



Université d'Ottawa • University of Ottawa



Université d'Ottawa · University of Ottawa

FACULTÉ DES ÉTUDES SUPÉRIEURES
ET POSTDOCTORALES

FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND
POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

Tanya BIRD

AUTEUR DE LA THÈSE - AUTHOR OF THESIS

M.A. (English)

GRADE - DEGREE

Department of English

FACULTÉ, ÉCOLE, DÉPARTEMENT - FACULTY, SCHOOL, DEPARTMENT

TITRE DE LA THÈSE - TITLE OF THE THESIS

Freedom and Shared Storytelling in J.R.R. Tolkien's
The Lord of the Rings

D. Manganiello

DIRECTEUR DE LA THÈSE - THESIS SUPERVISOR

CO-DIRECTEUR DE LA THÈSE - THESIS CO-SUPERVISOR

EXAMINATEURS DE LA THÈSE - THESIS EXAMINERS

D. Childs

D. Rampton

J.-M. De Koninck, Ph.D.

LE DOYEN DE LA FACULTÉ DES ÉTUDES
SUPÉRIEURES ET POSTDOCTORALES

SIGNATURE

DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE
AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

FREEDOM AND SHARED STORYTELLING IN J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S

THE LORD OF THE RINGS

by

© Tanya Bird

A thesis presented to the University of Ottawa in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of English.

December 2003



National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

ISBN: 0-612-90028-2

Our file Notre référence

ISBN: 0-612-90028-2

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this dissertation.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de ce manuscrit.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the dissertation.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Canada

Abstract

This thesis explores the freedom of shared storytelling in Tolkien's seminal essay, "On Fairy-Stories," and applies these principles to his fiction. In *The Lord of The Rings*, authentic storytelling is developed not through domination of others, but within the context of free relationships. Ultimately, the literary freedom that the author enjoys, and extends to the audience or to characters, is grounded in the Primary Creator's gift of freedom and invitation to engage in "subcreation." While Sauron ruptures the subcreative relationship by forging the ring of power to dominate others ("magic"), the elves, hobbits and other creatures share narrative ("enchantment"), affirming being through "recovery." Recovery counteracts Sauron's determinism and enables hope for "eucatastrophe," the redemptive grace at the heart of stories. Tolkien offers a unique alternative to secular models of literary freedom: human agency may be represented in literature not only through independence from divine intervention, but also in collaboration with it.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Domenic Manganiello, for his support and guidance in the preparation of this thesis. I would also like to thank the Professors of the Department of English at the University of Ottawa, and those who have taught me at Carleton University and St. Michael's College. I would also like especially to thank all of my dear family, friends, and fellow students whose encouragement has made this thesis possible.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Subcreation: “Partners in Making and Delight”	
<i>a) Relationship with the Primary Creator</i>	14
<i>b) Relationship with the Reader</i>	29
Chapter 2: Counterfeit Creation	
<i>a) The Case of Sauron</i>	44
<i>b) Saruman, the Elves, and the Ring of Power</i>	65
Chapter 3: Subcreation and Recovery	
<i>a) Elven Recovery</i>	77
<i>b) The Language of Hope</i>	101
Chapter 4: Shared Storytelling	
<i>a) Life as a Shared Narrative</i>	110
<i>b) The Role of Eucatastrophe</i>	117
Chapter 5: A Collaborative Model: Human and Divine Author	
<i>a) Freedom of the Characters: Literary Models</i>	133
<i>b) Free Will, Providence, and the Eucatastrophe</i>	145
<i>c) Human Author and Divine Creator</i>	163
Bibliography	168

Introduction

The aim of this Master's thesis is to explore the concept of the freedom of storytelling in J.R.R. Tolkien's seminal essay, "On Fairy-Stories," and how it applies to his major works of fiction. This thesis will be the first full-length study of Tolkien's ideas about the freedom of storytelling. In Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings*, authentic storytelling is developed not through power and dominion over others, but within the context of free relationships between characters in the novel who engage in the act of storytelling, between the author and a "primary" creator, and also between the author and his characters. According to Tolkien, the freedom of authors, characters and readers is ultimately derived from a source beyond the reach of art.

Many Tolkien critics have examined various aspects of the literary themes of discourse, power, creativity, and determinism. Until now, however, no one has related these themes to the idea of literary freedom Tolkien articulates in his theory of fantasy. In *Lord of the Rings: The Mythology of Power*, Jane Chance, for example, examines the political dimensions of linguistic power. While Chance views the Ring as a symbol of the power of language, she does not relate language to the free act of storytelling. This neglected aspect of Tolkien's linguistic imagination will be my focus. Tolkien's distinction between "magic" and "enchantment" will provide cues to the interpretation of shared storytelling as integral to literary freedom. Mary A. Schmiel has pointed out that "magic" and "enchantment" reflect two very different approaches to the subcreative relationship: one focuses on selfish domination, the other on shared creativity. To gain a broader understanding of the difference between these approaches, I propose to place Tolkien's discussion of them within the context of authorial and readerly freedom.

Tolkien views shared artistic activity as essential to the writer-audience relationship. This key principle can be seen at work at many points in his fiction, especially when hobbits, elves, and other characters recite poems and relate stories in varying styles and particular to their own experiences and points of view. Hobbit storytelling displays character “freedom” as characters comment on the action of the story and propose their own interpretations thereof. For the examination of the complex nature of the co-authorship of hobbit poetry, and the changing worldview envisioned therein, I am indebted to the work of Tom Shippey, who has insightfully explored the relationship of the hobbits’ storytelling to the content of the poems of which they share authorship, in his book, *The Road to Middle-Earth*. In *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, Shippey identifies the worldview of the poems with a providential universe. He also suggests that Tolkien counters the ideas of fate that Sauron and his minions employ to the eucatastrophe (a coined term whose multiple meanings I will explore later). In later chapters, I will argue that the redemptive nature of the eucatastrophe affirms literary “freedom” on a variety of levels.¹

It is especially necessary to highlight the importance of literary “freedom” in Tolkien’s writings, in light of the claim made by some critics that Tolkien undermines the sense of individual agency in his fiction. Rosemary Jackson, for example, in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, suggests that Tolkien’s work is part of a “romance tradition supporting a ruling ideology” (155). Jackson proposes that fairy-tales, such as Tolkien describes in “On Fairy-Stories,” lack the subversive qualities of “fantasy,” inciting rather the belief in “consolation.” Jackson sees a difference in narrative structure that leads to passivity on the part of the reader:

As narrative forms, fairy-tales function differently from fantasies. They are neutral, impersonalized, set apart from the reader. The reader becomes a passive receiver of events, there is no demand that (s)he participate in their interpretation. *Structurally, too, fairy tales discourage belief in the importance or effectiveness of action* for their narratives are ‘closed’. Things ‘happen’, are done ‘to’ protagonists, told *to* the reader, from a position of omniscience and authority, making the reader unquestioningly passive. (154)

In Jackson’s view, the reader’s “freedom,” in the sense of active participation, is lessened. This, however, is a misconception based on an incomplete understanding of Tolkien’s work in the context of his literary theory. Tolkien’s theory of storytelling clearly reinforces the value of reader participation, as I will explain in the first chapter of the thesis. The later chapters of the thesis will illustrate how Tolkien shares authorship with his characters, who are active participants in understanding and telling the stories of their lives; individual action is, in fact, enhanced by storytelling. I will argue further that human agency exists in spite of a relative degree of structural closure.

Another claim sometimes made is that Tolkien’s work reinforces political oppression. Jackson goes so far at one point as to cite much (but not all) “modern ‘faery’ literature” as “conservative vehicles for social and institutional repression” (154-55).² Tolkien, however, advocated neither the political repression of the individual person, nor the escapist fantasies of power that lead to such a state. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, like Orwell’s *1984*, portrays the value of individual freedom in the face of psychological oppression, according to Mason Harris:

Both Tolkien and Orwell go beyond the range of popular fantasy by presenting the power of evil as a temptation to the forces of good. Both give a dramatic sense of the power of the dark side, but are primarily concerned with the destruction both of civilized values and the individual’s personality through the state of mind induced by fantasies of omnipotence, or of submission to it. (47)

The illusion of power is destructive not only to the oppressed, but to the oppressor, undermining individual being through destruction of the external world:

Both Tolkien and Orwell see the fantasy of power as devouring the personality from the inside, while the ruling group which seeks to wield absolute power deliberately destroys the beauty of the external world and the pleasures of living in order to create a world where time and change will be abolished, and there will be no distraction from the sense of power....In the conclusion of both, the ultimate danger lies in the undermining effect of fantasies of power on the personality of the main character. (47)

While Mason Harris rightly points out the themes that are common to the Work of Orwell and Tolkien, it is important to note that the political vision which informs a piece of fiction does not always correspond to the author's personal convictions. After the publication of *Animal Farm* and *1984*, for instance, Orwell came under attack after he was accused of betraying the socialist cause. The case of Tolkien is different. Tolkien himself stated for the record his vehement opposition to fascism, totalitarianism, and other forms of political oppression. In Tolkien's fiction, the thematic treatment of power is consistent with his own views on the matter.³ *The Lord of the Rings* is not primarily about power of a political nature, however, so I will not delve further into the subject.

Artistic "freedom" is the most specific application of the concept of 'free will' in Tolkien's fiction.⁴ This thesis will focus on the literary rather than political aspects of "freedom"; accordingly, events within the novel as well as within the critical writings will be interpreted in this context. In Tolkien's understanding, "freedom" is an intrinsic part of artistic and creative ("subcreative") relationships. A necessary corollary of this is the importance of relationships to the artistic act, the most crucial being the relationship to one's own Creator, who provides both the artistic gift and the free will necessary to

exercise it. In Tolkien's theory, humans exercise 'freedom' as a gift of their creator in a way that implies an individual agency in the choice-making process that is not subject to compulsion or predetermined outcome.⁵ Free will, however, in this older tradition, is necessarily subject to some conditions and limitations. The proper use of freedom entails choosing among various goods. These choices take place in an ethical sphere which is in turn defined by the individual's relationship to the creator. To step outside and rupture that relationship (through 'sin'), is still considered a choice, but a wrong one that involves the misuse of the will. Choices are not infinite, however, since human beings are considered limited by the fact of their creatureliness. As Tolkien once put it, "Are there any 'bounds to a writer's job' except those imposed by his own finiteness? No bounds, but the laws of contradiction, I should think" (*Letters* 194).

Art, and especially myth-making of the type that Tolkien does in *The Lord of the Rings*, has the potential to harm or benefit others through the use or the abuse of free will:

Great harm can be done, of course, by this potent mode of 'myth' – especially wilfully. The right to 'freedom' of the sub-creator is no guarantee among fallen men that it will not be used as wickedly as is Free Will. (*Letters* 194)

Tolkien offers his theory of artistic "subcreation" and its ethical uses both in his letters, and in the critical essay, "On Fairy-Stories." The implications of Tolkien's thought on subcreation are even further developed in fictional form in his fantasy writing, and most especially *The Lord of the Rings*. *The Lord of The Rings* offers an imaginary universe in which the shared quality of storytelling, as noted earlier, enhances, rather than limits human freedom.⁶

In the essay "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien explains that the subcreative relationship is subject to certain limitations, but also to certain privileges. The artist receives the gift

of subcreative freedom to enrich creation from the Primary Creator; he passes on this freedom to the reader in his turn, who becomes a “partner in making and delight.” The first chapter of the thesis will introduce the reader to Tolkien’s main ideas on the subject as he expressed them in some key letters and in his critical writing. The chapter opens with a discussion of the “subcreative” relationship of the artist to the primary creator, and moves on to consider how the second type of subcreative relationship, that between reader and author, proceeds naturally from the first. I will try to show how Tolkien’s literary technique of “applicability,” rather than overt allegory, respects the freedom of the reader in a way that allows art to mirror an incarnational, redemptive aspect of reality.

In the four subsequent chapters, I will show how Tolkien’s pronouncements on “mythopoeia” and “subcreation” provide an indispensable theoretical framework from which to view pivotal relationships both inside the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* and outside its borders. To elucidate further the types of literary freedom that may occur between the author and his characters, audience, and primary creator, I will relate Tolkien’s views on narrative and freedom to those of other literary theorists. While they do not agree, of course, on all aspects of the question, their theories nevertheless intersect at crucial points and will help to highlight some of the implicit premises of Tolkien’s position.⁷

In the second chapter, the discussion will focus on how the elves and Sauron model two very different approaches to subcreative relationships. Sauron will be identified as the prototypical “magician” in *The Lord of the Rings*, who forges the One Ring in order to gain power over others. This is an act of false artistic creation and inauthentic communication that reduces the personhood of others. The self-enclosing

circle of Sauron's ring reflects not only power and self-enclosure but also a discourse that destroys relationships and instils despair through the deterministic outlook that accompanies 'fate.' The hobbits and the elves, who opt to destroy the ring, reject this approach in favour of a more open view of shared creativity. The elves are "enchanters" who affirm the subcreative relationship, and engage in artistic activity out of a desire to enrich the primary creation.

In the third chapter, I will contrast the ways that these opposing views of free will are manifested in the language of authorial figures. The "language of doom" that adheres to Sauron and his creatures will be contrasted with a "language of hope": that of elven recovery (the hopeful visions of other creatures such as the ents and Tom Bombadil will also be referred to for their particular versions of linguistic "recovery"). The hope that strengthens individual identity and resolution is grounded in "recovery," which linguistically restores the connection to the redemptive reality of what Tolkien calls the "eucatastrophe."

Yet another dimension of literary freedom is demonstrated by the hobbits: that which an author extends to his or her characters. The implied author interacts with these characters, who discuss their lives in terms of the story and are the ostensible recorders of the events that later reach the reader.⁸ The hobbits also share authorship with one another, and this process is reflected in the content of their songs and stories, which gradually come to envision a larger story than any one individual's experience. The fourth chapter foregrounds the role of the eucatastrophe to strengthen individual agency, and provide hope for a destiny that transcends present limitations.

In Tolkien's theory, the human author's plan works together in a 'redemptive' manner with the character's freedom, coming from beyond the enclosed bounds of the story to envision a more transcendent destiny, which is not immediately accessible to characters' understanding.⁹ Tolkien's theory offers another contribution to the debate on literary freedom: human agency may be represented in literature not only through independence from divine intervention, but in collaboration with it. The fifth and final chapter will begin with a discussion of methods of portraying literary "freedom" through chronological models that Gary Morson develops in detail in his important book, *Narrative and Freedom*. Tolkien's methods of showing literary freedom through author-character relationships will be compared to the methods of literary "sideshadowing" that Morson identifies in the works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. The key difference in Tolkien's work is its employment of the concept of eucatastrophe, which fulfills narrative freedom in conjunction with divine knowledge, rather than in opposition to it. The unexpected "grace" of the eucatastrophe is a joyous reversal of the apparently doomed outcome of events. In a story about subcreation, the artistic eucatastrophe shows that art itself can be redeemed, and that tales can come "true." In this way natural human limitation may be superseded through the gift of the divine creator via redemption of the creative faculty. This gift enhances, rather than limits freedom, and the redemptive model holds much hope for the ultimate truth of art, and unity of the best parts of life and story.

In this study I would like to contribute to increasing the seriousness and depth with which Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is viewed. Tolkien's oppositions are clear, but not simplistic.¹⁰ The good or evil nature of choices that characters make is often

revealed only in retrospect, after the outcome of their actions is apparent, requiring great discernment on their part, for as Aragorn says, “Good and Ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man’s part to discern them, as much in the Golden Wood as in his own house” (459). This ethical paradigm may be Tolkien’s gesture beyond the “Golden Wood” of Lothlórien (the world of “secondary creation”) towards the primary world of the present-day reader, where freedom and submission, selfishness and personhood, relationship and creativity, weakness and strength remain complex issues. I hope that my study will promote a greater understanding of Tolkien’s deft handling of these issues in his fiction.

Notes to the Introduction

¹ Several critics perceive a contradiction between Tolkien's fantastic secondary world and his Christianity. Mason Harris, in his article, "The Psychology of Power in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Orwell's *1984* and Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea*", finds the "absence of a personal God" as indicative of a more secular, humanistic vision:

...Tolkien's Sauron, like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, sets himself up as a rival to God.... Presumably the cure for the distortions Sauron introduces in Middle-earth would be a correct understanding of the relation of God to his creatures – like the insight granted to Adam at the end of *Paradise Lost*. Actually, Tolkien's epic is much more secular than Milton's. In the absence of a personal God or any distinct notion of life after death, his characters must rely on their own spontaneity and a belief in a providential force closely allied to the processes of Nature. While undoubtedly influenced by Christian ethics, Tolkien's 'secondary world' seems to be pervaded by a Romantic humanism with no specific link to Christian theology. Whatever might be said of Tolkien's religion, his epic belongs to the world of humanist thought. (55)

Tolkien's faith and fiction, however, were inextricably linked because he saw the artist's work as a subcreative endeavour that had deep roots in the redemptive nature of the 'myth become fact.' It is the force of providence that is the link between the secondary world of Tolkien's fantasy and the primary world. Tolkien does propose a vision of unity with the creator, but it is not allegorical or doctrinal, and so might be readily missed by those expecting a more overt form of religious allusion.

² Jackson in this context appears to include Tolkien's work, although in this paragraph she refers only to his critical essay and not to his fiction. Jackson says that the fairy-tale's claim to escape is false (156). In her view, there is no transcendent reality, but only the escape from engagement with social conditions, which has the result of seeking to reconcile reader or author to the political status quo, and/or repressing desire. It is on this point that she bases her claim that that fairy-stories can be instruments of oppression. Could it be that the claim that Tolkien's fantasy aims to reinforce political regimes rests on the premise that there is no legitimate escape, as there is no transcendent reality?

Brian Attebery, author of *Strategies of Fantasy*, suggests taking fantasy works (not authors) on their own terms, in the sense of reading with differing critical perspectives that enrich meaning, rather than dismissing a work for not adhering to specific norms (18-23). Attebery states, for example, that Jackson recognizes only two functions of fantasy: to "express" desires, or "expel" them (22). He suggests a third function, advocated by C.S. Lewis and other Inklings: *Sehnsucht*, a longing for what no material gratification can fulfil (23). Tolkien depicts this transcendent reality as the ultimate source of freedom, and the realization of desires which may only be fulfilled by a higher power.

While Tolkien did not want to be confined to material “chains” of “cause and effect,” he wanted to embrace the physical world as good; the universe in his view has the continual redemptive intervention of the creator, and this is finally the essence of the “consolation” that allows a glimpse through the “chinks” of the universe around us (for more on this, see Chapters 2-3). The “incarnational” approach to fantasy is part of Tolkien’s creative process, and is related to his ideas of “embodiment” of meaning as opposed to straight allegory, respecting and enhancing readerly freedom (see Chapter 1).

³ Jessica Yates, in her article, “Tolkien the Anti-Totalitarian,” comprehensively explores various critical objections to Tolkien’s work on the basis of political “totalitarianism.” Yates correctly asserts that it is the pair of evil rulers, Sauron and Saruman, who display the qualities of torture, killing of civilians, and instigating military attacks on other nations, as well as making slaves of their own subjects (Yates 236). Saruman in particular talks about a new “Order” ruled by the elite, on a means-justifies-the ends basis (see also Chapter 2). Aragorn (the future king), on the other hand, takes a position of leadership with the consent of his companions; Théoden, too, relies on the willing consent of his subjects (Yates 237).

Yates also answers objections that the villainization of orcs as the “other” promotes an attitude of intolerance or even racism. Tolkien emphasized that the orcs (Urukhai) represent embodied evil not to be found among human beings. Human beings, whether allies or enemies are to be treated as such, and not subjected to genocide:

Urukhai is only a figure of speech. There are no genuine Uruks, that is folk made bad by the intention of their maker; and not many who are so corrupted as to be irredeemable... (*Letters* 90)

Sauron’s human soldiers are regarded with a more compassionate eye, as Sam for example sees one of the fallen soldiers of the southern country Harad (allied with Sauron’s rule):

It was Sam’s first view of a battle of Men against Men, and he did not like it much. He was glad that he could not see the dead face. He wondered what the man’s name was and where he came from; and if he was really evil of heart, or what lies and threats had led him on the long march from his home; and if he would not really rather have stayed there in peace... (*Rings* 687)

⁴ In a letter to his son Christopher, Tolkien shows an awareness that the word “freedom” has been used in many different senses, especially in regards to politics. He recalls a conversation on the subject of freedom with his friend and fellow author C.S. Lewis:

...our converse turned on the difficulties of discovering what common factors if any existed in the notions associated with *freedom*, as used at present. I don’t believe there are any, for the word has been so abused by propaganda that it has ceased to have any value for reason and become a mere emotional dose for generating heat. At most, it would seem to imply that those who domineer over you should speak (natively) the same language... (*Letters* 93)

⁵ The philosopher William James found that the term “free” had been so overused as to have lost definite meaning and become an empty rhetorical gesture, to the extent that even determinists laid claim to the term freedom (Morson 82-83). In “The Dilemma of Determinism,” James avoided the term freedom, and coined a new term to oppose to determinism: “indeterminism” (Morson 83). What Tolkien means by “freedom” in his critical works is essentially “free will,” with its corresponding ability to be used or misused. In his fictional works, another aspect of freedom emerges: the resistance to determinism encouraged by the belief in a providential universe.

⁶ Tolkien’s stance on this issue might be atypical of modern British and American authors. John Fowles, for example, in his foreword to *The Magus*, states that freedom and belief in God are “antipathetic” (10).

⁷ In Chapter 2, for example some of Bakhtin’s key terms will set a theoretical framework in which to examine the type of relationship being postulated between author and divine creator, author and readers. (This is not intended to be a Bakhtinian reading, however, as Bakhtin and Tolkien differ in many key areas.) Once distilled from Tolkien’s fiction, these principles can then be re-integrated with his other theories on storytelling, such as eucatastrophe, in subsequent chapters.

⁸ In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne C. Booth talks about the implied author in terms of an “official scribe” or “second self” (71), but the implied author is also connected to the ethos that the reader experiences in the work:

Our sense of the implied author includes not only the extractable meanings but also the moral and emotional content.... the intuitive apprehension of a completed artistic whole; the chief value to which *this* implied author is committed, regardless of what party his creator belongs to in real life, is that which is expressed by the total form.... The ‘implied author’ chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices. (73-75)

What Tolkien means by “author” is the person who structures a text with meaning embodied (analogous, but not identical to the process by which the divine creator embodies meaning in the created world), which may be applied freely by any “reader” whose task is to share in its envisioning. In emphasizing the “Author,” Tolkien does not create a false narrative “persona” which the implied author must supersede in knowledge or accuracy of interpretation. Rather, he depicts the characters searching for an elusive vision of meaning, whose ultimate source is beyond art, and even beyond the literary author in origin (more on this will be discussed at the end of Chapter 5).

⁹ It should be acknowledged that authorship, meaning-making and union with the divine are part of Tolkien’s Christian worldview, and that the metaphysical conceptual framework associated with this view is diametrically opposed to the anti-metaphysical conceptual framework of poststructuralists like Barthes and Foucault.

¹⁰ Rosemary Jackson, for example, suggests that morality and aesthetics are “allied” in that ugly, material and sensual qualities are evil, beauty is good, etc. (156). This is a common misconception, grounded in neglect of a fundamental premise of Tolkien’s work: subcreation divorced from its context results in “mockeries” of primary creation, morally flawed by nature, and only incidentally aesthetically flawed. While orcs are the distortions of evil, and as such manifest the will of their maker (discordant speech, physical ugliness, etc.), characters who make the choice of evil are not always identifiable through this exterior quality. Saruman, for example, has a charming and pleasant sounding voice, making Gandalf’s seem harsh by comparison; Sauron, too, long had an attractive appearance and persuasive manner, which he used to corrupt the men of Númenor. Distortion of the landscape often results from a failure to show reverence to creation; see, for example, Tolkien’s references to the “slag-heaps” of Mordor, which he compared to state of World War I battlefields.

Chapter 1: Subcreation: “Partners In Making And Delight”

a) Relationship with the Primary Creator

Tolkien saw his own creativity in terms of relationships not only to the reader but also to a “primary creator.” He related his own activity as a creator of “secondary worlds” to his belief in a divine creator of the “primary world.” This view of the creative process had several implications. He thought that if human beings are created, they too are “creators” in their turn: what he called “subcreators.” It is also their task to participate in the enrichment of “primary creation,” that is, to seek “partners in making and delight,” not “slaves.” The subcreators, therefore, share their greatest gift with their readers: freedom.

In this chapter, I will examine Tolkien’s theory of art, particularly his concepts of “subcreation” and “mythopoeia.” Subcreation is crucial to an understanding of Tolkien’s poetics; the other main concepts stem from this. As I will argue in this thesis, storytelling in Tolkien’s work is an act of artistic freedom that is also shared, and it is this quality of relationship that truly defines the artistic endeavour. For Tolkien, then, authentic creative activity involves the artistic “sub-creator” in a series of relationships: first, to a “primary creator,” then to other beings, and finally to external reality. The integrity of the individual is achieved as a result of this dynamic process. In fashioning a “secondary world,” the artist does not attempt to produce an alteration in the primary world; instead, his work assists in the enrichment of creation. Through mythopoeia, the making of myths, the subcreator participates in the inventive power of the Supreme Artist. By analogy, the practice of “mythopoeia” also allows the human author to establish a relationship with readers. Tolkien prefers myth to allegory precisely because the former

allows for mutual interaction between author and reader, whereas the latter hinders it. Although myths are not the only types of stories that allow for different interpretations, myths are unlike allegories in that their “applicability” is intended to be determined by the reader as well as by the author. A story based on myth leaves room for readers to apply various meanings to the narrative. This is not the case in an allegory, in Tolkien’s view, since the mode resides in the “purposed domination” of the author, who determines the meaning of the story. In mythopoeia, then, the author allows for a shared making of meaning and thereby respects the freedom of the reader.

In later chapters I will argue that Tolkien proposes yet another type of relationship: the author’s extension of creativity to his characters, who in turn become “author” figures. This collaborative model of creativity reflects an authorial worldview in which human freedom collaborates with divine providence to realize the outcome of a story. The author’s attempt to bestow freedom to his characters is also a testimony of faith in his own freedom. In this chapter I will attempt to provide a foundation, using Tolkien’s own well-known theory, for later discussion that shows how subcreative storytelling is both “free” and “shared,” and is an affirmation of individual being and essence that gains its strength and value from an intricate network of relationships. Indeed language itself will be seen to reflect this pattern, as each name contains within it a story.

In his essay, “On Fairy-Stories” (the published version of the Andrew Lang lecture delivered at the University of St. Andrews on March 8, 1939), Tolkien develops a theory of what he calls “fairy-stories,” applying to fairy-tales, stories of elves and other worlds, and fantasy literature. In Tolkien’s view, the writer of fantasy is also a potential

maker of myth. Mythopoeia, as Tolkien terms it, is a making of myth through literature that seems to take on a life of its own, a “secondary world,” as it were, that can be entered into by the reader. This requires not the “suspension of disbelief,” but rather a type of “secondary belief” in which things seem true within the world of the novel:

What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful ‘subcreator.’ He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is ‘true’: it accords with the laws of that world. (37)

This secondary world should ideally have what Tolkien calls “the inner consistency of reality” to give it credibility and coherence. For Tolkien, giving life and believability to Middle-earth involved the creation of invented languages first and foremost – including two elven languages, human languages, dwarvish, the language of Mordor, and that of the Hobbits. Tolkien wrote his first myths, legends and poems as a “background” to his invented languages. He set *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* at a later time in the same world – which is actually our planet in an era of pre-history, called “Middle-earth.” The songs, poems and oral history that we hear parts of in these later books are meant to ‘ring true’ to us with the “inner consistency of reality.”

Tolkien coins the new term, *subcreator*, to describe the artist who fashions secondary worlds in the fantasy story. All authentic artists, in Tolkien’s view, are “subcreators” instead of “creators.” The term “subcreator” may apply to other forms of art as well, but the term has specific applications to fantasy. The literary “subcreator” “creates” artistically, but in a “secondary world,” using elements of the primary world in new combinations. This special world of fantasy Tolkien refers to as the realm of “faerie.” “But in such ‘fantasy,’ as it is called, new form is made; Faërie begins; Man becomes a sub-creator” (22).

The world of the fairy-story, when skilfully and successfully made, should be as complete and convincing as possible, with the “inner consistency of reality,” as if an entire world were to be crafted with the story. Indeed, this was Tolkien’s own creative approach to Middle-earth. For Tolkien, the child’s typical question after hearing a fairy-story, “is it true?”, could then be answered affirmatively: yes, it is “true in that world” (70-71). The sub-creator is able to make an entire enclosed world within the realm of story, in an act of subcreation that echoes primary creation. The relationship to the reader is also key to its manifestation, because the reader is able to experience the story with “secondary belief.”

Tolkien draws a distinction between authentic and inauthentic subcreation using the principles of “magic” and “enchantment.” He develops the discussion through examples of artistic activity within the fantasy realm of the “fairy-story” itself. Tolkien depicts the race of elves, in particular, as participating in this free and shared creativity, in contrast to the manipulators of magic:

At the heart of many man-made stories of the elves lies, open or concealed, pure or alloyed, the desire for a living, realized subcreative art, which (however much it may outwardly resemble it) is inwardly wholly different from the greed for self-centred power which is the mark of the mere Magician. Of this desire the elves, in their better (but still perilous) part, are largely made... (53)

As he goes on to distinguish between the two approaches, Tolkien says that the enchanter wants to produce an artistic secondary world, while the magician pretends to alter the primary world. The attempt to “rival” primary creation, in Tolkien’s view, is duplicitous because it ruptures the relationship between primary creator and subcreator. When one tries to create for oneself, as a means of enslaving others, this will to power destroys the freedom implicit in the creative act. In his essay, Tolkien refers to “Faërian” art and

drama as a model of artistic freedom: “to the elvish craft, Enchantment, Fantasy aspires...it seeks shared enrichment, partners in making and delight, not slaves” (53).

As noted earlier (according to Tolkien’s view of mythopoeia), the subcreator participates in the enrichment of creation. This enrichment, by analogy, is also shared with the audience, who join the artist in the making of meaning. The artist, as subcreator, can “refract” the divine light into stories, but the process does not end here. The shapes of myth are reflected in the minds of readers and listeners, who in turn may pass on these concepts to others in their own stories:

man, subcreator, the refracted light
through whom is splintered from a single White
to many hues, and endlessly combined
in living shapes that move from mind to mind... (“Mythopoeia”)

This image, however, could just as easily refer to the process of language itself. In Tolkien’s view, ancient languages reflected a mythic consciousness that saw “unities” between things, and the making of language, through speech, was a shared, collaborative activity that resulted in a mythic consciousness. Human speech, then, echoes divine creation through the word, as language enriches creation by re-imagining the new combinations of existing images, and intuiting the underlying unities of creation. Fantasy and story are a joint product of both existing fact, and the linguistic playfulness or freedom that allows for new combinations, “For creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard 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” (“On Fairy-Stories” 55).

In Tolkien’s vision, myth has a “language” that is also “living,” gaining new shades of meaning in its reception by listeners (who may themselves then communicate meaning to others). Tolkien was influenced by the literary theory of Owen Barfield, who

writes that, within the context of myth, words depend on relationships to other words, concepts and experiences for their meaning. Stephen Medcalf elucidates this key concept of Barfield's that affected Tolkien's theory of language and its mythic aspects. Says Medcalf, "Barfield's book *Poetic Diction* gave Tolkien a philosophy to account for and to some extent satisfy what was perhaps his deepest concern: our lack of a language to describe wonder, and the related fading of wonderfulness in our world" (31). Medcalf describes Barfield's concept of the "ancient semantic unities" as follows:

...we find many words, and increasingly many words the earlier the language we look at, which have both a spiritual or abstract sense, and a physical or concrete one. The classic example is perhaps *spirit* itself, whose original Latin form *spiritus* had once the meaning breath, or wind....In Barfield's view we must, therefore, imagine a time when such words 'meant neither *breath*, nor *wind*, nor *spirit*, not yet all three of these things, but when they simply had *their own particular meaning*, which has since in the course of the evolution of consciousness, crystallized into the three meanings specified.' (32)

Aspects of terms, now abstracted and separated, could once have been felt as an "unanalysable something including and transcending both" (33). From Medcalf's analysis, we might establish that Barfield's concepts of ancient unities allowed Tolkien to see the evolution of language itself as a shared making of meaning. Tolkien's term, "recovery," as inspiration to creativity, can therefore be understood as an act of collaboration with one's linguistic predecessors. Verlyn Flieger, in her article, "The Language of Myth," adds that recovery may also serve as an impetus for further linguistic development in the minds of the readers and hearers, who experience the process ongoingly.

It can be said that, as a result of this dynamic, language itself changes the consciousness of the reader (Flieger, "Language" 5). In Barfield's view, language also

multiplies meanings as the new contexts and ideas created by other words interact with previous ones, creating new shades of meaning each time the word is heard, says Flieger:

The words in themselves are ordinary. It is the way they are put together that makes them extraordinary...By their context the words are lifted out of the realm of ordinary speech and made metaphoric, outright symbolic. This is poetic diction, the language of poets and mystics. It produces in each of you (if not now, at least the first time you read or heard those words) Barfield's 'felt change of consciousness.' And each time you hear the words again, the meanings multiply as your changed consciousness changes yet again, enriching not just your experience of the words, but their very meaning in your mind. (5)

Tolkien describes this process of linguistic invention in his poem, "Mythopoeia." The use of language creates a mythic consciousness that slowly gains a self-reflexive awareness of its own activities, and mythologizes this in turn as an act of elves:

Yet trees and not 'trees,' until so named and seen –
and never were so named, till those had been
who speech's involuted breath unfurled,
....
response of those that felt astir within
by deep monition movements that were kin
to life and death of trees, of beasts, of stars:
free captives undermining shadowy bars,
digging the foreknown from experience
and panning the vein of spirit out of sense.
Great powers they slowly brought out of themselves,
and looking backward they beheld the Elves
that wrought on cunning forges in the mind,
and light and dark on secret looms entwined. ("Mythopoeia")

This poem sets a precedent for viewing creatures within *The Lord Of The Rings*, whether elves, ents, or characters such as Tom Bombadil, as representatives of the process of early making of language. The elves, making language on "cunning forges," are a mythic representation of image-making power. David L. Jeffrey refers to the elves as proto-recoverers (110), and this aspect of linguistic inventiveness, with reference to its use or

misuse in terms of forging of a Ring of Power, will be discussed in the following chapters.

The mythic consciousness of language, and the recovery of the creative process that elicits inspiration from these sources, are developed thematically in the following lines, which employ Tolkien's typical symbols of elves, jewels, flowers, and stars in a subtle, yet deceptively simple manner:

He sees no stars who does not see them first
of living silver made that sudden burst
to flame like flowers beneath the ancient song,
whose very echo after-music long
has since pursued. There is no firmament,
only a void, unless a jewelled tent
myth-woven and elf-patterned; and no earth,
unless the mother's womb whence all have birth. ("Mythopoeia")

The firmament and stars, in Tolkien's work, gain meaning in the sense of a purposefully woven pattern which, as we will see in Chapter 4, connects to Tolkien's providential view of the cosmos. The poetic consciousness necessary to see a star truly is also required to perceive the meaning and pattern behind it. Perhaps Tolkien speaks allusively in this passage about an autobiographical inspiration of his own. The linguistic terms that combined jewel and sun may have inspired his story of the "Silmarils" (Shippey, *Author* 86). The concept of the "Silmarils," the jewels that gave light (like stars), was key to the making of his first mythic writings (posthumously published in *The Silmarillion*) that preceded the events of *The Lord of the Rings*. In Chapter 4, I will further explore how stars and the providential view they represent are an impetus to artistic subcreation for the figures within his stories, as well as for Tolkien himself.

Linguistic "recovery," as Tolkien calls it, is key to mythic "sub-creation." But "recovery" is not simply a process of going back to old ideas and forgotten concepts; it is

also the result of a process of experimentation and inventiveness that refreshes wonder and clarifies perspective. In “On Fairy-Stories,” Tolkien suggests that fantastic use of language can release jaded consciousness from its possessive view of the world. In the “Secondary World” of the story, images from the “primary world” are found in new and intriguing combinations. The “language” of new combinations and adjectives generates the fantastic. For example, when you put the adjective “green” next to the word “sun,” you will have a new form that does not exist in nature, says Tolkien:

To make a Secondary World inside 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. Few attempt such difficult tasks. But when they are attempted and in any degree accomplished then we have a rare achievement of art, storymaking in its primary and most potent mode. (48-49)

These striking combinations lead us to see familiar things in an unfamiliar light – perhaps retaining some of the strangeness that they did in the fairy-story. This relates to what Tolkien calls “recovery.” Recovery means that art brings the sense of newness to what is familiar, and involves a “regaining of a clear view” and perspective:

Recovery (which includes return and renewal of health)...is a regaining – regaining of a clear view...seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them – as things apart from ourselves. We need, in any case, to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity – from possessiveness. (57)

When we see the familiar rearranged in exotic combinations in fantasy, we can go back to our own world with a renewed sense of wonder. Says Tolkien, there is no need to despair of painting because there are only “three primary colours”:

We should look at green again, and be startled anew (but not blinded) by blue and yellow and red. We should meet the centaur and the dragon, and then perhaps suddenly behold, like the ancient shepherds, sheep, and dogs, and horses – and wolves. This recovery fairy-stories help us make. In that sense only a taste for them may make us, or keep us, childish. (57)

Faces of the familiar need fresh attention; when we see something too many times, we may start to feel as though we own it and become dulled by a sense of “appropriation.” Tolkien uses this dragon imagery when he talks about how we can become blinded to the things around us. Like Smaug the dragon (in *The Hobbit*), we can let greed and possessiveness blind us to the actual beauty of the things in the world:

They have become like the things which once attracted us by their glitter, or their colour, or their shape, and we laid hands on them, and then locked them in our hoard, acquired them, and acquiring ceased to look at them. (58)

The recovery given by shared creativity, myth, and linguistic inventiveness helps to free us from this dragon-like approach, says Tolkien:

Creative fantasy, because it is mainly trying to do something else (make something new), may open your hoard and let all the locked things fly away like cage-birds. (58-59)

Fairy stories built on fantasy help in this “release.”

Recovery, as a key to linguistic inventiveness, helps one to regain perspective, and allows the subcreator intuitively to reconstruct old stories and invent new ones by seeing the “unities” between concepts that seem to be hidden within language itself. Here, Tolkien is indebted to Barfield’s concept of “ancient unities.” Tolkien, in his work as a linguist, tried to uncover “hidden” myths and legends that are recalled by the joining of concepts in old words. Writing in this way may lead to a recollection of the sense of pre-lapsarian unity of all things; it also helps to bring about the spiritual recovery and renewal of perspective that linguistic inventiveness does.

This “recovery” is not simply aesthetic in nature; it is also a recovery of aspects of vision and understanding that are lost to a post-lapsarian world. To “see things as we were meant to see them,” and to “clean our windows,” is, in part, to recapture this

relational view of the world that recognizes the distinctness and individuality of “things apart from ourselves,” of a reality independent of the human mind. In the poem, “Mythopoeia,” Tolkien proposes that myths may also participate in the Christian redemption of a fallen world, through their linguistic “recovery” of the original unities and patterns of creation. Evil is characterized by its distorted view of the world: “Evil will not see, for evil lies / not in God’s picture but in crooked eyes” (“Mythopoeia”). In “Mythopoeia,” Tolkien proposes a state in which humanity will use this faculty in a much more fully collaborative relationship with its creator:

In Paradise perchance the eye may stray
from gazing upon everlasting Day
to see the day-illuminated, and renew
from mirrored truth the likeness of the True.

....

In Paradise they look no more awry;
and though they make anew, they make no lie.
Be sure they still will make, not been dead,
and poets shall have flames upon their head;
and harps whereon their faultless fingers fall:
there each shall choose forever from the All. (“Mythopoeia”)

As much as Tolkien sees “subcreation” in terms of a primary creator, he also emphasizes its redemptive aspect. Although Christian theology traditionally holds that humanity lost many faculties, including linguistic ones, after the “fall,” Tolkien proposes that the subcreative faculty is still operative. Not only may one make art, but this art has the ability to “enrich” the primary creation and to eventually partake of its reality. Redemption of humanity for Tolkien is also the redemption of art, and of the creative faculties, and this in the end is envisioned as a story that comes “true.” Subcreation, in this view, remains a gift and a right, even in a post-lapsarian world: “Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made:

and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker” (“On Fairy-Stories” 55).

Story-making and redemption are inextricably linked. Tolkien’s Christian beliefs led him to see Christianity as a “true myth,” of which other myths are echoes; they also share the “redemption” at the end that Tolkien refers to as “eucatastrophe.” He believed that the Gospels contain a “true myth,” written by a supreme author who created the events recounted in the stories. Myth became fact as the redemption, depicted in a fragmented fashion in many myths, took place in the primary world. The gospels, says Tolkien, contain a “fairy-story” – “or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories...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 fulfillment of Creation” (“On Fairy-Stories” 71-72).

Humankind, as makers and lovers of stories, are fittingly redeemed through these stories of the Gospels, that personify the quality of redemptive joy that is at the heart of fairy-stories:

Of course I do not mean that the Gospels tell what is *only* a fairy-story; but I do mean very strongly that they do tell a fairy-story: the greatest. Man the story-teller would have to be redeemed in a manner consonant with his nature: by a moving story. *But* since the author if [sic] it is the supreme Artist and the Author of Reality, this one was made also to Be, to be true on the Primary Plane. So that in the Primary Miracle (the Resurrection) and the lesser Christian miracles too though less, you have not only that sudden glimpse of the truth behind the apparent Anankê of our world, but a glimpse that is actually a ray of light through the very chinks of the universe about us. (*Letters* 100-101)

The Resurrection is the primary eucatastrophe, and its main quality is joy:

The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man’s history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy. It

has pre-eminently the 'inner consistency of reality.' There is not tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many sceptical men have accepted as true on its own merits. For the Art of it has the supremely convincing tone of Primary Art, that is, of Creation. To reject it leads either to sadness or to wrath. ("On Fairy-Stories" 72)

Story-making becomes linked to this aspect of redemptive joy in the primary world.

The concept of eucatastrophe, or the "consolation of the happy ending," is a key aspect of Tolkien's theory of storytelling, and its implications for human freedom will become more apparent in the last two chapters of the thesis. In Tolkien's work, this 'consolation' seems to go beyond what is fated. He calls this sudden "turn" a joy "unlooked-for," and not accessible within the immediate understanding of the characters. The joyous turn is a redemption that transcends mere fate or luck, and it points towards a universe in which another power is at work to order events in a meaningful way, comparable to the author of the story:

The consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending: or more correctly of the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous 'turn' (for there is no true end to any fairy tale): this joy, which is one of the things which fairy-stories can produce supremely well, is not essentially 'escapist,' nor 'fugitive'. In its fairy-tale or otherworld – setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of *dycatastrophe*, 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. ("On Fairy-Stories" 68)

"The *eucatastrophic* tale is the true form of fairy-tale, and its highest function" ("On Fairy-Stories" 68). Accordingly, a story in which art is redeemed has as its eucatastrophe an art that becomes true. The unity of art and life, making and experience, is beyond the ability of a single person or subcreator to bestow, but it may be a "gift."

In the story "Leaf by Niggle," Tolkien depicts one such artistic eucatastrophe. In this parable of artistic experience, Niggle, an artist, goes on an afterlife journey and

experiences the “eucatastrophe” of finding out that his paintings of a tree have come “true”:

Before him stood the Tree, his Tree, finished. If you could say that of a Tree that was alive, its leaves opening, its branches growing and bending in the wind that Niggle had so often felt or guessed, and so often failed to catch. He gazed at the Tree, and slowly he lifted his arms and opened them wide.

‘It’s a gift!’ he said. He was referring to his art, and also to the result; but he was using the word quite literally... All the leaves he had ever laboured at were there, as he had imagined them rather than as he had made them; and there were others that had only budded in his mind, and many that might have budded, if he had only had had time... Some of the most beautiful – and the most characteristic, the most perfect examples of the Niggle style – were seen to have been produced in collaboration with Mr. Parish: there was no other way of putting it. (103-4)

Shared endeavour is integral to the realization of this vision. Some of Niggle’s most characteristic work has been “produced in collaboration” with another. Niggle and his companion Parish, who later joins him, turn the surrounding area into a garden, through a truly co-operative effort: “It is Niggle’s Picture, or most of it: a little of it is now Parish’s Garden” (108). They have also become rounded as human beings, gaining a clearer insight into those aspects of their human nature which they had neglected during their earthly lives. “Oddly enough, it was Niggle who became most absorbed in building and gardening, while Parish often wandered about looking at trees, and especially at the Tree” (106). At the end of the story, they experience joy and community when they learn the name of the place: “Niggle’s Parish”: “They both laughed. Laughed – the Mountains rang with it!” (112). Both the gift of artistic inspiration and the gift of enrichment of the primary creation are extended from the primary creator to the subcreator, who then shares it with others.

Tolkien describes how literary artists desire to make a “secondary world” that is somehow true, and that the “inner consistency of reality” might in some measure be joined with an outer reality:

Probably every writer making a secondary world, a fantasy, every sub-creator, wishes in some measure to be a real maker, or hopes that he is drawing on reality: hopes that the peculiar quality of the secondary world (if not all the details) are derived from Reality, or are flowing into it. (“On Fairy-Stories” 70)

Successful fantasy conveys the truth of art as a redemptive and joyful reality to be “glimpsed” in the consolation of the happy ending:

The peculiar quality of the ‘joy’ in successful Fantasy can thus be explained as a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth. It is not only a ‘consolation’ for the sorrow of this world, but a satisfaction, and an answer to that question, ‘Is it true?’ (“On Fairy-Stories” 70-71)

Each eucatastrophe created by the artist may come true in an as yet unforeseen way: “But in the ‘eucatastrophe’ we see in a brief vision that the answer may be greater – it may be a far-off gleam or echo of *evangelium* in the real world” (“On Fairy-Stories” 71). When art and life become linked, as they have in the gospels, this unity of legend and history gives the taste of joy and “primary truth” to a narrative; human creativity is fulfilled, with the result of joy:

It is not difficult to imagine the peculiar excitement and joy that one would feel, if any specially beautiful fairy-story were found to be ‘primarily’ true, its narrative to be history....The Christian joy, the *Gloria*, is of the same kind...But this story is supreme; and it is true. Art has been verified. God is the Lord, of angels, and of men – and of elves. Legend and History have met and fused. (“On Fairy-Stories” 72)

Story-making enriches creation, sanctified by its connection to the Christian story:

The Evangelium has not abrogated legends; it has hallowed them, especially the ‘happy ending’....So great is the bounty with which he has been treated that he may now, perhaps, fairly dare to guess that in Fantasy he may actually assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation. All tales may come true; and yet, at the last, redeemed, they may be as like and as unlike the forms that we give

them as Man, finally redeemed, will be like and unlike the fallen that we know. (“On Fairy-Stories” 73)

The “truth” of stories, then, may be an eschatological fulfillment that is not presently accessible to its writer and readers. Through the eucatastrophe, the nature of stories reflects the redemptive nature of reality itself, and provides a brief glimpse of a transcendent reality.

b) Relationship with the Reader

As we have seen through an examination of his essay, “On Fairy-Stories,” Tolkien has developed a theory of storytelling that is also applicable to his own fiction (as will be demonstrated in Chapters 2, 3, and 4). The central aspects of subcreation and eucatastrophe are founded on a relationship to a “primary creator.” The freedom extended to a subcreator to share in the creative act is then extended further to the reader, who envisions or interprets the story. In the second part of this chapter, I will focus on Tolkien’s further definition of his idea of a free relationship between author and reader, using the principles of “allegory” and “applicability.” Tolkien’s idea of the freedom of the reader is linked to his view of the relationship with a primary creator. As the subcreator shares in the creative activity of the Supreme Artist through “mythopoeia,” so too is the envisioning of the story a form of collaboration between author and reader. Subcreation and mythopoeic storytelling enable the extension of freedom to the reader to share in the making of meaning.

In Tolkien’s view, for an author to impose a set meaning on his or her own story is to limit the reader’s freedom. This idea is developed through the opposition of the terms “allegory” and “applicability”:

But I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse 'applicability' with 'allegory'; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author. (*Rings* 11)

This point is especially important to an understanding of Tolkien's symbolic representations in *The Lord of the Rings*; contemporary critics saw the Ring of Power, for example, as an allegorical representation of the use of the atomic bomb in the Second World War. In his foreword to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings* itself, Tolkien attempts to clear up this misconception:

As for any inner meaning or 'message', it has in the intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical.... The real war does not resemble the legendary war in its process or its conclusion. If it had inspired or directed the development of the legend, then certainly the Ring would have been seized and used against Sauron. (10-11)

Tolkien rejects allegory in favour of applicability. The highly complex nature of artistic inspiration points to a multitude of sources, not all of which are consciously intended:

An author cannot of course remain wholly unaffected by his experience, but the ways in which a story-germ uses the soil of experience are extremely complex, and attempts to define the process are at best guesses from evidence that is inadequate and ambiguous. (11)

Tolkien uses the term "allegory" to describe a narrative in which every character and object has an exact symbolic equivalent; the story may then be "read" to abstract a message that the author wants to convey. He distinguishes between a "moral" of the story, and an allegorical meaning that is predetermined by the author:

There is a 'moral', I suppose, in any tale worth telling. But that is not the same thing. Even the struggle between darkness and light (as he ¹ calls it, not me) is for me just a particular phase of history, one example of its pattern, perhaps, but not The Pattern; and the actors are individuals – they each, of course, contain universals, or they would not live at all, but they never represent them as such. (*Letters* 121)

Tolkien does, however, recognize the difficulty of writing a story free from allegory: “I dislike Allegory – the conscious and intentional allegory – yet any attempt to explain the purport of myth or fairytale must use allegorical language” (*Letters* 145). Human life itself, in Tolkien’s view, may be viewed as a type of allegory: “In a larger sense, it is I suppose impossible to write any ‘story’ that is not allegorical in proportion as it ‘comes to life,’ since each of us is an allegory, embodying in a particular tale and clothed in the garments of time and space, universal truth and everlasting life” (*Letters* 121). Accordingly, Tolkien proposes a point of convergence between allegory and story, as both may be “read” for meaning. This difference is in the approach and intention of the author: allegory is meant to elicit a given reading, while “story” has manifest applicability to life because it mirrors reality:

Of course, Allegory and Story converge, meeting somewhere in Truth. So that the only perfectly consistent allegory is a real life; and the only fully intelligible story is an allegory. And one finds, even in imperfect human ‘literature’, that the better and more consistent an allegory is the more easily it can be read ‘just as a story’; and the better and more closely woven a story is the more easily can those so minded find allegory in it. But the two start from opposite ends. You can make the Ring into an allegory of our own time, if you like: an allegory of the inevitable fate that waits for all attempts to defeat evil power by power. But that is only because all power magical or mechanical does always so work. You cannot write a story about an apparently simple magic ring without that bursting in, if you really take the ring seriously, and make things happen that would happen, if such a thing existed. (*Letters* 121)

Perhaps a story, even one of Tolkien’s own stories, does not always fall into a sharp divide, but may be placed into a “continuum” between myth and allegory. It is not the story itself that tends to fall into one of these strong binary categories, but rather the author’s own approach. The “freedom” of subcreation can be used for good or evil purposes, just as free will can: “Great harm can be done, of course, by this potent mode

of ‘myth’ – especially wilfully. The right to ‘freedom’ of the subcreator is no guarantee among fallen men that it will not be used wickedly as is Free Will” (*Letters* 194).

Joseph Pearce takes a different stance (than this thesis does) on the allegory / applicability issue, in his article, “Resurrecting Myth: A Response to Dr. Murphy’s ‘Response.’” For Pearce, Tolkien’s distinction between allegory and applicability remains a distinction between types of allegory. Pearce cites Tolkien’s statement that he wishes to avoid “formal or mechanical allegory” (see below), as a sign that other types of allegory might be welcome, and points to the idea that critics are able to use the other method of the parable as a more fitting comparison. Both parable and “formal” allegory, according to Pearce, are allegorical approaches: “In this passage Tolkien is speaking of the dangers of reducing the myth to a formal and mechanical allegory whilst advocating that the critic employ the more careful and subtle allegorical approach implied by the use of parables” (23). Tolkien makes a distinction between allegory and applicability (allegory and myth), but may support or even employ a parable – which is another type of allegory (see also Harrison). Pearce, however, does affirm Tolkien’s preference of applicability as resistant to the easy reduction of myth. Pearce downplays the difference between allegory and applicability in order to highlight the importance of meaning: “This *applicability* of the literal meaning of a story to the world beyond its pages is no less ‘allegorical’ than other forms of allegory; it is a difference in degree, not essence” (23). Even so, Pearce recognizes the importance of Tolkien’s distinction in establishing a relation to the reader: “Tolkien preferred the subtler allegorical approach of mythology whereby the *facts* of the story become *applicable* to the truth that is present in our own lives” (22).

Even if Pearce calls both approaches “allegory,” it must be recognized that Tolkien clearly distinguishes between the two approaches of author to reader and work – whether we call them modes of allegory, or allegory and applicability. It is not merely the “genre” of the resulting story that matters most in this distinction, but the relation with the reader. Christian meaning is present in the story, as Pearce points out, but in a way that ultimately is grounded in the subcreative relationship, which allows for the embodiment of meaning. It is in this context that Pearce’s argument should be considered. Pearce makes the point that Tolkien integrated Christian meaning in his work. The article was written in response to another critic who asserted the contrary, that in Tolkien’s conception of Middle-earth, the “linguistic foundations are as important as the religious” (as Pearce words it) (21). Pearce makes the point that Tolkien listed his Catholicism first in the aspects that influenced his writing; accordingly, Tolkien’s Catholicism is significant in his moulding of Middle-Earth (22).

Pearce offers some examples of Christian references in *The Lord of the Rings*: Tolkien’s statement that the incident on Mount Doom exemplifies an aspect of the Lord’s Prayer (see Chapter 5 for further details on how the eucatastrophe manifests the principle of “deliver us from evil”), and the fact that Sauron falls on the 25th of March, the date of Easter under the old calendar, as well as the feast of the Annunciation (23). Pearce sees the destruction of the One Ring as a direct allusion to Christ’s victory over sin and death: “On the twenty-fifth of March the One Sin, like the One Ring, had been ‘unmade’, destroying the power of the Dark Lord” (23). This date had much personal “applicability” for Tolkien, however – he intended his manuscript to be delivered to the

publisher (ready for the printer) by March 25th, 1953; he went so far as to specify this date in his contract (*Letters* 165).

It is not the 'a=b' type of meaning that Tolkien uses, but rather a dynamic interaction of elements, similar to the plot of a story. Tolkien develops this idea in his essay, "Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics" (first published in 1936). In the "Beowulf" essay, Tolkien makes the distinction between formal and mechanical allegory and myth; this, too, is a differentiation based on the author's intended relationship with the audience, rather than strict generic classifications. The opposite of "formal or mechanical allegory" is the incarnational model, argues Tolkien, in which meaning is embodied in the history and geography of the invented world. This incarnational model is an approach to literature that honours the embodiment of meaning, without finding restrictive singular applicability; new meanings and applications of the redemptive truth to the situation within the story unfold in the mind of the reader as well as the writer. To "dissect" a myth into parts would destroy the aliveness of story itself by creating a set of disembodied symbols:

The significance of a myth is not easily to be pinned on paper by analytical reasoning. It is at its best when it is presented by a poet who feels rather than makes explicit what his theme portends; who presents it incarnate in the world of history and geography, as our poet has done. Its defender is thus at a disadvantage: unless he is careful, and speaks in parables, he will kill what he is studying by vivisection, and he will be left with a formal or mechanical allegory, and, what is more, probably with one that will not work. For myth is alive at once and in all its parts, and dies before it can be dissected. (15)

The use of the term "mechanical" is key to the interpretation of authorial intention. As Tolkien later makes the point in his essay "On Fairy-Stories", the "device" of the storytelling "magician" is intended to dominate the reader's interpretation, and not to respect the reader's participation in meaning-making through applicability of ideas

inherent in the secondary world, as would the subcreative “enchanter”. Parable, then, becomes not so much a job for the fictional author, as one for the interpreter of a work. Tolkien’s use of parable (which he employs in the “Beowulf” essay to describe ongoing Beowulf scholarship) is intended to be an interpretive device.

Further discussion of the parable reveals a genre in which meaning is enabled to be present without either fixity of meaning or infringement upon the reader’s freedom to interpret. In his essay, “Parables and Transcendence” (published in *Ways of Reading the Bible*) Bernard Harrison distinguishes between parable and allegory. He describes how the biblical parables (used by Jesus as teaching devices) were often a way of calling into question the assumptions of the listener, and proposing a different, more transcendent set of values that belong to God. In order to make sense of the parable, the listener would need to change his or her assumptions to incorporate this new framework of understanding (parables in this sense allow one to ‘transcend’ present ideas and experience):

In short, to read the description of a sequence of events *as a narrative*, with a point and a structure, involves reading it against a background consisting of a set of presuppositions, together with the conceptual scheme in terms of which those presuppositions are formulated. The presuppositions and the underlying conceptual scheme direct the narrative. But the relationship is reciprocal, and hence narrative can be used to influence, to change, the underlying conceptual scheme. The technique is to tell the narrative in such a way that the mind, in order to discover a point and a structure in it, has to shift and rearrange the underlying conceptual structure. (200)

The presentation of a parable becomes a profoundly listener-oriented activity. Harrison also talks about how the parables were often told to illustrate the answer to a question. While an allegory may be more “monologic,” to illustrate a point that the author wishes to make to the audience, the parable is more “dialogic” or directed towards the listener’s

attention – because it is created out of a response to the listener’s own question or desire for more knowledge (see Chapter 2 for discussion of these terms).

In the genre of the parable, the listener should understand elements of the story in the context of the whole work, rather than studying each motif in isolation. Tolkien affirms his belief in embodied, incarnate meaning as opposed to doctrine concealed in an allegory. Bernard Harrison recognizes a similar distinction between allegory and parable:

Each of the elements of an allegory has an independent significance: to grasp the significance of the allegory just is to see what each separate *motif* represents, or stands for. A parallel, or simile, does not work like that: it is only when taken as a whole that it has significance.... What is proposed, in short, is a comparison, between the whole matter of debate and the whole content of the parable, not the delivery of a statement of doctrine concealed within an allegorical cipher. (Harrison 191)

“Parable” in this sense offers the embodiment of meaning that corresponds to Tolkien’s principles of “myth” and “applicability,” as it manifests meaning within the structure of the story; the sum of the whole is greater than its disparate elements:

If I am right, then, we have an explanation of why so much of the teaching of Jesus consists of narrative. It is because narrative offers, in the end, the only way of talking seriously about the moral life. It is serious because it is content to *show* what all other kinds of moral talk attempt, in the face of our condition as beings in a state of becoming, to *say*. (Harrison 208)

Robert Murray, in “J.R.R. Tolkien and the Art of the Parable,” also makes an important distinction that adds to the allegory/applicability issue; like Harrison, Murray sees the “parable” in a listener-oriented context that differs from allegory in its privileging of the listener’s interpretive process: “But the parable can be applied by *an individual* to her or her varying situations and states” (45). Murray further illumines the distinction of approach between allegory and story, and quotes Tolkien: “Of course,

allegory and story converge...from opposite ends..." (*Letters* 121). Murray sees

Tolkien's approach as rooted in the gospels themselves:

The functioning of allegory is powered not so much by the symbolic potency latent in things or in human life as by a plan or message which the author conceals under artificially constructed symbols, with clues to lead the reader to discover what is the intended solution in the actual world. All this, I believe, is implicit in those short phrases in which Tolkien says that story and allegory 'start out from opposite ends', and that the applicability of 'the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author'. But it is also important that he recognized that, in the greatest stories and allegorical narratives, the qualities of both modes of sub-creation may overlap and mingle. And so they do in at least some of the parables of Jesus. (47-48)

Murray, too, recognizes in Tolkien's statement on allegory and applicability a key strategy that Tolkien felt an author should use to recognize the reader's freedom – an effort that reflects subcreatively the narrative strategy that is mirrored in the teachings of the gospels.

Is Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* then a parable? Tolkien's secondary world embodied in his invented myth demands an interpretation more various than a single parable; as an entire history it elicits many responses to its vast array of interlinked stories. Tolkien wanted his work to be analogous to life, and treated accordingly. His work does, however, have similar elements as regards listener-oriented tales and a "transcendence" of current perceptions through story (see also Chapter 4). If not completely a parable, however, Tolkien's work may in turn provide critical insights about interpreting biblical parables: "Tolkien's 'applicability' is a better, because more flexible, key to understanding Jesus' parables than any rigidly defined set of categories" ² (Murray 46).

Gwenyth Elise Hood, in her dissertation, *The Lidless Eye and the Long Burden: The Struggle Between Good and Evil in Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings*, ³ concurs that

the making of categories is not central to Tolkien's distinction; she asserts instead that in the distinction between formal and mechanical allegory, Tolkien recognizes a need for the author to show reverence and respect for an art work's individuality: "Tolkien's *caveat*, then, turns out to be not an attack on any particular interpretive strategy, but a requirement that all strategies should recognize mystery, respect each work's individuality, and be used with great care" (21). Hood cites what Tolkien says in the *Beowulf* essay about meaning being embodied incarnate in a created world; this incarnational view has different implications from the reading of the story. Inventions of new things, or new combinations in the secondary world, do not have to reflect events in the primary world exactly. The final word on the debate about meaning belongs to Tolkien, who describes how the genre of fantasy enables the author to "embody" meaning in a secondary world (also quoted above):

It is at its best when it is presented by a poet who feels rather than makes explicit what his theme portends; who presents it incarnate in the world of history and geography, as our poet [*Beowulf's* author] has done. ("Beowulf" 15)

In his article, "Recovery: Name in *The Lord of the Rings*," David Jeffrey describes how Tolkien's use of language has an "incarnational" quality that sees the embodiment of meaning in story even at the level of the single word. According to David Jeffrey, Tolkien has a "medieval" approach to allegory, in which story is a repetition of the original "pattern" of incarnation and redemption. These aspects are repeated in the language itself, even more than in the narrative. Rather than directly referring to biblical events, Tolkien "recovers" patterns by finding them within the mythic structures of language itself: "Tolkien has chosen to anchor his referential language beneath the conscious structure of other mythic formulations (biblical or

Germanic) in the subconsciously meaningful deep structure of Western language itself' (112). Rather than overt allegory, Tolkien preferred applicability, and this approach extends to the individual words, which are richly allusive, rather than explicitly allegorical (*passim*).

Jeffrey explains how names within *The Lord Of The Rings* provide a glimpse into the character's place in a larger story. The character Aragorn, for example, has a name "charged with meaning" (112). Jeffrey offers a detailed analysis of the linguistic elements of Aragorn's name, and the ideas invoked through its association with Old English and other Indo-European languages. For example, the prefix "ar," when referring to a person, might be glossed as "*munus, apostolus, angelus minister*," in the context of a "messenger from heaven" (111). As a quality of character, it might also mean "*honor, dignitas, gloria, magnificentia, honestas*," or "*reverentia*," and could be used in the sense of heavenly glory, a "glory and power in the kingdom of heaven" (110). The suffix "agorn" could be read as an allusion to Old English terms, *agan* and *agangan*, with meanings including "to possess," "to pass by unnoticed, but also to surpass; to travel quickly, to come forth; to come to pass," in the context of "he saw a miracle come to pass" (111-12). The name of Arwen, Aragorn's betrothed, has a suffix, "wen," that is related to the Old English word "*wyn*" meaning joy, "yielding therefore the joy of 'ar,'" says Jeffrey (112). The form "*wen*" also refers to joy, but has more specific connotations of "conviction," "belief," and "expectation," and has even connections of faith in a providential order: "It is also used in the sense of 'faith,' 'in the fullness of time,' or faith in Providence" (112).

While Aragorn originally appears in *The Lord of the Rings* as “Strider,” a wandering “Ranger” with hidden purposes, he is eventually revealed as the exiled king who returns to fulfill earlier events in ways unforeseen. Furthermore, his marriage to Arwen, after he is crowned king, blesses the fulfillment of his kingdom with a return of lost Edenic peacefulness, as Gandalf says:

‘At last I understand why we have waited! Now not day only shall be beloved, but night too shall be beautiful and blessed and all its fear pass away!’

Then the King welcomed his guests, and they alighted; and Elrond surrendered the sceptre, and laid the hand of his daughter in the hand of the King, and together they went up into the High City, and all the stars flowered in the sky. And Aragorn the King Elessar wedded Arwen Undómiel in the City of the Kings upon the day of Midsummer, and the tale of their long waiting and labours was come to fulfilment. (1009)

We may draw on Jeffrey’s discussion to postulate that the name of Aragorn, a man who returns as a “light from the ashes” to re-forge the “sword that was broken,” shows the return of the unexpected that is associated with his kingship. Furthermore, we might speculate that his name alludes to the eucatastrophe itself, and the ability of language itself to hold this possibility for joyful turn of events within its meanings (see below, in discussion of “Dernhelm” and recovery). Aragorn’s kingdom is a fulfillment of joy and hope, and with his symbolic marriage, the fear associated with darkness as tangible power rather than simply absence of light passes away.⁴ The flowering stars might also allude to an ancient beauty that art seeks to recover; as portrayed in the poem, stars “flame like flowers beneath the ancient song, / whose very echo after-music long / has since pursued” (“Mythopoeia”).

For Tolkien, stories are linked to the reality of the Incarnation as a story that came true; all stories may recall this redemptive aspect of reality, and through eucatastrophe reenact aspects of this central theme in human experience. The “embodiment” of meaning

in a story becomes the author's way of reflecting such a divine embodiment of meaning in the created world. Not immediately apparent, this meaning must be searched for to be understood. Perhaps language itself reflects this incarnational quality of reality. For a myth to have the "inner consistency of reality," then, it must respect the freedom of the readers, and have "applicability" to experience without the restrictive interpretation intended by the writer of allegory. Tolkien's own writing process was intended to reflect this more open approach. He concentrated on the story itself, without overt attempts to insert religious symbolism:

The Lord of the Rings is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like 'religion', to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism. (*Letters* 172)

The Christian, incarnational view of history reappears in mythic stories, Tolkien proposes, because it is the nature of reality, and so all stories will reflect this pattern of meaning. According to David Jeffrey, the "sudden glimpse" of joy in Tolkien's eucatastrophe is a Christian incarnational reality (114). If this is so, then stories that share in the redemptive quality of the "primary truth" of the Gospels are themselves echoes of the incarnation in which "Legend and History have met and fused." Patterns are repeated, as truth is embodied in new settings. The story of the fall, for example, is one that is often repeated in Tolkien's own work:

These tales are 'new', they are not directly derived from other myths and legends, but they must inevitably contain a large measure of ancient wide-spread motives or elements. After all, I believe that legends and myths are largely made of 'truth', and indeed present aspects of it that can only be received in this mode; and long ago certain truths and modes of this kind were discovered and must always reappear. There cannot be any 'story' without a fall – all stories are ultimately about the fall – at least not for human minds as we know them and have them. (*Letters* 147)

Myth, as a type of “secondary creation,” is an embodiment of truth in “unfamiliar settings.” Mythopoeia stands on its own, as it were, and has “varied applicability” to the lives, interpretations, and experiences of readers. Subcreative fantasy writing is a type of embodiment of meaning in the form of the secondary world. This world has the inner consistency of reality, and so the reader may relate to this world in a way analogous to primary reality. The reader must also become a maker and interpreter of meaning.

Notes To Chapter 1

¹ Tolkien refers to Rayner Unwin, of the publishing firm George Allen & Unwin, engaged in publishing Tolkien's work. Rayner had first read and reviewed *The Hobbit* for his father, Stanley Unwin, as a young boy.

² Murray gives an example of the reading of the Good Samaritan parable that asks, "Who is my neighbour?" The question's meaning is found in its applicability to the lives of the listeners, who are meant to apply this principle to themselves:

But then Jesus turns the question round: it is now no longer 'how should I define (that is, limit) the category of neighbour,' but 'how should I behave, now that I have had to recognize that *anyone* can be my neighbour?' (46)

Even this parable has been read in a strictly allegorical fashion, says Murray, such as by the church fathers who "developed an interpretation which makes the whole story and every detail into an allegory of the drama of sin and redemption" (46):

To give only the main points, 'he fell among robbers' refers to the Fall caused by Satan. The priest and the Levite represent the Jewish law as viewed by Paul. The Samaritan, interpreted as meaning 'guardian', symbolizes Christ; his mount, the incarnation; the inn is the Church, and so on. (46)

And yet, says Murray, once the reader identifies the self with the Samaritan, and the allegorical reading follows, this may be yet another "possible aspect of the story's 'applicability'" (47). Accordingly, there is a point of convergence between allegory and applicability in that allegories are one type of applicable reading (though not the only one) (47).

³ Gwennyth Elise Hood's dissertation, *The Lidless Eye and the Long Burden: The Struggle between Good and Evil in Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings*, has some structural similarities to this thesis; she begins with an examination of the "On-Fairy Stories" essay, moves to a discussion of Sauron and the Elves, and closes with reflections on providence (perhaps this is a natural progression, given the desire to apply Tolkien's storytelling concepts to his own work). Her argument, however, is substantially different from mine. Hood identifies the eucatastrophe as the "informing purport" of the work, and contrasts a "Vision of Harmony" with a "Vision of Domination." Hood discusses at length the implications of the elven uses of magic in relation to the natural environment and to other creatures; her work does not propose a framework of narrative freedom or shared storytelling in which to view Tolkien's "subcreative" relationships, or to examine the elves, hobbits and Sauron as "author figures."

⁴ Only Tom Bombadil, in his state which suggests pre-lapsarian awareness, has experienced the darkness under the stars as "fearless."

Chapter 2: Counterfeit Creation

a) *The Case of Sauron*

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien has Sauron on the one hand, and a variety of creatures including elves, hobbits, and men on the other, embody two very different approaches to subcreation. I will focus first on Sauron, and deal with the elves and hobbits in later chapters. The elves display the “freedom” of storytelling as they “enchant” the audience with their poetry, and listeners in turn give willing assent to the secondary world of the story. Sauron’s forging of the Ring is an act of “magic,” intended to dominate other wills. This represents the “unfree” model of storytelling. Sauron’s act is a “subcreative fall” that ruptures the relationship with the primary creator. Sauron eventually becomes prey to the same deception that he uses on others, however, and mistakes his “secondary” creation for a “primary” creation. The forging of the Ring of Power to enclose his self and dominate others shows the nonentity resulting from a lack of true relationship, both with the primary source of his creativity, and with the recipients of it. This self-enclosure results in wordlessness and lack of communication.

Sauron, as an author figure, neglects the shared aspect of creativity. Accordingly, his discourse is corrupted to the point of becoming inarticulate. To draw out further the implications of the varying approaches to discourse that Tolkien demonstrates through Sauron and the elves, I will employ two terms developed by the theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. Sauron’s speech, whose purpose of domination constitutes what Bakhtin calls “monologic discourse.” Other characters who resist Sauron, such as the hobbits, ground their poetry in a relationship to the listener, and engage instead in “dialogic discourse.”

In subsequent chapters I will explain how the act of storytelling is shared between authors, as well as between author and audience. The hobbits, for example, change their poems to suit varying contexts. Storytelling for them is interactive. The elves also draw the listener into the secondary world of the poetry, respecting the freedom of their audience by eliciting willing assent. This enchantment is related to an authorial approach within the story that respects the reader's freedom as much as Sauron disrespects it. In the discussion of this chapter and subsequent ones, I will attempt to demonstrate that according to Tolkien's theory (as noted above), the freedom of shared creation, extended by primary creator to author, is in turn extended to the audience.

In the essay, "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien distinguishes between the two principles of *magic* (false creation) and *enchantment* (authentic secondary creation):

Enchantment produces a Secondary World into which both designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside; but in its purity it is artistic in desire and purpose. Magic produces, or pretends to produce, an alteration in the Primary World. It does not matter by whom it is said to be practised, fay or mortal, it remains distinct from the other two; it is not an art but a technique; its desire is *power* in this world, domination of things and wills. (52-53)

Both principles are, essentially, approaches to the making of art. Enchantment, as Tolkien says, is "artistic in purpose and desire," and so it is geared toward the realization of the subcreative world. Enchantment seeks willing participation of the listener; indeed, the listener's acquiescence is necessary for the embodiment of the secondary world. When accorded "secondary belief," the secondary world takes on the appearance of reality, through the means of the reader's imagination.¹ The reader accordingly becomes a "partner" in "making and delight." Magic, on the other hand, is deceptive in nature,

and only “pretends” to produce an alteration in the primary world. It produces, in fact, the illusion of power to all who desire to employ it.

In one of his letters, Tolkien, rather than referring to magic and enchantment, distinguishes between different approaches to ‘magic,’ by using terms that highlight the quality of deceit: “for the purposes of the tale, some would say that there is a latent distinction such as was once called the distinction between *magia* and *goeteia*.” Even with the change in vocabulary, Sauron’s attitude is once again characterized by his intention to subjugate:

The Enemy’s operations are by no means all goetic deceits, but ‘magic’ that produces real effects in the physical world. But his *magia* he uses to bulldoze both people and things, and his *goeteia* to terrify and subjugate. Their *magia* the Elves and Gandalf use (sparingly): a *magia*, producing real results (like fire in a wet faggot) for specific beneficent purposes. Their goetic effects are entirely *artistic* and not intended to deceive: they never deceive Elves (but may deceive or bewilder unaware Men) since the difference is to them as clear as the difference to us between fiction, painting, and sculpture, and ‘life’. (*Letters* 200)

As with the term “allegory,” which he could use in two different ways, or in at least one way that is distinguished from “applicability,” Tolkien uses the term magic in two different senses, one of which in the essay is referred to as “enchantment.” As Tolkien points out with reference to the two types of ‘magic,’ “Neither is, in this tale, good or bad (per se), but only by motive or purpose in use” (*Letters* 199). This passage foregrounds an essential point that Tolkien makes: the classification of a story or artistic endeavour into types is most important only as it defines the author’s approach and relation to his audience. So, too, is the case with allegory and applicability. An authorial approach that foregrounds free relationship, in Tolkien’s view, is paramount.

These principles of magic and enchantment refer to artistic approaches *within* the “secondary world” of the “fairy-story.” They are put into symbolic form within *The Lord*

Of The Rings, as characters become artist figures with more fully realized powers; their powers take on more concrete and literal meaning. For the elves, the subcreative art of enchantment implies the ability to make dreams seem real for the willing audience of their art. For Sauron, artistic “technique” means forging the “one ring” that was intended to dominate men, elves and dwarves.

Tolkien states that one of the main artistic purposes of the elves is to provide a contrast of artistic approach with Sauron. The elves have a different type of “magic” (elsewhere called “enchantment”) that is distinguished as a subcreative approach to art:

I have not used ‘magic’ consistently, and indeed the Elven-queen Galadriel is obliged to remonstrate with the Hobbits on their confused use of the word both for the devices and operations of the Enemy, and for those of the Elves. I have not, because there is not a word for the latter (since all human stories have suffered the same confusion). But the elves are there (in my tales) to demonstrate the difference. Their ‘magic’ is Art, delivered from many of its human limitations: more effortless, more quick, more complete (product, and vision in unflawed correspondence). And its object is Art not Power, sub-creation not domination and tyrannous re-forming of Creation. (*Letters* 146)

Although they do not create “primary” worlds, the elves have the ability to make their tales seem real at a primary level to their audience: “To experience *directly* a Secondary World: the potion is too strong, and you give to it Primary Belief, however marvellous the events” (“On Fairy-Stories” 52). The “suspension of disbelief,” is, in Tolkien’s view, only a “substitute” for successful “subcreation” (“On Fairy-Stories” 37). The sub-creator is able to make an entire enclosed world within the realm of story, in an act of subcreation that echoes primary creation.² Art, for Tolkien, is not the result, but the “operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-creation” (“On Fairy-Stories” 47). The relationship to the reader is also key because the successful tale can elicit the reader’s “secondary belief.”

In Sauron, Tolkien offers a model of artistic subjugation through the pretence of altering primary creation. Tolkien describes how his story is “fundamentally concerned with the problem of the relation of Art (and Sub-creation) and Primary Reality” (*Letters* 145). The forging of the Ring as a power-oriented “device” of the magician is also an act of “counterfeit creation.” What, in practical terms, would be the effects of such an approach, and how specifically does it relate to Sauron’s use of the ring? Alan McComas’ analysis of the linguistic dimensions of Sauron’s ring, in his article, “Negating and Affirming Spirit Through Language,” provides a theoretical context in which to view the implications of confusing primary and secondary creation. McComas distinguishes between two methods of using language that relate to an individual’s own understanding. McComas refers to Walter Benjamin’s theory of language as “the translation of the nameless into the name,” with the resulting addition of knowledge (7). Through using language, “we come to know the world and to know ourselves,” but we also become faced with a “division” in the universe, a “difference between being and knowing” (7). One may experience a world “re-created” through language, but language needs to be understood in a relation to what it represents. Here, McComas acknowledges Tolkien’s view of the necessity of understanding the relationship between subcreation and Primary Creation:

Language redefines the world through consciousness, and vice versa. In that sense the world is re-created through language – but only indirectly. It is important to understand the new powers and perceptions that we gain through the agency of language. Tolkien asserts that the human invention (language of man) must remain subordinate to the divine creation (language of things). With the proper relationship between being and knowing in mind, Tolkien characterizes human language as an inherently interiorized model of the world. (7)

McComas is referring to the human mind's ability to create general concepts about the world, such as "green" and "grass," and recombine them with what Tolkien calls "an enchanter's power," leading to an internal desire to wield power in the "world external to our minds" (7). When language is used to contain and to possess, evil may result: "What is evil about Sauron is his assumption that, through his knowledge – knowledge and power arrived at, *and literally contained by*, language – he can possess everything that is" (9). This danger of possessiveness is underscored by Tolkien in "On Fairy-Stories," but recovery is used to liberate the sense of wonder through the new combinations of language.

For McComas, Sauron's mistake is that he confuses the language of "words" ("epistemology") with the language of "things" ("ontology"):

Within the circle of the One Ring, epistemology and ontology merge: the 'language of man' and the 'language of things' interact: the boundary between Spirit and Magic is dissolved. When the object and the language articulating it are paradoxically recombined, so that they are and are not one and the same, what happens? Spirit – the inarticulate basis of the object, no longer has a place in the scheme. Existence, within the circle of the Ring, is utterly reduced to language. This is Tolkien's idea of evil. (44)

The human arts of "magic" attempt to replace the "spirit" inherent in the world, but existence must not be reduced to language. One who believes that words give power over the things themselves, to the extent that they are a substitute for the things, would be living in an illusory world, and failing to see things in a context outside of one's own mind. (Viewed in this light, McComas, too, asserts the dangers of confusing the human oriented language of words, that Tolkien terms Secondary Creation, with the language of things, that Tolkien terms Primary Creation, or Primary reality.) This confusion is central

to what Tolkien calls the “subcreative fall.” Language has a communal function and cannot be reduced to private speech.

In McComas’ article, Sauron is depicted as falling prey to his own deception, in mistaking the world of language for the world of things. In Tolkien’s terms, we can say that Sauron himself is deceived into believing that his own counterfeit activity is a primary creation. This mistaking of language and object is then clearly demonstrated in the inscription of his intention on the ring. Sauron, in fact, inscribed his intention to dominate other wills on the Ring itself, in the speech of Mordor (here translated):

*One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,
One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them. (Rings 63)*

As Gandalf says, “these are only two lines” of a longer verse long known to the elves, describing the making of the One Ring and the smaller rings designed to enslave the races of Middle-earth through it:

*Three Rings for the Elven-kings under the sky,
Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their halls of stone,
Nine for Mortal Men doomed to die,
One for the Dark Lord on his dark throne
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.
One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,
One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie. (Rings 64)*

This goal of domination is the only “discourse” associated with the ring. Sauron and his minions do not recite poems, tell stories, or engage in any other types of artistic activity.

McComas does not distinguish between the two approaches of Sauron and the elves as “free” or “unfree” in their orientation towards the audience and its response. He does, however, see a type of language that is destructive to the reader. He uses an image of a “black hole” to describe the non-entity resulting from the attempt to exercise

tyrannical power over other individuals. A narrative text will normally expose the author's mind to the reader, but in Sauron's case, McComas argues, this relationship is "inverted": "to wear or to 'read' the Ring causes the reader to be internally revealed to its author" (46). The wearer of the ring, desiring invisibility, "fades" and becomes visible only to the eye of Sauron (46). The One Ring assimilates the "texts" of the other elven-rings, and ends in "bypassing spirit or reality for the sake of dominating language – ends by assimilating spirit itself (the spirit, literally, of the ringbearer) and relegating spirit to language" (46). A dystopian view results in which language not only dominates, but also penetrates and confines through ceaseless observation and immobilization of the listener (46).

In Tolkien's view, the act of "counterfeit creation" for the purpose of domination is the essential subcreative "fall":

It has various opportunities of 'Fall'. It may become possessive, clinging to the things made as 'its own', the sub-creator wishes to be the Lord and God of his private creation. He will then rebel against the laws of the Creator – especially against mortality. Both of these (alone or together) will lead to the desire for Power, for making the will more quickly effective, -and so to the Machine (or Magic). By the last I intend all use of external plans or devices (apparatus) instead of development of the inherent inner powers or talents – or even the use of these talents with the corrupted motive of dominating: bulldozing the real world, or coercing other wills. The Machine is our more obvious modern form though more closely related to Magic than is usually recognized. (*Letters* 145)

The idea of the "machine" emerges as a type of "magic" that is developed in order to resist the limitations imposed by mortality. The Ring of Power is an exemplar of the "device" a magician produces to expedite the assertion of power at the expense of other wills.

Another aspect of "counterfeit creation" is Sauron's enslavement of the orcs; although he cannot create living beings through his own initiative, he alters existing ones

to become enslaved to his will. There is a suggestion in *The Lord Of The Rings* that Sauron has created the orcs as a race of slaves, in “counterfeit” of true creation. Tolkien refers to this idea as mere speculation:

Treebeard does not say that the Dark Lord ‘created’ Trolls and Orcs. He says he ‘made’ them in *counterfeit* of certain creatures pre-existing. There is, to me, a wide gulf between the two statements, so wide that Treebeard’s statement could (in my world) have possibly been true. It is *not* true actually of the Orcs – who are fundamentally a race of ‘rational incarnate’ creatures, though horribly corrupted....Suffering and experience (and possibly the Ring itself) gave Frodo more insight... ‘The Shadow that bred them can only mock, it cannot make real new things of its own. I don’t think it gave life to the Orcs, it only ruined them and twisted them.’ In the legends of the Elder Days it is suggested that the Diabolus subjugated and corrupted some of the earliest Elves, before they had ever heard of the gods, let alone of God. (*Letters* 190-91)

According to Tolkien, Sauron cannot in fact “create” a race of beings, but only twist an existing one to suit his own purposes. Orcs “are nowhere stated clearly to be of any particular origin. But since they are servants of the Dark Power, and later of Sauron, neither of whom could, or would, produce living things, they must be ‘corruptions’” (*Letters* 178).

Through counterfeit creation, Sauron intends to retain all power, and to “devour” other wills in a never-ending attempt to fill the void of non-being. The key to Sauron’s power is the following: in order to gain full control over other wills, he must have their acquiescence, at least initially (he is able to harm the body, but less able to harm the spirit without its willingness). In order to do this, his eventual minions offer the illusion of power. The tragic irony lies in the fact that although one may seem to wield power over others through a ring, one actually loses his individuality and is in turn “devoured” from within.

Sauron has channelled much of his power into the Ring in order to use it as his means of domination:

‘So it is now: the Nine he has gathered to himself; the Seven also, or else they are destroyed. The Three are hidden still. But that no longer troubles him. He only needs the One; for he made that Ring himself, it is his, and he let a great part of his own former power pass into it, so that he could rule all the others. If he recovers it, then he will command them all again, wherever they be, even the Three, and all that has been wrought with them will be laid bare, and he will be stronger than ever.’ (*Rings* 65)

Because so much power is contained within the ring, now lost to him, Sauron seeks it at all costs; “all his thought is bent on it” (65). The ring that Frodo possesses is the One Ring, the “Master-ring, the One Ring to rule them all,” says Gandalf. “This is the One Ring that he lost many ages ago, to the great weakening of his power. He greatly desires it – but he must *not* get it” (64). This is the impetus that drives the action of the story, as the hobbits attempt to destroy the Ring without Sauron’s knowledge, aided by their companions. Sauron’s enclosure of power in the ring, intended to increase his ability to “bind” and to control, also makes him particularly vulnerable to those who might use it against him. Tolkien himself refers to the folkloric tradition of confining power in an external object, which makes the owner almost invulnerable, as long as he may retain possession of the object, and preserve it from destruction. Placing power in an external object is a “mythical way of representing the truth that *potency* (or perhaps *potentiality*), if it is to be exercised, and produce results, has to be externalized and so as it were passes, to a greater or lesser degree, out of one’s direct control” (*Letters* 279). The image of the Ring of Power symbolically represents the weakness and vulnerability associated with the will to power. By enclosing his power in a material object, Sauron risks having it lost, stolen, or taken over by someone else. Sauron’s greatest fear is that his ring will

be used against him; indeed he cannot imagine that his enemies would decline to use such a weapon of power. To do otherwise is outside the realm of his comprehension. His psychology is consumed by the necessity of power. We could say, perhaps, that Sauron has been ensnared by his own creation. In forging the One Ring, Sauron has confined his whole being within a material object to the extent that he has no authentic self beyond it – when it is destroyed, so is he, along with his power. The attempt to enclose and protect the self also weakens Sauron, cutting him off from outside relationships and thus from a reality external to the self.

The Ring of Power's circular shape reflects this self-enclosing process. The individual wants to expand the domain of power, at the same time as enclosing and protecting the self. Even while giving the illusion of doing so, the Ring eats away at the individual's true being, which is actually grounded in relationship with other beings (i.e., not with the Ring of Power). The longer the Ring is worn, the less possible it is to do without it; it has over time a corrupting influence that diminishes the wearer's selfhood. Gollum, who has borne the Ring for hundreds of years, for example, has been so changed by it that he no longer has enough sense of selfhood to refer to himself as "I"; his identity has become almost inextricably linked with his need to possess the "precious" (as he refers to it). Gandalf describes how this misshapen hobbit, after taking the Ring beneath the mountains, lived in solitude, and was altered by the experience:

'He was altogether wretched. He hated the dark, and he hated light more: he hated everything, and the Ring most of all.'

'What do you mean?' said Frodo. 'Surely the Ring was his precious and the only thing he cared for? But if he hated it, why didn't he get rid of it, or go away and leave it?'

'You ought to begin to understand, Frodo, after all you have heard,' said Gandalf. 'He hated it and loved it, as he hated and loved himself. He could not get rid of it. He had no will left in the matter.' (68)

Gollum has come to equate the Ring with his sense of self, and is unable to part with it; the longer one possesses the ring, the less possible it is to give it up voluntarily. After losing the Ring to Bilbo, Gollum revives somewhat when removed from its influence, even as he directs all energy towards regaining it: “You see,” says Gandalf, “though still bound by desire of it, the Ring was no longer devouring him; he began to revive a little. He felt old, terribly old, yet less timid, and he was mortally hungry” (70). Even Frodo, as he discovers the ring’s true nature (shortly after receiving it from Bilbo), finds that he cannot attempt to harm it or cast it aside, even into his own fireplace. Intending to throw the Ring into the “hottest part of the fire,” Frodo cannot do so, “not without a great struggle.” Even as he tries to throw it away, “with an effort of will,” he finds that with the same motion “he had put it back in his pocket” (74). The Ring seems to have an irresistible force like a magnet.

The Ring provides the illusion of power and control for its bearer to wield in turn, and become in effect another Sauron. For this reason it is necessary to resist the desire to use the ring, even with good intentions, as a weapon against its maker. When Gandalf is offered the Ring by Frodo, he declines it, stating that by so using it he would eventually become subjected to it and corrupted by it:

‘Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself. Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good. Do not tempt me! I dare not take it, not even to keep it safe, unused. The wish to wield it would be too great for my strength. I shall have such need of it. Great perils lie before me.’ (75)

Sauron, in forging the ring, has made an object that limits, encloses and alienates those who come within the bounds of its self-defining and self-enclosing circle.

The self-enclosing desire for power that the Ring represents precludes authentic relationships and communication, resulting in non-being, insubstantiality, and parodies of creation. Rose A. Zimbardo discusses how the Ring represents an “idea of self,” a “delusion of false individuation” which desires the domination of other beings, “the dark desire that lurks within each of us to make all time and other creatures subject to our own wills,” resulting in a “convoluted” will that is “barren”: “He can only create shadowy parodies, grotesque imitations of the good” (67). Sauron, who attempts to rival primary creation for the purpose of dominion, does not recognize the distinctness of other creatures; the Nazgûl, for instance, the favoured servants of Sauron, are nameless figures who take on substantial appearance only to those wearing the ring. The Nazgûl, who were once nine human kings, were deceived by the promises of Sauron, and corrupted through their rings (which are controlled by the One Ring).³ As “wraiths,” they have no true shape in the world of the living; their black robes are “real robes that they wear to give shape to their nothingness when they have dealings with the living” (*Rings* 238). They became like living ghosts, or wraiths, as they are referred to, and bear the corresponding insubstantiality of evil. Their chief power is the ability to instill fear and despair in their enemies.

The will of the ring wraiths is subject to Sauron, and they, in turn, seek to impose their will on others. The Nazgûl attempt to pull Frodo into their own wraith-like world, to bring him, like themselves, under Sauron’s power. The Ring is key to the accomplishment of this end. Even though Sauron wants the Ring back for himself, he uses it to entice Frodo to fall under his sway. Stabbed with a Morgul-knife, with a splinter working towards his heart, Frodo nearly becomes a wraith himself:

‘They tried to pierce your heart with a Morgul-knife which remains in the wound. If they had succeeded, you would have become like they are, only weaker and under their command. You would have become a wraith under the dominion of the Dark Lord; and he would have tormented you for trying to keep his Ring, if any greater torment were possible than being robbed of it and seeing it on his hand... For your heart was not touched, and only your shoulder was pierced, and that was because you resisted to the last... You were in gravest peril while you wore the Ring, for then you were half in the wraith-world yourself, and they might have seized you. You could see them, and they could see you.’ (238)

Putting on the Ring distorts one’s experience of reality: the outer world grows dim, while the ring-wraiths become clearly visible. Frodo sees their shapes become “terribly clear”: “He was able to see beneath their black wrappings... In their white faces burned keen and merciless eyes... Their eyes fell on him and pierced him, as they rushed towards him...” (212). What seems unreal in the ordinary world gains visibility and detail: Frodo can see the figures, with their faces, robes, crowns and expressions, as well as the weapon intended to stab Frodo, which “glowed with a pale light” (212). This inverted aspect of reality is experienced by those who wear the ring.

The Ring makes its bearer vulnerable to Sauron’s dominating will, overpowering an individual’s ability to exercise his or her own will. In order to exercise their agency, the characters must resist the compulsion to put on the Ring (for its convenient effect of invisibility), and so make themselves peculiarly vulnerable to Sauron’s searching eye. In the early stages of the journey, Frodo finds it almost impossible to withstand the pressure of Sauron’s will: “He shut his eyes and struggled for a while; but resistance became unbearable, and at last he slowly drew out the chain, and slipped the Ring on the forefinger of his left hand” (212). This commanding power acts against an individual’s true volition: “He regretted bitterly his foolishness, and reproached himself for weakness of will; for he now perceived that in putting on the Ring he obeyed not his own desire but

the commanding wish of his enemies” (215). The seeming invisibility that the Ring confers has a more permanent, interior effect: the wearer “fades” to external reality, and his essence is consumed by the power of the self-consuming artefact:

‘A mortal, Frodo, who keeps one of the Great Rings, does not die, but he does not grow or obtain more life, he merely continues, and at last every minute is a weariness. And if he often uses the Ring to make himself invisible, he *fades*: he becomes in the end invisible permanently, and walks in the twilight under the eye of the dark power that rules the Rings. Yes, sooner or later – later, if he is strong or well-meaning to begin with, but neither strength nor good purpose will last – sooner or later the dark power will devour him.’ (60)

The wearers would eventually become like the Nazgûl, visible only in the wraith-like world of Sauron and the ring. Their identity has been almost entirely diminished in the world of external reality.

The act of naming in *The Lord Of The Rings* demonstrates how language can be used to confer identity and being with a single word. In the act of naming, reverence for identity is demonstrated together with recognition of relationships (as I will later argue). Accordingly, it is very significant that Sauron denies names to his creatures. They are plagued by wordlessness, seem not to refer to each other by name, and often resort to muttering, hissing and sniffing as ways of interacting with their environment. In *The Lord of the Rings: The Mythology of Power*, Jane Chance theorizes that the reason that words are so effective against the evil of the Nazgûl, for example, is that they counter the wordlessness of evil. Communication restores the relationship to the exterior world that has been cut off through the self-enclosing properties of the ring.

While the Ring demonstrates the wordlessness of Sauron, it might also represent a way of using language. Language itself is key to the intoxicating power that the Ring represents, in McComas’ view:

This language will *insist* on being used. It will rend his soul, it will estrange him from the very memory of his nature (as has been shown). It is an image of language so utterly potent, and yet so entirely unidentified with any object, including itself, that though it threatens to assimilate all the world in its own system, and can overwhelm every argument of nature, yet in the end it will subsume itself through its own abnegation. (44)

How, then, can this view be reconciled with Chance's assertion that the Ring represents wordlessness? The answer, I suggest, is that the Ring represents inauthentic discourse; language removed from its context represents lack of true communication.

Jane Chance also sees the Ring with its property of invisibility as a symbol of the dissolution of identity. The ring's property of invisibility figuratively conveys the dissipation of identity: "It is no accident that the natural wearing of the Ring on the finger renders its wearer invisible, for when the Ring masters its wearer, it totally erases the identity of its wearer, and he becomes for the moment without a self" (28). Chance then equates the loss of independent self with the loss of language. The evil characters, losing their independence and identity, also lose their powers of speech:

Throughout this drama of the symbolic value of language, letters from the principals convey important clues, messages, instructions; species subverted and transformed by evil – the Black Riders, for example – lose their ability to choose good and evil and their ability to act independently. These Riders (fallen Men) hiss and mutter rather than talk (1:235). Their strength exists in darkness and loneliness (1:236), as if they symbolized despair, ultimate irrationality, which for most of us means nothingness, inhumanity, or what is described as the abyss, a kind of chaos. (45)

Certain types of speech counteract its power. For example, when Frodo strikes at the chief of the Nazgûl, he shouts out an invocation in Elvish in order to defend himself:

At that moment Frodo threw himself forward on the ground, and he heard himself crying aloud: *O Elbereth! Gilthoniel!* At the same time he struck at the feet of his enemy. A shrill cry rang out in the night; and he felt a pain like a dart of poisoned ice pierce his left shoulder... (*Rings* 212)

Aragorn speculates that the word has been more powerful against the Nazgûl: “More deadly to him was the name of Elbereth” (214). Frodo, wearing the ring, is invisible to the eyes of his companions, but his cry to Elbereth remains audible and present:

“Suddenly to his horror Sam found that his master had vanished; and at that moment a black shadow rushed past him, and he fell. He heard Frodo’s voice, but it seemed to come from a great distance, or from under the earth, crying out strange words” (213).

According to Chance’s reasoning, naming, speech and storytelling are a verbal means of defence against the dehumanizing practices of Sauron: “Words, speeches, songs – all serve an important role in *LotR* [*Lord of the Rings*], especially as a weapon to counter the wordlessness, the power, sought by Sauron and Saruman” (Chance 51). The act of communication, then, restores the identity of free beings.

In her article, “Cultural Functions Motivating Art,” Joanna Kokot discusses how a song is related to a situation in which it has a specific “cultural function.” Kokot distinguishes between two types of utterances, only one of which is determined by the communicative situation. Kokot describes how Sauron’s utterance is fixed, and not context-oriented: “In the case of all the other poems and songs it is the communicative situation which determines the function of the utterance. In the case of Sauron’s distich and the poem from the Barrows the utterance, as a quasi-magical one, has its function already fixed” (202). This focus on the act of communication as being oriented towards the receiver and the context recalls Bakhtin’s concept of dialogic discourse (discussed further below).⁴ Bakhtin also sees dialogic discourse as an act of communication that anticipates and allows for response. (Although Kokot does not explore the aspect of artistic response directly, I will also be referring in the third chapter to the response of

hobbits to one another's poetic writings, and the collaborative, antiphonal exchanges that result.)

Kokot contrasts two types of authorial approaches; works of art are made either for creative or destructive purposes. Kokot says that the text on Sauron's ring operates as a destructive force: "The performative force of poetic works of art is so strong that they can act as tools of destruction, as embodiments not of the ethical order of the world, but of chaos and evil. The inscription on Sauron's Ring, for example, is a text which operates in this way" (199). Sauron's inscription is designed not only to manipulate, but to destroy. This puts Sauron's forging of the ring, the making of a text for destructive purposes, into direct opposition with hobbit storytelling as a subcreative act, a shared enrichment of creation. Is it really, however, the text that is the tool of destruction, or the Ring itself? Perhaps the Ring is the means of Sauron's destruction as he uses it to channel his power and control others. If, however, we see it as an attempt to rival creation through making, it is a type of artistic "counterfeit creation" - what Tolkien referred to, when talking about approaches to stories themselves, as the tool and technique of the magician. The ring, as a negative symbol of language, is, in effect, a destructive text.

Joanna Kokot proposes that Sauron's verse, inscribed on his ring, demonstrates the objectification of his discourse (201). She demonstrates that the text associated with the Ring is inscribed into it; when the Ring is destroyed, so too is the text. The inscription only enhances the destructive power of the ring, and does not allow for an exchange of communication in any sense. The text is transitory, like the Ring itself:

In the case of Sauron's distich its influence depends on the language in which it is uttered. Moreover, this distich (in its Mordor version) is not fixed in the

traditional lore, but is a written text, an inscription on the Ring intensifying the Ring's destructive power. Thus the impact of the distich depends exclusively on the existence of the Ring – with the destruction of the Ring the text of the distich is also destroyed. (201)

According to Alan McComas, the signs on the Ring point to the reality that they represent:

The Ring is imprinted with a script of Elvish runes comprising a verse or spell of power, quoted above. In that sense it is a page overwritten with text – an image of language and literature. But the Ring itself is not merely a symbol or token of power. It is of itself the actual entity referred to by the signs that encircle it – the crucible filled with the living power to which the signs point. (44)

Language, when “divorced from its object,” paradoxically becomes objectified:

With this image Tolkien is opening a demonstrative discourse on the self-contained and perpetually self-regarding nature of language. The limitation of human language lies in the very property that makes it so useful (and dangerous) – it is divorced from its object. So always, ultimately, language only means *itself* – it is a system that is appropriately imaged by a circular object. (44)

Sauron's power has been channelled into a single object.⁵ Sauron does not seek to interact with others, only to impose on them.

The relationship between author figures and their audience in Tolkien's fiction extends even further than his stated theory allows for. To elucidate further the authorial approaches that Tolkien contrasts through the art of Sauron and the elves, Bakhtin's concepts of monologic and dialogic discourse may be employed to describe how Sauron's forging of the Ring of Power is an attempt to impose his will on other beings through the making of an artefact. This Ring represents language itself, when employed in a monologic manner. The inauthentic quality of Sauron's discourse is mirrored in the nature of his power-based approach to other beings, since Sauron's will to power destroys both identity and the possibility of interpersonal relationships.

Bakhtin sees relationship as crucial to both identity and communication.

Discourse, in his view, cannot take place without a relationship of speaker to listener, and this relationship characterizes the nature of the discourse. Bakhtin also foregrounds the role of the listener/reader in any type of discourse, whether it is *monologic* or *dialogic* (*Dialogic* 343-44). Monologic discourse, the “single-voiced word,” is an objectifying discourse that is aimed at unilaterally promoting a single viewpoint, and does not enter into dialogue with the reader (Danow 24). When Sauron forges the Ring as an artistic attempt at pure domination, his “discourse” is corrupted to the point of unrecognizability. The Ring (as a material object) represents the objectifying and externalizing tendencies of such discourse as Sauron’s, a uni-directional attempt at domination. The Ring as “text” removed from communication might be rightly represented as an enclosing object, designed to bind and to control (oriented towards subjects, it reduces them to objects).

Dialogic discourse allows for the response of the other; it incorporates, says Bakhtin, “a relationship to someone else’s utterance as an indispensable element” (Danow 22). According to Bakhtin, the monologic word “is by its very nature incapable of being double-voiced... If completely deprived of its authority it becomes simply an object, a *relic*, a *thing*” (Danow 24). As Kokot shows, Sauron’s carving of this intention to dominate into the Ring itself demonstrates an artistic act removed from the context of reciprocal communication (Kokot 201). Removed from its context, this utterance has become “fixed” (Kokot 199).

Bakhtin, then, has recognized the possibility for literary discourse in relationship to a listener; the opposing discourse of power tends towards objectification. This reinforces the validity of a perceived opposition in Tolkien’s work between shared

storytelling that preserves subjectivity and Sauron's monologic desire to reduce people to objects, appropriately symbolized by the making of a material object (i.e. the ring) for the purpose of power and domination.

The inauthentic quality of monologic discourse underscores a key aspect of Tolkien's presentation of the theme of subcreation. The death-like or life-giving qualities associated with one's approach to communication, be it destructive or creative, have a great impact on identity. If, as Bakhtin believes, communication restores the identity of free beings, then the act of communication restores being through recognition of the distinctness of the other. Sauron himself becomes bound by his own creation; his discourse is limited to the words engraved on the ring. All his will is bent on domination, and becomes objectified, as he seeks to objectify others. There is only "One Ring," one artifact, one side of a discourse; there is no room for shared creativity or communication. The enclosing circle of the Ring binds his victims in slavery, cutting off the individual's free relations with others and obscuring identity. If true identity is found in meaningful relationship, then Sauron has in effect diminished his own identity by taking the approach of magic, technique, and domination. Without true communication, there is no true identity.

The equation of power with lack of substance, and self-enclosure with non-being, reveals much about Tolkien's concepts of the nature of good and evil, in terms of authentic and inauthentic discourse. True essence and true communication are brought about through relationships. These relationships may extend on different levels – from author to creator, from author to listeners. In Tolkien's view, the freedom of the Primary

creator, and the relationship implicit in the divine act of creation, are extended to the human author, who freely subcreates, and in turn extends this freedom to his listener.

b) Saruman, the Elves, and the Ring of Power

Sauron tries to convince others that he and they are self-authorized, and empowered through self-enclosure. In doing so, however, they are in effect cutting themselves off from the source of their life: relationship and communication. In the case of subcreators, this relationship depends on the primary creator, the source from which their creative power extends. In the final section of this chapter, I will discuss two other, more partial approaches to the attitude that Sauron typifies. The first is that of the wizard Saruman, who aspires to become a “ring-maker,” like Sauron, and uses language accordingly to control others. This results in a flawed and fragmented communication. The elves, although a major force of good in the novel, are not free either from the temptations to use the rings that Sauron has planned to use for the enslavement of their race. The elvish approach to the rings is not that of domination, but rather of temporary control and enclosure. The elves are eventually offered the One Ring of Sauron, which they must choose to either use or to renounce. In discussing these varying choices, I will show how the overall use or renunciation of Sauron’s ring is related to an accompanying worldview of either power or “weakness,” hope or despair. This will provide the background for the following chapter on elvish storytelling, which centres on how the elves offer a “language of hope” in contrast to Sauron’s “language of despair.”

Saruman makes another type of choice than the elves do in regards to the power of the ring, and falls prey to its deceptiveness. He wants to be another ring-maker and ruler of nations, but is a subject of Sauron himself. In contrast to Elrond’s ideas about

wisdom and weakness, Saruman's approach indicates that he prefers the use of "magic" rather than "enchantment." Steeped in knowledge, the head of the "White Council," Saruman has studied the magical arts of the enemy, and most particularly the rings: "But Saruman has long studied the devices of the Enemy himself, and thus we have often been able to forestall him. It was by the devices of Saruman that we drove him from Dol Guldur" (*Rings* 274). Saruman aspires to become a "ring-maker," following in the footsteps of Sauron to use a device to further his power. He also seems to undergo a subcreative "fall," like Sauron. He now wears a ring, presumably of his own making, although without the corresponding power that Sauron's Ring of Power holds.

Relying on the power of his own knowledge, Saruman believes that he can anticipate the course of the future, and acts accordingly to secure his place in it:

'A new Power is rising. Against it all the old allies and policies will not avail us at all. There is no hope left in Elves or dying Númenor. This then is one choice before you, before us. We may join with that Power. It would be wise, Gandalf. There is hope that way. Its victory is at hand; and there will be rich reward for those that aided it. As the Power grows, its proved friends will also grow; and the Wise, such as you and I, may with patience come at last to direct its courses, to control it.' (276-77)

His certainty of his own knowledge leads to the conclusion that he belongs to one of the elite few, the "Wise," who must direct the course of actions for others: "The time of the Elves is over, but our time is at hand: the world of Men, which we must rule. But we must have power, power to order all things as we will, for that good which only the Wise can see" (276). Adopting this approach to power, he is convinced that the means must justify the ends:

'We can bide our time, we can keep our thoughts in our hearts, deploring maybe evils done by the way, but approving the high and ultimate purpose: Knowledge, Rule, Order; all the things that we have so far striven in vain to accomplish,

hindered rather than helped by our weak or idle friends. There need not be, there would not be, any real change in our designs, only in our means.’ (277)

In Saruman’s case, the “means” has included the burning of villages, and killing of children, as king Théoden states:

‘Even if your war on me was just – as it was not, for were you ten times as wise you would have no right to rule me and mine for your own profit as you desired – even so, what will you say of your torches in Westfold and the children that lie dead there?’ (603)

Saruman’s arts are now oriented towards manipulation and deception. As a magician, he uses language to deceive and dominate, and his discourse is accordingly ‘corrupted.’ Saruman loses the quality of “recovery” associated with language. He attempts to divorce words from their meanings, unlike elves, who seek to unify meaning and form. This splitting of words and meaning for the purpose of political manipulation, is evocative of George Orwell’s description of “double-speak” (Orwell 336-40). As Sauron does through the Nazgûl, so too does Saruman manipulate his audience through their fears, using the “shadow” of despair: “And over their hearts crept a shadow, the fear of a great danger: the end of the Mark in a darkness to which Gandalf was driving them, while Saruman stood beside a door of escape, holding it half open so that a ray of light came through” (602). Gimli responds:

‘The words of this wizard stand on their heads,’ he growled, gripping the handle of his axe. ‘In the language of Orthanc help means ruin, and saving means slaying, that is plain. But we do not come here to beg.’

‘Peace!’ said Saruman, and for a fleeting moment his voice was less suave, and a light flickered in his eyes and was gone. (602)

Even the intention of “peace” in diplomacy conceals hidden aggression.

The connection between the two magicians, Sauron and Saruman, is cemented by Saruman’s aspiration to achieve the status of ring-maker; Saruman uses language as

Sauron uses the ring. While his discourse appears to be reasonable, inviting his listeners to agree, it is geared at manipulation:

Suddenly another voice spoke, low and melodious, its very sound an enchantment. Those who listened unwarily to that voice could seldom report the words that they heard; and if they did, they wondered, for little power remained in them. Mostly they remembered only that it was a delight to hear the voice speaking, all said that it was wise and reasonable, and desire awoke in them by swift agreement to seem wise themselves....For many the sound of the voice was enough to hold them enthralled; but for those whom it conquered the spell endured when they were far away, and ever they heard that soft voice whispering and urging them. But none were unmoved; none rejected its pleas and its commands without an effort of mind and will, so long as its master had control of it. (601)

Although it appears to be “enchantment,” Saruman’s technique is, in fact, “magic,” with all its implications. The key difference to those experiencing it is in the compulsion felt only when they resist it. The colour of Saruman’s robes leaves the eye “bewildered” with shifting colours, mirroring the evanescent quality of his language. Gandalf recounts a meeting with Saruman, who renounces the title of the White that he had as head of the Council (each wizard has a “colour”):

‘I looked then and saw that his robes, which had seemed white, were not so, but were woven of all colours, and if he moved they shimmered and changed hue so that the eye was bewildered.
 “I liked white better,” I said.
 “White!” he sneered. “It serves as a beginning. White cloth may be dyed. The white page can be overwritten; and the white light can be broken.”
 “In which case it is no longer white,” said I. “And he that breaks a thing to find out what it is has left the path of wisdom.” (276)

Saruman rejects the concept of white light, refracted into colours, that Tolkien connects with the subcreative art (Flieger, *Splintered* 67). (In her book, *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien’s World*, Flieger explains this concept of light in detail.) Saruman “breaks” the white light, symbolically cutting off the source of his creative (i.e., subcreative) power. Convinced of his own knowledge, Saruman desires a self-

authorizing power: “For I am Saruman, the Wise, Saruman Ring-maker, Saruman of Many Colours!” (276). He has undergone a subcreative fall, desiring power and self-authorization, but his freedom has actually been limited; aspiring to become another Sauron, he becomes subject to Sauron’s control, and fails to understand that freedom can sometimes take the form of service (605-6).

Saruman, still in the process of changing into what he is, experiences linguistic corruption. Sauron, who is almost fully corrupt, is no longer an articulate presence; the compulsion of his will is felt only as the pressure of an “eye,” working through the ring. Serving as a point of contrast to Sauron, Saruman shows an author figure in the process of subcreative fall, still accessible to our understanding, as the Sauron figure no longer is. Sauron’s utterance has become so removed from the context of free communication that it appears (symbolically) as the inarticulate pressure of the eye.

The elves are at the opposite polarity of Sauron’s approach, and yet are vulnerable to the same errors through the power of their enchantment, and the use of the elven-rings. Tolkien describes the significance of the heightened aesthetic powers of the elves, which they employ in subcreative fashion:

The Elves represent, as it were, the artistic, aesthetic, and purely scientific aspects of the Humane nature raised to a higher level than is actually seen in Men. That is: they have a devoted love of the physical world, and a desire to observe and understand it for its own sake and as ‘other’ – sc. as a reality derived from God in the same degree as themselves – not as a material for use or as a power-platform. They also possess a ‘subcreational’ or artistic faculty of great excellence. They are therefore ‘immortal’. *Not* ‘eternally’, but to endure with and within the created world, while its story lasts. When ‘killed’, by the injury or destruction of their incarnate form, they do not escape from time, but remain *in* the world, either disincarnate, or being re-born. (*Letters* 236)

Elvish longevity has the effect of allowing the experience of individual continuity in the face of continual temporal change in the outward world. Accordingly, the elves are tempted to the nostalgia for things past, and the desire to preserve the present moment:

This becomes a great burden as the ages lengthen, especially in a world where there is malice and destruction... Mere *change* is not represented as 'evil': it is the unfolding of the story and to refuse this is of course against the design of God. But the Elvish weakness is in these terms naturally to regret the past, and to become unwilling to face change: as if a man were to hate a very long book still going on, and wished to settle down in a favourite chapter. Hence they fell in a measure to Sauron's deceptions: they desired some 'power' over things as they are (which is quite distinct from art), to make their particular will to preservation effective: to arrest change, and keep things always fresh and fair. (*Letters* 236)

The three elven-rings used for protection and preservation in Middle-Earth, while good in themselves, are dependent on the existence of Sauron's ring for their effectiveness:

The 'Three Rings' were 'unsullied', because this object was in a limited way good, it included the healing of the real damages of malice, as well as the mere arrest of change; and the Elves did not desire to dominate other wills, not to usurp all the world to their particular pleasure. But with the downfall of 'Power' their little efforts at preserving the past fell to bits. (*Letters* 236)

Elvish art is an attempt to preserve a way of life in a world of temporal changes that seem accelerated because the elves themselves are "ageless." This attempt to prevent change becomes dangerously similar to the "hoarding" of memory, says Tolkien, and can easily turn into greed.

Using their enchantment to enclose and protect, albeit with good intentions, the elves become liable to the same type of subcreative "fall" as Sauron:

The 'Elves' are 'immortal', at least as far as this world goes: and hence are concerned rather with the griefs and burdens of deathlessness in time and change, than with death. The Enemy in successive forms is always 'naturally' concerned with sheer Domination, and so the Lord of magic and machines; but the problem: that this frightful evil can and does arise from an apparently good root, the desire to benefit the world and others* [footnote: * "Not in the Beginner of Evil: his was a sub-creative Fall, and hence the Elves (the representatives of sub-creation par excellence) were peculiarly his enemies, and the special object of his desire and

hate – and open to his deceptions. Their Fall into possessiveness and (to a less degree) into perversion of their art to power”] – speedily and according to the benefactor’s own plans – is a recurrent motive. (*Letters* 146)

The ambiguous, or “perilous” nature of their art is demonstrated in their forging of the three elven-rings. These rings show the dangers of “recovery.” The elven-rings were made not as tools to achieve power over others, but to aid in healing and preservation in Middle-earth, explains Elrond (who uses one of the rings to protect Rivendell, as Galadriel does Lothlórien):

‘The Three were not made by Sauron, nor did he ever touch them... But they were not made as weapons of war or conquest: that is not their power. Those who made them did not desire strength or domination or hoarded wealth, but understanding, making, and healing, to preserve all things unstained. These things the Elves of Middle-earth have in some measure gained, though with sorrow.’ (*Rings* 286)

When art is used to preserve and enclose (even if not to dominate), the art will dissipate when the means of enclosure disappears. When Sauron’s ring is destroyed, the power of the elven rings, too, will pass away, along with the hidden lands they protect, as Elrond proposes: “Some hope that the Three Rings, which Sauron has never touched, would then become free, and their rulers might heal the hurts of the world that he had wrought. But maybe when the One has gone, the Three will fail, and many fair things will fade and be forgotten. That is my belief” (286). The One Ring, if regained by Sauron, will be a means of control over the lesser ones, and all that is preserved within them; their use is thus perilous: “But all that has been wrought by those who wield the Three will turn to their undoing, and their minds and hearts will become revealed to Sauron, if he regains the One. It would be better if the Three had never been. That is his purpose” (286). The rings, then, are ultimately linked to Sauron, who conceived of their use. Elves, eventually, must make the choice to use rings or renounce them.

The elves endeavour to restore unfallen unity, and also perhaps to grow and tend a realm that is enclosed from Sauron and his effects. It is in this aspect, perhaps, that there is an ambiguous dimension to elvish creativity that I believe is intentional on Tolkien's part. The attempt to use "recovery" to protect and to preserve can become subject to problems when improperly approached. The elvish "fall" happens when elves seek to enclose beauty within art, and resist change and passing in a world where they are constant. Tolkien talked about the elvish "fall" into the desire for the preservation of things, just as the men of Númenor desired immortality. Indeed, he later in life changed his mind about the primary symbolism of the ring, feeling upon re-reading that the central issue was the elvish resistance to impermanence, and the desire to "hoard" memory:

But I might say that of the tale is 'about' anything (other than itself), it is not as seems widely supposed about 'power'. Power-seeking is only the motive-power that sets events going, and is relatively unimportant, I think. It is mainly concerned with Death, and Immortality; and the 'escapes:' serial longevity, and hoarding memory. (*Letters* 284)

Tolkien's use of ambiguity is not intended to blur distinctions, but rather, ultimately to clarify them. Galadriel, for example, has long used an elven ring to guard Lothlórien from Sauron's eye; Gandalf, too, bears an elven ring, used to "kindle" spirits to resistance against Sauron's "incarnate evil." Both Galadriel and Gandalf are tempted with the opportunity to guard, and potentially to use, the Ring of Power, that Frodo offers to them. These characters are presented with a final decision about their approach to power and technique. As Galadriel refuses the One Ring and the power it represents, she realizes that the "power" of the lesser ring she possesses to preserve Lothlórien unchanged will also pass away when the great ring is destroyed, as she tells Frodo:

'Do you not see now wherefore your coming is as the footstep of Doom? For if you fail, then we are laid bare to the Enemy. Yet if you succeed, then our power

is diminished, and Lothlórien will fade, and the tides of Time will sweep it away. We must depart into the West, or dwindle to a rustic folk of dell and cave, slowly to forget and to be forgotten.' (384)

Galadriel comes to a point where she must choose between the power to protect her realm, and deal with events as she dictates, or the option to give up claim to the ring, see it destroyed, and also become subject to the passing of time and the impermanence that adheres to experience in Middle-earth. The ambiguity surrounding the elven-rings must eventually be resolved, therefore, and Sauron's ring must be either used against him or destroyed. When Sauron's ring is destroyed, the elven rings, too, will pass away, along with the hidden lands they protect.

The decision of how to deal with the Ring of Power is one that must also be made on a wider societal scale. In Rivendell, a council of elves, together with Gandalf, and representatives of dwarves, men, and hobbits, is conjoined to decide the fate of the ruling ring. The leaders of these diverse peoples decide, collectively, to destroy the Ring of Power. It is a shared decision, marked as well by 'storytelling' as various characters give accounts of the events that led them to the council (Drury 9). The advice of Elrond is key to this process. Elrond manifests the primordial values of elvish recovery: respect, reverence, and the desire to protect and preserve, rather than to rule. Elrond describes why the Ring of Power must not be used:

'We cannot use the Ruling Ring. That we now know too well. It belongs to Sauron and was made by him alone, and is altogether evil. Its strength, Boromir, is too great for anyone to wield at will, save only those who have already a great power of their own. But for them it holds an even deadlier peril. The very desire of it corrupts the heart. Consider Saruman. If any of the Wise should with this Ring overthrow the Lord of Mordor, using his own arts, he would then set himself on Sauron's throne, and yet another Dark Lord would appear. And that is another reason why the Ring should be destroyed: as long as it is in the world it will be a danger even to the Wise. For nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was

not so. I fear to take the Ring to hide it. I will not take the Ring to wield it.'
(285)

The refusal to use Sauron's own weapon against him may be the most 'wise' choice, but seems 'weak' and foolish to those such as Saruman who judge merit on the basis of strength and power. Sauron finds it inconceivable for anyone to deny the opportunity to wield power, and therefore does not anticipate the plan to destroy it. This might provide the advantage of surprise to those who plan to destroy the ring, says Elrond:

'Well, let folly be our cloak, a veil before the eyes of the Enemy! For he is very wise, and weighs all things to a nicety in the scales of his malice. But the only measure that he knows is desire, desire for power; and so he judges all hearts. Into his heart the thought will not enter that any will refuse it, that having the Ring we may seek to destroy it. If we seek this, we shall put him out of reckoning.' (287)

The seemingly foolish quest is a quest of renunciation, in which "weakness" may prove in some ways to be more valuable than strength, says Elrond:

'The road must be trod, but it will be very hard. And neither strength nor wisdom will carry us far upon it. This quest may be attempted by the weak with as much hope as the strong. Yet such is oft the course of deeds that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere.' (287)

The 'strength in weakness' of the hobbits is a major theme of the story. In contrast to heroic figures such as Aragorn, they are intended to bring the story 'down to earth' to be accessible to the readers, but also to exemplify the "unforeseeable" effects of acts of virtue in the grander scheme of events:

But the earliest tales as seen through Elvish eyes, as it were, this last great Tale, coming down from myth and legend to the earth, is seen mainly through the eyes of Hobbits: it thus becomes in fact anthropocentric. But through Hobbits, not Men so-called, because the last Tale is to exemplify most clearly a recurrent theme: the place in 'world politics' of the unforeseen and unforeseeable acts of will, and the deeds of virtue of the apparently small, ungreat, forgotten in the places of the Wise and Great (good as well as evil). A moral of the whole (after the primary symbolism of the Ring, as the will to mere power, seeking to make

itself objective by physical force and mechanism, and so also inevitably by lies) is the obvious one that without the high and noble the simple and vulgar is utterly mean; and without the simple and ordinary the noble and heroic is meaningless. (*Letters* 160)

The unanticipated ability of the “weak” to surprise with “unforeseeable acts of virtue” is thematically related to a refusal of despair. Gandalf sees an acceptance of despair as linked to the belief that one knows all possibilities that the future may hold; one who despairs does not account for the unexpected. To destroy the Ring becomes an act of hope: “ ‘Despair, or folly?’ said Gandalf. ‘It is not despair, for despair is only for those who see the end beyond all doubt. We do not.’” (286). Hope always holds the possibility for surprise, for the “eucatastrophic” turn of the unexpected. In the following chapter, I will describe how the use of language reinforces hope, and strengthens identity and relationships when used by the elves and others in “recovery” that counters the assertions of “doom” that adhere to Sauron and the Ring of Power.

Notes To Chapter 2

¹ Subcreative figures within the “secondary world” of these stories enjoy a greater power to make their art seem “real” than the authors in the “primary” world actually possess. It is a ‘wish fulfillment,’ of sorts, of the desire to make the inventions of fantasy seem real to the author and audience: “an essential power of Faerie...the power of making immediately effective by the will the visions of fantasy” (“On Fairy-Stories” 22). In Tolkien’s stories, this ability is possessed to a great extent by the elves.

² The world of the fairy-story, when skilfully and successfully made, should be as complete and convincing as possible, with the “inner consistency of reality,” as if an entire world were to be crafted with the story. Indeed, this was Tolkien’s own artistic approach to Middle-earth. For Tolkien, the child’s typical question after hearing a fairy-story, “is it true?”, could then be answered affirmatively: yes, it is “true in that world” (“On Fairy-Stories” 70-71).

³ The Nazgûl, who were once mortal kings of Númenor, were subject to Sauron’s influence through the lesser rings, eventually becoming the ringwraiths.

⁴ Although Kokot does not refer to Bakhtin, she may be influenced by Bakhtin in her view of communication as a context-oriented action in which the meaning rests between speakers.

⁵ In Bakhtinian terms, his power and discourse have become objectified, as they do not participate in a dynamic interaction between speakers.

Chapter 3: Subcreation and Recovery

a) *Elven Recovery*

While Sauron's forging of the Ring is a monologic attempt at power and domination, the use of dialogic storytelling, employed by the elves and hobbits, is oriented towards the receiver, and the context of the communication. Elvish storytelling provides an affirmation of being, not through domination of other wills, but through shared enrichment of creation. When elves sing together, they extend this invitation to other creatures, such as the hobbits. Their singing also reflects a relational aspect of language itself. The storytelling of elves is relational in terms of its content as well as its audience; it approaches Tolkien's idea of "recovery" in its ability to regain a clearer view of things and take a larger perspective of the world. Recovery in this sense is the renewal of the foundational subcreative relationship: the relationship with the primary creator.

In David Jeffrey's view, the central opposition in *The Lord of the Rings* is that of an approach that favours linguistic recovery, versus an approach that values only knowledge, resulting in a corruption of language:

The great opposition in *The Lord of the Rings* is an opposition between a Recovery of old elven wisdom and a present obtrusiveness of the knowledge of Orthanc. It is expressed as a struggle between the language of elves and the gobble of orcs. (110)

The language of elves is equated with wisdom, while the gobble of orcs is connected to the fragmented perception of those searching for mere knowledge. This opposition is similar to that between enchantment and magic, or between shared storytelling and the Ring of Power. These pairs of binary opposites help the reader to distinguish the attitude with which one approaches communication. Tolkien's work poses the question of how we are to approach communication: does an author's vision dominate that of the readers,

or aid their ability to act freely? In this chapter on elvish storytelling, and in the next chapter on hobbit storytelling, I will discuss how, through the elves and hobbits, Tolkien depicts shared storytelling that affirms being and identity, in part through the nature of the vision of meaning that it offers. Invitation to the exchange of stories as well as to the envisioning of them is another way that the elves, the ents, Tom Bombadil, and the hobbits are able to develop a relationship between the speaker and his listeners. Subcreative freedom is extended to all, as any listener may become a potential speaker of stories and thereby extend the dialogue *ad infinitum*.

The storytelling of the elves is subcreative in terms of relationship with a primary creator; the elves subcreate out of a desire to enrich the primary creation. This same respectful attitude is extended to their audience, who are enabled to become “partners in making and delight,” and add to the story their “primary belief” (which for human storytellers, would be “secondary belief”) ¹ in which one experiences the world of the story as a secondary reality. The word “enchantment” is used to describe the overwhelming effect of the elvish song that seems to pull its listeners into it. Frodo experiences this at Rivendell:

Then the enchantment became more and more dreamlike, until he felt that an endless river of swelling gold and silver was flowing over him, too multitudinous for its pattern to be comprehended; it became part of the throbbing air about him, and it drenched and drowned him. Swiftly he sank under its shining weight into a deep realm of sleep. (*Rings* 249-50)

The willing listener has succumbed to the flow of words that brings him into a dream state. The skill of the elves is such that the effect becomes still deeper; a musical effect of unity and beauty is created, with a sense of pattern too large for comprehension, expanding out to the “margins of the world.” Even though Frodo does not understand all

of the words, they seem to open up a secondary realm of “visions” – of another realm he has not seen but grasps intuitively and aesthetically:

At first the beauty of the melodies and of the interwoven words in elven-tongues, even though he understood them little, held him in a spell, as soon as he began to attend to them. Almost it seemed that the words took shape, and visions of far lands and bright things that he had never yet imagined opened out before him; and the firelit hall became like a golden mist above seas of foam that sighed upon the margins of the world. (249)

The enchantment experienced by the listener is a unity of form and content, of words and their sounds. It is perhaps Tolkien’s ideal of the form of art (while the hobbit storytelling represents the ‘real,’ or actual ability of the storyteller). Elvish songs are written by Tolkien first in the original elvish language (Quenya or Sindarin), with translations provided. Bilbo’s own song of Eärendil is composed in the elvish style, but not “translated” from English; rather it appears in English in the book, representing the “Common Speech”:

*‘Eärendil was a mariner
that tarried in Arvernien;
he built a boat of timber felled
in Nimbrenthil to journey in;
her sails he wove of silver fair,
of silver were her lanterns made,
her prow was fashioned like a swan,
and light upon her banners laid.’ (250)*

Tom Shippey effectively analyses the song in terms of the unity of form and content, blended word and melody, which are characteristic of the elves ² (*Road* 146). These include internal rhymes within the middle of words, multiple rhyming syllables, alliteration that may also be assonance, as well as “a web of grammatical repetitions and variations”: “*‘her sails (he wove) of silver fair,/of silver (were) her lanterns (made), or later ‘his sword (of steel) was valiant, / of adamant) his helmet tall’*” (*Road* 146). These

variations seem to “hover at the edge of identification,” “also never quite exact” with an effect of “rich and continuous uncertainty, a pattern forever being glimpsed but never quite grasped” (*Road* 146). This bears analogy to the visions evoked by the poetry, of lost lands and glimpses of an underlying unity (*Road* 146).³ Tolkien’s creative vision was perhaps yet more fully embodied in his poetry written first in the invented languages of Quenya and Sindarin, which displays qualities of internal rhyme, alliteration, and a polished flow of language.⁴ As yet, there do not appear to be literary/metrical analyses of poetry written in the elven languages (perhaps because there is not enough knowledge of word meanings to study the metaphors and pronunciation).

Elvish song also expresses the quality of being “inside” language that Tolkien as a linguist sought. Listening to the elvish art of song, one does not hear the individual words, but experiences it as “secondary reality.” To experience language as a story that one might give primary belief to (although not be deceived into substituting it for primary reality) is to fully experience the power of ancient mythic unities. “Inside” of language, one might experience the refreshment of “recovery” as Frodo and Sam do on the mound of Cerin Amroth in Lothlórien:

The others cast themselves down upon the fragrant grass, but Frodo stood awhile still lost in wonder. It seemed to him that he had stepped through a high window that looked on a vanished world. A light was upon it for which his language had no name. All that he saw was shapely, but the shapes seemed at once clear cut, as if they had been first conceived and drawn at the uncovering of his eyes, and ancient as if they had endured forever. He saw no colour but those he knew, gold and white and blue and green, but they were fresh and poignant, as if he had at that moment first perceived them and made for them names new and wonderful. In winter here no heart could mourn for summer or for spring. No blemish or sickness or deformity could be seen in anything that grew upon the earth. On the land of Lórien there was no stain.

He turned and saw that Sam was standing beside him, looking round with a puzzled expression, and rubbing his eyes as if he were not sure that he was awake. ‘It’s sunlight and bright day, right enough,’ he said. ‘I thought that Elves

were all for moon and stars: but this is more elvish than anything I ever heard tell of. I feel as if I was *inside* a song, if you take my meaning.' (369)

Tolkien, in his letters, called the Cerin Amroth passage the “heart” of the book (*Letters* 221). This passage evokes the profound capacity for wonder and recovery to refresh our experience of the world around us. According to Tolkien, the experience of recovery at its most heightened is the perception that one has been inside of language and exposed to all of its meanings. The literary artist, writing his story, may also be able to experience it from the inside, or perhaps to show others what he himself has seen in language. Frodo is experiencing through linguistic ‘recovery’ a “light” that language has no name for. The ancient unities are attempts to express in language a mythic consciousness that cannot finally be contained by it. In their light, however, Frodo may perceive “anew” through a refreshed vision. The description of the colours in the above passage echoes the wording of the description of recovery in the essay “On Fairy-Stories” (as quoted in Chapter 1): “We should look at green again, and be startled anew (but not blinded) by blue and yellow and red...” (“On Fairy-Stories” 57). It is inside the process of linguistic recovery of language that the “veil” covering perception may be lifted.⁵

The language of myth, represented in Tolkien’s story by the languages of the elves and ents, is what enables a “recovery” of “ancient unities.” Even more than the elves do, the ents demonstrate an approach to language that understands ancient unities. Because, for the ents, names tell a story, language itself holds the seeds of story within it. The ents add a further dimension to recovery, as they use their language to recount a history of each object through its relationships with other things. According to David Critchett, each word “assumes all the other objects and the process by which they came into being” (39). The ent, Treebeard, tells the hobbits about names: “My name is

growing all the time...so *my* name is like a story. Real names tell you the story of the things they belong to in my language” (*Rings* 486). Treebeard illustrates how names tell stories, in his description of the hill they are standing on:

I can see and hear (*and* smell *and* feel) a great deal from this, from this, *a-lalla-lalla-rumba-kamanda-lind-or-burímë*. Excuse me: that is a part of my name for it; I do not know what the word is in the outside languages: you know, the thing we are on, where I stand and look out on fine mornings, and think about the Sun, and the grass beyond the wood, and the horses, and the clouds, and the unfolding of the world. (486-87)

The ents use words to tell stories, affirming being through the recognition of relationships. While poststructuralists see words as signifiers that can be defined only in terms of other signifiers, Tolkien does not. He values the essence of each person and thing, and through his “entish” view of language, furthermore, he values the way such essences become all the more substantial through relationships. For the thing signified by entish language becomes only more real through relationships, which form its ontological essence.⁶ The fulfillment of an individual’s being, says theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, is realized only through the act of communication, and the relationship of self to other:

The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a *thou*). . . . The very being of man (both external and internal) is the *deepest communion*. *To be* means *to communicate*. (*Problems* 287)

According to Ruth Coates (author of *Christianity in Bakhtin*), Bakhtin also theorizes that naming itself is an interdependent action. In Bakhtin’s “Philosophy of the Act,” “one who names himself,” as Bakhtin puts it, is a “*samozvanets*,” a “pretender” (Coates 32). A true name, according to Bakhtin, is not self-authorized, but rather is conferred by another. One’s identity is then interdependent, says Coates:

In Bakhtin’s universe one cannot name oneself, and all autonomy is falsely conceived, for life depends upon interdependence, on the willingness and ability

of each consciousness to transcend itself in a self-denying, creative, affirmative, move out into the world...to claim autonomy is both self-destructive and destructive of the world. (32)

Tolkien also links communication with community. Naming affirms relationships; it is an act of participation in what is being seen, as is storytelling.⁷ It is necessary to relate to something, in order to understand it, before a name may be bestowed.

The act of naming situates the identity of free beings within the relationships that they have had with other beings. Tolkien's invented language explicitly demonstrates the qualities of storytelling and relationship as opposed to objectification. It reflects Tolkien's view that old words contain hidden myths with a vision of the interconnectedness between things. Storytelling restores this connection through a type of "recovery."

Like the elves, ents, and hobbits, Tom Bombadil also uses "recovery"; his songs demonstrate especially a "language of hope" that emerges in contrast to the "language of despair" used by the barrow-wight, and also by the Nazgûl. As the only character that seems to be completely free of the Ring and its influence, Tom Bombadil adds a further dimension of linguistic recovery to the story. Tom's approach to language as to life is one of 'wonder and delight,' to revere and understand it but not to use it as tool or technique. Tolkien explains how Tom experiences the delight in other things for their own sake, and does not take the approach of learning in order to manipulate nature, as would a proto-scientist, Saruman; a wielder of magic, like Sauron; or even, to some extent, the elves, who use their enchantment to shape the natural world. Bombadil is a figure who takes delight in observing and interacting, but has renounced claim to manipulation:

...but if you have, as it were taken 'a vow of poverty', renounced control, and take your delight in things for themselves without reference to yourself, watching, observing, and to some extent knowing, then the question of rights and wrongs of power and control might become utterly meaningless to you, and the means of power quite valueless. It is a natural pacifist view... (*Letters* 179)

Tom loves knowledge for its own sake, not for what he can do with it (even more so than the elves). Tom's vision is a holistic view available when knowledge is not concentrated to the achievement of an end. Says Tolkien, Tom is a type of "spirit that desires knowledge of other things, their history and nature, *because they are 'other'* and wholly independent of the enquiring mind, a spirit coeval with the rational mind, and entirely unconcerned with 'doing' anything with the knowledge: Zoology and Botany not Cattle-breeding or Agriculture. Even the Elves hardly show this: they are primarily artists" (*Letters* 192).

When Tom holds the Ring up to his eye, he 'sees through' its illusion. He is not subject to its invisibility; correspondently, his identity is not diminished:

It seemed to grow larger as it lay for a moment on his big brown-skinned hand. Then suddenly he put it to his eye and laughed. For a second the hobbits had a vision, both comical and alarming, of his bright blue eye gleaming through a circle of gold. Then Tom put the Ring about the end of his little finger and held it up to the candle-light. For a moment the hobbits noticed nothing strange about this. Then they gasped. There was no sign of Tom disappearing! (*Rings* 148)

Tom is also not deceived when Frodo puts on the ring:

'Hey there!' cried Tom, glancing towards him with a most seeing look in his shining eyes. 'Hey! Come Frodo, there! Where be you a-going? Old Tom Bombadil's not as blind as that yet. Take off your golden ring! Your hand's more fair without it. Come back! Leave your game and sit down beside me! We must talk a while more, and think about the morning. Tom must teach the right road, and keep your feet from wandering.' (148)

Tom's attitude is perhaps a necessary corrective, because his 'unfallen,' or 'primitive' view of language in some ways manifests Tolkien's principle of recovery, as the 'regaining of a clear view.'

A key aspect of Tom's 'clearer view' lies in his approach to knowledge. Because Tom does not seek to define by enclosure, he is open to viewing a larger picture that closes down when one seeks to capture it in a single word or idea. Tolkien describes Bombadil as the "exemplar" of a principle:

Also T.B. [Tom Bombadil] exhibits another point in his attitude to the Ring, and its failure to affect him. You must concentrate on some part, probably relatively small, of the World (Universe), whether to tell a tale, however long, or to learn anything however fundamental – and therefore much will from that 'point of view' be left out, distorted on the circumference, or seem a discordant oddity. The power of the Ring over all concerned, even the Wizards or Emissaries, is not a delusion – but it is not the whole picture, even of the then state and content of that part of the Universe. (*Letters* 192)

Tolkien here implies that all works of art are like the Ring in that they must create an enclosure in which to view the universe. Even as the world is reflected in the glass of art, there is always the "distortion" that accompanies the attempt to convey the universe within a limited realm. Language becomes a double-edged sword that limits what it describes. To see a word cut off from its context might be to mistake subcreation for primary creation, or to view all of the world through the circumference of the ring.

While his words may appear to be "nonsense," Tom is a prototypical maker of language, engaged in the making of mythic unities. Bombadil is comparable to both unfallen man and to the early makers of human language. Tom, as Iarwin (in elvish), or "First" of creatures in Middle-earth, is "Eldest," and accordingly possesses pre-lapsarian knowledge:

Eldest, that's what I am. Mark my words, my friends: Tom was here before the rivers and the trees; Tom remembers the first rain-drop and the first acorn. He made paths before the Big People, and saw the little People arriving... When the Elves passed westward, Tom was here already, before the seas were bent. He knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless – before the Dark Lord came from Outside. (*Rings* 146)

Tom resembles a pre-lapsarian Adam. He has the “lost” faculty to interact with creatures that Tolkien mentions as a quality of “consolation” or wish-fulfillment in fairy-stories; this power was traditionally held to be the natural power of Adam and Eve in their dominion over the Garden of Eden. His ability to command within his own proper realm (but not beyond), may reflect the “naming” ability that is also a measure of linguistic “recovery” in Tolkien’s view.

The “enchantment” of Tom’s storytelling enfolds listeners within the secondary realm of song, so that they forget their status as listeners, and experience it as a secondary reality. Tom’s stories seem to penetrate beyond the conscious memory of the hobbits, as words awaken hidden understanding:

When they caught his words again they found that he had now wandered into strange regions beyond their memory and beyond their waking thought, into times when the world was wider, and the seas flowed straight to the western Shore; and still on back and back Tom went singing out into the ancient starlight, when only the Elf-sires were awake... The hobbits sat still before him, enchanted. (146)

Tom tells a story of the elves awakening to consciousness and to language. As Tolkien depicts them in the poem, “Mythopoeia,” elves in story are associated with human memory of mythic consciousness. Tom’s words fulfil the function of recovery, creating “wonder” in his audience: “The stars shone through the window and the silence of the heavens seemed to be round him” (146). It is at this point that Frodo asks, “Who are you, Master?” (146).

The “recovery” that his stories enable also recalls an ancient pattern of unity that Tolkien believed to be inherent in the mythic consciousness. Tom recalls a time when the world was flat, and the “blessed realm” was accessible across the seas, before the shape of the world was changed to round, and Valinor was removed from the “circles of the world.” Because Tom has the ability to evoke vision within his audience, it is fitting that Frodo has a significant dream or a vision (he is not certain which it is) within Tom Bombadil’s house. After a night of song and story, Frodo dreams of a wave that is like the one that covered the realm of Númenor; this one, however, rolls back to uncover a landscape under a rising sun:

That night they heard no noises. But either in his dreams or out of them, he could not tell which, Frodo heard a sweet singing running in his mind: a song that seemed to come like a pale light behind a grey rain-curtain, and growing stronger to turn the veil all to glass and silver, until at last it was rolled back, and a far green country opened before him under a swift sunrise. (150)

Frodo’s dream pre-figures the possibility (but not certainty) for recovery of a lost realm. At the end of the novel, when Frodo approaches Valinor, he again sees the parting of a curtain to reveal the lost land. Through association with Tom, Frodo has been enabled to have this vision of return to a state of existence that appears to have been lost when the shape of the world was changed, “before the seas were bent,” as Tom puts it (146). (In the fourth chapter, there will be further discussion on the significance of the change in shape of the world, and the means by which transcendence is achieved, and lost union regained through eucatastrophe.)

The vision that Tom offers through his language fills a recuperative role, counteractive to the songs of Old Man Willow and the barrow-wight, that attempt to impose a death-like unconsciousness to render their victims powerless:

*Cold be hand and heart and bone,
And cold be sleep under stone:
Never more to wake on stony bed,
Never, till the Sun fails and the Moon is dead.
In the black wind the stars shall die,
And still on gold here let them lie,
Till the dark lord lifts his hand
Over dead sea and withered land. (156)*

The barrow-wight's song is a destructive "prophecy," forecasting death to the listeners, and the subjugation of a dead world to the dark lord's (i.e. Sauron's) possessive "hand." The "stars" and the harmonious cosmos they represent shall "die." The listeners become stilled in death, or death-like sleep, associated with the barrow-wight's hoard of "gold."

Language, used to hoard and to control, is associated with this death-like state unwilling (or unable) to imagine a benevolent universe, or an optimistic future. The destructiveness of the spell is inseparable from the mind-numbing content of its proclamation. The hobbits, under this spell, are greatly in need of "recovery." Frodo hews at the barrow-wight, and calls for help to Bombadil, whose assistance comes in the form of a song. Tom rescues them from the spell of the barrow-wight, as he tells them to wake in a "clear and commanding voice":

*Get out, you old Wight! Vanish in the sunlight!
Shrivel like the cold mist, like the winds go wailing,
Out into the barren lands far beyond the mountains!
Come never here again! Leave your barrow empty!
Lost and forgotten be, darker than the darkness,
Where gates stand forever shut, till the world is mended. (157-58)*

Tom's vision offers an alternative view to the death-like state accompanying the barrow-wight's prophecy:

*Wake now my merry lads! Wake and hear me calling!
Warm now be heart and limb! The cold stone is fallen;
Dark door is standing wide; dead hand is broken.
Night under Night is flown, and the Gate is open! (158)*

Poems in Middle-earth have the effect of altering the experience of reality for the listeners, according to Joanna Kokot. Poems may be context-specific, but they also convey world-views:

The performative function is typical not only of the literary works of art which are uttered with a view to changing an aspect of the reality surrounding the performers. Every poem in Middle-earth, no matter what its primary function in the actual communicative situation is, creates a reality which is no less 'real' than the extratextual world. The performance of a poem or a song sets the participants of the communicative situation in the work of art's 'space' – that is, when the artistic work is performed the world created by it becomes the dominant aspect of the reality surrounding the speaker or singer and the listeners. (200)

Kokot correctly surmises that songs which attempt to counteract the effects of an utterance based on chaos must attempt to show this “disturbance” as temporary and passing:

Thus the evil and chaos embodied by these poems are as impermanent as the evil and chaos in Middle-earth.... Evil and destruction exist there; and the transitory nature of the texts, and of the effects of their utterance, suggests that the aspect of reality activated by them is not the only and permanent order, but merely its passing disturbance. (201)

When Tom Bombadil banishes the barrow-wight, he shows its vision is lacking in substance, something that will “vanish in the sunlight,” and “shrivel like cold mist.”

It is indeed two visions of the world that are at war within these songs. Kokot explains that chaotic utterances are transitory because they are merely passing disturbances in the temporal order. Perhaps, however, there is a stronger reason. Good and evil in Tolkien's world operate on a more fundamental level than order and disorder; it is not only a social and political order, but the integrity of the individual that is at stake. The content of the utterances associated with Sauron is not, in my view, meant solely to be disruptive of social and cosmic order. It is meant to be deterministic in its effect on

other minds, a type of “propaganda” that convinces others they are fated to be ruled by Sauron.

These images are continually associated with a closed, deterministic world in which not only is free will overridden through the ring, but choices appear futile in view of inevitable doom. To further explore the implications in terms of Sauron and his ring, it will be helpful to examine the situation in terms of ancient concepts of fate, as described by Margaret Visser in her book, *Beyond Fate*. Visser at one point applies her own theory directly to Tolkien’s work, and even specifically to the Ring symbolism. Sauron’s ring is equated with doom, and the enclosing bonds of fate, while the quest to destroy the Ring is a destiny:

Destiny is different from fate....Where a circle is used as a metaphor for fate, time is either left out of the picture or becomes cyclic; fate is an outline in the sense of a strangling bond or an imprisoning wall. A ring can mean a promise freely entered into, like a wedding ring: promises commit people and are therefore binding. But a ring symbolizing encirclement by force is an embodiment of fate, a thing of power and oppression, like the Ring of the Niebelung, which curses whoever owns it. The One Ring in Tolkien’s saga is always associated with fate as imprisonment: a perilous journey, twisting but linear, needs to be undertaken to undo its power, to release the world from the Ring of Doom. (22-23)

The destruction of the Ring then becomes part of a journey in linear time, eventually freeing not only the self, but the world, from the imposition of fate. Fate in the context of a bond on human action is equated with the image of the closed circle, analogous in Tolkien’s work to the effects of the Ring of Power itself (as well as within the actual words of Sauron and his minions). In *Beyond Fate*, Visser explains how the ancient view of fate may be viewed through the “diagrammatic metaphor” of a closed circle (18-28). A circle implies an eternally revolving sequence of time and events, echoing the recurrence of the seasons, with no beginning and no end (20). The closed form of the

circle, however, has potentially negative implications, especially as regards the felt sense of human freedom. It may even represent despair, at the inability to break out of one's fate. As Visser puts it, "But because the circle is a closed form, because of its association with fate, and because of its flatness, it can also express human despair: no way out, no possibility of change, of breaking out of a fatal concatenation of events" (20).

Visser contrasts the historical ideas of fate and destiny, which are applicable to human free will as envisioned in *The Lord of the Rings*. The Greek concept of *moira* could mean one's portion in life, or an area divided by bounds, as life is from death (35-36). This outline reflects the symbolic quality of fatalistic thinking: "Fatalistic thinking insists always upon the defining outline, upon 'that's all there is'.... The Greeks called this outline *anangké*, which is often, and not entirely correctly, translated into English as 'necessity'" (36). The necessity of fate constrains action, and the diagrammatic shape of the circular, enclosing outline indicates the binding power of 'fate' upon action: "The container presses upon and constrains its contents; the rope binds the neck, the Ring the finger. Fate sees to it that we carry out its decrees" (36-37). In contrast to the ancient Greek and Roman view of fate, emerged the Judeo-Christian idea of destiny. Visser points to Christianity's roots in Judaism, as the source of a "radical alternative to fatalistic thinking" (21). Instead of a circular model, Judaism had a linear model, of a journey undertaken, resulting in a freedom from the bond of fated outcomes:

Christianity's roots in Judaism provided it with a perennially powerful story about hope and freedom: that of the Exodus, or Way Out. The picture is of a journey of a people out of bondage to liberation.... This epic of liberation from captivity – through vision, determination, trust, and agreement to obey God's law – is a radical alternative to fatalistic thinking, to believing that the way things are is necessarily how they must continue to be. (20-21)

Human free will operates in agreement with divine law, with the resultant outcome of reinforcing human freedom. Linear time, rather than cyclical time, becomes the new model, and the “road” is then a symbol of freedom (21). The Christian view (such as Tolkien shared) envisions a spiritual destination as an ending of life’s journey. This is destiny, different from fate: it foregrounds freedom, through choice, and allows for individual participation in the making of a life, and a life story.

The idea of a transcendent destiny counteracts the closed circles of fate, proposes Margaret Visser, in a way which supersedes the other method of understanding:

The hopelessness implicit in a belief in doom is overcome through looking not only ahead but also upwards – that is, above the diagram. One way of expressing this is to say that fate is changed thereby into destiny.... A fixed destiny, an end or aim that is eventually reached, becomes the end or goal of a journey and a road: a destination. Destiny, in religious terms, is not a confinement but fulfillment – in the unmediated enjoyment of a transcendent God (that is, a God who is above, or utterly outside and other than, anything like the metaphor of a fatal diagram). (22)

In *The Lord of the Rings*, this destination, at the end of the story, is depicted in the journey of the ringbearer, Frodo, accompanied by Bilbo (who has also carried the ring) over the sea to Valinor, to be healed of their mental and physical wounds at the end of their lives. The ending of their journey is equated with the ending of the journey of life. The full sense of destination emerges only at the end, when one moves beyond the bounds of the world and the temporal perspective. Fate and transcendence of fate are related to one’s point of view, as Visser points out. Within the “diagram,” events appear bound to a fixed outcome. When one searches “above” or beyond the diagram, a different understanding of reality is known to belong to the divine perspective. This goal of a journey out of bondage is often equated with a God who is “utterly outside and other than” the experience of fate, but also outside of one’s present understanding. In one of

Tolkien's letters, he explains how the eucatastrophe of story is equated with a glimpse of a reality not bound by the chains of material cause and effect. The eucatastrophe allows one the feeling that this "chain of death" has been at least temporarily broken:

... your whole nature chained in material cause and effect, the chain of death, feels a sudden relief as if a major limb out of joint had suddenly snapped back. It perceives – if the story has literary 'truth' on the second plane... – that this is indeed how things really do work in the Great World for which our nature is made. (*Letters* 100)

These ideas of the Ring as symbol of fate can be taken one step further: the view of fate symbolized by the Ring is not one that Sauron represents, but rather one that he *imposes*. Sauron demonstrates an artistic approach that is unfree, rather than free. His approach is monologic, geared towards the imposition of his power on others.

Sauron's language is a language of "doom," that is contrary to freedom in the sense of individual agency; he finally attempts to convince others of the workings of a deterministic universe, which he and his minions believe will cement their power. Sauron's chief followers, the Nazgûl, are the means by which he promotes despair, both through the inarticulate quality of their magic, and the threats that they offer to Frodo, Éowyn, Gandalf, and others (further explanation of the Nazgûl's language of doom will be dealt with at the end of this chapter, in conjunction with the idea of prophecy). The Nazgûl use the "shadow" of death to demoralize their enemies:

For yet another weapon, swifter than hunger, the Lord of the Dark Tower had: dread and despair.

The Nazgûl came again, and as their Dark Lord now grew and put forth his strength, so their voices, which uttered only his will and his malice, were filled with evil and horror. Ever they circled above the City, like vultures that expect their fill of doomed men's flesh. Out of sight and shot they flew, and yet were ever present, and their deadly voices rent the air. More unbearable they became, not less, at each new cry. At length even the stout-hearted would fling themselves to the ground as the hidden menace passed over them, or they would stand, letting their weapons fall from nerveless hands while into their minds a

blackness came, and they thought no more of war, but only of hiding and of crawling, and of death. (*Rings* 854-55)

Gandalf acknowledges the effectiveness of the strategy to promote division: “Even in the heart of our stronghold the Enemy has power to strike us: for his will it is that is at work” (884).

The visions that Sauron shows to Denethor through the *palantir* (a ‘seeing-stone’) evoke a belief in inevitable defeat. Denethor, the Steward of Gondor, has begun to use the *palantir* to gain knowledge, and to challenge Sauron through contests of will. Denethor’s reliance on knowledge, strength and power as the best means of resisting Sauron also leads him to desire to use Sauron’s own ring against him (Denethor’s son, Boromir, has already tried to take the Ring from Frodo but failed and relented). This valuation of military strength and magical power also makes Denethor more vulnerable to despair when he is overwhelmed by the martial prowess of Sauron’s empire (as Gandalf explains):

‘In the days of his wisdom Denethor did not presume to use it, nor to challenge Sauron, knowing the limits of his own strength. But his wisdom failed; and I fear that as the peril of his realm grew he looked in the Stone and was deceived: far too often, I guess, since Boromir departed. He was too great to be subdued to the will of the Dark Power, he saw nonetheless only those things which that Power permitted him to see. The knowledge which he obtained was, doubtless, often of service to him; yet the vision of the great might of Mordor that was shown to him fed the despair of his heart until it overthrew his mind.’ (890)

Sauron has manipulated the visions of events; to attach the weight of truth to these readings of an inevitable future is both faulty and dangerous. The power of despair shows only those pieces of evidence convenient to its arguments. Denethor, relying on the *palantir* as an index of truth, has been misled, seeing “only those things which that Power permitted him to see” (890). The knowledge Denethor obtains by this device may

be useful, but it is tainted by Sauron's interference and has a hidden cost: despair and insanity. Denethor eventually attempts to kill himself and his ailing son Faramir by setting alight a funeral pyre (Faramir is rescued, but Denethor refuses to be saved). Denethor's eventual choice is to have certainty and control at all costs, or to have nothing:

‘I would have things as they were in all the days of my life,’ answered Denethor, ‘and in the days of my longfathers before me: to be the Lord of this City in peace, and leave my chair to a son after me, who would be his own master and no wizard's pupil. But if doom denies this to me, then I will have *naught*: neither life diminished, nor love halved, nor honour abated.’ (888)

His situation has been exacerbated by his inability to recognize hopeful signs. For example, when Gondor is besieged, Denethor calls Gandalf's hope of deliverance foolish, as he has seen in the *palantir* the ships with black sails (those of an army in service to Sauron) moving up the river Anduin towards the city:

‘Pride and despair!’ he cried. ‘Didst thou think that the eyes of the White Tower were blind? Nay, I have seen more than thou knowest, Grey Fool. For thy hope is but ignorance. Go then and labour in healing! Go forth and fight! Vanity. For a little space you may triumph on the field, for a day. But against the Power that now arises there is no victory. To this City only the first finger of its hand has been stretched. All the East is moving. And even now the wind of thy hope cheats thee and wafts up Anduin a fleet with black sails. The West has failed. It is time for all to depart who would not be slaves.’

‘Such counsels will make the Enemy's victory certain indeed,’ said Gandalf. (887)

Denethor does not realize, however, that the vision, while literally accurate, has been wrongly interpreted: the ships have been captured by Aragorn (the future high king), and will prove decisive in the favourable outcome of events:

Thus came Aragorn son of Arathorn, Elessar, Isildur's heir, out of the Paths of the Dead, borne upon a wind from the Sea to the kingdom of Gondor; and the mirth of the Rohirrim was a torrent of laughter and a flashing of swords, and the joy and wonder of the City was a music of trumpets and a ringing of bells. But the hosts of Mordor were seized with a bewilderment, and a great wizardry it

seemed to them that their own ships should be filled with their foes; and a black dread fell upon them, knowing that the tides of fate had turned against them and their doom was at hand. (881)

The leader of the Nazgûl, about to assault Gondor, finds fate to be similarly changeable:

The darkness was breaking too soon, before the date that his Master had set for it: fortune had betrayed him for the moment, and the world had turned against him; victory was slipping from his grasp even as he stretched out his hand to seize it. (872)

As Tolkien shows, what seems “fate” is variable and not fixed, and victory comes in the face of defeat; the eucatastrophic turn of the story is an overturning of fated outcomes (more on this will be explained in Chapter 5, in the context of free will and determinism).

The necessity to resist despair and to hope for eucatastrophe is demonstrated by Gandalf, who responds effectively to Nazgûl threats by refusing to be convinced of their ultimate authority:

‘You cannot enter here,’ said Gandalf, and the huge shadow halted. ‘Go back to the abyss prepared for you! Go back! Fall into the nothingness that awaits you and your Master. Go!’

The Black Rider flung back his hood, and behold! he had a kingly crown; and yet upon no head visible was it set. The red fires shone between it and the mantled shoulders vast and dark. From a mouth unseen there came a deadly laughter.

‘Old fool!’ he said. ‘Old fool! This is my hour. Do you not know Death when you see it? Die now and curse in vain!’ And with that he lifted high his sword and flames ran down the blade.

Gandalf did not move. And in that very moment, away behind in some courtyard of the City, a cock crowed. Shrill and clear he crowed, recking nothing of wizardry or war, welcoming only the morning that in the sky far above the shadows of death was coming with the dawn.

And as if in answer there came from far away another note. Horns, horns, horns. In dark Mindolluin’s sides they dimly echoed. Great horns of the North wildly blowing. Rohan had come at last. (861)

While evil is the privation of good (in the Boethian view), it nevertheless retains power to affect one: “But the absence can have power, can be a force itself, working physically as

well as psychologically: this is the essence of the Nazgûl's challenge, to which Gandalf makes (can make?) no answer" (Shippey, *Author* 214). Instead, the rooster's crow and the horns of Rohan provide an "answer," as Tom Shippey explains in *Author of the Century* (214). Shippey proposes that the cock's crow, associated with the biblical incident of St. Peter's third denial of Christ, here turns from a sign of defeat to a sign of victory:⁸

Frightened after the arrest of Jesus, Peter denies three times that he knew him, and remembers Christ's prophecy – 'before the cock crows thou shalt deny me thrice' – only after the third denial, when he hears the cock crow and realizes too late what he has done. In that story the crowing of the cock acts above all as a rebuke of Peter's natural fear of death. What it means, perhaps, in that context, is that from now on the fear of death will be conquered, and not only by Peter: for beyond death there will be a resurrection. (214)

Tolkien considered the coming of the horns of Rohan to be a eucatastrophe, and found it one of the passages that most moved him personally (*Letters* 221). The eucatastrophic "turn" here comes in the face of denial, death, and defeat: even the apparent sign of this defeat is in fact an indication of the transcendent reality above it, "that in the sky far above the shadows of death was coming with the dawn" (*Rings* 861). This reflects the redemptive nature of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, in terms of eucatastrophic participation in Christian redemption.

Freedom from the choicelessness that Sauron encourages is found in the "conversion" to a viewpoint that allows for the possibility of redemption. In Tolkien's view, this freedom is shown in life as in story by the eucatastrophe, which is characterized by its unexpectedness and unforeseeable nature. The eucatastrophe seems come from 'beyond' the world, whether this be the world of Middle-earth or the world of the story, and it is thus that one transcends notions of "fate." In contrast to the worldview

that Sauron attempts to impose, are the hope of redemption and unexpected joyous turns, “unlooked-for” outcomes that are proposed in songs that characters use to ward off despair, as Frodo does in Shelob’s lair, and Sam does in the tower of Cirith Ungol. The main purpose of the songs is to renew hope, and as the novel progresses, they are increasingly oriented towards this subject matter. Words and speech are effective weapons against Sauron because as vehicles of story and song, they inspire identification with a higher plane of reality that is ultimately beyond the reach of Sauron and his minions, who remain confined within the bounds of their desire for power over others (see also Kokot 200-1). The struggle to counteract the Ring with songs and stories is also the struggle to counter a destructive worldview with a restorative one.

The elvish use of a “language of hope” is also crucial to the affirmation of being and relationship. The antithetical nature of the ring’s compulsive, dominating force, in contrast to the life-affirming, relational aspects of story and laughter is displayed in the following passage, in which the Nazgûl hunt for Frodo, who feels the command to put on the Ring and thereby reveal himself:

Once more the desire to slip on the Ring came over Frodo; but this time it was stronger than before. So strong that, almost before he realized what he was doing, his hand was groping in his pocket. But at that moment there came a sound like mingled song and laughter. Clear voices rose and fell in the starlit air. The black shadow straightened up and retreated. It climbed on to the shadowy horse and seemed to vanish across the lane into the darkness on the other side. Frodo breathed again. (92)

The elves and their song have the power to drive the ringwraiths away from Frodo. This is where we first hear the invocation that will become prominent later as Frodo uses it to ward off the Nazgûl at Weathertop:

*Snow-white! Snow-white! Oh Lady clear!
O Queen beyond the Western Seas!*

*O Light to us that wander here
 Amid the world of woven trees!*

*O Elbereth! Gilthoniel!
 We still remember, we who dwell
 In this far land beneath the trees,
 Thy starlight on the Western Seas. (93)*

Its subject matter is the nostalgia for the “blessed realm,” from the elves who are exiled in Middle-earth. Thematically, the poem deals with the association in memory of a place in which the obscured vision of what Tom Shippey calls the “tree-tangled Middle-earth” (*Author* 201-3) is briefly overcome in song, through reference to a higher plane of existence (as I will discuss at greater length in Chapter 4). The exact nature of this realm is not completely clear within the book, although in song it is equated with starlight (associated with Varda, lady of the stars, a queen of the higher order of beings known as the Valar, and a ruling power in Valinor). Valinor, within the story, has been geographically removed from the “circles” of the world through an act of divine intervention. The elves, in exile in Middle-earth, are subjected to the partial knowledge of obscured and incomplete vision – symbolized by the tree branches that both obscure and reveal the stars (*Author* 202).

The elvish use of language in verse is a fictional way of portraying some of the ancient unities that Tolkien “recovered” through existing languages; this was key to his own creative process. Tolkien once said that he wrote *The Lord Of The Rings* to create a world in which the phrase, “*Elen síla lúmenn’ omentielmo*” (“a star shines on the hour of our meeting”) would be a credible greeting:

Nobody believes me when I say that my long book is an attempt to create a world in which a form of language agreeable to my personal aesthetic might seem real. But it is true. An enquirer (among many) asked what the L.R. was all about, and whether it was an ‘allegory’. And I said that it was an effort to create a situation

in which a common greeting would be *elen sila lúmen* 'omientielmo, and that the phrase long antedated the book. (*Letters* 264-65)

This might be understood to be an example of Tolkien's practice of writing stories to provide a background to his invented languages. Stephen Medcalf sees this as an effort to create a world in which a "specific detail would be credible": "Neither *The Silmarillion*, with the romances which led into it, nor *The Hobbit*, seems to have presented itself to him in quite this way, with the need to create a whole Secondary World in which some specific detail would be credible" (45). Perhaps it is not, as Medcalf suggests, a detail which Tolkien is building a world around, but rather an entire view of a providential universe that may be encountered in a phrase. For Tolkien, the stars were a mythic representation of a mysterious patterning force at work in the cosmos. Even a seemingly separate entity such as a star might have unanticipated effects on other beings. If a star shines on the "hour" of a meeting, the timing of what appears to be a chance correspondence of events might in fact be providence.

This greeting is placed within the book, significantly, at the point at which Frodo and Sam first encounter the elves, whose presence and songs have driven away the pursuing Nazgûl. When the elves offer to accompany the hobbits on their journey for that night, Frodo thanks one of them, in the elvish speech that he has learned from Bilbo: "I thank you indeed, Gildor Inglorien," said Frodo bowing. '*Elen sila lúmen* 'omientielvo, a star shines on the hour of our meeting,' he added in the high-elven speech" (*Rings* 94). Elvish storytelling is a fitting send-off to Frodo and Sam at the start of their journey. The elvish singing is placed within the context of a poetical descriptive passage, in which the veil of mist covering the stars is drawn away as the elves burst into song:

Away high in the East swung Remmirath, the Netted Stars, and slowly above the mists red Borgil rose, glowing like a jewel of fire. Then by some shift of airs all the mist was drawn away like a veil, and there leaned up, as he climbed up over the rim of the world, the Swordsman of the Sky, Menelvagor with his shining belt. Suddenly under the trees a fire sprang up with a red light.

‘Come!’ the Elves called to the hobbits. ‘Come! Now is the time for speech and merriment!’ (95)

An invitation to companionship and conversation then follows. Sam is deeply affected by his encounter with the elves: “Sam could never describe in words, nor picture clearly to himself, what he felt or thought that night, though it remained in his memory as one of the chief events of his life” (96). Sam and Frodo are influenced by elvish poetry to begin songs of their own when they are in need of a special degree of courage and inspiration to complete their quest. In the following pages of this chapter, and at further length in the fourth chapter, I will describe how recovery-oriented language, the “language of hope,” provides for unforeseen outcomes that move above the enclosing boundaries of the world as Sauron may see it.

b) The Language of Hope

While a recovery-oriented approach to language counters non-being and the lack of true identity, the inventiveness of new language also enables a rejection of Sauron’s determinism. Latent meanings also provide a hopeful counterpart to the “language of doom.”⁹ Language holds unforeseen possibilities that allow for the unexpected turnaround of events. In this respect, Tolkien was influenced not only by Barfield’s theory of ancient unities as outlined in *Poetic Diction*, but also by a newer essay of Barfield’s, “Poetic Diction and Legal Fiction” (Medcalf, “Language” 50).¹⁰ In his article, “The Language Learned of Elves,” Stephen Medcalf describes how “Poetic Diction and Legal Fiction” proved influential on Tolkien’s treatment of material in *The Lord Of The*

Rings: “This essay,” says Medcalf, is “not about the ancient semantic unity but its converse, the creation of new meanings in language” (50).¹¹ In terms of ‘legal fiction,’ Barfield’s analogy asserts the increased possibilities of communication from existing words and texts. Barfield draws a connection between the “tarnung” of legal fiction, and its counterpart in terms of poetic metaphors, which he terms “tarning” (50). Language allows speakers the freedom to articulate new understandings about the relationships in the world around them:

One can see that it would fascinate Tolkien both because it is not involved with the concept of consciousness as creative of the primary world, as the ancient semantic unity was, and because it is concerned with a creative power over language which is not only a recovery of ancient awareness. It can in fact deal with the creativity of language in expressing new aspects of the universe of ‘things apart from ourselves.’ (50)

This model allows for new insights within an existing framework. Perhaps the unforeseen quality of the fairy-tale ending may be linked to the possibilities contained within words themselves.

According to Medcalf, Tolkien furthers Barfield’s concept of *tarning* to show that the words in a prophecy can mean more than was originally intended (51). Medcalf shows how, through the thematic treatment of the “Dernhelm” episode in which Éowyn slays the chief of the Nazgûl, the latent possibilities within language provide another type of “recovery.”¹² Tolkien, by settling on the name “Dernhelm,” was using the “Anglo-Saxon equivalent” to Barfield’s term of “tarnung”:

At some date, which on the evidence might well have been late in 1947, Tolkien altered her pseudonym to *Derning* or *Dernhelm*, which are the Anglo-Saxon equivalents of *tarning* and *Tarnhelm*, finally settling for *Derhelm*. At the same period, a prophecy was introduced about the death of the Lord of the Nazgûl, to which Tolkien gave several forms, settling on ‘not by the hand of man shall he fall.’ (51)

The coincidence of these two changes shows that Éowyn's purpose as Dernhelm is to kill the leader of the Nazgûl, and to fulfill the prophecy by opening out the latent possibilities within its seemingly closed meanings. In the text itself, Éowyn, disguised as Dernhelm, defies the leader of the Nazgûl, who threatens her with the domination and destruction of Sauron: "Come not between the Nazgûl and his prey! Or he will not slay thee in thy turn. He will bear thee away to the houses of lamentation, beyond all darkness, where thy flesh shall be devoured, and thy shrivelled mind be left naked to the Lidless Eye" (*Rings* 874). His "shadow" accompanies the abandonment of hope for "despair" at any possibility of other outcome. It is this quality of despair, as much as any physical threat, that Éowyn's defies. It is also this despair he attempts to reinforce through reference to a prophecy: "Hinder me? Thou fool. No living man may hinder me!" (874). When Éowyn challenges the Nazgûl, she both overturns and fulfills the prophecy, and the hidden meaning that she embodies is unleashed:

Then Merry heard of all sounds in that hour the strangest. It seemed that Dernhelm laughed, and the clear voice was like the ring of steel. 'But no living man am I! You look upon a woman. Éowyn I am, Éomund's daughter. You stand between me and my lord and kin. Begone, if you be not deathless! For living or dark undead, I will smite you, if you touch him.'

The winged creature screamed at her, but the Ringwraith made no answer, and was silent, as if in sudden doubt. Very amazement for a moment conquered Merry's fear. He opened his eyes and the blackness was lifted from them. There some paces from him sat the great beast, and all seemed dark about it, and above it loomed the Nazgûl Lord like a shadow of despair. A little to the left facing them stood she whom he had called Dernhelm. But the helm of her secrecy had fallen from her, and her bright hair, released from its bonds, gleamed with pale gold upon her shoulders. Her eyes grey as the sea were hard and fell, and yet tears were on her cheek. A sword was in her hand, and she raised her shield against the horror of her enemy's eyes. (874)

Éowyn's "helm of secrecy" falls from her just as the Nazgûl contemptuously asserts his invulnerability. The true meaning of "Dernhelm" is revealed by Tolkien's translation of

the name in the text (Medcalf, “Language” 51). Éowyn and Merry, a hobbit (halfing), destroy the Nazgûl together (Medcalf, “Language” 51). Accordingly, the “helm of secrecy” as a trope for hidden meanings in poetry and metaphor gains another dimension in its application to a prophecy whose words may be fulfilled in ways other than anticipated: “It seems likely that Barfield’s theme of tarning has been transformed in Tolkien’s imagination not only into the heroic masking of Dernhelm, but also into the ancient theme of the oracle whose words mean more than they are understood to say” (Medcalf, “Language” 51).

Medcalf’s insights on the latent possibilities inherent in the apparently fixed text of a prophecy might serve as groundwork for further speculation. It is likely that the reversal of prophetic meaning is not only a transformation of the words, but also of the worldview accompanying them. Tom Shippey links prophecy in *Macbeth* to *The Lord of the Rings*; both Macbeth and the Nazgûl chief are deceived by prophecies about themselves into a belief about their own invulnerability:

The prophecy on which the Lord of the Nazgûl relies – ‘No living man may hinder me!’ – is much the same as the one which the witches’ apparition gives to Macbeth, ‘Laugh to scorn / The power of man, for none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth’. Both Macbeth and the Nazgûl are deceived in much the same way, for Macduff was not born but ‘from his mother’s womb / Untimely ripped’, while the Nazgûl falls not to a ‘living man’, but to the combined attack of Éowyn, a woman, and Merry, a hobbit. (*Author* 192)

Tom Shippey further discusses the interaction of free will and prophecy. He explains how Tolkien discusses the “use of magic to tell the future” in contrast to Shakespeare’s use of the theme in *Macbeth*. In *Macbeth*, the witches’ prediction does come about, although “increasingly in ways which Macbeth did not expect” (such as the origins of Macduff, and the marching of Birnam wood in the form of soldiers) (*Author* 193). *The*

Lord Of The Rings furthers the question by asking what Shakespeare's play does not, says Shippey:

The question which the play does not raise is whether these events would have come true if Macbeth had not tried to make them come true. He was made Thane of Cawdor without doing anything. Could he have succeeded by fair means without murdering Duncan? And would Macduff have become his deadly enemy if Macbeth had not tried to forestall the prophecy by murdering him and his family? (Author 193-94)

The question of whether or not magic can "foretell" the future is dealt with in detail in the scene in which Galadriel offers Frodo and Sam a glimpse into her mirror. Galadriel may attempt to see into the future, but her attempts are differentiated from Sauron's "deceits" (Author 194). Galadriel's magic is of a different variety, and she claims only to show possibilities, and not the definitive outcome of the future:

One might note that she does not entirely accept Sam's repeated use of the word 'magic', saying that she does not 'understand clearly' what the word means, and that the same word is used to describe 'the deceits of the Enemy'; so the 'magic of Galadriel' is not the same as the 'deceits' of Macbeth's witches. She also adds that 'the Mirror shows many things, and not all have yet come to pass. Some never come to be, unless those that behold the visions turn aside from their path to prevent them.' (Author 194)

Shippey establishes Tolkien's interest in the implications of 'prophecy' and its potential for insight into the future. *The Lord of the Rings* affirms the role of free will in spite of the presence of apparent signs to the contrary:

Both Tolkien and Shakespeare are aware of prophetic ambiguity, but Tolkien is much more concerned with drawing out its philosophical implications. His point, always, is that his characters have free will but no clear guidance, not from the *palantir*, or from the Mirror of Galadriel. As it happens, all the visions seen in the Mirror by Sam and Frodo seem to be true, though they are a mix of present, past and future; but unlike the witches' visions, they have no effect on anyone's actions. (Author 194)

Tolkien shows Éowyn breaking apart the seemingly bound prophecy, as she demonstrates through story the latent meanings possible within words themselves. When

Éowyn faces the leader of the Nazgûl, he casts the “shadow of despair” over her, but she does not give in. The fatalism she resists is not only that of the prophecy regarding the Nazgûl's death, but that of the despair that he attempts to instil. When Medcalf's insights on the latent possibilities for new meanings within language, and Shippey's insights on the reversal of fatalistic portents are combined, a further aspect of “recovery” emerges. It may be that language itself provides, in microcosm, the opportunity for eucatastrophe. The reading of signs as portents of certain doom is shown to be thereby unreliable. Apparent meanings are not as fixed as may be suggested, and for this reason, the “freedom” of storytelling is rooted in language itself.

If the freedom of storytelling finds its roots in language, so, too, does the collaborative, providential model of the universe that gradually emerges through poem and prophecy. This thread will be taken up in the fourth chapter, in which eucatastrophe is a quality shown to be associated with shared storytelling and the view of life as a journey with a destination. The concepts of “destiny” and “destination” in the third chapter will form the groundwork for the discussion in the fifth chapter of free will and providence as a collaborative vision of subcreator and character, author and primary creator. Much of the fifth chapter will involve a discussion of the reading of “signs,” and how eucatastrophe shows the redemptive nature of subcreation, in an overturning of apparent fated outcomes associated with the ring.

Notes to Chapter 3

¹ Tolkien does suggest that Faërian drama (within fiction) may through its enchantment allow the audience to experience a secondary world “directly,” as if with “primary belief”: “To experience *directly* a Secondary World: the potion is too strong, and you give to it Primary Belief, however marvellous the events” (On Fairy-Stories 52).

² This descriptive passage is read by Shippey as applying to the song of Eärendil sung by Bilbo, but the passage may likely refer to other elven songs preceding Bilbo’s. Bilbo’s song is differentiated from the flow of poetry that precedes it: “Then he wandered long in a dream of music that turned into running water, and suddenly into a voice. It seemed to be the voice of Bilbo chanting verses. Faint at first and then clearer ran the words” (*Rings* 250).

³ Eärendil, a half-elven mariner, journeys to Valinor to make an appeal on behalf of the exiled elves. There, he hears words and sees visions, perhaps of a providential design, the understanding of which is not available to those in Middle-earth:

*...and words unheard were spoken then
of folk of Men and Elven-kin,
beyond the world were visions showed
forbid to those that dwell therein. (252)*

He stays in the Blessed Realm, and does not return to the mortal world to share his experiences, but rather becomes a bearer of the light of a Silmaril, flying through the firmament to bring the light of the morning star:

*...the Silmaril as lantern light
and banner bright with living flame
to gleam thereon by Elbereth
herself was set, who thither came
and wings immortal made for him,
and laid on him undying doom,
to sail the shoreless skies and come
behind the Sun and light of Moon. (252)*

Eärendil becomes a symbol of hope: “for ever still a herald on / an errand that should never rest / to bear his shining lamp afar, / the Flammifer of Westernesse” (253). His role is perhaps analogous to that of the poet and literary artist, to hint at moments of mystical insight (as Bilbo hints at them through his song).

⁴ See, for example, Galadriel’s song as the fellowship leaves Lothlórien (Tolkien *Rings* 398).

⁵ When asked by a friend whether he had been “inside language,” Tolkien replied affirmatively, saying that for a moment he had lifted the “veil” (Flieger, *Splintered* 9).

⁶ The post-structuralist view of language is clearly opposed to the idea of a transcendent reality as signified. This concept of the transcendent realm envisioned in story will be further developed in Chapter 4, as the eucatastrophe within the story points to a reality beyond it. In Tolkien's view of language, words can tell stories, that relate concepts as signifiers to one another, but while words embody meaning, they gesture towards this meaning in a way that suggests it is not ultimately encapsulated in the words.

⁷ Bakhtin also sees lack of recognition of another's being as analogous to "absolute death": "Absolute death (non-being) is the state of being unheard, unrecognized, unremembered (Ippolit). To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself" (*Problems* 287).

⁸ Shippey's insight has inspired much further discussion on the changeable nature of signs in terms of resistance to determinism, and the freedom of storytelling, in the final thesis chapter.

⁹ Tolkien's envisioning of the "ruin" of Sauron's fortress is enabled through his use of linguistic recovery. The word "ruin" that describes the change from sign of doom to sign of hope is one of Barfield's own exemplary models of linguistic theory that Tolkien has skilfully applied within a fictional context. Barfield, in *Poetic Diction*, wrote a chapter on the history of the word "ruin" as an onomatopoeic description of process. Tolkien in turn adapted this older meaning to his narrative depiction of Sauron's downfall. As the Nazgûl, and Barad-dûr itself fall in a state of "ruin," the transience of their power is accentuated. The apparent invulnerability is transmuted in an instant, as the fortress falls in a long and spectacular process, whose collapse is analogous to the wave that destroyed Númenor (with a similar aspect of changeability). The view of Mordor, and especially the fortress of Barad-dûr, such as Denethor might have seen is depicted as Frodo sees it from Mount Doom, a moment before its collapse:

And there upon the dark threshold of the Sammath Naur, high above the plains of Mordor, such wonder and terror came on him that he stood forgetting all else, and gazed as one turned to stone.

A brief vision he had of swirling cloud, and in the midst of it towers and battlements, tall as hills, founded upon a mighty mountain-throne above immeasurable pits; great courts and dungeons, eyeless prisons sheer as cliffs, and gaping gates of steel and adamant: and then all passed. Towers fell and mountains slid; walls crumbled and melted, crashing down; vast spires of smoke and spouting streams went billowing up, up, until they toppled like an overwhelming wave, and its wild crest curled and came foaming down upon the land. (982)

Even the seemingly invulnerable fortress collapses like a "wave" without the Ring of Power (see below in Chapter 5 for further discussion of the "wave"). The Nazgûl, too, are destroyed when Barad-dûr is:

And into the heart of the storm, with a cry that pierced all other sounds, tearing the clouds asunder, the Nazgûl came, shooting like flaming bolts, as caught in the fiery ruin of hill and sky they crackled, withered, and went out. (982)

¹⁰ This newer essay appeared in 1947 while Tolkien was engaged in writing the last books of *The Lord of the Rings* (Medcalf, “Language” 50). Barfield’s understanding of how a given term can come to mean more than was originally intended is encapsulated in his adaptation of a German term, *Tarnung*, that referred to the magical helmet of secrecy, the *Tarnhelm*, as portrayed in the *Niebelungenlied* (Medcalf, “Language” 50). This term could also have more sinister implications of concealing political agendas, as it was used under the Nazi regime ‘for the precautionary practice of hiding one meaning in another.’

¹¹ For legal purposes, language must be seen to have a fixed and definite meaning to allow for consistency in the interpretation of cases, and “justice and mutual understanding” (Medcalf “Language” 50). A necessary corollary is the possibility for “latent” meanings to emerge, in the unforeseen circumstances that accompany new cases, and the interpretive decisions that accompany them. This extends not only to the individual cases, but also to the larger socio-political views underlying the legal system, even as far as “whole new concepts of society or the universe” (Medcalf, “Language” 50).

¹² It is likely that Barfield’s essay inspired significant changes to the late drafts of the Dernhelm sequence in *The Lord of the Rings*, which was close to completion at the time that “Poetic Diction and Legal Fiction” appeared (Medcalf, “Language” 51). In earlier drafts, Éowyn’s assumed name (while in disguise) was Cyneferth, then Grímhelm (Medcalf, “Language” 51). At this time she was not yet supposed to kill the Nazgûl, but only his winged steed (Medcalf, “Language” 51).

Chapter 4: Shared Storytelling

a) Life as a Shared Narrative

In this chapter, I will discuss how the journey of life is equated with shared authorship and making of meaning. For the hobbits, the telling of stories and poems is a joint process, as poems are passed along through different speakers, who add nuances to a continually evolving text (or group of related texts). The meaning of the whole reflects a “transcendent” theme that might not have been realized through just one speaker, but becomes progressively clearer as the story unfolds.

Storymaking, like life, becomes a quest for understanding in *The Lord Of The Rings*. The fact that storytelling is shared is key to the understanding of the journey. These tales gain meaning and enrichment from their context, as the themes of one teller will be taken up and answered by another. Quest, perhaps, provides an ideal environment for the exchange of stories that is a shared making of meaning. Always in view within Tolkien’s work is the “destination” of the travelers; journeying is an essential process that will lead to the fulfillment of life’s story. The “ending” of a tale, transformed by eucatastrophe in unforeseeable ways, becomes linked with Christian joy and redemption.

In “On Fairy-Stories,” Tolkien speculates that individual life, in a sense, may be viewed as an allegory (see Chapter 1). An individual life might be ‘read’ as one reads a narrative; meaning is embodied within a particular person in a particular set of circumstances. Life, when viewed as a narrative, becomes a unified, cohesive, and meaningful whole. Alasdair McIntyre, in his book, *After Virtue*, speculates on how the unity of an individual life has traditionally been understood: “In what does the unity of an individual life consist? The answer is that its unity is the unity of a narrative embodied in

a single life. To ask ‘What is the good for me?’ is to ask how best I might live out that unity and bring it to completion” (203). The individual must choose how best to bring that life to fruition, working with the many possibilities that circumstances offer.

Accordingly, when one’s life is viewed as a whole, the making of choices is grounded in one’s perception of narrative pattern. Says McIntyre, “I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’” (201). McIntyre’s theories indicate that a person’s attempt to understand the meaning of a life naturally occurs through narrative. The insights gained through the meaningfulness of events in terms of the “story” then allow for the individual to become a “co-author” of the story as he or she decides on the next course of action. The unity of the story can be brought to completion as the individual sees best. In Tolkien’s work, we may see the hobbits going through the same process of looking at their lives in terms of a story, and trying to find meaning therein. Life itself may be “read” for meaning just as we read stories, and the making of stories reflects the meaning-making process in our own lives.

The making of meaning in an individual’s life is enabled through the structuring of this life in narrative, taking into account an individual’s choices and actions in relation to a larger history of events. What is the beginning of one character’s story may be inserted into the middle of the action of the greater story (200). According to McIntyre, this provides the “moral starting point” of tradition and history in which one person is part of a larger narrative; “accountability” then arises as each individual must attempt to make sense of his or her own life in this context (200-203). The exchange of stories is an essential part of this process; just as lives are interlinked, so too are stories (203).

Accordingly, the meaning-making of one's own life may be fulfilled through shared storytelling. In *The Lord Of The Rings*, we may also see the interlocking nature of the lives of the hobbits, and how this is reflected in their exchange of stories.

In *The Lord Of The Rings*, hobbit storytelling through poems and prose narrative is a way to find meaning; it is also a joint narrative that represents the experience of more than one individual. The hobbits share the act of storytelling with one another, building a pattern of narrative in which several different voices can be heard. Tom Shippey, in *The Road to Middle-Earth*, describes the process by which a strand of narrative may be begun by one character, only to be taken up by another, such that both participate in the event being recounted, and make alterations according to their own experience (142):

Thus at the very end of Volume Three Frodo sings again 'the old walking-song, but the words were not quite the same'; he says not 'we may...take the hidden paths that run, /Towards the Moon or to the Sun', but 'I shall'. And he does, leaving Middle-earth the next day. The song he is fashioning is another of Bilbo's, though it is 'to a tune as old as the hills.' (142)

When Frodo begins to sing Bilbo's song, he too is in the situation of starting out on a journey, but his is a different quest. While Bilbo left on a set of adventures that ended with his finding the ring, Frodo is leaving with a specific purpose: to destroy the ring. He is more certain of the planned outcome of his quest, and the dangerous process of attempting to cross unnoticed into Mordor, hence "I shall" take the "hidden paths." As the book progresses to the end, we see that Frodo does indeed take the "hidden paths" to a land removed from the ordinary geography of the world, joined by Bilbo. Both the song and the quest are fulfilled in ways originally unanticipated by their singers.

Storymaking is also connected to the experience of life itself. Tom Shippey further specifies the relationship: within the poems the journey of life is represented as

the “Road” (141-42). Storytelling is an essential part of that journey. The content of most deeply felt poems is this journey, in one way or another; both elves and hobbits have their own way of representing it. The analogy of life as journey is reflected in Bilbo’s poem, “The Road Goes Ever On and On.” Life is a “Road,” a journey portrayed in poem and story. This Road has many entryways and paths, on which any individual may enter into a journey or quest (*Road* 141):

*‘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 eager feet,
Until it joins some larger way
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then? I cannot say.’* (*Rings* 86-87)

The Road refers not only to an isolated individual’s journey, but also to a collective one. Narratives may join one another through an exchange of stories or poems. As one meets other people on the road, one can also become a part of their stories. Strands of narrative are interwoven into a larger joint story. This is especially the case in terms of the quest to destroy the ring, which is an endeavour larger than any one individual can accomplish. Now that Bilbo has finished his task as ring-finder, Frodo takes up the part of ring-bearer. One character may leave the road and have his journey taken up by others.

This idea of a joint quest is reflected in the shared storytelling of the poem itself. At the end of his own life, Bilbo once again takes up the thread of the song, and speaks of leaving the “Road” for rest:

*‘Now far ahead the Road has gone,
Let others follow it who can!
Let them a journey new begin,*

*But I at last with weary feet
Will turn towards the lighted inn,
My evening-rest and sleep to meet.* ' (1024)

Within the story, the “inn” is Rivendell, but the image may also refer more generally to death (Shippey, *Road* 140). Even though his life may eventually end, Bilbo’s story continues as it joins with those of other hobbits. His actions gain meaning in how they affect others. Future generations in their turn will tell his story and update it. Bilbo passes on his task of ring-bearer to others in their turn, who then form stories about their own experiences. “Let them a journey new begin,” as Bilbo says.

This principle of continuity is demonstrated during the Council of Elrond when Bilbo offers to take up the Ring once again on the quest to Mordor. Bilbo compares living his life to writing his book, and reasons that perhaps it is his task to take up the Ring again, since the story began with his finding the ring: “Bilbo the silly hobbit started this affair, and Bilbo had better finish it, or himself.” Gandalf tells Bilbo that he is only a small part of a larger story, and that the part of the ring-bearer has now passed on to Frodo:

‘Of course, my dear Bilbo,’ said Gandalf. ‘If you had really started this affair, you might be expected to finish it. But you know well enough now that *starting* is too great a claim for any, and that only a small part is played in great deeds by any hero. You need not bow! Though the word was meant, and we do not doubt that under jest you are making a valiant offer. But one beyond your strength, Bilbo. You cannot take this thing back. It has passed on. If you need my advice any longer, I should say that your part is ended, unless as a recorder. Finish your book, and leave the ending unaltered! There is still hope for it. But get ready to write a sequel, when they come back.’ (287)

Bilbo is part of larger story; the story of any individual is part of a larger narrative. The shared actions of many heroes result in the events that make up a “story.”

The sense of a broader narrative is a continual source of inspiration to the hobbits, who find comfort in being part of a larger story because their actions may turn out to end happily for others, even if not for themselves. Like actors in a play, they find meaning in enacting a narrative, although they are not sure of the ending; this does not happen until one may view all of the events of a story in retrospect. At the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*, the hobbits know that they wish to destroy the Ring of Power to restore peace in Middle-earth; that is the object of their quest. The hobbits do not recite poetry about destroying the ring, but they do speculate as to their role in a set of events that predates their own experience. As their journey continues, they find strength in the act of storytelling, and become figures that are co-authors of their narratives just as much as they are co-authors of their lives.

Frodo and Sam, who at one point find themselves on the borders of Mordor, discuss their lives in terms of what would make a good story. Frodo talks about how he dislikes present circumstances, but sees a “path” laid out before them. Sam responds that such is the case in many stories. Sam says that heroes of stories do not usually look for adventure to add excitement to their lives:

‘But that’s not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind. Folk usually seem to have been just landed in them, usually – their paths were laid that way, as you put it. But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn’t. And if they had, we shouldn’t know, because they’d have been forgotten. We hear about those as just went on – and not all to a good end, mind you; at least not to what folk inside a story and not outside it call a good end. You know, coming home, and finding things all right, though not quite the same – like old Mr Bilbo. But those aren’t always the best tales to hear. [sic] though they may be the best tales to get landed in! I wonder what sort of a tale we’ve fallen into?’ (739)

One's situation presents a duty to be fulfilled, but nevertheless it must be freely acquiesced to; a journey also provides the opportunity to turn aside or turn back. It is then necessary for the individuals to fulfill the quest through their own free will.

When the hobbits speak about life as a story, they think about what kind of ending would bring meaning to their lives. As McIntyre says, to determine the type of a story is key to understanding its meaning (198). "Don't the great tales never end?" Sam asks Frodo. "'No, they never end as tales,' said Frodo. 'But the people in them come, and go when their part's ended. Our part will end later – or sooner'" (*Rings* 739). Sam wonders whether or not their story will actually become one that is told by others:

'Still, 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 afterwards. And people will say: 'Let's hear about Frodo and the Ring!' And they'll say: 'Yes, that's one of my favourite stories. Frodo was very brave, wasn't he, dad?' 'Yes, my boy, the famousest of the hobbits, and that's saying a lot.' (739)

Frodo and Sam speculate on their role in a story; even though they do not know what "kind" it is, and what the end will be, they do have faith that there is a "meaning" to be gained.¹ Thinking of themselves as characters adds humour and light-hearted fun to the situation as well: "'Why Sam,' he [Frodo] said, 'to hear you somehow makes me as merry as if the story was already written'" (740). Sam gets pleasure from the prospect of having a story told about Frodo. Frodo, however, does not take Sam's story as a self-aggrandizing thing; his laugh "from the heart" adds a sense of perspective to matters. The idea of life as a story brings satisfaction, if one can contemplate successful resolution for others. The story idea also causes them to see their wish to turn back from a different perspective:

‘You and I, Sam, are still stuck in the worst places of the story, and it is all too likely that some will say at this point: “Shut the book now, dad; we don’t want to read any more.”’

‘Maybe,’ said Sam, ‘but I wouldn’t be one to say that. Things done and over and made into part of the great tales are different.’ (740)

Tolkien writes about life as a story whose ending is not predetermined. The value of choice is emphasized because the ending is unforeseen. Characters do not know that their actions or sacrifices will result in victory, either for themselves or for others. In fact, they often strongly suspect otherwise. It is at these times that participation in a larger “story” inspires bravery; the idea is that even if the outcome is despair and defeat, their actions are worthy of song. This sense of worthiness is not motivated by a desire for fame and recognition; even if no one else hears of their deeds, the characters themselves are aware that they have made the right choice. A key aspect of courage is the ability to act in spite of the feeling that the situation appears to be doomed, but story and song provide hope for eventual unforeseen outcomes, hinting at the possibility of another eucatastrophe.

b) The Role of Eucatastrophe

Stories also gain meaning for the hobbits because of how they are reflective of continuing patterns, which may have a joyful outcome. An earlier “eucatastrophe” sets up the strong possibility of other eucatastrophes occurring later in the same story. This is especially apparent in the scene in which Frodo and Sam discuss the role of Eärendil, who preserved the light of the Silmarils (a eucatastrophic turn in an earlier story, published in full in *The Silmarillion*), now present in the phial of Galadriel:

‘Beren now, he never thought he was going to get that Silmaril from the Iron Crown in Thangorodrim, 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 past the happiness and into grief and beyond it – and the Silmaril went on and came to Eärendil.

And why, sir, I never thought of that before! We've got – you've got some of the light in that star-glass that the Lady gave you! Why, to think of it, we're in the same tale still! It's going on.' (739)

This talisman enables them to gain the necessary courage and inspiration to ward off evil and despair, in the den of Shelob. Sam recalls its power just as they are overcome by mental and physical darkness:

Then, as he stood, darkness about him and a blackness of despair and anger in his heart, it seemed to him that he saw a light: a light in his mind, almost unbearably bright at first, as a sun-ray to the eyes of one long hidden in a windowless pit. Then the light became colour: green, gold, silver, white. Far off as in a little picture drawn by elven-fingers, he saw the Lady Galadriel standing on the grass in Lórien, and gifts were in her hands. *And you, Ringbearer*, he heard her say, remote but clear, *for you I have prepared this*.

The bubbling hiss drew nearer, and there was a creaking as of some great jointed thing that moved with slow purpose in the dark. A reek came on before it. 'Master, master!' cried Sam, and the life and urgency came back into his voice. 'The Lady's gift! The star-glass! A light to you in dark places, she said it was to be. The star glass!'

'The star-glass?' muttered Frodo, as one answering out of sleep, hardly comprehending. 'Why yes! Why had I forgotten it? *A light when all other lights go out!* And now indeed light alone can help us.' (746-47)

While the phial is a magical object like the ring, it emits a light that has the effect of recovery.² It causes Frodo to cry out the words of an invocation to Eärendil that directly counteracts the effects of Shelob, by raising the possibility of hope:³

For a moment it glimmered, faint as a rising star struggling in heavy earthward mists, and then as its power waxed, and hope grew in Frodo's mind, it began to burn, and kindled to a silver flame, a minute heart of dazzling light, as though Eärendil had himself come down from the high sunset paths with the last Silmaril upon his brow. The darkness receded from it until it seemed to shine in the centre of a globe of airy crystal, and the hand that held it sparkled with white fire.

Frodo gazed in wonder at this marvellous gift that he had so long carried, not guessing its full worth and potency. Seldom had he remembered it on the road, until they came to Morgul Vale, and never had he used it for fear of its revealing light. *Aiya Eärendil Elenion Ancalima!* he cried, and knew not what he had spoken; for it seemed that another voice spoke through his, clear, untroubled by the foul air of the pit. (747)

Within the fictional world of Middle-earth, poems can change the reality of a situation, or at least the apprehension of this reality (Kokot 200). Frodo changes the bleak prospect of the situation with the words that he cries after opening the phial of Galadriel. The “recovery” of his use of the glass in the den of Shelob (Jeffrey 110) is the evocation of another quality of reality that has been obscured by the darkness that carries the “stench of death.” Frodo is in danger not only from Shelob, but also from the paralysing fear of despair. Expressing faith in the possibility of eucatastrophe, even when situations appear hopeless, seems to bring about the best possibility for the outcome. The radiance of the star-glass brings courage; it is associated with the continuity of story, and perhaps the beauty and power of language itself. As a “light when all other lights go out,” it offers to provide hope in a situation that is otherwise despairing. This crystal phial has the power to evoke an aspect of experience that gleams above “heavy earthward mists.” Courage may then come by regaining a “clearer view” through identifying with a larger story, even if the mind cannot foresee the final outcome.

This theme of transcendent reality is visible even more clearly in Sam’s song in the guard tower of Minas Morgul, when he fears that Frodo has been captured by the orcs. Sam writes his own song that brings hope in darkness, and its content asserts the existence of a reality that rises above the present experience of limitations and obstacles. There remains inspiration for song, even when the individual no longer has grounds for hope in the resolution of his own circumstances:

*‘Though here at journey’s end I lie
in darkness buried deep,
beyond all towers strong and high,
beyond all mountains steep,
above all shadows rides the Sun
and Stars for ever dwell:*

*I will not say the Day is done,
Nor bid the Stars farewell.’* (943)

Sam’s singing comforts Frodo, whose response to this song allows them to find each other while Frodo lies imprisoned within the tower: “He thought that he had heard a faint voice answering him” (943):

‘Then I wasn’t dreaming after all when I heard that singing down below, and I tried to answer? Was it you?’
‘It was indeed, Mr. Frodo. I’d given up hope, almost. I couldn’t find you.’ (944)

There is an intuitive understanding of a larger pattern of which they are a part; characters have faith that there is one, even if they cannot perceive the whole of it themselves. There are hints that suggest a cause for faith. Art itself is also a means to express this faith and grasp at the intuitive understanding.

It is here that shared storytelling is integral to the sense of meaning. The making of meaning is shared; songs are developed through the antiphonal exchange of voices. The relational view that is developed through songs is reflected in the singing of the songs themselves, which envision a world in which the pattern of the stars is also a sign of an ordering principle at work behind events. This providential power exists in a more transcendent realm; the knowledge is not fully accessible to characters within the realm of time.

Singing and shared poetry are evoked for a final time in the narrative in a way that emphasizes the elements of eucatastrophe and transcendence. When Frodo and Sam leave again for the Grey Havens and Frodo’s final journey over the sea to Valinor, the “old walking-song,” the “Road Goes Ever On,” begun by Bilbo, is sung by Frodo a final time, “but the words were not quite the same” (Shippey, *Road* 142):

*'Still round the corner there may wait
A new road or a secret gate;
And though I oft have passed them by,
A day will come at last when I
Shall take the hidden paths that run
West of the Moon, East of the Sun.'* (Rings 1066)

Even at the end, however, singing remains a shared task on a shared journey. The elves answer in voices of a different song, that also relates their longing for Valinor and the lost joys that it represents:

*'A! Elbereth Gilthoniel!
silivren penna miriel
o menel aglar elenath,
Gilthoniel, A! Elbereth!
We still remember, we who dwell
In this far land beneath the trees
The starlight on the Western Seas.'* (1066)

As it has changed shape over the course of the story, “old walking-song” (“The Road Goes Ever On”) has come to signify a journey of life. At the end of the narrative, Tolkien fittingly equates the destination of the journey with a wider destiny, involving a transcendence of what he calls the “circles of the world.” Frodo too, as ring-bearer, may now take the “hidden paths” over the sea to Valinor (Shippey, *Road* 142), that were lost when the flat world became round, and Valinor was removed from the circles of the world. The ‘eucatastrophic’ language of fairy-stories describes the location of this place: “West of the Moon, East of the Sun.” This is a transcendent end that emerges in their stories as the mythic destination of the journey.⁴ This idea emerges more clearly in elvish poetry, both in the passage quoted above, and in others (quoted in Chapter 2) in which recovery allows a vision of a providential cosmos.

In his book, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, Tom Shippey explains how the elvish “worldview” of the cosmos is manifested in the images of stars and trees:

The images oppose stars and trees: the stars give a promise, or for the elves a memory, of a world elsewhere; the trees represent both this world and a barrier to starlight, something through the branches of which mortals look up to try to catch a glimpse of the vision which would otherwise be clear. (202)

It is through this limited earthly vision that the elves address Elbereth with their hymn (201): “*We still remember, we who dwell / In this far land beneath the trees, / Thy starlight on the Western Seas*” (*Rings* 93). The elves, in Middle-earth, have a limited access to the reality that their song embodies. The understanding of providential order in the cosmos, unavailable in the temporal earthly sphere, is represented through the image of stars obscured by mist or trees, the “tree-tangled Middle-earth” (Shippey, *Author* 202-3). Shippey explains the significance of the imagery: “The Sindarin song of Rivendell again addresses Elbereth as kindler of the stars, and presents the singer as gazing at the stars *o galadhremmin ennorath*, ‘from tree-tangled Middle-earth’” (Shippey, *Author* 202).⁵ Elvish songs, and later the songs of Sam and Frodo, invoke powers of which they have only partial knowledge:

So the elves address Elbereth as, ‘O Light to us that wander here / Amid the world of woven trees’, and sing that ‘We still remember, we who dwell / In this far land beneath the trees, / Thy starlight on the Western Seas’. (202)

The nostalgia that these songs represent is for the lost realm of Valinor, which emerges at the ending of *The Lord of the Rings* as the final destination of the journey of Frodo and of the elves.

This destination is “free” from the closed “circles of the world” that are associated with it. What it represents also is freedom from the closed circles of fate, especially in terms of the providential view, or a “recovery” of a lost experience of reality. This may be a place, a plane of existence, or a view of reality, however we might put it. Mythically present in the story, it is difficult to ‘pin down’ in its exact nature. This type of

transcendent view in Tolkien's work is often referred to, but its nature is never fully specified. What can be stated with certainty is that in Tolkien's mythos, the eucatastrophe comes from a source "beyond" middle-earth. In his letters, Tolkien makes the claim that eucatastrophe almost breaks the fabric of everyday existence, letting in the light of hope. This allows a temporary glimpse beyond the confinement of present experience, to a higher reality:

So that in the Primary Miracle (the Resurrection) and the lesser Christian miracles too though less, you have not only the sudden glimpse of the truth behind the apparent Anankê of our world, but a glimpse that is actually a ray of light through the very chinks of the universe about us. (*Letters* 101) ⁶

This "joy of the happy ending" lies "beyond the walls of the world" ("On Fairy-Stories" 68). ⁷

Joseph Pearce, in his book, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Man and Myth*, discusses Tolkien's ideas about the transcendent destination in Christian terms. According to Pearce, Tolkien sees earthly life in terms of a place of suffering and of limited knowledge; understanding and fulfillment of these present limitations happens in the afterlife. Full revelation will happen only in eternity; this, says Pearce, "was the source and essence of the 'shadowlands' imagery which permeates so much of Tolkien's work, and so much of the work of his friend C.S. Lewis" (123). Pearce makes this connection between the "vale of tears" which we are living in on earth, and the "veil of tears" that obscures our present perception (123-24):

To both writers this world was but a land of shadows, a *veil* of tears as well as a vale of tears, which shielded mortal men from the fullness of the light of God. In Tolkien's work this can be seen most clearly in his story *Leaf by Niggle* where everything becomes more real after death than it has been before. (124)

Frodo's journey across the sea to Valinor is another example of this 'shadowlands' imagery, as Frodo leaves Middle-earth for the "Blessed Realm" (Pearce, *Tolkien* 123).

Pearce notes how this scene is also portrayed in *The Silmarillion*, "though more metaphysically" (124):

And latest of all the Keepers of the Three Rings rode to the Sea, and Master Elrond took there the ship that Círdan had made ready. In the twilight of autumn it sailed out of Mithlond, until the seas of the Bent World fell away beneath it, and the winds of the round sky troubled it no more, and borne upon the high airs above the mists of the world it passed into the Ancient West, and an end was come for the Eldar of story and of song. (*Silmarillion* 304)

The 'escape from death' and the fullness of revelation experienced only in the eternal afterlife are both hinted at in Tolkien's eucatastrophe, observed both in Frodo's vision, and later in his journey with Bilbo.⁸

Frodo's dream or vision in the house of Tom Bombadil of a wave rolling back presents a hopeful possibility that is realized at the end of the story:

But either in his dreams or out of them, he could not tell which, Frodo heard a sweet singing running in his mind: a song that seemed to come like a pale light behind a grey rain-curtain, and growing stronger to turn the veil all to glass and silver, until at last it was rolled back, and a far green country opened before him under a swift sunrise. (*Rings* 150).

Unlike the wave of destruction that subsumed Númenor, this wave rolls backwards to uncover a country. The backward motion of the wave is a joyous "turn" that is fulfilled at the ending of the story, when the ship that Frodo is taking across the sea to Valinor is on the point of embarking on the opposite shore. Once he arrives, he is beyond the realm of the story in Middle-earth, but the ending is hinted at with tantalizing possibility:

And the ship went out into the High Sea and passed into the West, until at last on a night of rain Frodo smelled a sweet fragrance on the air and heard the sound of singing that came over the water. And then it seemed to him that as in his dream in the house of Bombadil, the grey rain-curtain turned all to silver glass and was

rolled back, and he beheld white shores and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise. (*Rings* 1068-69)

Frodo's destination is a place analogous to the eucatastrophe at the ending of the fairy-story, beyond tears and in joy, a realm "beyond" the world of the story. It is story, however, that gives us the most approximate vision of this place, which Frodo journeys to carrying the phial of Galadriel.

When Tolkien's characters do hear their own story told by others, they experience the emotion that accompanies the "consolation of the happy ending," the eucatastrophe in a 'fairy-story.' It is a doubling of joy, which multiplies what has already been given to those who experience this through the events of their own lives. After the (many-voiced) host cries out praise, Aragorn says a final "praise them with great praise," leading the way for a minstrel of Gondor to sing, "to Sam's final satisfaction and pure joy":

'...now listen to my lay. For I will sing to you of Frodo of the Nine Fingers and the Ring of Doom.'

And when Sam heard that he laughed aloud for sheer delight, and he stood up and cried: 'O great glory and splendour! And all my wishes have come true.' And then he wept. (990).

When the eucatastrophe of the story arrives, joy and tears are intermingled, just at the time of the "turn" of unexpected deliverance: "It is the mark of a good fairy-story, of the higher or more complete kind, that however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give to child or man that hears it, when the 'turn' comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art, and having a peculiar quality" ("On Fairy-Stories" 68-69). Sorrow is not merely avoided, but transcended, as one passes into joy. The quality of joy is special because it gives a "glimpse" beyond the world of story (and by extension, the world of the reader): "In such stories when the sudden 'turn' comes we

get a piercing glimpse 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" ("On Fairy-Stories" 69-70). When they hear their own story told, the host who have fought against Sauron are overcome by the feeling of "consolation" of the happy ending. Their former sufferings are transformed into joy in the telling of a story. They are able to pass beyond the "veil of tears":

And all the host laughed and wept, and in the midst of their merriment and tears the clear voice of the minstrel rose like silver and gold, and all men were hushed. And he sang to them, now in the Elven-tongue, now in the speech of the West, until their hearts, wounded with sweet words, overflowed, and their joy was like swords, and they passed in thought out to regions where pain and delight flow together and tears are the very wine of blessedness. (*Rings* 990)

Not just Frodo and Sam, but all find relief and joy in the telling of a story that marks their adventure. This is shared storytelling at its best: the telling of a story whose events they have shared moves the entire community of people. We might view this passage in *The Lord Of The Rings* in which experience becomes story, as participating in the Christian joy of the eucatastrophe that Tolkien saw as the fusion of legend and history that is evangelium, "a far-off gleam or echo of *evangelium* in the real world" (*Letters* 71) (also quoted in Chapter 1):

It is not difficult to imagine the peculiar excitement and joy that one would feel, if any specially beautiful fairy-story were found to be 'primarily' true...such joy has the very taste of primary truth....The Christian joy, the *Gloria*, is of the same kind; but it is pre-eminently (infinitely, if our capacity were not finite) high and joyous. But this story is supreme; and it is true. Art has been verified. God is the Lord, of angels, and of men – and of elves. Legend and History have met and fused. ("On Fairy-Stories" 72)

The eucatastrophe links story and primary reality, and echoes in this way the Christian *Gloria* as well.

Christian joy and many-voiced praise are thematically linked when the news of victory is brought to Minas Tirith. The Eagle's tidings are described in "eucatastrophic" terms; the Christian joy of redemption that Tolkien associated with the 'fairy-story' eucatastrophe is reflected in the biblical, messianic language of the passage. Tolkien's language here makes explicit his association of these themes; the renewal of Aragorn's kingship echoes biblical language of divine kingship and ultimate victory:

*'Sing now, ye people of the Tower of Anor,
for the Realm of Sauron is ended forever,
and the Dark Tower is thrown down.*

*Sing and rejoice, ye people of the Tower of Guard,
for your watch hath not been in vain,
and the Black Gate is broken,
and your King hath passed through,
and he is victorious.'* (999)

The description of the king's reign echoes qualities of the blessed afterlife, as described in the 23rd Psalm (see also Shippey, *Author* 209), in the Eagle's words:

*'Sing and be glad, all ye children of the West,
for your King shall come again,
and he shall dwell among you
all the days of your life.'* (999)

The announcement of the victorious turn of events is accompanied by the enjoinder/invitation to "sing" and so participate in the speaker's poetic utterance, as it is also a shared utterance: "Sing all ye people!" (999).⁹

The poetic language in which the victory is finally announced by the Eagle has biblical echoes. The Eagle, as a traditional symbol of John the Evangelist, draws the link between the gospel story and evangelical good news. The visions in Ezekiel and Revelation refer to "four living creatures" that have been interpreted by St. Irenaeus of Lyons, St. Augustine of Hippo, and St. Jerome as symbols of the "four evangelists": St.

Matthew (man), St. Mark (lion), St. Luke (calf), and St. John (eagle) (Just par. 5-6). The eagle was associated with St. John because of the contemplation of the divine nature of Christ, who is described as the Word of God within the gospel, according to George Ferguson, author of *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*:

Because St. John, in his Gospel, soared upward in his contemplation of the divine nature of the Saviour, the eagle became his symbol. In a more general sense, the eagle came to represent the inspiration of the gospels. It is from this symbolic interpretation that the lectern, from which the gospels are read, is often given the form of a winged eagle. (5)

The eagle is associated with the Word of God, and the ability of inspiration to gain revelation of the divine nature. Accordingly, when Tolkien uses the symbol of the Eagle to bring news of deliverance from the power of evil, he is showing that both the Eagle and the good news that it brings are thematically linked to the Christian “evangelium” of the gospels.

The applicability of the eagle’s meaning connects biblical accounts of Christian redemption to the literary redemption of the eucatastrophe. In both *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, the eagle is consistently both the means of unexpected delivery from disaster, and the messenger of good news. The eagle’s voice is not the only authorial voice, however – the announcement is not the definitive “end” but is also an invitation to participate in shared singing: “Sing all ye people.” By analogy, then, the authoritative pronouncement of the eagle is linked to the primary creator’s own “word” that is also an extension of subcreative freedom to its readers.

Tolkien shows his characters acting as author figures in their own lives, as they search for understanding by making narratives; their choices are directed towards the best continuation of the narrative. Sharing authorship with one another, they find meaning in

their fellowship as they exchange tales. As the novel progresses, yet another level of shared authorship emerges: a divine author's extension of freedom to his creation to celebrate redemption through song. In the following chapter, I will examine how subcreative freedom is modelled by the literary author, who attempts to extend the same freedom to his characters.

Notes to Chapter 4

¹ Perhaps Frodo and Sam here are engaging in “dialogic discourse” not only with one another, but also with their author. Bakhtin recognizes several types of dialogic discourse that may be passive or active. The passive involves a merging of the author’s and character’s voices (see note 3 below), while the active variety involves a “sideward glance” to someone else’s word (*Problems* 199), which could involve characters who anticipate the response of other characters, or even that of the author and/or reader. Sam and Frodo’s conversation anticipates the reaction of a potential implied reader.

² Tolkien’s work contains strong thematic elements of the ambiguous magical object (ambiguous because it preserves, but also encloses beauty, with the commensurate risk of evoking possessiveness). In *The Silmarillion*, the mythical saga which precedes the events of *The Lord of the Rings*, the Silmarils play a central role in much of the war, alienation and bloodshed amongst the elves, and also between elves and dwarves. Fëanor, an elf, underwent an artistic “fall into possessiveness” when he attempted to forge jewels that would “ensnare” the light of the Two Trees (a marvel surpassing the sun and moon). Eventually, though, when the trees were destroyed, all that was left of their light was contained in the Silmarils, which became a symbol of hope. One went into the firmament (on Eärendil’s ship, traveling through the firmament, as the light of the morning star), while the others were cast into the sea and earth. The light of the Silmaril (now Eärendil’s star), set in the water of Galadriel’s fountain, is now present within the phial that she offers to Frodo. Frodo puts it into his pocket, and wields it as a talisman – willingly, at the suggestion of Sam. It emits light, and provides hope – but does not oppress him or reveal his inner self to a hostile glance, as the Ring does. Moreover, it releases the light freely, when called upon for inspiration.

³ Is Frodo merely a mouthpiece, with no voice of his own here? Frodo submits, invoking another power for aid, wielding the phial more as a relic perhaps than as a tool or device. During Elrond’s Council, Frodo also seems to feel another voice speaking through his, but his own “effort” and willing assent are required. If the light that it emits is a reminder of an earlier eucatastrophe, and of their own part in this larger narrative for Frodo and Sam (see also page 118), it may also be analogous to the poetic inspiration which encourages them to form narrative and poetry as an antidote to despair (see also pages 119-120). Later, Frodo and Sam gain initiative and hope from their memory of the Eärendil story, and the recollection that they carry the light-filled phial, and are now part of the same story.

Is Tolkien actually privileging the character, Frodo, by allowing him to voice his (i.e. Tolkien’s) own crucial poetic utterance? The Eärendil story has its roots as early as 1913, when Tolkien, after reading two mysterious lines of Old English poetry which he considered to refer to John the Baptist using a name for the morning star (Carpenter 64):

*Eala Earendel engla beorhtast
ofer middangeard monnum sende.* (Carpenter 64)

These lines, “ ‘Hail Earendel, brightest of angels / above the middle-earth sent unto men’” (Carpenter 64), sparked a reaction in Tolkien akin to what he would later come to call “wonder” and “recovery”: “ ‘I felt a curious thrill,’ he wrote long afterwards, ‘as if something had stirred within me, awakened from sleep. There was something very remote and strange and beautiful behind those words, if I could grasp it, far beyond ancient English’” (Carpenter 64). Tolkien, inspired by the lost story behind these words, later in 1916 began a poem which was arguably the beginning of his mythology: “The Voyage of Earendel the Evening Star” (Carpenter 71). Frodo is voicing this hail (or invocation) to Eärendil in an elven language that he does not wholly understand (note the phonetic and syllabic similarities between the two lines, Tolkien’s also being a salutation to a figure who is a bearer of light). Perhaps, in speaking these words, “*Aiya Eärendil Elenion Ancalima*,” Frodo is repeating Tolkien’s own process of “recovery,” being inspired by a fragment of Old English poetry to join a longer literary tradition. The continuity of artistic vision between artist and character, as well as between speakers and inventors of a language, is at play within this passage.

⁴ Although of course, Valinor is not the home of Êru, the One, it is more closely associated with the Valar, the subcreative powers. This realm is closer to an Eden-like existence, and is not subject to the influence of Sauron, or the same effects of passing and change that the elves experience in Middle-earth.

⁵ Shippey says that the phrase means, literally, “middle-lands,” for which he has substituted “Middle-earth” (*Author* 202).

⁶ Margaret Visser identifies *anangké* as ‘necessity,’ the binding power of ‘fate’ upon action (36-37). Tolkien refers in this quotation to the ability of the eucatastrophe to penetrate beyond the boundaries of “fate” that are perceived as the material chains of cause and effect (*Letters* 100) (see also thesis pages 24-25, 90-92).

⁷ The post-structuralist view of language is clearly opposed to the idea of a transcendent reality as signified. In Tolkien’s view of language, words can tell stories, that relate concepts as signifiers to one another, but while words embody meaning, they gesture towards this meaning in a way that suggests it is not encapsulated in the words.

⁸ As Pearce points out, the “gift of death” offered to men and not to elves is equated with a sense of “homecoming” for those who accept it as such:

Aragorn’s final words to Arwen before his death encapsulate the sense of hope at the heart of Tolkien’s sub-creation: ‘In sorrow we must go, but not in despair. Behold! we are not bound for ever to the circles of the world, and beyond them is more than memory. Farewell!’ (*Tolkien* 125)

⁹ The variety of languages in which the multitudes offer praises to the hobbits in the celebration of victory on the Field of Cormallen exemplifies the many-voiced nature of poetic utterances; the act of song is an invitation to others:

And as the hobbits approached swords were unsheathed, and spears were shaken, and horns and trumpets sang, and men cried with many voices and in many tongues:

'Long live the Halflings! Praise them with great praise!

Cuio i Pheriain anann! Aglar 'ni Pheriannath!

Praise them with great praise, Frodo and Samwise!

Daur a Berhael, Conin en Annûn! Eglerio!

Praise them!

Eglerio!

A laita te, laita te! Andave laitivalmet!

Praise them!

Cormacolindor, a laita tárienna!

Praise them! The Ring-bearers, praise them with great praise!' (989)

Chapter 5: A Collaborative Model: Human and Divine Author

a) Freedom of the Characters: Literary Models

In previous chapters, I have focused on Tolkien's ideas about how an author extends "freedom" to the audience in relation to a primary creator. In this chapter I will go on to explore another dimension of authorial "freedom": the author's extension of freedom to the characters, manifested in a world-view of human freedom and divine knowledge within the fictional world. I will examine literary devices to extend freedom to characters that have been explored by Gary Morson, in his book, *Narrative and Freedom*. I will then indicate how Tolkien's use of these techniques is informed by his concept of the subcreative relationship. Concepts of divine omniscience and providence will be explored as they impinge on human freedom – is human action deterministic, or completely free according to this model of action? Or, is there a third possibility of collaborative interaction between free will and providence? Several philosophical models of human experience will be mentioned to develop the issues involved in the question; Tolkien's complex and inventive stance on this matter will finally be resolved with reference to his theory of "eucatastrophe" as a proposed answer to these questions. According to Tolkien's own theory, the authorship of a "primary author" or a "primary creator" is responsible for the sudden grace of the eucatastrophic ending, and the patterning of seemingly chance events that work together with the individual to form the "authorship" of a story of a life.

Tolkien models his characters' freedom on the author's freedom. Unlike some thinkers, who view literary characters (as they do human beings) as "free" only when they escape an omniscient view of future actions (in which authorial or divine "surplus of

knowledge” precludes the possibility for actions without compulsion), Tolkien takes a different view of authorship, in which the human vision collaborates with the divine one. The grace of the creator is extended to his creation in unforeseeable ways, and the freedom that an author bestows on his characters is in turn a gift of his own Author.

Tolkien’s portrayal of the characters’ freedom takes its place in the context of a long-standing philosophical debate about human free will and divine omniscience. As Leopold Damrosch describes in his book, *God’s Plots and Man’s Stories*, this issue has existed since the earliest novels, and indeed has played a crucial part in the inception of the genre. Puritan autobiography began in an attempt to discern the workings of God in one’s own life; human authorship was an attempt to recapture a divine plan for human life through the construction of a narrative. “Studying the story of his own life, the Puritan seeks to discern what Shepard calls ‘God’s plot,’ implying by ‘plot’ a stratagem or manipulative program that has much in common with plot as literary critics understand it” (4). In this view, God’s providence controls human life, and people are not so much authors as interpreters. Puritan psychology, says Damrosch, “locates the self in a universe controlled by a mysterious and inexorable Providence” (4). Human authorship is an effort to understand God’s authorship of events, known as “providence.” Limited human understanding, however, can only discover a pattern of meaning through an overview of events that happen in linear time. As Damrosch puts it, “the truth can only emerge from a sustained scrutiny of behaviour over a period of time, and thus the need for temporal narrative is born” (4). The relevance of Puritanism to the novel is not in doctrinal points, but in “Faith that sees human life as a narrative invented by God but

interpreted by human beings” (4). The early novelists such as Defoe mirrored this search for meaning in life through a fictional representation of this process.

Puritans, believing in providential “authorship” of real events, needed to create a “fictional universe” that manifested these principles of providential control:

Puritan writers devoted arduous effort to understanding the problem of freedom in a universe controlled by an all-knowing and all-disposing God, and novelists in the Puritan tradition had to face the further paradoxes involved in fictionalizing such a universe. Creators who mimic the only true Creator, they must present imaginary events that imitate the real events ordained by the Almighty. (10-11)

This Puritan view of fiction was linked to an understanding of predestination; because God in his omniscience foresaw events, the outcome of events became fixed, to the extent that even human will and salvation were “predestined” by God’s knowledge of them. All initiative belonged to God, the source of the call to divine grace as well as the ability to choose to accept this grace. For the Puritans, however, this was not necessarily a problem; God’s intervention was a welcome alternative to the pressures of sin (provided, of course, one was a member of the “elect”; this was a great source of worry and consequent introspection). In fiction, the interpretation of this controlling force at work depended on its reception by the character:

If narrative fictions are a combination of plot and character, then what has been said thus far is suggestive of determinism as a function of character, the experience of a personality that feels free when drawn by what it loves and unfree when driven by what it hates. (28)

Later philosophers argued for and against a deterministic model of a clockwork universe in which events might be predicted by observing the course of present events, if one’s calculations were accurate enough.¹ Accordingly, authors who opposed the idea of a deterministic universe wanted to offer a concrete alternative in their fiction.

The model of character freedom in a story reflects how authors envision divine “authorship” in their own lives. In *Narrative and Freedom*, Gary Morson discusses the types of narrative “freedom” that an author can extend to his characters. According to Morson, literary authorship directing the actions of characters has been traditionally linked with skepticism about whether or not human beings have free will, or if they too are limited in freedom by the omniscient viewpoint of a divine “author.” Morson explains that the “literary closure” that gives meaning to events may only be accessible outside of the novel; characters within the structure of the novel’s events and its temporal progression do not have access to the total meaning of events. The increased knowledge of author, and readers as re-readers who have the end in view, seems to reduce the characters’ knowledge, and renders their actions “deterministic” because they are foreseeable (*passim*).

The author’s approach to the structure of the story can reflect this concept of the universe. In the secular model of literary freedom, it is necessary for the author to demonstrate the extension of freedom to the characters through an open concept of time, in which the ending is unforeseen by the author. Characters are shown to have the ability to make other choices in a way that is also not foreseen by the author. If the author knows the end, the “surplus” of knowledge renders actions taken to be inevitable; this reflects a deterministic view of the universe that regards divine omniscience as oppressive. Morson analyses the operation of these principles in the works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Tolstoy, says Morson, uses the device of open-ended writing in his plots; even as Tolstoy conceived of events, he was not certain of which course they would take, and some threads of narrative were abandoned altogether. This had the effect

of making his works seem even more ‘true to life.’ This appears in contrast to the works of other authors in which readers feel certain that any plot element raised in the story will be resolved in the “structural closure” of the ending, in accordance with the author’s overall plan.

In the works of Tolstoy, Morson sees the principle in operation not only through the author’s open-ended literary technique, but in the way in which the characters relate to the signs by which their future may be understood. In *Anna Karenina*, for instance, Anna believes in omens, and their potential to foreshadow the future: “She is in fact as superstitious as she is fatalistic. Indeed, the two qualities often go together, inasmuch as they both construct explanations that elude causality and foreclose choice” (Morson 76). She continually bases her actions on her view of the temporal structure of the world, in which the future can be ‘read’ as easily as the past. While some readers have considered this to be an indication of Tolstoy’s own views, Morson asserts that “they have displaced the locus of structuring to the wrong agent” (80). Tolstoy is actually rejecting the validity of Anna’s assumptions:

Anna sees a world in which plots are already written from the future and in which responsibility has no meaning; Tolstoy describes the causes that lead to these beliefs and the real alternatives they disable. In the *Oedipus*... identification with the hero involves a sense of choice, but the contemplation of the structure reveals the inevitable outcome shaping all prior events. *Anna Karenina* works in the opposite way: when Tolstoy allows us to identify with the heroine, readers see her as she sees herself, as a foredoomed tragic heroine. But the novel subjects that self-image to scrutiny and discovers in fatalism a self-indulgent and self-destructive choice. (76)

As characters become readers of signs “foreshadowing” a future, this is called into question by the variety of other interpretations and choices available (76). Unfortunately, Anna does not realize this until the ending of the novel, a moment before her death (79).

Like Tolstoy, Tolkien shows characters rejecting certain readings of omens, but Tolkien offers a different type of alternative in its place to the determinism associated with the authorial and divine surplus of knowledge. The author, in imitation of the primary creator, extends a type of “grace” to his characters that they see through the “eucatastrophe.” This is a particularly Christian view of literary freedom; the divine author’s “surplus of knowledge” is complementary to human freedom. Later in the chapter we will see examples of how the characters reject the determinism implicit in the reading of signs to elicit the ending of a closed system of events, in favour of the hopeful ending of a eucatastrophe whose authorship is ultimately beyond their anticipation.

Tolkien, to a limited extent, demonstrates the types of literary “freedom” that Morson proposes. This freedom is placed, however, within the context of his Christian views, and subject to the conditions of that relationship; literary freedom corresponds to a redemptive model of Christian theology. Tolkien attempts to show an open process of decision-making, in which every character has a chance to make a choice. The other possibilities for choices are “shadowed” as we see the characters wavering in the process of choosing. Not only does this sideshadowing affirm free will, but it also shows the opportunity for redemption that is open to each character.

Tolkien shows this principle, that Gary Morson calls “sideshadowing,” operating within his work.² Rather than implying, as foreshadowing does, that present events contain their future outcome, sideshadowing illuminates other actions and events that might have been possible with every choice that is made. According to this model, time becomes not just “points of actuality” but “fields of possibility” (Morson 11-12):

Sideshadowing relies on a concept of time as a *field of possibilities*. Each moment has a set of possible events (though by no means every conceivable

event) that could take place in it. From this field a single event emerges – perhaps by chance, perhaps by choice, perhaps by some combination of both with the inertia of the past, and in any case contingently. To later observers, the other possibilities usually appear invisible or distorted. Thus a field is mistakenly reduced to a point, and, over time, a succession of fields is reduced to a line. Sideshadowing restores the field and thereby recreates the fullness of time as it was. Sideshadowing suggests that to understand any moment is to grasp its field of possibilities. (Morson 119-20)

Authors can show the range of possible choices offered to the characters, and make the other possibilities fully “present” to the reader; this approach fights the “deterministic” world view, showing how a range of choices is available, and very nearly made. Morson extensively describes how Dostoevsky emphasizes the multitude of other choices that his characters could have made. These are somehow mysteriously “present” as well in that they cast shadows on the present, and also serve to affect the course of future events.

When Tolkien’s story is viewed in terms of sideshadowing, we see how the quality of fiction emphasizes the freedom of the characters within the realm of the story – choices are balanced on a knife-edge of uncertainty. Frodo, Gollum and Bilbo each are “shadows” for the others, showing the real possibilities that exist for them with regards to the ring. Elizabeth Arthur examines Gollum’s complex relationship to Bilbo and Frodo in her article, “Above All Shadows Rides the Sun: Gollum as Hero.” Gollum is a character “foil” for Frodo, says Arthur, and serves to illustrate the potential for Bilbo and Frodo to have become equally changed, had they given in to the temptation of the Ring: “There is little doubt that Gollum is a picture of what any of the other Ringbearers might have been, had circumstances treated them less kindly, or their own characters been less strong” (20). Arthur offers the following example of a case in which the “shadow” of Gollum’s attitude passes over Bilbo, who at that moment takes on Gollum’s appearance in the eyes of Frodo:

Slowly he drew it out. Bilbo put out his hand. But Frodo quickly drew back the Ring. To his distress and amazement he found that he was no longer looking at Bilbo; a shadow seemed to have fallen between them, and through it he found himself eyeing a little wrinkled creature with a hungry face and bony groping hands. He felt a desire to strike him.

The music and the singing round them seemed to falter and a silence fell. Bilbo looked quickly at Frodo's face and passed his hand across his eyes. 'I understand now,' he said. 'Put it away! I am sorry: sorry you have come in for this burden: sorry about everything. Don't adventures ever have an end? I suppose not. Someone else always has to carry on the story. Well, it can't be helped. I wonder if it's any good trying to finish my book? But don't let's worry about it now – let's have some real News! Tell me all about the Shire!'

Frodo hid the Ring away, and the shadow passed leaving hardly a shred of memory. The light and music of Rivendell was about him again. (*Rings* 249)

The singing falters when suspicion comes between Bilbo and Frodo, and is restored when they resolve the difficulty. Frodo is “shadowed” just as much as Bilbo is, perhaps, as his own possessive and jealous guarding of the Ring makes him see anyone else who wants to touch it as a potential thief (see also, for example, Frodo's treatment of Sam in Mordor when he offers to assume the burden of the ring). Frodo sees a nameless “creature” instead of Bilbo; repulsed, he feels the urge towards violence, and the desire to “strike” him. Bilbo sees how he appears in Frodo's eyes, and recognizes that although he has given the Ring up willingly, it still has adverse effects on him when he is in close proximity to it. Bilbo, recalling that he has passed the Ring on to Frodo, apologizes, and friendship is restored. This “shadow” that falls is not simply the illusion causing distrust in Frodo that is cast by the Ring (or even a Jungian shadow of Bilbo's darker nature), but the presentation of other potentialities that Morson would call “sideshadowing.” Frodo also shows what Gollum could have been, and offers him that chance of redemption. Gollum is not redeemed, in Tolkien's moral scheme, but he very nearly was.

Gollum's possibility for redemption is briefly and movingly described. After Gollum returns from meeting with Shelob in her lair (where he plans to lead Frodo and

Sam to their deaths, in order to obtain the Ring for himself), he has a brief moment of regret when he sees Sam and Frodo in peaceful sleep:

And so Gollum found them hours later, when he returned, crawling and creeping down the path out of the gloom ahead. Sam sat propped against the stone, his head dropping sideways and his breathing heavy. In his lap lay Frodo's head, drowned deep in sleep; upon his white forehead lay one of Sam's brown hands, and the other lay softly upon his master's breast. Peace was in both their faces. (741)

He literally reaches out, moved by their closeness:

Gollum looked at them. A strange expression passed over his lean hungry face. The gleam faded from his eyes, and they went dim and grey, old and tired. A spasm of pain seemed to twist him, and he turned away, peering back up towards the pass, shaking his head, as if engaged in some interior debate. Then he came back, and slowly putting out a trembling hand, very cautiously he touched Frodo's knee – but almost the touch was a caress. (742)

Readers are witnesses to his debate, but are not privileged to know his thought. The elements of decision are shown through his actions (perhaps this is because he is a unified being, shown in the process of acting as he chooses). For a “fleeting moment,” Gollum gains the possibility of being restored to his hobbit nature:

For a fleeting moment, could one of the sleepers have seen him, they would have thought that they beheld an old weary hobbit, shrunken by the years that had carried him far beyond his time, beyond friends and kin, and the fields and streams of youth, an old starved pitiable thing. (742)

Ironically, Gollum's touch causes Frodo to cry out, and Frodo's cry in turn sparks Sam's negative reaction to Gollum. Gollum retreats once more into himself after Sam's display of suspicion. After a brief moment of choice, the possibility of redemption is lost, and Gollum is confirmed in his decision to betray them:

But at that touch Frodo stirred and cried out softly in his sleep, and immediately Sam was wide awake. The first thing he saw was Gollum – ‘pawing at master,’ as he thought.

‘Hey you!’ he said roughly. ‘What are you up to?’

‘Nothing, nothing,’ said Gollum softly. ‘Nice Master!’

‘I daresay,’ said Sam. ‘But where have you been to – sneaking off and sneaking back, you old villain?’

Gollum withdrew himself, and a green glint flickered under his heavy lids. Almost spider-like he looked now, crouched back on his bent limbs, with his protruding eyes. The fleeting moment had passed, beyond recall. ‘Sneaking, sneaking!’ he hissed. (742)

Gollum retains the insult, in spite of Frodo’s advice (743).

For Tolkien, the subcreative relationship is key because Gollum’s possibility for redemption has been lost through his own choice, but also by the provocation occasioned through another character’s assumption of Gollum’s fixed role as villain, and lack of recognition of his freedom to choose otherwise in ways as yet unknown. Sam, in labelling Gollum as a “villain,” has assumed knowledge of the outcome of the story in advance. Sam commits an offence “against narrative,” and the freedom occasioned therein, according to Dominic Manganiello, author of “The Neverending Story: Textual Happiness in *The Lord of the Rings*”: “Sam offends against narrative as well as moral sense by typecasting Gollum as a villain in the piece, by writing him off, before events have run their course” (10). Characters may become “author” figures in their own lives, but should not attempt to typecast others before the outcome of their decisions is known. This presumption has caused Gollum to withdraw back into himself, but in the discussion preceding this event, Gollum is viewed in terms of a more open-ended concept of a character’s role in a story. At this point, Frodo and Sam question how Gollum would see himself in terms of story – and whether or not he would like to be a hero; even Gollum has a choice of what he may aspire to. The participation in story and meaning-making applies even to Gollum, as Sam speculates:

‘Why, even Gollum might be good in a tale, better than he is to have by you, anyway. And he used to like tales himself once, by his own account. I wonder if he thinks he’s the hero or the villain?’

‘Gollum! he called. ‘Would you like to be the hero – now where’s he got to again?’ (740) ³

Although all of the hobbits, and Gollum himself, are “under the weight of doom” (671), they have the ability to reach a transcendent destination, in which the “fate” of choicelessness and despair that the Ring represents is destroyed. In the following passage, Gollum is also shown as a creature who has the ability to be redeemed:

Not even an eagle poised against the sun would have marked the hobbits sitting there, under the weight of doom, silent, not moving, shrouded in their thin grey cloaks. For a moment he might have paused to consider Gollum, a tiny figure sprawling on the ground; there perhaps lay the famished skeleton of some child of Men, its ragged garment still clinging to it, its long arms and legs almost bone-white and thin: no flesh worth a peck. (671)

The potential for “redemption” that Tolkien sees in fairy stories is offered even to Gollum; his “famished skeleton” (reminiscent of the valley of dry bones of Ezekiel) holds the possibility for renewal and nourishment. As a “child of Men” (an interesting phraseology, seeing as he was thought to be a former hobbit), Gollum is a free-willed being who is offered the chance of redemption, and even perhaps a type of moral and spiritual ‘resurrection.’ Tolkien underlined Gollum’s “potential for good,” going so far as to imagine an alternative ending to the plot, had Gollum chosen otherwise (Manganiello 10):

The interest would have shifted to Gollum, I think, and the battle that would have gone on between his repentance and his new love on the one side and the Ring. Though the love would have been strengthened daily it could not have wrested the mastery from the Ring. I think that in some queer twisted and pitiable way Gollum would have tried (not maybe with conscious design) to satisfy both. Certainly at some point not long before the end he would have stolen the Ring or taken it by violence (as he does in the actual Tale). But ‘possession’ satisfied, I think he would then have sacrificed himself for Frodo’s sake and have *voluntarily* cast himself into the fiery abyss. (*Letters* 330) ⁴

Tolkien himself was not completely sure of the course that the action would take, and wrote several drafts of the ending of his story. His characters in Morson's sense had "freedom" to choose in that they were free from the author's foreknowledge of their choices. Tolkien wrote instead always trying to work out events according to the "logic of the plot"; he was "listening" as much as he was "inventing." ⁵

Tolkien wanted to leave the writing process open to the intervention of another "Author," just as he showed his characters doing. Dominic Manganiello compares this to "the interplay between omniscience and the future" as described by Peter Geach. Geach compares this process to a blank piece of paper, blank because no scientific analysis can predict what will be written:

What the Moving Finger has once writ cannot be erased... But ahead of where the Moving Finger has writ there is only blank paper; no X-ray vision can reveal what is going to stand there, any more than some scientific treatment of the paper on my desk can show what words I am going to inscribe on it. (Geach 53; qtd. in Manganiello 11)

Both the author's own subcreative freedom and that of his characters are part of an overall pattern whose nature unfolds only in time, says Manganiello:

Tolkien believed he was meant to write his legendarium as Bilbo was meant to find the Ring (Letters, 232), and had no exact notion of what shape it would take moment by moment. Writing, like reading, became the adventure of finding out what happens next. Both author and character collaborated in their own way with the overall design of the One as it unfolded before them. (11)

b) Free Will, Providence, and the Eucatastrophe

In Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, the characters' freedom is derived from their relationship to the author. This models Tolkien's view of free will and divine providence as ways that humans relate to their own divine "author." As we saw in Chapter 4, the characters see themselves as participating in a larger story, which encourages rather than discourages their sense of free will and individual agency. Characters act with free will, but their actions form part of a larger pattern in which chance events are actually ordered by a providential awareness outside of the realm of the "story."

Tolkien structures Middle-earth in a way that is inherently meaningful; the 'providential' universe manifests a divine plan that works together with human free will, rather than overriding it. In her article, "Providence, Fate, and Chance: Boethian Philosophy in *The Lord of the Rings*," Kathleen Dubs draws parallels between Tolkien's view of providential powers at work in the story, and the influence of Boethian philosophy on Tolkien. She notes how Tolkien here takes the cue from Boethius, who theorizes that what appears to be "chance" in the coincidence of seemingly unrelated events occurring at the same time is the working of providence to bring about outcomes. The patterning of events is not accomplished through the subversion of will, but rather through the "confluence" of events, in Boethius' view: "Further, the order that makes these causes coincident and confluent proceeds in an inescapable interweaving of causes; it descends from the source of Providence and arranges all things in their proper places and in their proper times" (Book V, Prose 1). Dubs clarifies the distinction further; chance is not a random series of events, but rather a set of events with their particular

causes in a universe ordered by God (36). In this context, all events have their causes, but human choice-making is not compelled by any single outside cause.

Chance, also referred to in the book as “fortune,” provides characters with opportunities for action that they might accept or reject. For example, when Frodo recovers from being wounded by the Morgul-knife, his own resistance to its power combines with the shallowness of the wound to save his life (Dubs 38). As Gandalf tells Frodo, “Yes, fortune or fate have helped you, not to mention courage. For your heart was not touched, only your shoulder pierced; and that was because you resisted to the last” (*Rings* 238). Says Dubs, “The role of ‘fortune or fate’ is here quite clear, as is the idea that ‘fortune or fate’ bears a direct relationship to the independent actions of individuals. Fate helped Frodo because he helped himself. Like Boethius, Tolkien allows for both freedom and fate, and in such a way that each seems to depend upon the other” (38). The combination of circumstances that led to Bilbo’s finding of the Ring (which he later passed on to Frodo), is attributed to “chance” by the characters, but Gandalf acknowledges that it was perhaps something more (that led to Bilbo’s finding the Ring in the same year that Sauron was driven from Mirkwood): “a strange chance, if chance it was” (*Rings* 267).

“Doom” is another concept that at first indicates an irrevocable future (as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3). In fact, the future course of events depends on individual will to respond to the tasks laid in one’s path by circumstance. Frodo sees the task of taking on the Ring as a “doom,” and yet he chooses to take it. While the Council is silent, Frodo reflects. Frodo speaks voluntarily, “with an effort,” and yet the words also seem to be given to him, as Frodo becomes a “mouthpiece”:

A great dread fell on him, as if he was awaiting the pronouncement of some doom that he had long foreseen and vainly hoped might after all never be spoken. An overwhelming longing to rest and remain at peace by Bilbo's side in Rivendell filled all his heart. At last with an effort he spoke, and wondered to hear his own words, as if some other will was using his small voice.

'I will take the Ring,' he said, 'though I do not know the way.' (288)

When Frodo accepts the ring, he feels as if another voice is speaking through him, but his own volition is shown as he communicates this intention, speaking "with an effort"

(Drury 9). This, says Roger Drury, is "a phrase implying wilful action" (9). It requires willing acquiescence on the part of Frodo to respond to this calling that he sees as "doom." Doom here is an appointed task (although seemingly by circumstance), that one accepts out of duty rather than desire. Elrond's subsequent comment also emphasizes Frodo's deliberately willing acceptance (9):

'But it is a heavy burden. So heavy that none could lay it on another. I do not lay it on you. But if you take it freely, I will say that your choice is right.'
(*Rings* 288)

Frodo's task has been appointed to him, according to Elrond, but even Elrond is not certain of this plan, and expresses his uncertainty (Dubs 39):

'If I understand aright all that I have heard,' he said, 'I think that this task is appointed for you, Frodo; and that if you do not find a way, no one will. This is the hour of the Shire-folk, when they arise from their quiet fields to shake the towers and counsels of the Great. Who of all the Wise could have foreseen it? Or, if they are wise, why should they expect to know it, until the hour has struck?'
(*Rings* 288)

Not only Frodo's circumstances, but also his actions, become a part of the pattern that ends in the triumph of hope beyond expectation. As Elrond points out, even the "wise" should not expect to foresee this. In his letters, Tolkien talks about a central "recurring theme" of the work being "the place in 'world politics' of the unforeseen and unforeseeable acts of will, and the deeds of virtue of the apparently small, ungreat,

forgotten in the places of the Wise and Great (good as well as evil)” (*Letters* 160). While providence works through chance events, seen as fate or even prophecy, the small acts of virtue by the individual human will are what is truly unforeseeable in the scheme of events.

Providence orchestrates meetings and the coming together of fellowship in the Council. Almost every attendee has come to Rivendell for other specific reasons (Dubs 39), and yet they are together able to make the decision as a group of how to dispose of the Ring that Frodo has just brought there, as Elrond states:

‘That is the purpose for which you are called hither. Called, I say, though I have not called you to me, strangers from distant lands. You have come and here met, in this very nick of time, by chance as it may seem. Yet it is not so. Believe rather that it is so ordered that we, who sit here, and none others, must now find counsel for the peril of the world.’ (*Rings* 259)

Roger Drury, in his article, “Providence at Elrond’s Council,” further develops the theme of a providential ordering through confluent events with specific reference to the coming together of fellowship in decision-making at Elrond’s council. While prophecy has foretold a fortuitous meeting at the time that the Ring is brought to Rivendell, the individual members are able to choose their own responses to the narratives of others, and the resultant choice offered by the present situation. Says Drury, “Thus during the Third Age of Middle Earth, although actions may be foretold, the mere existence of a prophetic statement does not compel characters into specific action. Free will is never subsumed by predestination; the two remain an indefinite mixture” (9). Not only chance, but a series of small “eucatastrophes” and “close escapes” has brought Gandalf and others to this event. According to Gunnar Urang, this creates a “pattern of hope” in which a final hopeful outcome is seen to be possible (qtd. in Drury 9). This is seen to

have parallels to the Christian concept of the working of God in history, also seen as a hopeful pattern that nonetheless enables human freedom of choice. Drury (with reference to the Council of Elrond) also concurs that Tolkien's work displays a collaborative model of human free will and divine providence:

The Council of Elrond at Rivendell provides several indications of providential design at work in the War of the Ring. The co-ordination of complex events, the balance of providential will and individual freedom of choice, and a continuing series of eucatastrophes all parallel the traditional Christian view of God at work throughout history. (9)

The fuller knowledge of events that inheres in divine providence raises the question of determinism. If fate determines events, how can humans have free will? The problem of a seeming contradiction of free will and fate can be resolved through the Boethian distinction between fate and providence, Dubs proposes (35-37). What appears to be fate is simply the ordering of the world that humans cannot perceive fully, because they are in time. The workings of providence are called "fate" by those with imperfect understanding of beings in time, according to Boethius:

... Providence is the divine reason itself, established in the highest ruler of all things, which arranges all things; Fate is the arrangement that inheres in the things that have motion, the arrangement through which Providence weaves all things together in their proper orders. Providence embraces all things equally, despite the fact that they are different, and despite the fact that they are infinite; Fate sets out individual things into their motions, things that are apportioned to specific places, appearances, and times. As a result, this unfolding of the order of things in time, which is unified according to the divine mind's seeing of it in advance, is Providence; this same unification, when set out and unfolded in specific times, is called Fate. (Book IV, Prose 6)

Boethius' distinction between fate and providence illumines Tolkien's use of the term "fate" within the book; when the characters respond to the idea with wisdom, they recognize that circumstances may be favourable, but the individual initiative is necessary to act on them. Galadriel, speaking to Frodo, after she has rejected his offer of the ring,

and they are about to depart Lothlórien, uses the language of “fate” in a sense that indicates opportunity for action rather than fixity of outcome (Dubbs 40): “ ‘Let us return!’ she [Galadriel] said. ‘In the morning you must depart, for now we have chosen, and the tides of fate are flowing’ ” (*Rings* 385). Individual action may in fact change the direction of circumstance:

These ideas (free will and fate) are not incompatible if we view them in Boethian terms, for free will operates within the order of the universe, fate being merely the earthly manifestation of that order. And here we can see more clearly than before that free will sets that order in motion; Frodo’s and the Lady’s choices have determined the direction of that order, have set the tides flowing. It has not worked in the reverse direction. For ‘determinism’ to have worked here, it would have to be defined anew. (Dubs 40)

The Boethian understanding of fate does not have all of the negative implications that Visser’s definition of the term presents (see Chapter 3); in Boethius’ interpretation fate is simply our limited understanding of the workings of providence. In both Boethius’ Christian interpretation, and the classical attitudes to fate that Visser describes, there is the element of limited understanding of the workings of the world, from a human perspective within time and the world, rather than from a divine, eternal perspective transcending both. For Boethius, the transcendent understanding of events, as available to the eternal perspective of the One who orders them, is providence. From the Jewish and Christian perspective, as Visser argues, it is a sense of destiny. In both cases, however, what is being proposed is a model in which human action works in harmony with the divine plan, and divine knowledge.

The journey of life becomes equated with providence itself (Shippey, *Road* 141). What is the impetus that has led Bilbo and Frodo on their quest? They have been ‘called’ to participate in a story, and this is a call that they may choose to accept or reject. The

many branches of the road represent possible choices along the way. A series of choices about direction to be taken results in the eventual outcome of the journey: the reaching of a destination. Destinations must be worked towards, like the “destiny” of one’s life that the quest and its ending resemble. For Tolkien, the ending of a story, any more than of a life, is not a fated, predetermined ending, but rather is a result of a fluid process that involves the making of choices at every turn.

The concept of divine providence has been traditionally viewed as very problematic in terms of human free will. If the overall course of the action is seen in advance by divine omniscience, how can human actions be free of compulsion? To resolve this question in terms of Tolkien’s work, a further reference to Boethius may be germane. Boethius says that because humans experience time, and the divine observes all actions in time through eternity, it is a false analogy to compare human foreknowledge of events to divine foreknowledge. Boethius shows the argument for divine foreknowledge as being contrary to human freedom: “I mean, if such things could be forcibly turned aside in some other direction than they were foreseen to go, then there would now be no immovable foreknowledge of the future, but only indefinite opinion instead” (Book V, Prose 3). His answer is that God views human actions from a different vantage point: the perspective of eternity in which all moments are present. Divine knowledge does not precede, and so compel human action from an earlier point in linear time, but rather it perceives the free actions in the eternal present, “since God has an ever-eternal and ever-present-moment condition, his knowledge as well has passed beyond all the motion of time and is stable in the simplicity of its own present; it embraces the

infinite reaches of what has passed and what is to come and, in its own simple perception, it looks at all things as if they are being carried out *now*” (Book V, Prose 6).

While future actions may seem to be necessary because of divine knowledge of them, human nature is nonetheless free from compulsion: “the same future event seems to be necessary when it is referred to divine knowledge, but completely and absolutely free when weighed in the balance of its own nature” (Book V, Prose 6). Providential knowledge does not imply necessity for an event to come to pass. To make this point, Boethius distinguishes between different two types of necessity. Boethius uses the example of a man walking, who is observed; the observer does not force the man to walk:

For it is not the thing’s own nature that makes this necessity but only the addition of condition; for no necessity compels a man to move forward who is taking a step voluntarily; even though it is a necessary thing that he move forward at the point at which he takes a step. Therefore, it is in just this way that it is necessary that a thing exists if Providence sees it as a present thing, even if it has no necessity in its nature. (Book V, Prose 6)

If we see Tolkien’s eucatastrophe in terms of Boethian philosophy, we may understand the unforeseeable nature of the eucatastrophe as due to the similarly unforeseeable nature of providence. The universe is a “providential” one, in which providence orders events, seen at first as fate or chance within the “circles of the world.” This view of events as “fate” changes after we see the eucatastrophe, in which the events and choices made freely will often have consequences beyond what is foreseen or even hoped. This “grace,” or deliverance from apparent defeat into a more profound victory, has a “redemptive” quality. (It is a transcendence of the closed chains of fate and “doom,” into an opened, higher outcome in which joy of the unexpected ending shows how free will and good intentions overcome evil to create a final, more harmonious outcome.)

This force comes from “beyond” the world, and from beyond the realm of story, to bring about eucatastrophe. This principle is visible in the “chance” of the timing at which Gollum comes to bite the Ring from Frodo’s finger, in the incident at the Cracks of Doom. This chance is a result of the pity that led Frodo to spare Gollum’s life (*Rings* 639). In doing so, he reflects on the words of his own conversation with Gandalf. Frodo recognizes that intentions are not proof of guilt, and accordingly, even Gollum deserves a chance to prove himself:

It seemed to Frodo then that he heard, quite plainly but far off, voices out of the past:

*What a pity Bilbo did not stab the vile creature, when he had a chance!
Pity? It was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need.*

I do not feel any pity for Gollum. He deserves death.

Deserves death! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give that to them? Then be not too eager to deal out death in the name of justice, fearing for your own safety. Even the wise cannot see all ends.

‘Very well,’ he answered aloud, lowering his sword. ‘But still I am afraid. And yet, as you see, I will not touch the creature. For now that I see him, I do pity him.’ (639-40)

Frodo’s pity for Gollum enables a change in the course of events, when Frodo is overcome by the temptation of the Ring at the Cracks of Doom. When Frodo claims the Ring for his own and puts it on, he reverses the decision that has been taken on the path of his entire quest. Sam watches Gollum and Frodo fighting on the brink of the abyss; Gollum bites the Ring off Frodo’s finger and vanishes with the Ring into the Cracks of Doom, where both he and it are destroyed:

Then Frodo stirred and spoke with a clear voice, indeed with a voice clearer and more powerful than Sam had ever heard him use, and it rose above the throb and turmoil of Mount Doom, ringing in the roof and walls.

‘I have come,’ he said. ‘But I do not choose to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!’ And suddenly, as he set it on his finger,

he vanished from Sam's sight. Sam gasped, but he had no chance to cry out, for at that moment many things happened....

The fires below awoke in anger, the red light blazed, and all the cavern was filled with a great glare and heat. Suddenly Sam saw Gollum's long hands draw upwards to his mouth; his white fangs gleamed, and then snapped as they bit. Frodo gave a cry, and there he was, fallen upon his knees at the chasm's edge. But Gollum, dancing like a mad thing, held aloft the ring, a finger still thrust within its circle. It shone now as if verily it was wrought of living fire.

'Precious, precious, precious!' Gollum cried. 'My Precious! O my Precious!' And with that, even as his eyes were lifted up to gloat on his prize, he stepped too far, toppled, wavered for a moment on the brink, and then with a shriek he fell. Out of the depths, came his last wail *Precious*, and he was gone. (981-82)

Frodo is delivered at the end from his apparent evil choice – or to be precise, his refusal to choose for good – perhaps under the burden of a will that had been broken by more pressure than it was allowed to bear. With the Ring gone, Frodo comes back to himself, and recognizes the role of Gollum's intervention:

'Yes,' said Frodo. 'But do you remember Gandalf's words: *Even Gollum may have something yet to do?* But for him, Sam, I could not have destroyed the Ring. The Quest would have been in vain, even at the bitter end. So let us forgive him! For the Quest is achieved, and now all is over. I am glad you are here with me. Here at the end of all things, Sam.' (983)

Gandalf had foreseen this possibility when he praised Bilbo's pity for Gollum, stating, "even the wise cannot see all ends." Frodo's earlier actions for good, and most especially his "pity" for Gollum, were taken up by a greater providence that ordered events so that Frodo should later be 'saved' at this point. In Tolkien's view, Frodo was "delivered" from evil when he had made every utmost effort of the will to resist it. In one of his letters, Tolkien cites the passage from the Lord's Prayer which states, "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil":

I think rather of the mysterious last petitions of the Lord's Prayer: Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. A petition against something that cannot happen is unmeaning. There exists the possibility of being placed in positions beyond one's power. In which case (as I believe) salvation from ruin will depend

on something apparently unconnected: the general sanctity (and humility and mercy) of the sacrificial person... In the case of those who now issue from prison 'brainwashed', broken, or insane, praising their torturers, no such immediate deliverance is as a rule to be seen. But we can at least judge them by the will and intentions with which they entered the *Sammath Naur*; and not demand impossible feats of will, which could only happen in stories unconcerned with real moral and mental probability. (*Letters* 252)

Free will has its human limit with the strength of resolution, and the finite capacity to bear torment or oppression, and Frodo's ability to resist the Ring is overcome by external pressure. Tolkien says that when someone has borne all he can, past the limits of his will, his best intentions should be taken into account:

...I think you will see that it was *quite impossible* for Frodo to surrender the Ring, in act or will, especially at its point of maximum power, but that this failure was adumbrated from far back. He was honoured because he had accepted the burden voluntarily, and had then done all that was within his utmost physical and mental strength to do. He (and the Cause) were saved – by Mercy: by the supreme value and efficacy of Pity and forgiveness of injury. (*Letters* 251-52)

Evil may sometimes have such an overpowering effect that the individual's will is broken, and the ability to choose is compromised. This is the reason for the intervention of "grace," when another power works from outside to order events for the good of the individual, taking the original intentions and the goodness of the actions (especially mercy or pity that has been shown) into account. The eucatastrophic outcome is unforeseen, and is often a grace that comes in to save beyond where individual will is able to carry out its intentions.

The eucatastrophe is the moment at which the sudden deliverance of divine providence saves the situation, and finally brings about the end of the journey, which individuals cannot achieve on their own. Frodo goes as far as he can by the power of his own will, and only after his own limits have been exceeded does another power come in to assist him:

Frodo deserved all honour because he spent every drop of his power and will and body, and that was just sufficient to bring him to the destined point, and no further. Few others, possibly no others of his time, would have got so far. The Other Power then took over: the Writer of the Story (by which I do not mean myself...) (*Letters* 253)

The operation of grace comes from a source whose “authorship” brings about a redemptive turn of events, according to Tolkien. The human author can only echo the redemptive truth that was realized through actual events in the primary world.

Tolkien sees the need for an intervention beyond the human self, one that is even beyond the boundaries of the human author. Tolkien clearly elucidates the necessity for this reality of outside intervention: “But one must face the fact: the power of Evil in the world is *not* finally resistible by incarnate creatures, however ‘good’; and the Writer of the Story is not one of us” (*Letters* 252). This writer is “‘that one ever-present Person who is never absent and never named’ (as one critic has said)...[footnote:] Actually referred to as ‘the One’ in App. A. II . 317. 1. 20” (253). In Tolkien’s view, salvation necessarily comes from the “One” whose redemptive power is also the ultimate source of the “eucatastrophe,” as it is manifested in story:

But the One retains all ultimate authority, and (or so it seems as viewed in serial time) reserves the right to intrude the finger of God into the story: that is to produce realities which could not be deduced even from a complete knowledge of the previous past, but which being real become part of the effective past for all subsequent time (a possible definition of a ‘miracle’). (*Letters* 235)

The reality of the deliverance that comes from the “finger of God” in the story is not one that could be deduced from knowledge of previous events, as if it were a deterministic world in which events, once set in motion, were on a course to a single, unstoppable result. The ultimate “authority” rests with the author of primary creation, who is able to produce the unforeseeable and the new from the standpoint of eternity.

This particularly Christian view of grace shows Frodo using his will to its limits, even as he is taking part in an endeavor planned by providence (of which he is the willing “instrument”). Frodo is aided in the final resolution of the task that he has chosen. Frodo’s “failure” is redressed by means of the mercy that he himself has shown, as Tolkien argues:

I do not think that Frodo’s was a *moral* failure. At the last moment the pressure of the Ring would reach its maximum – impossible, I should have said, for any one to resist, certainly after long possession, months of increasing torment, and when starved and exhausted. Frodo had done what he could and spent himself completely (as an instrument of Providence) and had produced a situation in which the object of his quest could be achieved. His humility (with which he began) and his sufferings were justly rewarded by the highest honour; and his exercise of patience and mercy towards Gollum gained him Mercy: his failure was redressed. (*Letters* 326)

This aspect of Tolkien’s view can enrich the concept of human free will and divine providence as portrayed in fiction. While Tolkien follows Boethius’ lead in presenting the collaborative interplay between human free will and divine providence, he also adds another dimension to the “authorship” of life events: the redemptive role of the eucatastrophe as an aid to transcending limitations inherent in that same free will.

While the destruction of Gollum and the Ring following Frodo’s claim of it is described by Tolkien as a “catastrophe” in a letter, the event has the eucatastrophic result of reversing the “doom” of failure that Frodo was under:

...still there are abnormal situations in which one may be placed. ‘Sacrificial’ situations, I should call them: sc. positions in which the ‘good’ of the world depends on the behaviour of an individual in circumstances which demand of him suffering and endurance far beyond the normal – even, it may happen (or seem, humanly speaking), demand a strength of body and of mind which he does not possess: he is in a sense doomed to failure, doomed to fall to temptation or be broken by pressure against his ‘will’: that is against any choice he could make or would make unfettered, not under the duress.

Frodo was in such a position: an apparently complete trap... But at this point the ‘salvation’ of the world and Frodo’s own ‘salvation’ is achieved by his

previous *pity* and forgiveness of injury. At any point any prudent person would have told Frodo that Gollum would certainly [footnote: 'Not quite certainly'. The clumsiness in fidelity of Sam was what finally pushed Gollum over the brink, when about to repent.] betray him, and could rob him in the end. To 'pity' him, to forbear to kill him, was a piece of folly, or a mystical belief in the ultimate value-in-itself of pity and generosity even if disastrous in the world of time. He did rob him in the end – but by a 'grace', that last betrayal was at a precise juncture when the final evil deed was the most beneficial thing anyone cd. have done for Frodo! By a situation created by his 'forgiveness', he was saved himself, and relieved of his burden. He was very justly accorded the highest honours... (*Letters* 233-34)

We see Tolkien shows “grace” counteracting the “doom” of necessary failure. In its place, Tolkien inserts eucatastrophe, which overturns foreshadowed doom, releasing characters when they are extended beyond their limits.

Tolkien undermines the “foreshadowing” of future events when he shows his characters as potential “readers” of omens and signs of doom that are often proved to be false. Here we may perceive the “unforeseen” quality of eucatastrophe which comes in despite the apparently “doomed” course of events. Some signs indicate apparent defeat, while others indicate the possibility for hope that strengthens as “doom” approaches. The future does not cast shadows on the past in a way that definitely presages what is to come, either for the readers or for the characters. Both possibilities are shadowed, in a way that emphasizes the indeterminacy (at least for us) of what is to come. If there is a “shadowing,” it is usually of defeat. (The hopeful possibilities are hinted at, but finally victory is unforeseen.)

The turning from a sign of defeat to a sign of victory shows that signs do not always prefigure ends, but merely indicate that change is happening. As Aragorn says, “Behold the setting Sun setting in a great fire! It is a sign of the end and fall of many things, and a change in the tides of the world” (895). The transitory and unreliable nature

of looking for “signs” of outcome is manifested in a series of weather omens, in which a seemingly set “fate” is shown to be ephemeral and continually changing like the tide.

When the battle before the Black Gate of Mordor begins, the sun is hidden, and hope withdraws:

...but the sun now climbing towards the South was veiled in the reeks of Mordor, and through a threatening haze it gleamed, remote, a sullen red, as if it were the ending of the day, or the end maybe of all the world of light. And out of the gathering mirk the Nazgûl came with their cold voices crying words of death; and then all hope was quenched. (926)

Deliverance may happen even in the face of seeming defeat as the return of the Eagles brings about the “turn” of the battle: “ ‘So it all ends as I thought it would,’ his [Pippin’s] thought said, even as it fluttered away; and it laughed a little within him ere it fled, almost gay it seemed to be casting off all doubt and care and fear. And then even as it winged away into forgetfulness it heard voices, and they seemed to be crying in some forgotten world far above: ‘The Eagles are coming! The Eagles are coming!’” (927).

Some signs may indicate the opposite of what they first appear to, as in the case of Faramir and Éowyn, who discuss waiting for the “stroke of doom” (998) while they wait for the outcome of the events in Mordor. They stand, watching from the walls of Minas Tirith, and they see the same sight that those at the Cormallen Field did: the clouds rising out of Mordor. And yet it seems to take on a different “significance” to Faramir – that of the wave that destroyed the island nation of Númenor:

Then presently it seemed to them that above the ridges of the distant mountains another vast mountain of darkness rose, towering up like a wave that should engulf the world, and about it lightnings flickered; and then a tremor ran through the earth, and they felt the walls of the City quiver. A sound like a sigh went up from all the lands about them; and their hearts beat suddenly again. (998)

Faramir compares the darkness to the wave that destroyed Númenor, “the land of Westernesse that foundered, and of the great dark wave climbing over the green lands and above the hills, and coming on, darkness unescapable” (998). Faramir also states his inability to interpret the “sign”: “It was but a picture in the mind” (999). When Éowyn questions whether “Darkness Unescapable” is to be the case at present, Faramir states his faith that “in this hour” he does not believe that any “darkness will endure,” even as the situation thus changes:

And the Shadow departed, and the Sun was unveiled, and light leaped forth; and the waters of Anduin shone like silver, and in all the houses of the City men sang for the joy that welled up in their hearts from what source they could not tell.

And before the Sun had fallen far from the noon out of the East there came a great Eagle flying, and he bore tidings beyond hope from the Lords of the West... (999)

“Light leaped forth,” but at this time the joy comes to the people of Gondor from an inner source of knowledge more powerful than any external sign: “from what source they could not tell” (999).

The shadow which seems to be “darkness inescapable” is shown to be the actual signal of the defeat of Sauron, when viewed by those at the battle on the Field of Cormallen, at the edge of Mordor. When the Ring is destroyed, the fortress and gates of Sauron tumble into ruin, accompanied by “a vast soaring darkness”; the “doom” that falls is not a foreseeable destruction, but is a consequence of the actions of the ringbearer, as well as of Sauron (who has made himself vulnerable to this destruction by enclosing this power in the ring):

‘The realm of Sauron is ended!’ said Gandalf. ‘The Ringbearer has fulfilled his Quest.’ And as the Captains gazed south to the Land of Mordor, it seemed to them that, black against the pall of cloud, there rose a huge shape of shadow, impenetrable, lightning-crowned, filling all the sky. Enormous it reared above the world, and stretched out towards them a vast threatening hand, terrible

but impotent: for even as it leaned over them, a great wind took it, and it was all blown away, and passed; and then a hush fell. (985)

The wave of Númenor that Faramir envisions has instead changed to an indication of deliverance from destruction. Again, the pattern is for an affirmation of hope to come in the face of seeming despair and “darkness inescapable.” This hope is freely chosen by the characters, because it seems valuable in itself, and not because it is certain to be realized. This free choice of hope, extending beyond the fate of the single self, towards the ultimate resolution of a single story, is followed by deliverance.

The changeable nature of apparent omens confirms Tolkien’s understanding of a non-deterministic universe. The providential power may turn the workings of fate into something entirely different, that cannot be “read” in terms of a book to have a given, foreseeable ending. The essential quality of eucatastrophe that lends “freedom” to experience is its unforeseeable nature; even signs themselves are liable to thus reflect this turnabout from apparent despair to joy.

This turnabout seems to be a “change” in the tides of fate, that is, the working of events within the world, but it is also truly a change in perception: what Verlyn Flieger calls “metanoia,” a “reversal of the direction of the mind” (*Splintered* 31). This is analogous to a conversion experience – a shift in worldview, and also a change in spiritual orientation. In *Splintered Light*, Flieger equates metanoia with the effects of Tolkien’s eucatastrophe. The joyous “turn” of the story causes a similar change in the mind:

The turn in the fairy-story is the reversal of direction when the downward trend swings suddenly upward. To read of the turn is to experience it, to undergo a change of mood from dark to light, from despair to joy. This is *metanoia*, reversal of the direction of the mind. The same word means ‘repentance.’ The turn, then, is a kind of conversion, and what we feel at the turn in a fairy-story is, to however

small a degree, a conversion experience. In Tolkien's terms it would be a Secondary experience, echoing what is for him the Primary experience at the turn of the Christian story, the Resurrection. (31)

Eucatastrophe in a story occasions a conversion of view, just as the redemption of the Christian story does in the primary world.⁶

Tolkien takes this metanoia one level further to show that the eucatastrophe is beyond anticipation. It is not available to the temporal sequential perspective of those within life, or within the story. The outcome of a story will not be known until the end. The eucatastrophe of Frodo's story, his "transcendence" and journey to Valinor for healing of his wounds at the end of his life, is hinted at in the dream in Tom Bombadil's house – but that too is a form of metanoia – a reversal of the wave destroying Númenor, that was Tolkien's own dream. It shows not certainty, but promise and possibility. The final meaning of this metanoia is a shift in perception that momentarily moves beyond limitation, to a participation in the understanding of redemption and hope fulfilled.

The uncertain nature of eucatastrophe as the unforeseen joy is only realized in terms of certainty though the fullness of time and ending. With eucatastrophe, though, we move into a place beyond what Pearce calls the "vale of tears" into joy; we perceive beyond the "veil of tears" that hides our vision on earth. Story itself, however, shows a promise, in its participation of the eucatastrophe of the incarnation; this hope extends into the nature of language itself, that Tolkien shows through "recovery." The subcreator enriches not only creation, but the joy of redemption.

c) *Human Author and Divine Creator*

Just as Tolkien portrays human (and elvish, hobbit, etc.) free will interacting with providential forces within the plot of his novel, he also attempts to show another dimension of this collaboration through his own role as author. Tolkien attempts to show or extend freedom to his characters, through the writing process. This mirrors the Primary Creator's gift of freedom, but with several key differences, the most important of which is that the author, as subcreator, provides life to his characters that is extended to him through his own acknowledgment of the subcreative relationship, in which authentic artistic freedom is to be found.

When Tolkien refers to the "Writer of the Story (by which I do not mean myself)" (*Letters* 253), he illuminates a key aspect of his own creative approach. Often stepping back to allow his characters "freedom" by leaving the ending unforeseen as he writes the drafts, Tolkien attempts to give "life" to characters, and make their actions seem most true according to their nature. In this sense he follows the "logic of the plot" (which Gary Morson, for example, might see as open time). Tolkien, however, is doing more than attempting to model the "inner consistency of reality." He is also opening himself to a further dimension of collaboration beyond that which author and characters share. When Tolkien relates to another author of the story, beyond himself, he is showing himself open to the influence of another "power" whose authorship is shared with his own. Tolkien shows himself willing also to be, like Frodo, the instrument of "providence," even as he labours through the process of drafting and redrafting the story.

Tolkien shows, through his mythic account of one of the Valar, Aulë (later published in *The Silmarillion*), how it is that the subcreative author's giving of "life" to

characters comes from the source that has given life to him. Aulë attempts to create beings out of impatience to “anticipate the will of the Creator” (rather than to replace primary creation). As Tolkien explains in a letter, Aulë as a subcreator has powers that are limited, a gift to him, and he cannot bestow life: “The One rebuked Aulë, saying that he had tried to usurp the Creator’s power; but he could not give independent life to his makings. He had only one life, his own derived from the One, and could at most only distribute it” (*Letters* 287). These beings can act, and speak, only as his own mind directs, as Illúvatar tells Aulë: “These creatures of thine have only thy will, and thy movement. Though you have devised a language for them, they can only report to thee thine own thought” (*Letters* 287).⁷ Here Tolkien shows a model of complete authorial control; the human author, attempting to create for himself, has made only puppets, a “counterfeit” creation: “this is a mockery of me” (*Letters* 288-89).⁸ Aulë, however, because of love for what he has made, is not willing to see his creations destroyed, and petitions Illúvatar to spare them: “As a child to his father, I offer to thee these things, the work of the hands which thou hast made” (*Silmarillion* 43). He goes so far as to offer to destroy his ‘creations,’ but Illúvatar refuses. Aulë’s humble appeal restores the subcreative relationship. Illúvatar now extends “life” to Aulë’s ‘creations,’ the dwarves, through an act of grace, in a collaborative making that exceeds the subcreator’s individual capabilities:

‘Do you wonder at this?... Behold! thy creatures now live, free from thy will! For I have seen thy humility, and taken pity on your impatience. Thy making I have taken up into my design.’ (*Letters* 287)

The free will of the author’s own creations is a gift of the primary creator. The tale becomes true, as subcreations become real and take on life due to divine grace.⁹

Tolkien's Christian model of grace, freedom and providence enabling and working with free will is made possible, in part through the (secular) literary technique of sideshadowing, the use of an open-ended writing process. It is also manifested in Tolkien's special literary technique that he describes in the essay "On Fairy-Stories." He describes the "eucatastrophe" as common to fairy-stories, and says that it reflects the divine Redemption in Christianity, as a "true myth" that actually happened. For Tolkien, the very structure of story itself reflects redemptive grace. Even as the author models human freedom, he models human redemption, and so the aspect of "relationship" with a Primary Author is just as important as the relationship with a character for showing the portrayal of a free being.

As we have seen throughout the course of the thesis, the quality of literary freedom in Tolkien's work has a variety of facets, each of which is related to the other. Ultimately, however, each type of subcreative freedom that the author enjoys, and extends to the audience or to the characters, is grounded in the Primary Creator's gift of freedom. Storytelling itself, in Tolkien's view (following the example of the Primary Storyteller), is by nature an invitation to further shared storytelling.

Notes to Chapter 5

¹ As William James put it, “those parts of the universe already laid down absolutely appoint and decree what the other parts shall be....Any other future complement than the one fixed from eternity is impossible. The whole is in each and every part, and welds it with the rest into an absolute unity, an iron block, in which there can be no equivocation of shadow or turning” (qtd. in Morson 83).

² Morson discusses sideshadowing in depth as a view of time present in the novels of Dostoevsky. Much of his discussion builds on the theorist Bakhtin’s concept of indeterminism.

³ The one story that Gollum does relate to the two hobbits concerns the deserted city, and the Ring that Isildur cut from Sauron. Gollum’s story making faculty, perhaps, has atrophied, present only in the riddle exchanges with Bilbo from the depths of memory (in *The Hobbit*). The desire for the Ring consumes Gollum, and overwhelms his sense of identity; he can no longer identify himself with any larger pattern or story. Gollum does not appear to see himself as part of a group or community, except perhaps for that brief moment with Frodo and Sam. It is also Gollum’s vow to serve Frodo, as master of the “precious,” that draws him close enough to other beings to have any relationship at all, and this vow retains its power to act on him, mysteriously, at the end.

⁴ Gollum would have been torn between his loyalty to Frodo and his desire to keep the Ring to himself (just as Frodo is also torn between his quest and the temptation of the ring). Tolkien supposes that Gollum might have tried to claim the Ring for himself, but the desire for the Ring being satisfied, Gollum would have sacrificed himself by destroying himself and the ring, which he knew Sauron would never allow him to keep for long. (This “sideshadow” is potentially present in the actual tale, and yet comes in to play at the most crucial point in the novel. When Gollum falls over the precipice, he “keeps” the Ring until it is destroyed.)

⁵ As Tolkien also “listens,” rather than only inventing, he is going back to the mythic potentials within language itself, and so collaborating with all of the earlier speakers of a language, whose consciousness has helped to shape the pattern of meanings within words. If language “recovers” a pattern of creation, Tolkien goes back as well to the primary word of the divine author, perceiving the patterning of the cosmos. Collaboration between author, speakers of language, readers, and divine providence is interdependent and complex, operating at many levels. Interdependence is key to artistic subcreation.

⁶ This idea of the reversal of the direction of the mind, even a “conversion” of worldview to one that allows for human freedom, has been spoken of in a secular context. Gary Morson, for example, discusses Dostoevsky’s heroes being “converted” from “vortex time” to “open time.” In vortex time possibilities are closed, rather than opened:

If in sideshadowing apparently simple events ramify into multiple futures, in vortex time an apparent diversity of causes all converge on a single catastrophe. A hidden clock seems to synchronize this diversity so that, even though causal lines seem unrelated to one another, they not only lead to the same result but do so at the same moment. (163)

Vortex time exerts a compulsive force analogous to that of a black hole: “Like an astronomical black hole, the catastrophe or obsessive idea seems capable of bending space and time. Its immense gravitational pull makes escape increasingly difficult” (164). Morson asserts, like Tolkien, the possibility of hope even in spite of the apparent despair: “Such unexpected survival beyond the vortex, such an escape from inevitability, suggests that certainty may not be so certain after all. No matter how strong the vortex, no matter how much time may seem to close, there remains the *possibility of possibility*” (166).

⁷ The quotations from the *Letters* use Tolkien’s own wording which he likely recalled from a slightly different draft than was later published in *The Silmarillion* (see also *Silmarillion* 43).

⁸ This may be analogous in Tolkien’s view, to the writing of allegory with specific intentions that does not have the “inner consistency of reality.”

⁹ As we saw in Chapter 1, the reality of subcreation is one of Tolkien’s themes relating to eucatastrophe.

Works Consulted

Primary Sources:

- Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Book of Lost Tales Part II*. Ed. C. Tolkien. London: Allen & Unwin, 1984.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Hobbit*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1987.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. "Leaf by Niggle." *Tree and Leaf*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. *Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*. Eds. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1968.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1983.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. "Mythopoeia." *Tree and Leaf*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. London: Unwin Hyman, 1984.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. "On Fairy-Stories." *Tree and Leaf*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Peoples of Middle-earth*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. *Poems and Stories*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1980.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Silmarillion*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. *Unfinished Tales*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. London: Allen & Unwin, 1980.

Secondary Sources:

- Anand, Valerie and Dale Nelson. "Tolkien-Why Is He Important Today?" *Mallorn: the Journal of the Tolkien Society*. 39 (2001): 38-40.
- Arthur, Elizabeth. "Above All Shadows Rides the Sun: Gollum as Hero." *Mythlore: a Journal of J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, General Fantasy & Mythic Studies*. 18.1 (1991): 19-27.
- Attebery, Brian. *Strategies of Fantasy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.

- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Art and Answerability*. Eds. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Trans. Vadim Liapunov. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Eds. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson. Trans. Caryl Emerson. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Barfield, Owen. *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973.
- Barkley, Christine and Muriel B. Ingram. "There but Not Back Again: The Road from Innocence to Maturity." *Riverside Quarterly*. 7.2 (1982): 101-104.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." *Literary History and Bibliography*. 2001. Eastern Illinois University. 17 Sept. 2003.
<<http://www.eiu.edu/~literary/4950/barthes.htm>>
- Basney, Lionel. "Myth, History, and Time in The Lord of the Rings." *Tolkien: New Critical Perspectives*. Eds. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1981. 8-18.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968.
- Birzer, Bradley J. *J.R.R. Tolkien's Sanctifying Myth: Understanding Middle-earth*. Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2003.
- Brewer, Derek S. "The Lord of the Rings as Romance." *J.R.R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller: Essays in Memoriam*. Eds. Humphrey Carpenter, Robert T. Farrell, and Mary Salu. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979. 249-64.
- Bratman, David. "Top Ten Rejected Plot Twists from The Lord of the Rings: A Textual Excursion into the 'History of *The Lord of the Rings*.'" *Mythlore*. 22.4 (2000): 13-38.
- Boethius. *Consolation of Philosophy*. Ed. and trans. Joel C. Relihan. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001.
- Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.
- Bullock, Richard P. "The Importance of Free Will in The Lord of the Rings." *Mythlore*. 11.3 (1985) 29; 56-57.

- Calabrese, John A. "Dynamic Symbolism and the Mythic Resolution of Polar Extremes in *The Lord of the Rings*." *Spectrum of the Fantastic*. Ed. Donald Palumbo. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1988. 135-140.
- Calabrese, John A. "Continuity with the Past: Mythic Time in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*." *Spectrum of the Fantastic*. Ed. Donald Palumbo. Greenwood: Westport, CT., 1988. 31-45.
- Carpenter, Humphrey. *The Inklings*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1978.
- Chance, Jane. *The Lord of the Rings: The Mythology of Power*. New York: Twayne, 1992.
- Chambers, Ross. *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Chesterton, G.K. *Orthodoxy*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959.
- Coates, Ruth. *Christianity in Bakhtin*. Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Collins, Robert A. "'Ainulindale': Tolkien's Commitment to an Aesthetic Ontology." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*. 11.3 (2000): 257-65.
- Critchett, David. "One Ring to Fool Them All, One Ring to Blind Them: The Propaganda of *The Lord of the Rings*." *Extrapolation*. 38.1 (1997): 36-56.
- Christopher, Joe R. "The Moral Epiphanies in *The Lord of the Rings*." *Mallorn*. 33.2 (1996): 121-25.
- Damrosch, Leopold Jr. *God's Plot & Man's Stories : Studies in the Fictional Imagination from Milton to Fielding*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- Danow, David. K. *The Thought of Mikhail Bakhtin*. London: Macmillan, 1990.
- de Armas, Frederick A.. "Gyges' Ring: Invisibility in Plato, Tolkien and Lope de Vega." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*. 3.4 (1994): 120-38.
- Dodds, David Llewellyn and Irene Oberdorfer (discussion). "Magic in the Myths of J.R.R. Tolkien and Charles Williams." *Inklings: Jahrbuch für Literatur und Ästhetik*. 10 (1992): 37-60.
- Dubs, Kathleen E. "Providence, Fate, and Chance: Boethian Philosophy in *The Lord of the Rings*." *Twentieth Century Literature*. 27.1 (1981): 34-42.
- Drury, Roger. "Providence at Elrond's Council." *Mythlore*. 7.3 (1980): 8-9.

- Egan, Thomas M. "Chesterton and Tolkien: The Road to Middle-Earth." *Seven*. 4 (1983): 45-53.
- Fader, Shanti. "A Fool's Hope: Hobbits Rush in Where Heroes Fear to Tread." *Parabola: The Magazine of Myth & Tradition*. 26.3 (2001): 48-52.
- Farrell, Robert T., T. A. Shippey, and Mary Salu. "Creation from Philology in *The Lord of the Rings*." *J.R.R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller: Essays in Memoriam*. Eds. Robert T. Farrell and Mary Salu. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979. 286-316.
- Ferguson, George. *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- Flieger, Verlyn. "Frodo and Aragorn: The Concept of the Hero." *Tolkien: New Critical Perspectives*. Eds. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1981. 40-62.
- Flieger, Verlyn. "The Language of Myth." *Mythlore*. 21.3 (1996). 4-6.
- Flieger, Verlyn. *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983.
- Friedman, Barton R. "Fabricating History: Narrative Strategy in *The Lord of the Rings*." *Clio: an Interdisciplinary Journal of Literature, History, & the Philosophy of History*. 2 (1973): 123-44.
- Foucault, Michel. "What is an Author?" *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. Ed. David F. Bouchard. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- Green, William H. "The Ring at the Center: Eaca in *The Lord of the Rings*." *Mythlore*. 4.2 (1976): 17-19.
- Hall, Robert A., Jr. "Silent Commands? Frodo and Gollum at the Cracks of Doom." *Mythlore*. 10.3 (1984): 5-7.
- Hall, Robert A., Jr. "Who Is the Master of the 'Precious'?" *Mythlore*. 11.3 (1985): 34-35.
- Hammond, Wayne G., and Christina Scull. *J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator*. London: Harper Collins, 1995.
- Harris, Mason. "The Psychology of Power in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Orwell's *1984* and Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea*." *Mythlore*. 15.1 (1988): 46-56.
- Harrison, Bernard. "Parable and Transcendence." *Ways of Reading the Bible*. Ed. Michael Wadsworth. Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981. 190-212.

- Helms, Randel. "The Structure and Aesthetic of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*." *Mythcon I: Proceedings*. Los Angeles: Mythopoeic Society, 1971. 5-8.
- Hennelly, Mark M., Jr. "The Road and the Ring: Solid Geometry in Tolkien's Middle-Earth." *Mythlore*. 9.3 (1982): 3-13.
- Hood, Gwennyth Elise. *The Lidless Eye and the Long Burden: The Struggle between Good and Evil in Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings*. (PhD dissertation) Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1984.
- Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. London: Methuen, 1981.
- Jeffrey, David Lyle. "Recovery: Name in *The Lord of the Rings*." *Tolkien: New Critical Perspectives*. Eds. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1981. 106-116.
- Jones, Diana Wynne. "The Shape of the Narrative in *The Lord of the Rings*." *J. R. R. Tolkien: This Far Land*. Ed. Robert Giddings. London: Vision, 1983. 87-107.
- Just, Felix. (Loyola Marymount University). Home Page. 26 July 2003.
<http://bellarmine.lmu.edu/~fjust/Evangelists_Symbols.htm>
- Keene, Louise E. "The Restoration of Language in Middle-Earth." *Mythlore*. 20.4 (1995): 6-13.
- Kokot, Joanna. "Cultural Functions Motivating Art: Poems and Their Contexts in *The Lord of the Rings*." *Inklings*. 10 (1992): 191-207.
- Lense, Edward. "Sauron Is Watching You: The Role of the Great Eye in *The Lord of the Rings*." *Mythlore*. 4.1 (1976): 3-6.
- Levitin, Alexis. "Power in The Lord of the Rings." *Orcrist: Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin J. R. R. Tolkien Society*. 4 (1969): 11-14.
- Lewis, C.S. *Letters of C.S. Lewis*. Ed. Walter Hooper and W.H. Lewis. London: Oxford University Press, 1947.
- Lobdell, Jared. *England and Always: Tolkien's World of the Rings*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981.
- Manganiello, Dominic. "The Neverending Story: Textual Happiness in *The Lord of the Rings*." *Mythlore*. 18.3 (1992): 5-14.

- McComas, Alan. "Negating and Affirming Spirit through Language: the Integration of Character, Magic, and Story in *The Lord of the Rings*." *Mythlore*. 19.2; 19.3 (1993) 4-14; 40-49.
- McIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.
- Medcalf, Steven. "The Coincidence of Myth and Fact." *Ways of Reading the Bible*. Ed. Michael Wadsworth. Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981. 55-78.
- Medcalf, Stephen. "'The Language Learned of Elves': Owen Barfield, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*." *Seven*. 16 (1999). 31-52.
- Morse, Robert E. "Rings of Power in Plato and Tolkien." *Mythlore*. 7.3 (1980): 38.
- Morson, Gary Saul. *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.
- Murray, Robert. "J.R.R. Tolkien and the Art of the Parable." *Tolkien: A Celebration*. Ed. Joseph Pearce. London: Harper Collins, 1999.
- Nuttall, A.D. "Gospel Truth." *Ways of Reading the Bible*. Ed. Michael Wadsworth. Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981. 41-54.
- Orwell, George. "Politics and the English Language." *Landmarks: A Process Reader*. Ed. Roberta Birks et al. Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice Hall, 1998. 333-43.
- Otty, Nick. "The Structuralist's Guide to Middle-Earth." *J.R.R. Tolkien: This Far Land*. Ed. Robert Giddings. London: Vision, 1983. 154-178.
- Pearce, Joseph. "Resurrecting Myth: A Response to Dr. Murphy's 'Response.'" *Saint Austin Review*. 3.1 (2003): 20-24.
- Pearce, Joseph. *Tolkien: Man and Myth*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998.
- Rawls, Melanie. "The Rings of Power." *Mythlore*. 11.2 (1984): 29-32.
- Reckford, Kenneth. "'There and Back Again': Odysseus and Bilbo Baggins." *Mythlore*. 14.3 (1988): 5-9.
- Reynolds, William. "Poetry as Metaphor in *The Lord of the Rings*." *Mythlore*. 4.4 (1977): 12-16. 1977.
- Ryan, J. S. "Dynamic Metahistory and the Model of Christopher Dawson." *Minas Tirith Evening-Star: Journal of the American Tolkien Society*. 18.3 (1989): 10-14.

- Ryan, J. S. "Saruman, 'Sharkey' and Suruman: Analogous Figures of Eastern Ingenuity and Cunning." *Mythlore*. 12.1 (1985): 43-44, 57.
- Ryan, J. S. "The Poem 'Mythopoeia' as an Early Statement of Tolkien's Artistic/Religious Position." *Minas Tirith Evening-Star*. 18.4 (1989): 4-6.
- Sartre, Jean Paul. "On Literature." *Critical Theory Since Plato*. Ed. Hazard Adams. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1971.
- Scheps, Walter. "The Fairy-Tale Morality of *The Lord of the Rings*." *A Tolkien Compass*. Ed. Jared Lobdell. La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1975. 43-56.
- Schmiel, Mary Aileen. "The Forge of Los: Tolkien and the Art of Creative Fantasy." *Mythlore*. 10.1 (1983): 17-30.
- Shippey, Tom A. *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.
- Shippey, Tom A. *The Road to Middle Earth*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1982.
- Simpson, Dale W. "Names and Moral Character in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*." *Publications of the Missouri Philological Association*. 6 (1981): 1-5.
- Stoddard, William. "A Critical Approach to Fantasy with Application to *The Lord of the Rings*." *Mythlore*. 10.3 (1984): 8-13.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. "Guide to the Names in *The Lord of the Rings*." *A Tolkien Compass*. Ed. Lobdell, Jared. La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1975. 153-201.
- Visser, Margaret. *Beyond Fate*. Toronto: House of Anasi Press, 2002.
- Wadsworth, Michael. "Making and Interpreting Scripture." *Ways of Reading the Bible*. Ed. Michael Wadsworth. Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981. 7-22.
- Ward, Patricia. "Ethics and Recent Literary Theory: The Reader as Moral Agent." *Religion and Literature*. 22.2-3 (1990): 21-31.
- Wytenbroek, J. R. "Apocalyptic Vision in *The Lord of the Rings*." *Mythlore*. 14.4 (1988): 7-12.
- Yates, Jessica. "Tolkien the Anti-Totalitarian." *Mallorn*. 33.2 (1996): 233-45.
- Zimbardo, Rose A. "The Medieval-Renaissance Vision of *The Lord of the Rings*." *Tolkien: New Critical Perspectives*. Eds. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1981. 63-71.