state of poetic faith, one in which she will be able to regard that which takes place in the secondary world as true.

Tolkien continues to press the reader on this point by speaking interchangeably about actual events in his own life and the events narrated in the trilogy:

> the composition of The Lord of the Rings went on at intervals during the years 1936 to 1949, a period in which I had many duties that I did not neglect. In spite of the darkness of the next five years, I found that the story could not now be wholly abandoned, and I plodded on, mostly by night, till I stood at Balin's tomb in Moria. . . . It was almost a year later when I went on and so came to Lothlorien and the Great River in 1941. . . . In the next year I wrote the first drafts of the matter that now stands as Book III. . . . There, as the beacons flared in Anorien and Theoden came to Dunharrow, I stopped. Foresight had failed and there was no time for thought (I, ix).

Although the reader is unfamiliar with the story, the peculiar nomenclature of Middle-earth indicates that these names refer to events in the story. Once again Tolkien is using the device of his literary history to describe the chronology of the trilogy's composition, thus running the sense of urgency, drama, and epic proportion that belong to the War of the Ring into his own creative process, and vice versa. The sensation that these two worlds, this primary "lived" one, and the secondary "created" one, interpenetrate one another and deserve equal consideration is intense as a result of this knitting together. This tension is emphasized a few lines onward when Tolkien tells that in 1944 he had to leave the loose ends and complexities "of a war which it was my task to conduct, or at least report" (I, x). The war he refers to is the War of the Ring, the composition of which took place at the same time as the Second World War in this world. By connecting his literary war to the political war being suffered at that time, it is as though the latter confers some special degree of "trueness" on the former. It is significant that he speaks of conducting and reporting on this literary war as it implies that this war occurred in some way independent of the artist's will. He did not compose this war; he conducted it. The implication that the events of

the trilogy are somehow beyond the purposed control of the artist is another way of subtly persuading the reader that Middle-earth possesses the "inner consistency of reality."

Tolkien explicity addresses the apparent autonomy of his story when he says

> As the story grew it put down roots (into the past) and threw out unexpected branches; but its main theme was settled from the outset by the inevitable choice of the Ring as the link between it [the trilogy] and The Hobbit (I, x).

The artist is involved in making choices concerning his fiction, but by his own account, these choices are sometimes inevitable, that is, not subject to the domination of the artist. According to Tolkien's aesthetic, the artist, as one who must create out of his finite understanding of the primary creation, conducts his prior understanding of primary reality to the secondary world. The primary reality that informs the artist's creative activity extends far beyond his finite capacity to perceive it, and so when it is conveyed through the artist to the literary creation, it follows a path of its own beyond the artist's conscious intent. The apparent autonomy at work in the trilogy's composition is a sign that the trilogy is grounded in underlying reality, or that it at least echoes convincingly the deepest reality, usually unsounded, in the primary world. Here again, it is worth contrasting Tolkien's view with a Coleridgian understanding that perceives the operation of the imagination, either primary or secondary, as the vital agency for constituting secondary worlds and the primary one. Nevertheless, the autonomous element at work in Tolkien's creative process implies that this process is somehow linked to that which transcends the artist's finite intentions and understanding.

Through ironic dissembling and ambiguity, Tolkien is establishing in the Foreword a context for what is to follow. He is claiming on behalf of his literary world the status of reality, and he is bidding the reader to adopt an attitude appropriate to it. He is saying, between the lines, "believe in this thing with me, and you will experience the strange, marvelous, and deeply moving while inside it." His ironic posture employed in the Foreword accomplishes three things. First, it convinces the reader that she shares with the author an advantageous perspective; they both stand outside the story and so know more than anyone within it. Second, through the intimate and affectionate discussion of the trilogy's composition, the reader is persuaded to entertain the literary reality of Middle-earth, to share the author's respect for his secondary world. Third, the reader is encouaged to enter Middle-earth with a sympathetic spirit. This is another effect of the bond of ironic complicity that the reader shares with the author. The author, operating as the "authority" here for the reader, is extremely fond of his creation. The reader takes on the author's attitude, at least provisionally, and so appropriates some of his good feelings toward the Middle-earthians.

Between the Foreword and the Prologue, the reader is provided with a hand-drawn map of Middle-earth. This extremely detailed map prepares the reader for the geographical vastness of Middle-earth, and serves as a visual aid to her transition from this world to the secondary world. It is a graphic reinforcement for the reality of Middle-earth.

It is apparent within the first paragraph of the Prologue that Tolkien has abandoned his primary voice altogether, and has assumed the

pose of "translator" of various Middle-earthian documents. He provides a link between this world and Middle-earth by referring to The Hobbit along with titles exclusive to Middle-earth (I, 19). The "Red Book of Westmarch" and "There and Back Again" are books that belong to Middle-earth; but any devotee of fantasy literature in this world has seen The Hobbit on bookstore shelves. The placement of this familiar element from the primary world inside Middle-earth reminds the reader of the underlying continuity between them, and is made more comfortable upon entering this fantastic world.

The translator is concerned with introducing Hobbits: their history, habits, and customs. He strategically avoids discussing the ways in which Hobbits differ from people in this world until he has established the ways in which they are the same. He informs the reader that

> Hobbits are an unobtrusive but very ancient people, more numerous formerly than they are today; for they love peace and quiet and the good tilled earth: a well-tilled countryside was their favourite haunt. They did not and do not understand or like machines more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water mill, or a hand loom, though they were skillful with tools. Even in ancient days, they were, as a rule, shy of the 'Big Folk', as they called us, and now they avoid us with dismay and are becoming hard to find (I, 19).

Only at this point does the translator refer to their ability to disappear, and to their remarkable height, which seldom reaches three feet. They are akin and yet strange to us. Yet because they were presented initially in terms of their similarities, the reader is more inclined to appropriate their differences.

The translator implicitly insists on the existence of Hobbits by placing them within a time frame of "ancient days" and, then suggesting

that this ancient race is still extant, if not accessible. By claiming that they still exist but are "hard to find," the translator persuades the reader to regard them as real creatures by suggesting they are verifiable if difficult to find.

The translator supports his more explicit claims for the existence of Hobbits by the use of his scholarly tone and method, which imply that Hobbits are a matter worthy of serious study and consideration. This appeals to the assumed positivistic orientation of the reader, for whom scholarship is the articulation of true things, i.e., "facts." This is splendidly ironic, for Tolkien is using positivistic assumptions in order to undermine them: he is using "scholarship" to undermine the assumption that truth is largely confined to the empirically verifiable. By treating Hobbits in a scholarly fashion, he is claiming for a creature whose existence is not empirically verifiable the status of real, compelling the reader to abandon or revise any narrowly defined concept of what "true" and "real" might mean. Tolkien has ironically disaffirmed the narrow definition of the "real" and "true" that issues from popular positivism by employing a method derived from positivism itself: the scholarly approach of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He dissembles, pretending to subscribe to a narrow view of the real, and then uses the same scholarly tone to affirm the reality of his literary creatures, easing the reader into an acceptance of his fantastic world and into a posture that is open to alternative perceptions of the true.

The authoritative scholarship of the translator grasps the vast sweep of the three ages of Middle-earth as well as the minutiae of individual episodes. The reader is meant to share in this historical vantage point. He tells the reader that

> in spite of our later estrangement Hobbits are relatives of ours: far nearer to us than Elves or even the Dwarves. Of old they spoke the languages of Men, after their own fashion, and liked and disliked much the same things as Men did. But what exactly our relationship is can no longer be discovered (I, 20).

The use of "ours" and "us" includes the reader in the perspective that allows the translator to make these observations, continuing the bond of complicity between the reader and the voice from the text begun in the Foreword. Both reader and translator have the advantage of standing outside the story, and in sharing his historical perspective, the reader shares as well in his scholarly authority. The authenticity of the translator's scholarship is continually reinforced by his use of annotation, his command of key historical dates, and his quoting of the records from the Third Age.[5] Within this context, the claim that we are related to Hobbits is one the reader can entertain.

By claiming that Hobbits are related to human beings, the translator provides a basis whereby the reader can bridge an enormous span of time. Since he says that the Hobbits' own lore, ancient from the perspective of our twentieth century, does not include their own most distant past, the time frame of Middle-earth is one remotely distant from ours (I, 21). The modern reader may willingly entertain possibilities in the remote past that she would scoff at if presented as occurring in her own time, since the remote past teems with potentialities that cannot be disproven. In such a distant time, the question of proving that such events occurred is irrelevant and vulgar. Therefore, the reader is free to entertain the fantastic without apology. Moreover, she is made to feel, in this context, that she has some personal investment in these ancient affairs because she has been told

she is related to these beings.

While the subtle agenda of the translator is to bring the reader to accept and respect the reality of Middle-earth, his more obvious task is to provide information about Hobbits. He delivers this information in the sentimental and prolix style characteristic of much of the "objective" scholarship of the late nineteenth century,[10] setting the scene for the reader's initial encounter with the Hobbits face to face. At the time the story begins, the Hobbits had long been accustomed to plenty:

> there in that pleasant corner of the world they plied their well-ordered business of living, and they heeded less and less the world outside where dark things moved, until they came to think that peace and plenty were the rule in Middle-earth and the right of all sensible folk. They forgot or ignored what little they had ever known of the Guardians and the labours of those that made possible the long peace of the Shire. They were, in fact, sheltered, but they had ceased to remember it (I, 25).

Despite their cultural myopia, the Hobbits are presented as virtuous, compassionate, strong and likeable. They enjoyed the homely comforts more than anything else, and were moderate and generally content, having little or no crime, and requiring minimal government. Their basic social unit was the clan. Amid all this good-natured virtue, there was little want or strife, and few heeded the portents of trouble that began to appear in the Shire at the time this "history" opens. The wealth of information about Hobbits given here, and the claim that we are "relatives" aid the reader in identifying with the Hobbits at the outset. It is through their eyes and experiences that the reader will encounter and appropriate the world that is Middle-earth. It is critical that the reader empathize with them because they are the medium through which the multi-levelled reality of Middle-earth will be led forth.

The Prologue ends with a "Note on the Shire Records." In a final attempt to affirm the reality of Middle-earth, the translator comments upon the development of the "Red Book of Westmarch," its various redactions, commentaries, and extant copies. The tone used is so banal that one could easily mistake it as referring to works available in the primary world. He reminds the reader of the remoteness of the Third Age, of which "there is no record of the day when at last he [Celeborn, Elflord] sought the Grey Havens, and with him went the last living memory of the Eldar Days in Middle-earth (I, 39).

The nostalgia of this last sentence of the "Note" is a direct contrast to the presentness with which Chapter I opens. Having undergone more than thirty-nine pages of preparation for the opening scene, the reader is well-disposed to any peculiarities she might encounter in the Shire. In the face of the persistent assertion on the part of the artist and the translator that this history is "true" and Hobbits exist, the reader's desire to know more about this world has been whetted. Having disarmed the reader of her skepticism toward fantasy by beckoning her to "pretend" with the artist that this work warrants serious consideration, she is led deeper into a state of literary commitment by the translator's scholarly approach. In both cases she has been deceived to some extent. In the Foreword, while Tolkien implies he is only provisionally committed to this literary world, inviting the reader to join in this game of pretend, he believes that the scope of reality is greater than that afforded by our waking ordinary experience. In some degree, the literary realm and the experience of it are "true" and "real." He pretends to "pretend" for his reader, in the hope of bringing her to share in his more flexible view of the real, that he does not truly

believe in the reality of Middle-earth. The translator in the Prologue also deceives the reader by dissembling with regard to his true motives. He uses the posture of the fact-finding scholar to disaffirm the narrow view of fact derived from positivism, our public truths, to make a space where the reality of his three-foot high literary creatures can be affirmed. He is at once sincere, with regard to offering information about Hobbits, and ironic, mocking "facts" with a caricature of the "fact-finding" method.

The effect of this ironic dissembling on the reader is to bring into question the nature of "fact" and "true" and "real" as they are popularly conceived. At the same time, it subtly points to an alternative view, one that conceives forays into fantastic literary worlds as legitimate and enriching for our existence in this world. Within the province of the artist's intentions, the reader has been brought to be what she is fitted for. She becomes a willing companion to his literary world, prepared to encounter all the pathos and joy offered therein.

Although the reader enters Middle-earth knowing a great deal about Hobbits, she knows very little about Middle-earth beyond the confines of the Shire. The reader is in a position similar to that of the Hobbits at the outset of the narrative, although for different reasons. Both the reader and the Hobbits are aware of the wide world beyond the Shire, but none of them have experienced it. The reader has been ironically seduced to the brink of discovering that world, while the Hobbits will be compelled to do so through their circumstances. Together they will discover this world, through their encounter with its stories as well as through current events.

CHAPTER IV

MYTHOPOEIC REALISM: THE STORY-SHAPED WORLD OF MIDDLE-EARTH

Having gained his reader's attention and sympathy in the preliminary sections to The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien shifts his strategy at the opening of the narrative proper. The first five chapters serve to familiarize the reader with Hobbits and their small corner of the world on a variety of levels. The method through which this is accomplished provides both the reader and the protagonists with a foretaste of the complexity of the larger world that lies beyond the Shire's borders.

The narrative voice in these opening chapters has a slightly sarcastic edge to it as it describes the self-absorbed and simple-minded community of Hobbiton. The Hobbits are portrayed as suspicious and provincial, distrustful of anything that falls outside their compass of the "natural." They are not concerned with much that occurs beyond their little land, and they suspect those who are, like Bilbo Baggins. Bilbo's famous adventure, mysterious wealth, dealings with "outlanders," and vigorous old age caused great consternation among the locals:

> There were some that shook their heads and thought that this was too much of a good thing; it seemed unfair that anyone should possess (apparently) perpetual youth as well as (reputedly) inexhaustible wealth.
>
> 'It will have to be paid for,' they said. 'It isn't natural and trouble will come of it!' (I, 43)

This grave deficiency in the perspective of the local Hobbits is established from the outset, indicating at once the worldview that is

to be disaffirmed in the course of the narrative. This cultural myopia is demonstrated several times during the introduction to Shire-life. The locals of Hobbiton are not only suspicious of outlanders and adventurers; they regard Hobbits from other "farthings" of the Shire with equal distrust. In Hobbiton, Hobbits from Buckland are regarded as queer and unnatural, because they live "on the wrong side of the Brandy-wine River and right agin the Old Forest" (I, 45). Even the more moderate voices in the community, such as that of Gaffer Gamgee, agree that the best thing that ever happened to Frodo was that Bilbo brought him "home" from Buckland to Hobbiton, "to live among decent folk" (I, 46). The sheer proximity of Buckland to the outside world that the rest of the Shire strives to fence out creates an attitude of distrust toward the Bucklanders.

The posture of the Hobbits who inhabit the heart of the Shire, rejecting that which does not fit into their view of what is normal, ironically echoes the posture of the positivist who refuses to entertain anything that eludes the scope of verification. Like the positivist, the Hobbits occupying the heart of the Shire have to undergo a process of reassessing their perspective. This imaginative movement echoes that undertaken by the reader in the preliminary sections.

Despite their narrow, provincial perspective, the Hobbits are fun-loving and humorous people, within the safety of their closely circumscribed world. They are childishly enthusiastic about Bilbo's upcoming birthday party, and they dedicate formidable energy to enjoying the homely comforts. At the party

> There were three official meals: lunch, tea, and dinner (or supper). But lunch and dinner were chiefly marked by the fact

> that at those times all the guests were sitting down and eating together. At other times there were merely lots of people eating and drinking--continuously from elevenses [sic] until six-thirty. (I, 51)

The guests are superbly frightened and entertained when Gandalf produces a firework dragon that whizzes over their heads, since this was an expected feature of Gandalf's display. Yet when Bilbo disappears with a flash during his farewell speech, they are indignant and annoyed at having their predictable evening spoiled.

Among all these fat, jolly, intolerant Hobbits are a few who are less fearful and more adventurous. These are Frodo, Merry, and Pippin, all of whom have an "unnatural" penchant for tramping about the countryside. Frodo sometimes wanders off alone under the trees in starlight, "to the amazement of sensible folks" (I, 71), to visit Elves. These unusual Hobbits are more predisposed to revising their views and being open to the strange and "unnatural," just as, presumably, the reader is. They, along with the unlikely Sam Gamgee, are the obvious candidates for the great journey they must undertake.

As the narrative progresses, two competing approaches to "world" among the Hobbits are revealed in conversations among the inhabitants. At the Green Dragon, young Sandyman exemplifies the biased and fearful provincialism which the positivistic mind always exhibits. When Sam Gamgee remarks that the Elves are leaving Middle-earth in great numbers, sailing from the western coast of the Shire, Sandyman replies:

> Well, that isn't anything new, if you believe the old tales. And I don't see what it matters to me or you. Let them sail! But I warrant you haven't seen them doing it, nor anyone else in the Shire. (I, 74)

Sandyman doesn't believe in the old tales, and he implies that he doesn't believe in the existence of the Elves, or at least he won't

until he sees one. Sam, on the contrary, believes "there's more truth in some of them [old stories]" than Sandyman "reckons" (I, 73). Sam is a poor gardener, unlike Frodo and his wealthy cousins, yet he is literate, fascinated by stories of the Elves. He believes he once saw one in the woods. He also willingly entertains the possibility of walking trees, reported to him by a cousin who patrols the Shire's borders. Sandyman embodies a crude, narrow point of view while Sam presents a more thoughtful, sensitive and open perspective. By characterizing the two approaches to the world in this way, embodying them in the characters of Sam and Sandyman, Tolkien is manipulating the reader into adopting Sam's open approach. Sam is likeable, thoughtful, and virtuous as a character, while Sandyman is dull-witted and obnoxious. The reader is more willing to like Sam and by extension, his attitude. Moreover, since the reader will be perceiving the events at the end of the Third Age through the eyes of Sam and his fellows, it is important to elicit such sympathy from the reader at such an early stage.

The presentation of the varying approaches to "world" among the Hobbits is meant to secure the reader's identification with the protagonists. At the same time, such variety contributes to the consistency of "reality" within the Shire. A believable community, even one populated with fantastic three-foot high beings, is not monolithic in its thoughts. By presenting a variety of postures within this fictional community, Hobbiton seems more like a "real" community.

Another factor which contributes to the quality of "realness" evoked by the Shire is the attention given to physical descriptions. There are few pages that do not contain a passage such as

> the sun was warm and the wind was in the south. Everything looked fresh, and the new green of Spring was shimmering in the fields and on the tips of the trees' fingers.

And

> The late afternoon was bright and peaceful. The flowers glowed red and golden: snapdragons and sunflowers, and nasturtiums trailing all over the turf walls and peeping in at the round windows. (I, 49)

Such descriptions function less to evoke vivid images than to create an atmosphere of the charming normality and contentment of the inhabitants.

The depth of the Hobbits' affection for their fruitful and lovely country, as well as for the homely comforts it provides, is expressed in their songs. These songs are seldom solemn in tone, being more like "ditties," yet they contain a reflection of the Hobbits' worldview and concerns that correspond to the characterization provided in the narrative. They speak of the ordinary and familiar, and do homage to the natural and the pleasant necessities of living. They focus on the immediate experiences of life in the Shire, "one's own" in its most direct and primary manifestation. For example, the companions sing a walking song that speaks about the thrill of the new thing discovered, but that ends by speaking of home and bed (I, 115). There is a sense of adventure displayed here, but only within the safe boundaries of their own country:

> Still round the corner we may meet
> A sudden tree or standing stone
> That none have seen but we alone.
> . . . . . .
> Until the stars are all alight
> Then world behind and home ahead,
> We'll wander back to home and bed.

Their more reflective and philosophical songs also use as a departure point the meditation of the familiar and ordinary:

> The Road goes ever on and on
> Down from the door where it began.
> Now far ahead the Road has gone,
> And I must follow if I can,

Pursuing it with weary feet,
  Until it joins some larger way
Where many paths and errands meet.
  And whither then? I cannot say.

(I, 162)

One of the Hobbits' chief characteristics, their humour, is evident in the Bath Song sung at Crickhollow:

Sing hey! for the bath at the close of day
That washes the weary mud away!
A loon is he that will not sing:
O water Hot is a noble thing!

(I, 145)

Whether humourous or reflective, the songs these Hobbits sing convey the deep sense of affection and enjoyment the Hobbits have had for their land and the life it provides them. Their attachment to their land grants them a sense of rootedness that is their greatest strength, allowing them later to "sit on the edge of ruin and discuss the pleasures of the table or the small doings of their fathers, grand-fathers, and great-grand-fathers" (II, 208).

The reader's initial enccunter with the Hobbits of the Shire focusses her attention on the immediate and ordinary experiences and attitudes of their life. The Hobbits are chiefly concerned with eating, drinking, walking, and talking, the pleasures afforded by their environment. These are the aspects of living that they are both compelled and drawn to deal with immediately. These critical initial constituents of "world" are the foundations for what can be termed "one's own." For both the Hobbits and the reader, the Shire is their first locus for "world" in Middle-earth, and it functions for them all as "their own," that which first roots them to this world.

The Hobbits' view of world is one that affirms the life they enjoy in the Shire, finding it satisfying and desirable. Within their

borders, they find much to celebrate and enjoy. Yet their narrow focus on the version of life known to Shire-inhabitants is their greatest fault, as it fails to acknowledge all that lies beyond the Shire and thus deprives them of the wisdom appropriate to the world beyond.

At the narrative level, the task of the four Hobbits are called to perform requires strength and wisdom. They derive strength from their close association with their land. But they must acquire a kind of wisdom unknown to them if they are to achieve their quest, one that transcends the parochial, "one's own." This involves a radical expansion of their comprehension of the scope of the world.

The need to educate the Hobbits concerning the parameters of world is met by the subtle agenda or sub-text of the trilogy, that seeks to construct and sustain this vast, complex and compelling literary world for the reader. The initial encounter with the Shire begins a process analogous to that undergone by a person seeking wisdom according to the classical prescription. One is rooted in the primary experiences of this world, but then through a process of disaffirmation and re-appropriation, one comes to a cumulative understanding of the "real," of truth that sustains the whole. The reader and the Hobbits are led through this process to stand at the brink of wisdom. At the same time, the development of the reality of Middle-earth according to this strategy serves the author's own primary agenda, by creating such a remarkable context for his eucastrophe and its "effects."

Once the safe and familiar worldview of the Shire is established, it is ruptured through story, through the telling of the Tale of the Rings of Power. Gandalf narrates this history, this ancient memory of the forging of these Rings in the First Age, and the process whereby it

came into Frodo's possession. In this tale, Frodo learns that the world beyond the Shire is vaster than he could imagine, and more ancient, more ancient than the oldest memories of the Hobbits. The chief characteristic of this wider world is conflict--unending conflict between various powers struggling for the domination of Middle-earth. Some critics, such as Katherine Crabbe, have noted that the power struggle in Middle-earth is not a case of simple dualism. She argues for a moral pluralism in Middle-earth, where hierarchies of goods, ranging from the earthly to the divine,[1] are opposed to a hierarchy of evils ranging from the human to the daemonic. This moral universe is made more complex with the theme that the seeds of evil reside in every good. As Crabbe puts it

> That such a danger exists (and its presence is equally clear in the lives and fates of Denethor, Wormtongue, and Saruman, all once good men who fell away from the good and became servants of Sauron) suggests that Tolkien is working with a notion of man as creature "strong enough to stand, but free to fall."[3]

Certainly, the development of Frodo's character exemplifies this theme. But Crabbe's assessment of the moral universe that is Middle-earth, while correct, is remarkably undialectic, and so incomplete. She fails to take into account the polar companion to this theme, that, as Elrond puts it, "nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so" (I, 351). As the wise understand it, evil is a state one chooses to enter into. This theme emerges in Gandalf's tale, where he speaks of ancient Eregion where "many Elven-rings were made," including the Great Rings of Power (I, 76). The One Ring, the Ruling Ring, was made by Sauron himself. Obviously Sauron himself is a fallen Elf-lord, whose descent into evil is commensurate with his former wisdom, power and goodness.

The implication of Sauron's fall for Frodo, who will assume the burden of the Ruling Ring, escapes him at this time. The import of this story is no more than to reveal the Shire as a tiny insignificant island in the ocean of Middle-earth's affairs. But if he does not fully perceive his own fate in the story of Sauron's fall, he does acquire some comprehension of what is expected of him:

> I should like to save the Shire, if I could--though there have been times when I thought the inhabitants too dull and stupid for words, and have felt that an earthquake or an invasion of dragons might be good for them. I don't feel like that now. I feel that as long as the Shire lies behind, safe and comfortable, I shall find wandering bearable: I shall know that somewhere there is a firm foothold, even if my feet cannot go there again. (I, 96)

Here Frodo perceives both the strength and the weakness of the Shire imagination. It is deficient in that it cannot entertain the reality of the wide world beyond, confining its attention to the affairs of the Shire. And so, the Shire folk are stupid, lacking in the wisdom required by their true situation. Yet the same exclusivity grants them a closeness with their land, a confident and intimate knowledge of it that serves as a firm foothold for them, a source of strength and a reason to endure. Although the fate of the Shire at the hands of Saruman and his gang demonstrate that not even the Shire is safe and comfortable, this does not invalidate the emotional and psychic sustenance that Frodo and his companions derive from their own. If anything, the later events complete the suggestion that the good found in the Shire takes its power from some source beyond, which may be rekindled in the aftermath of suffering and conflict.

The dominant theme in the Tale of the Rings is that of the dreadful power of the Ring-lord, and the ensuing conflicts. The Hobbits soon

discover, again via story, the antithesis of Sauron and his power when they hear the Elves' hymn to Elbereth. Just as a Black Rider is about to discover the Hobbits, "clear voices rose and fell in the starlit air" (I, 116), the voices of Gildor's Elves. The song, dedicated to Elbereth --"Snow White," "Queen beyond the Western Seas"--reveres her and laments their separation from her:

> O Elbereth! Gilthoniel!
> We still remember, we who dwell
> In this far land beneath the trees,
> Thy starlight on the Western Seas.
>
> (I, 117)

Three times the hymn evokes the great distance that separates Elbereth and these, her kin. It speaks of her "sowing stars in the Sunless Years," indicating that she has creative powers beyond the scope of Middle-earth, and that there was a time of darkness relieved by her efforts. The adulation given her by the Elves and her creative capacity beyond Middle-earth suggest she is a power on the side of the good that transcends Middle-earth. The nostalgia of the Elves, and their memory of her starlight outside Middle-earth suggest that they are of her kind, if not her stature. She is closely associated with light--"O light to us that wander here," and they are described as beings who glimmer and shimmer, "although they bore no lights," presumably partaking of her primary light. The encounter with these Elves and their hymn introduces the Hobbits to a new dimension in their now expanding worldview, the existence of powers beyond Middle-earth, powers of light, ancient and beyond their grasp or understanding. They are now aware, from this encounter, of the source from which all that is good and directed toward healing, nurturing and preserving, emanates.

The deficiency of their original worldview is made plain to them by Gildor, when he speaks to Frodo of the immense danger they are in. Frodo exclaims:

> 'I knew that danger lay ahead, of course; but I did not expect to meet it in our own Shire. Can't a Hobbit walk from the Water to the River in peace?'
>
> 'But it is not your own Shire,' said Gildor. 'Others dwelt here before Hobbits were; and others will dwell here again when Hobbits are no more. The wide world is all about you: you can fence yourselves in, but you cannot forever fence it out.' (I, 23)

Gildor's statement challenges the heart of the Hobbits' strength and courage by telling them that their own is not theirs at all, except in a most fleeting way. They are beset by the wide world that is forcing its way into their previously comfortable ignorance. Yet the Elves have given them a hint of what a more abiding and permanent source of strength might be, in their hymn. Gildor disaffirms their worldview, but serves them by preparing them to take on a world they cannot continue to live apart from.

The introduction of the complex powers that constitute "world" Middle-earth via story is consonant with Tolkien's view that story can serve as a conduit or revelatory medium for the reality that underlies uncritical perception. Although the nature of the underlying reality of Middle-earth is only briefly alluded to in these first instances, the allusions prepare the Hobbits for their actual encounter with the wide world. They are at least aware of the powers, seen and unseen, benevolent and evil, that are at work in Middle-earth, if they are not yet equipped to cope with them.

The Hobbits' worldview expands before they ever leave the Shire, and they grasp the deficiency of their original perspective. Yet that

perspective is not abrogated. Rather, their gaze refocusses, their peripheral vision increases. Their progress suggests, in a way analogous to the Platonic model, that the good and the true, the concept of order, is met first in one's own, in the immediacy of experience. The error lies in taking the good of a particular situation as the limit of the good, and not grasping that it participates in a greater good. The Hobbits are surprised by the idea that their own land is not theirs at all, and so they must reassess their sitz im leben. They can retain their original appreciation of the Shire and their relationship with it, but only if they put it into a larger context. What is disaffirmed in the early part of the strategy is not the good that can be known through the Shire, but rather the posture with which it was regarded. Their own may still offer the Hobbits strength and courage, but they can no longer regard it as the limit of the good and the true.

As the quest continues beyond the Shire's borders, the Hobbits and their companion reader now perceive the wide world that encompasses their affection for their own turf, and yet extends far beyond such parochialism to include the motions of mighty powers, earthly and transcendent. These are the parameters of the wide world that they have encountered in story, and as they journey their knowledge of these things assumes substance and deepens through direct encounter.[4]

As they encounter Bombadil, the Hobbits' understanding of the non-human order and of the very land itself, which they previously took for granted as adequate, is brought into question in a new and arresting way. They experience the ability of the trees in the Old Forest to move themselves from place to place, culminating in the attempt of the Old Willow to swallow and digest Merry and Pippin (I, 166). After they are

rescued by Bombadil, they hear his strange stories about the wonderful and sometimes cruel and cunning things that live in the Forest. "As they listened, they began to understand the lives of the Forest, apart from themselves, indeed to feel themselves as strangers where all other things are at home" (I, 182). The Hobbits are uncomfortably aware that the "good earth" outside the Shire is not unequivocally good in itself, and that sometimes it is not good at all. The non-human order is subject to the same powers that order and disorder the rest of Middle-earth. This becomes plain in their encounter with the Barrow-wights, where they are spellbound by the ancient evil that permeates the old Barrows. This great Forest lies on the Shire's border, separated only by a thick hedge the Hobbits built to "fence the world out." The close proximity of the two suggests that they are connected despite the efforts of the Shire people to dissociate them. The tendency of the Forest to manifest cruel and unfriendly ways as well as friendly and beneficial ways in agency anticipates the fate of the peaceful, fruitful Shire in result, its spoiling and uprooting toward the end of the narrative. This moral ambiguity as it appears in the very earth recalls the theme that the potential for evil resides in every good, even in one as apparently innocuous as the chthonic order. It also suggests, tentatively, that the "very earth" is not a mere "object," but an imaginative, dialectical construct---a "phenomenon" in short, determined by the particular imagination that perceives it.

During their strange visit with Bombadil, the Hobbits experience the power of the word. The continuous rhyming that escapes Tom's lips sounds at first nonsensical and irrelevant, but events prove it to be otherwise. Tom threatens to sing Old Man Willow's roots off (I, 169), with the result that the willow releases Merry and Pippin. When Tom

sings

> Hey! Come derry dol! Hop along my hearties!
> Hobbits! Ponies all! We are fond of parties!

the ponies follow of their own accord, to the surprise of the Hobbits (I, 171). Tom's verse is his preferred way of expressing and effecting his will. He employs poetry in its literal sense as making, using words in their capacity as spells, formulas of power over living creatures. This verbal power of Bombadil subtly suggests what Tolkien himself is trying to achieve through his words, to "make immediately effective by the will the visions of 'fantasy'."[5] With Bombadil, Tolkien is insinuating into the reader's mental landscape the power of the word to effect results. Bombadil's words are an extreme case of this, commanding the actions of the creatures that fall under his dispensation in the Forest. So great is his ability to make effective through the will his vision or perception that the Ruling ring has no power over him (I, 184).

The episode in the Old Forest is the complement to the initial episode in the Shire. Like that of the Hobbits, Bombadil's concern is largely restricted to the affairs within his own territory. Yet unlike the Hobbits, he is aware of the true parameters of Middle-earth. He remembers the Kings of Numenor, the coming of the Hobbits, and the stars and the dark "when it was fearless--before the Dark Lord came from outside" (I, 182). He is First, Eldest, and Fatherless in Middle-earth. His ancient memories allow a scope to his perspective that sees beyond the local and the temporal. He chooses to narrow his focus out of knowledge, unlike the Hobbits who do so from ignorance. The relationship of the Hobbits with their land appears extremely limited when compared to that of Bombadil. Their stay with him brings about for them a comprehension of the depth and variety in the chthonic order. It also

reinforces the implications of the Elves' hymn, that the goodness we love in our own is rooted in something much greater than our own. Tom's stories about the queer lives in the Forest suggest that the earth is not wholly good, evil, or even innocuous. Rather, the presence of the good in that order is a sign of something that transcends that order.

When the Hobbits leave the Forest, their worldview has been radically broadened in scope through story and experience. When we review the pattern of traffic between the presentation of story and narrative event up to this point, it appears that a story that represents some particular aspect of world precedes the direct encounter with that thing in narrative events by the Hobbits. The Hobbits, with the reader, begin the adventure with the circumscribed and provincial perspective characteristic of the Shire. This narrow view is disturbed by Gandalf's Tale of the Rings, where they are introduced to the powers and principalities of Middle-earth, and particularly the daemonic power of Sauron. Within a short time, the Hobbits are being pursued by Sauron's messenger of evil, the Black Rider. They are saved from the Black Rider when they hear the Elves' hymn, a hymn to the antithesis of Sauron --Elbereth of the stars. They then encounter the representatives of Elbereth in Middle-earth, in Gildor's wandering company.

When we consider the content of the various stories heard up to this point, an interesting relationship emerges. Gandalf's Tale of the Rings and the Elves' hymn are both "historical." They preserve what the wise have deemed to be significant in the memories of the Middle-earthians. The ditties of the Hobbits, on the other hand, do not remember portentous events or heroic deeds but simply celebrate the immediate and homely. They are a people who, in their cultivated

isolation, have lost their memory of where they came from and why. Bombadil also remembers Middle-earth, and knows his place in its ancient continuum. Therefore, the process of seeking wisdom, of acquiring a perspective, a worldview that is appropriate for the end of the Third Age, is at the same time for the Hobbits a process of recovering their memory. In the process of hearing stories throughout their journey, the expansion of worldview accompanies this recovery of their memory as Middle-earthians.

The recovery of memory begins for them in an arresting way: they learn of the existence of powers including the great evil of Sauron while sitting comfortably in the heart of the Shire. This, followed by their pursuit by the Black Rider while only a few miles from Hobbiton signals the bitter fate that awaits the Shire people, and incarnates the motif of the potential for evil residing in every good since some of the Hobbits become agents in their own oppression and tragedy. Structurally, this motif finds its grand opposite at Mount Doom, where in the heart of Sauron's realm a most spectacular eucatastrophic "turn" is facilitated by the wretched and unlikely Gollum. The former motif, where the good turns to darkness, suggests a perversion or failure of the will on the part of the free creatures. The latter motif, where the dark and hopeless situation is unexpectedly redeemed, suggests providential intervention or grace. The Hobbits find themselves involved in events that echo and manifest the accumulated wisdom of the Middle-earthian memory as it is expressed in its mythos. In this interplay between story and experience, Tolkien suggests, vitally and economically, the function of a living mythology: to centre and effect a sense of accord between the received account of world and the quotidian experience

of it.

As the Hobbits and the reader continue to meet the stories of Middle-earth, the pattern complicates. The stories of the Middle-earthians move between three centres of perception or imagination. The first of these is the perception of the immediate, one's own in its primary sense. As we have seen, some of the implications of this centre of perception are expanded and developed in the Hobbits' encounter with Bombadil. In their encounter with the Ents this imaginative centre flowers. The Hobbits' understanding of the non-human order, which they first met in their own "good earth" is challenged and transformed by Bombadil. He shows them, as an observer of that order, that the chthonic order pulsates to its own rhythms of good and ill. In the Ents, the Hobbits encounter the chthonic made self-conscious and articulate. At his first encounter with Treebeard, Pippin perceives in the Ents' eyes

> an enormous well behind them, filled up with the ages of memory and long, slow, steady thinking; but their surface was the sparkling with the present: like the sun shimmering on the outer leaves of a vast tree . . . it felt as if something that grew in the ground--asleep, you might say, or just feeling itself as something between root-tip and leaf-tip, between earth and sky had suddenly waked, and was considering you with the same slow care that it had given to its own affairs inside for years. (II, 66-67)

Pippin grasps intuitively that this earth-born creature is both rooted in the chthonic world and yet in possession of a steady, conservative, and ancient consciousness. The Ents, "old as mountains" (II, 84), with their tree-like limbs and bark for skin are free and responsible, able to choose their actions. Their wisdom is the accumulated wisdom of the ages, born in memories that reach back to the beginnings of

Middle-earth. Hear Treebeard remember

> In the willow-meads of Tasarinan I walked in the Spring.
> Ah! the sight and smell of the Spring in Nantasarion!
> And I said that was good.
> *
> And I walk in Ambarona, in Tauremorna, in Aldalome,
> In my own land, in the country of Fangorn,
> Where the roots are long,
> And the years lie thicker than the leaves
> In Tauremornalome.
>
> (II, 91)

Treebeard knows about roots: moreover, he knows that he knows about roots. He is the antithesis of the idea of "passive nature" existing solely for the needs and desires of "higher" life forms. Treebeard is conscious of his existence as an eathborn creature, and of his place in the wider world, which he chooses to aid in the war against Sauron. But the freedom and consciousness of the Ents does not guarantee that they choose the good. The Huorns, Ents that have become like trees, but queerer and wilder, never shook off the great Darkness that the Enemy covered Middle-earth with in the First Age. They chose to nurse their dark imagination through the ages. Yet the Huorns are still able to choose, and from their shadows they emerge to aid Treebeard and the others in capturing Isengard for the Free Peoples (II, 217). The Ents, formed of the "bones of the earth" participate consciously in the same moral universe that confronts the human races of Middle-earth. They suggest the profound relationship between the chthonic order and the human, while cautioning against the arrogance of the human imagination that believes it can dominate the non-human.

The second centre of imagination is found in the histories of the Wise, which preserve the memory of the "long defeat," the struggles of the Free Peoples against the Enemies who would enslave them. These

stories recall both the broad shape of that history--its victories and defeats--as well as the individuals who acted out the drama. In Rivendell, at the great council, Elrond recalls the three ages of struggle, from the forging of the Rings to the fall of Isildur and Elendil, and finally to the present and how the Ruling Ring came to Frodo (I, 318 f.). The recurring theme in Elrond's story is that those who keep the Ruling Ring become enslaved by its potential for domination --first Isildur, then Gollum, and finally Bilbo, who, although he ultimately gave up the Ring of his own volition, came perilously close to succumbing to the Ring's power. This theme recurs in the "present" narrative events, as the Fellowship leaves Lothlorien, and Boromir is overcome with desire for the Ring and tries to take it from Frodo. Frodo is forced to put on the Ring to escape, and so draws the attention of the Great Eye. As a result, Orcs descend and Boromir is killed (II, 18). The same theme is present at Mount Doom, where Frodo abjures his responsibility to destroy the Ring and claims it as his own. Although the quest is redeemed by the unlikely Gollum, Frodo is spiritually wounded by his inability to renounce the Ring (III, 382). Even those who are not in direct proximity to the Ring are undone by lust for the power it promises. Saruman, blinded by his desire to be a "power," is not prepared to defend himself against the combined forces of Rohan and Fangorn, and is cast down; and Denethor's wisdom is corrupted by his pretentious use of the Palantir in his efforts to find the Ring and to know the mind of Sauron. He takes his own life (III, 157 f.). Thus the warning implicit in the memory of the Wise against coveting the Ring and the power it confers is unhappily verified in the fall of these individuals during the last days of the Third Age. As

Elrond puts it, "such falls and betrayals, alas, have happened before" (I, 347).

The stories of the "long defeat" do not only serve as cautionary tales, revealing the responsibility and danger implicit in being free creatures. They also stand as archetypes of hope. For example, at Weathertop Aragorn tells the story of Beren and Tinuviel, a mortal hero and an Elven-woman of the Second Age (I, 258). In this lay, the emphasis is placed on the love affair between these two rather than on the heroic events through which "fate them bore." The narration of the lay is followed by Aragorn's account of the greater context in which their affair took place. He tells of the belief of the Elves that Beren and Tinuviel met once again "beyond the sundering seas" after their death. Sam recalls this story much later in the narrative action of the trilogy, as he and Frodo crawl towards Cirith Ungol. He cites Beren as an example of hope to encourage them in their own hopeless task:

> Beren now, he never thought he was going to get the Silmaril . . . and yet he did, and that was a worse place and a blacker danger than ours. But that's a long tale, of course, and goes on beyond happiness and into grief and beyond it--and the Silmaril went on and came to Earendil. And why, sir, I never thought of that before! We've got--some of the light of it [the Silmaril] in that star glass. . . . (II, 408)

This story strengthens Sam, who identifies his situation as similar to that of Beren when he was trapped in Thangorodrim. Beren succeeded in a "blacker" situation which leads Sam to believe that perhaps he and Frodo can succeed. What is really remarkable here is that Sam sees this story not only as a sustaining traditional memory: he grasps it as <u>his</u> memory by perceiving that he is part of the same story.

> I wonder if we shall ever be put into songs or tales. We're in one, of course; but I mean: put into words, you know, told by the fireside, or read out of a great big book with red and black letters, years and years later. And people will say: "let's hear about Frodo and the Ring!" (II, 408)

Sam grasps how stories arise out of the insights and experiences of individuals, like himself. For the historical mind, all lives--individually or collectively--are stories. But Sam also perceives that the communal memory chooses those salient features of the memory that inform in the midst of living. His question becomes "shall be become a significant feature of the common memory, the public perception?" Later at the coronation feast of Aragorn, Sam receives the delightful and appropriate answer to his question as the bard begins "The Tale of Nine-fingered Frodo and the Ring of Doom" (III, 286).

The memories preserved by the Wise usually involve the deeds of the Elves, who were often the prime agents for the Free Peoples in the wars against Morgoth and Sauron. However, the Elves maintain a unique perception in Middle-eath, one that observes what other Middle-earthians know only vaguely, the Blessed Realm beyond the world. This is the third centre of imagination in Middle-earth, first encountered in the hymn to Elbereth. The hymn alludes to powers outside of Middle-earth that created the stars and from which the Elves themselves have come. The glory of these "powers" shimmers dimly in the land of Lothlorien, the "Dream-flower." Lorien, the "heart of Elvendom on earth" is where the fulness and essence of the Elvish sensibility is maintained. Galadriel, herself an exile from the Blessed Realm, preserves the unblemished splendour of the golden wood with the power of her Ring of Adamant. The Silvan Elves she rules lead a bittersweet existence, one

of nostalgia for their true home, from which they draw their sustenance. At the same time they hold Middle-earth and their works there dear to them, and regret the inevitable passing of both. Galadriel knows that if the Ruling Ring is destroyed, her own power to preserve, nurture, and heal in Middle-earth will diminish and end. In strange allusive language, she mourns her fate, calling upon "Varda, the kindler," the source of their hope and longing, whom they also call Elbereth. She laments the fading of Lorien, and of all the Elves' works in Middle-earth, and her words distress the Fellowship (I, 483, 489). But the Fellowship has seen Lorien, the perfect incarnation of that goodness from beyond the stars, and they will preserve it in their memory, when Lorien is no more (I, 490).

The end of the Third Age is above all apocalyptic, a time of radical transformation. The time of the Elves is ending, and the Dominion of Men is beginning (III, 308). The Eldar children, the Elves, will depart for the Uttermost West beyond the sea, or else fade "into a rustic folk, slowly to forget and be forgotten" (I, 473). However, the Elvish imagination that seeks to nurture, heal, protect and delight in creation will be appropriated, if only derivatively, by the Free Peoples who encountered them before their departure. Through remembering the children of Elbereth, the rememberers in Middle-earth can preserve some awareness of the sustaining power of Elbereth, the possibility of goodness that transcends Middle-earth.

The rememberers of the Third Age have been given more than just the possibility of transcendent goodness, however. The end of the Third Age experienced two events where such goodness revealed itself. The first incident is the resurrection of Gandalf after his fall into

the abyss with the Balrog. The Fellowship are certain of his death and mourn him deeply. Then he suddenly reappears in Fangorn Forest before Aragron, Legolas and Gimli. In recounting the story of his struggle with the Balrog, Gandalf smote his enemy and "then darkness took me, and I strayed out of thought and time, and I wandered on roads that I will not tell. Naked I was sent back--for a brief time, until my task was done" (II, 135). When he first meets his companion and they cry out his name, he says, "Gandalf," . . . as if recalling from memory a long disused word. "Yes, that was the name. I was Gandalf." (II, 125). He is transformed from "Gandalf the Grey" to "Gandalf the White." This episode suggests strongly that Gandalf was not only saved from apparent death: it suggests that he in fact died to the mode of living known in Middle-earth, but he was "sent back" by the transcendent power to complete his "task," which is, of course, to ensure the continuation of a free Middle-earth. He returns, appropriately transformed; "indeed I <u>am</u> Saruman, one might almost say, Saruman as he should have been" (II, 125). Against all hope and expectation, Gandalf returns from death in a new incarnation, revealing the intervention of some gracious power.

The eucatastrophe at Mount Doom is the second and more dramatic revelation of such power. Frodo forsakes his responsibility to destroy the Ring, and claims it as his own. At the instant the Ring makes him invisible, Gollum reappears to literally snap the Ring, finger and all, off Frodo's hand. Gollum's fall into the fissure ensures the destruction of the Ring, but it has nothing to do with any moral intentions on his part. He was merely responding to the excruciating bondage he suffered because of the Ring, finally overwhelmed by his lust for it. At

the same instant Frodo is succumbing to the same bondage, the same unendurable desire to claim the Ring as his own. The Ring is destroyed at this moment when Frodo and Gollum become equals in torment. This destruction of the Ring, despite the failure of the actors to maintain their moral integrity, speaks of the revelation of power from beyond the world. In Middle-earth it is known as the power of Elbereth, kindler of light in dark places. For Frodo, and for all Middle-earth, this kindler, remembered and met in story, has been manifested at Orodruin.

As the armies of the West orchestrate themselves for the final assault on Mordor, Merry and Pippin consider their story-shaped discovery of Middle-earth. Pippin comments to Merry that they can't "live long on the heights," among the great and mighty company they find themselves in. Merry replies

> I can't. Not yet at any rate. But at least, Pippin, we can now see them and honour them. It is best to love first what you are fitted to love, I suppose: you must start somewhere and have some roots, and the soil of the Shire is deep. Still, there are things deeper and higher; not a gaffer could tend his garden in what he calls peace but for them, whether he knows them or not. I am glad I know them a little. (III, 179)

In this economical statement, Merry utters the essence of their experience in the wide world. He recognizes, echoing the classics, that we come to know and love first in our own; but then we must see how it participates in the greater whole, in the higher and deeper things that appear as the world unfolds before us. In this manner, Tolkien's trilogy leads forth the world as it is imagined in Middle-earth.

This world is led forth through the stories that shape experience, and the experiences that become the stories. It is here, in the exquisite dialogue between story and experience, that the truth offered

in Middle-earth can be found. The shape of the world expressed in their stories "tells all" to the Middle-earthians, as their fictions, in their richness and honesty and integrity, are seen as congruent with their experience. The heart's desire, the impulse of the imagination to render congruency between the world it shapes in experience and the fictions that in turn shape it, is obtained in Middle-earth. The very name "Middle-earth" is a sign of that process. It speaks of the place of the creatures there--the middle-ground--somewhere between blessedness and the fall, and shaped by both.

AFTERWORD

To seduce is to lead one away from an existing allegiance. In its subordinate sense, to seduce is also to persuade through charm. As an agent of seduction, The Lord of the Rings charms the reader away from the simplistic, uncritical and positivistic imagination that constitutes the public truth of modernity to a poetic faith in the imagination of Middle-earth, an imagination that is dialogical and integral as the popular imagination of modernity is not.

The matrix of the Middle-earthian imagination proceeds from the experiences and perceptions of the Hobbits, beginning with the nascent dialogue that exists at the outset of the narrative between the account of world given in their stories and their naive experience of their own. The inadequacy of this imagination is revealed as the greater world of Middle-earth reveals itself through the unfolding dialogue between the account of world given in their stories and their more mundane experience of the phenomena. The disclosure of the greater whole to the Hobbits does not, ultimately, deny their love of their own. Instead it strengthens it and enriches it by placing their own in its proper context. They come to know it as a part of the whole, a whole that embraces the Shire, Middle-earth, the transcendent Blessed Realm and beyond.

The whole that the Hobbits discover is constituted by the dialogical relationship between the stories and the daily phenomena as they shape and are shaped by each other. The vitality of this dialogue is evident as we witness the Hobbits themselves becoming the latest chapter in the story of Middle-earth, which will in turn shape and enrich the

new age, and perhaps offer hope to those who come after, as they face their particular darkness.

In its ongoing process, the Middle-earthian imagination attempts to address the whole. It is a historical imagination that conceives of a beginning to time, and an appropriate end for each age. It tries to account for a world in which the temporally conceived inevitably passes away, and yet the desire to conserve the good, as it emerges in history, persists. In the memory, a recurring pattern of conflict between the powers of good and evil emerges in each age, and yet each age is not merely a repetition of the former, since each age is constituted by its unique actors and events that enrich it by their variety and particularity. For the historical imagination of Middle-earth, it is necessary to perceive the pattern of like events from age to age, but as Tolkien remarks, they are only "like events, never from world's beginning to end the same events."

This historical imagination remembers the apparent paradox of the immortal Elves suffering exile in history. The presence of the Elves and their unique memory permits the recognition of the transcendent when it enters Middle-earthian history. This imagination testifies to the demonic potential that lies within the good, as well as the possibility of redemption for the fallen. It holds the joy of the particular and local, as well as the grandeur and folly of the ages. It knows the secret consciousness of the chthonic and the arrogance of those who would try to dominate it. As the Hobbits make this rich imagination their own, they are centred within their world. They perceive their age within the greater context of Middle-earthian history; they know the place of the Shire in relation to the wider world; and they glimpse

the greater whole that embraces all. Above all they learn of their relationship to the greater community of Middle-earth, a fellowship that they could not imagine, in their naivete and provincialism, prior to leaving the Shire, and one which they could not imagine living without when they return, as Merry's comment to Pippin reveals. Within this community, a shared imagination is recovered and reconstructed at the end of the Third Age, one in which "good," "evil," and "justice" have a currency for all its members.

For the critical modern reader, the charm of Middle-earth lies principally in this shared imagination. We hear there a voice that attempts to "tell all," through its dialogical process, while intimating that it can never "tell all" definitively precisely because it is a process. In this, it respects one of the critical assumptions of modernity. On the other hand, this imagination affirms the presence of the good and of the unspeakable wholeness in a simple manner that is not possible for our modernity. In this, it keeps alive the hope and the possibility of such an affirmation for us, even if it does not specifically show us the way.

The reader who enters into this imagination shares in its community. She shares it not only with all of those wonderful and fantastic inhabitants of Middle-earth, but with the artist and other readers. As the new age dawns in Middle-earth, Frodo composes the latest episode in the Middle-earthian story in his "Red Book of Westmarch." As our "translator" tells us in the Prologue, this "work" is the source material for the trilogy, which in turn has entered our world of story. As Frodo turns to depart for the Uttermost West, he tells Sam

> you will read things out of the Red Book and keep alive the memory of the age that is gone, so that people will remember the Great Danger and so love their beloved land all the more. And that will keep you as busy and as happy as anyone can be, as long as your part of the story goes on. (III, 383)

The "story" has fallen to us and our age, the age of the Dominion of Men. We are heirs to this story, to this imagination, since we enter into its dialogical process by virtue of reading the trilogy. Tolkien says that in encountering literary images, "each hearer will give to them a peculiar personal embodiment." The imagination that shapes and then perceives the phenomena is similarly engaged in re-presenting and perceiving the "secondary" phenomena suggested by the literary artist. The imaginative power is a human power, and yet each individual imparts her own subtle shades, derived from her particular experience, to her imaginative process and that which issues forth from it. Each reader makes a text "her own" as she re-presents it in her own deeply human yet subtly individual way. In this, the reader is drawn into a reciprocal and dialogical process by all texts; in The Lord of the Rings this process beckons with exceptional urgency as it displays this process occurring with the narrative even as it invites the reader to join in.

As "heirs" to this story, as readers who have made it our own, we receive the Middle-earthian memory and the imagination that shapes it. As we appropriate this imagination, it becomes part of our imaginative process, so that the reciprocity is carried forth into the primary world. This is another example of the profound integrity of this text, a text that is ultimately and fittingly comic. The Lord of the Rings reveals a consciousness of tensions and conflicts that are not and cannot be resolved finally. It comes to rest at that place where we briefly glimpse such unities that emerge from the unending process--weddings,

coronations, homecomings and healings. This comic version seeks to tie up all the loose ends, both within the narrative and outside of it, even as it knows such unities are brief and precious. In The Lord of the Rings, not only are the plot elements resolved through comic unity: the text itself succeeds through a confluence of Classical literary strategy and a story-shaped worldview resonant of the biblical imagination--the same confluence that shaped our present western ways of seeing. Beyond the confines of the text, the trilogy brings the critical reader's imagination into a reciprocal dialogue with the imagination displayed therein. The reader who meets this text shapes and is to some degree shaped by the imagination of the text, and she appropriates something of this imagination, which in turn is carried into our ordinary primary world. In this imaginative dialogue, in the very process, a kind of unity is given to all those who have entered The Lord of the Rings--the unity of a shared imagination, an imagination that can hold the world without debasing or confining it. In Coleridge, it is the office of the imagination to shape all into "one graceful and intelligent whole." In this dialogical mythopoeic work, one can seek such a whole, the heart's desire.

NOTES

CHAPTER ONE

[1] By "positivism," I mean positivism as it has pervaded the modern popular perspective rather than the formal philosophical movement of the early twentieth century, Logical Positivism. Popular positivism is unconscious, uncritical, and unhistorical. It assumes that reality can be split into two categories, "subject" and "object." It assumes that reality is constituted by "facts." "Facts," in turn, are those things which can be verified. Those things that cannot be verified are meaningless. They may be entertaining, but they cannot tell us anything about reality. Popular positivism, like its predecessor, lays a great deal of emphasis upon empirical verification. However, it also accepts logical verification of "facts," when this is expedient and serves to confirm long held assumptions. This is ironic when it is recalled that positivism was originally an effort to move away from pure logical and metaphysical speculation as methods for describing reality. The animating force in popular positivism is a desire for a method of establishing objective truth. As an antidote to political and religious propaganda, this is understandable and perhaps desirable. However, the historical sense has taught the critical thinker that the dichotomy between "subject" and "object" is no longer a "true fiction," and that "facts" are never objective, but rather are always subject to interpretation, which is itself subject to the assumptions of a given age. Unfortunately, in popular positivism the original impulse that generated it has been forgotten, and it now assumes the existence of an absolute criterion for objective truth, never considering the ambiguous, historically and culturally conditioned aspects of how we view things.

[2] See George Grant, Time as History (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1969).

[3] Amos Niven Wilder, The New Voice (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 48 f. Wilder discusses the modern urgency for a voice that can "tell the whole story," through the plays of Samuel Beckett, for one, and contrasts this modern need with what was given in the realism and humanism of the biblical story.

[4] Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God: Creative Mythology Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, c. 1968), p. 10.

[5] George P. Grant, Time As History, p. 29.

[6] Ibid., p. 55.

[7] This is a reference to Nietzsche's characterization of his enterprise, "philosophizing with a hammer." In his study of Nietzsche's

thought, Martin Heidegger commented on the interpretation of this phrase:

> It means to hammer out a content and an essence. . . . Above all it means to tap all things with a hammer to hear whether or not they yield that familiar hollow sound, to ask whether there is still solidity and weight in things. (Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche: Vol. I: The Will to Power as Art, translated by David Farrell Krell [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979], p. 66).

Once we know our horizons to be such, and yet have not abandoned the hope that they may approach truth, this is what the courageous undertake: to examine our "idols" in order to reveal whether their significance transcends what our "tortured instincts will be create" (op. cit. n. 4). Yet this is an enterprise that is too painful and which perhaps requires too much courage for some, who, rather than risk the discovery that all the idols are hollow, choose to live in despair with what the historical perspective has revealed, saying, "if I cannot be certain of truth, I will have none."

[8] S. T. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1975), p. 167.

[9] Alan Richardson, ed., A Theological Word Book of the Bible (London: SCM Press, 1979), p. 144, "Mind, Heart."

[10] A. N. Wilder, The New Voice, p. 65.

[11] Northrop Frye, The Great Code (Toronto: Academic Press, 1982), p. 34.

[12] Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, p. 167.

[13] See Owen Barfield, Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., n.d.), especially pp. 36-45; and What Coleridge Thought (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), where Barfield discusses the notion in Coleridge that the act of imagination and its product is at one (p. 76).

[14] J. R. R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings, 3 vol. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965), vol. 1: The Fellowship of the Ring; vol. 2: The Two Towers; vol. 3: The Return of the King. All subsequent parenthetical references to the trilogy will refer to this edition.

[15] Joseph Campbell, The Hero With a Thousand Faces (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949). Campbell demonstrates that all mythological hero adventures conform to a pattern he calls the Monomyth, one which universally follows in three stages: separation, initiation, and return.

[16] Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories" in The Tolkien Reader (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966).

[17] I prefer to describe Tolkien's method of presenting Middle-earth as a "leading forth" of that which he had for so long laboured to give birth to. The work is a true production, where the many elements of Tolkien's literary and philological interests are somehow marshalled through his creative imagination to become a secondary world, once uttered.

[18] Leo Strauss, who taught me through his writings to understand the subtlety and complexity of the writing of the classics, has commented upon the strategic element in the writings of Aristotle, Thucydydes, and Plato. The strategic element common to these writers is that of reticence, of writing "in between the lines" in order to respect the "Truth" without insulting their public "truths." This is discussed further in Chapter Three. While Strauss cites Aristotle's writings as those which taught him to read the classics, my own preference is for the ironic strategy employed by Plato, whose writings are closer to my literary concerns than those of Aristotle. For that reason, although there were certainly other writers of that period who needed to be strategically reticent, I draw heavily upon the example of this that we find in the Republic.

NOTES

CHAPTER TWO

[1] This quotation by Lewis is given on the book jacket of the Ballantine edition of the trilogy. No publication data was offered there. This quotation was chosen, despite the unscholarly context from which it was taken, because it illustrates the intensity of those remarks that Wilson found so irritating.

[2] Edmund Wilson, "Oo Those Awful Orcs!" in The Bit Between My Teeth (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1965).

[3] Ibid., p. 328.

[4] Ibid., p. 330 f.

[5] Ibid., p. 332.

[6] Burton Raffel, "The Lord of the Rings as Literature" in Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 246.

[7] Daniel Hughes "Pieties and Giant Forms in The Lord of the Rings," in Shadows of Imagination, ed. Mark Hillegas (Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), p. 81. This view is present in the essays of many of Tolkien's critics. See Thomas J. Gasque, "Tolkien: The Monsters and the Critters"; Burton Raffel, "The Lord of the Rings as Literature"; both in Tolkien and the Critics. See also Roger Sale, "Tolkien and Frodo Baggins" in Modern Heroism: Essays on D. H. Lawrence, William Empson, and J. R. R. Tolkien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Gunnar Urang, Shadows of Heaven (London: SCM Press, 1971). Clyde S. Kilby, "Meaning in The Lord of the Rings" in Shadows of Imagination.

[8] Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," p. 71.

[9] Ibid., p. 68.

[10] Ibid., p. 47.

[11] Ibid., p. 56.

[12] Ibid., p. 73.

[13] Redaction criticism, in its specifically biblical application, conceives the biblical traditions as the result of a protracted process of each generation preserving and sometimes recasting ancient tribal

stories in the light of new historical developments and theological concerns. In a specific time frame, a particular form of the communally held myth will prevail, to be reworked into a relevant idiom by succeeding generations. While the shape or embodiment of the story may gradually chnge, it will retain vestiges of the original pattern. Redaction criticism conceives the corpus of biblical stories as "traditions in process."

[14] For example, see Bilbo's translation of "The Fall of Gilgalad" (I, 251); or his recasting of the Lay of of Earendil (I, 307 f.). The young hobbits also rework older material when they compose an adventure song for Frodo based on the model of the old adventure song composed by Thorin Oakenshield's company and Bilbo (I, 151).

[15] Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," p. 80.

[16] Ibid., p. 22.

[17] Ibid., p. 55.

[18] Ibid., p. 46.

[19] Ibid., p. 49.

[20] Ibid., pp. 70-71.

[21] Ibid., pp. 56-57.

[22] Ibid., pp. 69-67.

[23] Ibid., p. 68.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., p. 70.

[26] Ibid., p. 73.

[27] Ibid.

[28] W. D. Norwood, "Tolkien's Intention in The Lord of the Rings" in The Tolkien Papers: Mankato Studies in English, No. 2 (Mankato, Minnesota: Mankato State University Press, 1966), p. 18; R. J. Reilly, "Tolkien and the Fairy Story," in Tolkien and the Critics, p. 149.

[29] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1975), p. 167.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., p. 171.

[33] Ibid., p. 167.

[34] Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," p. 46.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., p. 47.

[37] Ibid., p. 70.

[38] Ibid., p. 55.

[39] Coleridge, Biographia, p. 169.

[40] Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," p. 37.

[41] Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977), p. 128 f.

[42] Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," p. 37.

[43] Coleridge, Biographia, p. 169.

[44] Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," p. 62.

[45] Owen Barfield, Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., n.d.), p. 130.

[46] Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," p. 68.

[47] Gunnar Urang, Shadows of Heaven, p. 131.

[48] Ibid., p. 122.

[49] This phrase is the title of Urang's chapter on Tolkien.

[50] Ibid., p. 123.

[51] Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monster and the Critics," from The Proceedings of the British Academy, Vol. 22 (London: Amen House, 1936), p. 15.

[52] Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," p. 30.

[53] Ibid., p. 21, n. 15.

[54] Norwood, "Tolkien's Intention . . . " p. 20.

[55] Tolkien, "Beowulf . . ." p. 14.

NOTES

CHAPTER THREE

[1] Leo Strauss, Persecution and the Art of Writing (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1952), p. 25.

[2] Leo Strauss, The City and Man (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1964), p. 54.

[3] Ibid., p. 59.

[4] Ibid., p. 84.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Derived from the discussion given in Soren Kierkegaard's The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates, trans. Lee M. Capel (London: William Collins and Sons, 1966), p. 80 f.

[7] Leo Strauss, What is Political Philosophy? (New York: The Free Press, 1959), pp. 39-40.

[8] Plato's Symposium in Great Dialogues of Plato, trans. W. D. H. Rouse (New York: New American Library, 1959), pp. 104-06.

[9] For example, he quotes Meriadoc concerning pipeweed in "The Herblore of the Shire" (I, 28); he makes reference to The Hobbit as the source for the account of the finding of the Ring in the Prologue (I, 32); and he makes numerous references to the various versions of the "Red Book" in the "Note" (I, 37).

[10] In particular, one recalls the styles of Max Muller and James Frazer.

NOTES

CHAPTER FOUR

[1] Kathryn F. Crabbe, J. R. R. Tolkien (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1981), p. 83 f.

[2] Ibid., p. 85.

[3] Ibid., p. 87.

[4] Given that there are over sixty examples of prose narrative, poetry and song that could be considered as 'story' that is mythic in significance, I have chosen to deal with those stories that establish the major motifs of the Middle-earthian imagination.

[5] Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," p. 22.

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