

Enchantment: A Teleology

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Abstract

Despite the highly developed nature of his fictional world, Middle-earth, Tolkien never formally laid out a tabulated magic system for his fantasy creation. Nevertheless, unlike many stories by others in the fantasy genre, the magic he does include is far from just a shallow, world-building mechanism. Instead, it encapsulates the core theme of his fiction and the purposes which Ilúvatar (the God of Middle-earth) has given to the story's many characters.

This paper will examine the nature and function of this magic from many angles: the identification of good magic with art and evil magic with domination; the delineation between good and evil magics; the source of magic; the intricate relation between magic and the inner being of the individual; the connection between magic and the activity of Ilúvatar; and the status of magic as a multi-level, self-conscious contemplation of Story itself. In other words, this paper will be a teleology of magic, an exploration of Tolkien's purpose and meaning for this power in his work.

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Enchantment: A Teleology

Of this desire the elves, in their better (but still perilous) part, are largely made; and it is from them that we may learn what is the central desire and aspiration of human fantasy – even as the elves are, all the more in so far as they are, only a product of Fantasy itself. (“On Fairy-Stories” 64)

I have not used ‘magic’ consistently . . . But the elves are there (in my tales) to demonstrate the difference. Their ‘magic’ is Art, delivered from its many human limitations . . . (The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien 146)

Middle-earth: The Birth of Modern Fantasy

On October 20, 1955, J.R.R. Tolkien published the final instalment of his famous trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*—a work that has been widely celebrated as inaugurating the birth of the modern fantasy genre. Since that year, a veritable flood of further material by Tolkien has enriched his world of Middle-earth through the form of additional tales, private essays pertaining to his creation, and earlier drafts of his work. Tolkien’s continued popularity, no doubt, is connected with the rise in popularity of the fantasy genre, which continues to reflect his influence to this day. From Terry Brooks’ highly derivative *The Sword of Shannara* to the orcs (and many other elements) in the online-game *World of Warcraft*, novelists, screenwriters, and game-developers have borrowed and transformed elements of Middle-earth for decades.

In the wide range of these works, perhaps the single most consistently recurring element is the presence of magic (even when technically absent by traditional standards, magic may still appear through parallel substitutions such as genetic powers or science and technology). Most other elements seem optional, whether they be the traditional cast of elves, dwarves, or talking trees; secondary worlds; cataclysmic threats at the hands of a dark lord; or other common tropes of the genre. Regardless of how one may delineate this literature’s extent and draw generic boundaries, there must always be a means for

creating the fantastic in fantasy. And yet, this “means for creating the fantastic” —i.e., magic—varies widely. In *World of Warcraft*, magic can be drawn from the natural world; in Christopher Paolini’s *Inheritance Cycle*, from the life-force within a person; in Brooks’ *The Wishsong of Shannara*, from science (in minor instances); in Wayne Thomas Batson’s *The Berinfell Prophecies*, from genetic abilities. Its manifestations range from vague, nebulous forces to highly structured rules for use. The discussion among the fantasy community on creating whole “magic systems” testifies to the diversity and essential importance of the magical element.

Thus, in light of Tolkien’s connection to modern fantasy, a full consideration of his work should explore the presence of magic within his created world. Given the immense extent of his world-building (including the creation of multiple original languages), one may then be surprised to discover no formal development of a “magic system” for Middle-earth. Tolkien himself writes, “I am afraid I have been far too casual about ‘magic’ and especially the use of the word,” calling the consideration of this term “a [very] large question, and difficult,” and saying that he “could hardly be burdened with a pseudo-philosophic disquisition” on the subject given the nature of his story (*Letters* 199). Elsewhere, he remarks, “I have not used ‘magic’ consistently” (*Letters* 146). These statements somewhat parallel his comment in the well-known essay, “On Fairy-Stories,” that he had misapplied the term “magic” in the earlier arguments of the essay (142). However, despite the lack of intricately tabulated rules for the arcane powers of Middle-earth, Tolkien’s views on the subject are far from negligible. For him, magic means more than a mere plot device; instead, it bears theological implications and treats questions of

human creativity, the nature of evil, the teleology of the created order, and the relation of the present world to the life to come.

The Nature of Magic

In his writings, Tolkien employs many labels to denote the magical powers of his story-characters. Some of the major terms are: magic, Magic (capital M), Enchantment, Art, goeteia, and magia. Throughout, Tolkien always seems to have maintained a distinction between good magic on the one hand, and bad magic on the other. However, beyond this recognition, there appears to be much confusion (or silence) in the critical literature as to the specific applications and scope of these terms. Flieger, for example, seems to argue in one essay that real magic bears little relevance to *Lord of the Rings* at all. As she says, “out of eleven hundred or so pages” there is “not a great deal of fantasy” (FR 8).¹ She then proceeds to explain away many of the few magical instances she finds: the elven cloaks and rope, lembas, the Phial of Galadriel, and even much of the power demonstrated by the Ring.

Perry fares a little better in his own examination, overviewing several instances (in his opinion) of magia and goeteia in *Lord of the Rings* (400). However, he falls short in that he does not adequately characterize the relation of these terms to Tolkien’s concept of Art. (Perry leaves magia out of this relation altogether.) The significance of both terms as modes of Art will be seen later. Likewise, Curry tackles Tolkien’s idea of Enchantment, contributing much to the sense of “imagined wonder” that Tolkien wished to communicate with the term—an insight that Shippey lauds him for elsewhere (7). Nevertheless, Curry also argues that Enchantment does not directly affect the real,

¹ For “FR” and all other abbreviations, see the appendix provided at the end of this paper.

physical world (“Enchantment” 160). Again, as will be seen, such an idea misses a significant part of Tolkien’s intent for his story world.

In his published materials, Tolkien addresses the topic of magic in three major instances: Letters 131 and 155 in Carpenter’s *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* and in “On Fairy-Stories.” In Letter 155 to Naomi Mitchinson,² Tolkien forthrightly states that “the thought about it [magic] is not casual” (199), no matter how casual his word choices about it had been in *Lord of the Rings*. He goes on to make a distinction between *magia* and *goeteia* forms of magic in his work, of which *magia* appears to produce physical effects in the real world while *goeteia* creates illusions (though not necessarily ones meant to deceive). Here Tolkien draws a key point in his vision for the magic system of his cosmology: Both forms are used by good and evil forces in his story. Only motivation for use makes the magic good or evil.

Of the possible motivations, Tolkien highlights two polarities: domination and artistry. The former he links to the idea of machinery (a recurrent theme), to swift results, and to a possible degeneration into cruelty if the original purpose for domination is forgotten. In this letter, however, artistry receives little consideration; for that, one may look to Letter 131, a longer piece written a few years earlier to Milton Waldman about *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*. In it, he writes that his cosmology “is mainly concerned with Fall, Mortality, and the Machine,” to which he adds the footnote, “It is, I suppose, fundamentally concerned with the problem of the relation of Art (and Sub-

² A drafted portion which was not sent. The sent letter is dated 25 September 1954.

creation³) and Primary Reality” (145). Thus, by his own admission, the question of artistry is perhaps *the* driving motivation of his creative work.

It should come as no surprise that Tolkien weds this consideration of art to the magic which so pervades his story world. He considered the two as being closely akin. Of authorial artistry in particular, he writes:

But how powerful . . . was the invention of the adjective: no spell or incantation in Faërie is more potent . . . The mind that thought of *light, heavy, grey, yellow, still, swift*, also conceived of magic that would make heavy things light and able to fly, turn grey lead into yellow gold, and the still rock into swift water. (OFS 41)

In his letter to Waldman, Tolkien also explicitly describes how his use of the term “magic” has been “inconsistent.” In the *Lord of the Rings* and his other fantasy stories, Tolkien is not clear on whether “magic” can be used to describe all arcane powers, or if the term should be reserved for only those powers that are evil. The best example of such ambiguity comes with the Lady Galadriel’s words to Sam: “For this is what your folk would call magic, I believe; though I do not understand clearly what they mean; and they seem to use the same word of the deceits of the Enemy” (FOTR 353). Indeed, in both letters, Tolkien points to this very moment of the story to demonstrate that distinguishing between different types of magic is necessary.

For clarity’s sake in the Waldman letter, Tolkien sets aside the term “magic,” capitalizes it, and uses it to denote the evil use of power. For him, “Magic” is a tool of domination. As to the good power of the Elves, however, “there is not a word” to

³ “Sub” because this type of creation refers to the work of individuals who themselves have been created by the prime creator—God.

describe it. Tolkien settles for the term “Art,” though of a manner “delivered from many of its human limitations: more effortless, more quick, more complete (product, and vision in unflawed correspondence)” (146). Neither of these letters employs the term “Enchantment,” which Tolkien had developed some years earlier in “On Fairy-Stories.” However, since in this essay Tolkien clearly uses this term to describe the artistic powers of his elves, Enchantment will likewise be used in the following examination to denote the good, arcane powers of Tolkien’s world. By the same token, Magic will be used to denote those powers which are evil.

At first glance the definition of Enchantment is disappointing in scope. According to Tolkien, “Enchantment produces a Secondary World into which both designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their desires while they are inside; but in its purity it is artistic in desire and purpose” (OFS 64). Previously, he has defined a *secondary world* as a story with “the inner consistency of reality” (60-1) —called Fantasy when such authorial creativity is practiced by men. When practiced by the elves, it becomes the more powerful “Faërian Drama” where for the spectator, “you yourself are, or think that you are, bodily inside its Secondary World” (63). Faërian Drama, then, is a more specified term for the elves’ *goeteia*, their power to create illusions (in this case, the illusion of experiencing a drama as if it were real). Notwithstanding the efficacy of this elvish craft, unless one wishes to relegate all wonderous actions of Tolkien’s elves to figments of the imagination, defining Enchantment as merely the creation of a vivid secondary world will not suffice. The elves must also have *magia*, a means to touch reality.

While not explicitly stated as so in Tolkien's letter to Mitchinson, this *magia* also should be understood as a component of Enchantment. With "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien defines Enchantment as the higher, elvish form of Art, which he describes as "the human process that produces by the way (it is not its ultimate or only object) Secondary Belief" (64). Again, by its focus on secondary belief, such a statement appears to restrict itself solely to the art of story-telling. However, Tolkien begins his statement by saying "Art is," not "the story-telling art is"; in other words, he equates Enchantment to art-in-general and not just a specified art-form. A better reading of his definition would accept Enchantment as applying to all forms of art, and understand Tolkien's discussion of story-telling as merely one example of that application. A brief consideration of Tolkien's stories demonstrates that his elves indeed use *magia* in their art.

Fëanor, perhaps, is the earliest major example of such an artist in the history of Middle-earth. He crafted the Silmarils, holy jewels of light—a tangible and non-illusory example of artistry. As Tolkien states in his letter to Waldman, "By the making of the gems the sub-creative function of the elves is chiefly symbolized" (*Letters* 148). Some of the light from these gems would later be caught in the Phial of Galadriel, a beautifully wrought object which, among accomplishing other things, subsequently shatters the gates of a fortress during Frodo and Sam's escape from Cirith Ungol (an occurrence not illusory by any stretch of the imagination). There is also the more mundane example of Sam's elven rope, which on one occasion mysteriously unties itself after use as Frodo and Sam wander through Eryn Muil.

For most people, rope will never fall under what they consider "Art." Even if one broadens art from the story-telling discussed by Tolkien to include tangible objects such

as paintings, tapestries, and sculpting, most would draw a line between what they consider a tool and what they consider aesthetic. With Tolkien, however, one may better understand his idea of art as one that is synonymous with craftsmanship—which would include everything from shoemaking to composing Handel’s *Messiah*. Of this sense, *Smith of Wootton Major* provides a prime example. While not included in Tolkien’s far-encompassing canon of Middle-earth, *Smith* represents, in the words of Verlyn Flieger, Tolkien’s “latest, purest, and most uncompromising presentation of that world [Faërie],” which he originally expressed in “On Fairy-stories” (“Afterword” 68).⁴

As Tolkien writes in his personal essay about *Smith*, the townspeople of Wootton Major consist “mainly of craftsmen” in a time “before the advent of power-machinery” (*Smith* 112). The statement is far from an innocuous comment on the setting. For Tolkien, the Machine was the chief symbol of power and domination, associated especially with Morgoth, Sauron, and Saruman in his fictive works and likewise denounced in “On Fairy-Stories.” As seen earlier in his letter to Waldman, Tolkien considered the Machine to be one of the major concerns of his writings. By telling a story of pre-Industrial Revolution craftsmen, Tolkien is thereby consciously taking a major ideological position. The conflict in *Smith* is not one against Machine and totalitarian domination on the scale of the great wars in Middle-earth. Instead, the problem lies with possessiveness—a petty form of domination—that has shifted the craftsman’s focus from skilled labor to mere

⁴ In “On Fairy-stories,” Tolkien writes: “Faërie itself may perhaps most nearly be translated by Magic – but it is a magic of a peculiar mode and power, at the furthest pole from the vulgar devices of the laborious, scientific, magician” (32-3). At this point in his essay, Tolkien has not yet separated Magic from Enchantment, but clearly from this statement he intended Faërie to represent the latter.

profit. This change has not only resulted in the virtual elimination of the fine arts in the village, but also in the declining quality of their more practical products (*Smith* 127-9).

In short, the whole of *Smith* deals heavily with the link between artistry and craftsmanship, a point which can be seen illustrated in the character of Smith himself. Smith is by trade, as his name suggests, a blacksmith and not a practitioner of the fine arts; yet a rejuvenation of his craft is part of the larger plan of Faërie to breathe new creative artistry and life into the whole village and its various occupations. Of the “plain and useful” items wrought by Smith, Tolkien writes: “They were strong and lasting, but they also had a grace about them, being shapely in their kinds, good to handle and to look at” (*Smith* 17). This statement may be taken as a snapshot of Tolkien’s broad theme of Art, which extends to the works of the *artisan* and not just the *artist*.

Enchantment and Force

Taken in full, then, elven Enchantment must include both *goeteia* and *magia* forms. Recognizing that art encompasses all of craftsmanship helps to explain why many instances of Enchantment (or good “magic”) in Middle-earth do not accord with usual notions of artistry. By this new definition, Enchantment might easily broaden to include everything from the lightning that Gandalf brings down on goblins in *The Hobbit* to the mirror of Galadriel in *Fellowship of the Ring*. Craftsmanship, after all, produces tools for both life and war, as Tolkien recognized in *Smith*: “in time he could have forged weapons that in his own world would have had power enough to become the matter of great tales and be worth a king’s ransom” (20).

However, that Smith, the moral protagonist of the tale, does not forge such weapons suggests a difficulty in the relationship between the craftsman’s work and war:

As mentioned earlier, Tolkien emphasized that both good and evil magics are identical in source; their only difference stems from the purposes for which they are used. The present question at stake is whether motivations for war cross the threshold between artistry and domination, altering one's use of *magia* or *goeteia* from Enchantment to Magic. Regardless of the material one works with, a craftsman may always create beneficial and skillful products solely intended for peaceful use. War, however, is necessarily the work of force; destruction is its immediate result, not the creativity that is at the center of Art. One must therefore consider whether Enchantment only applies to non-martial employments.

Ultimately, the difficulty revolves around the question of Power, which provides the key distinctive between Enchantment and Magic that Tolkien develops in "On Fairy-Stories." Tolkien writes: "Enchantment . . . in its purity is artistic in desire and purpose. Magic produces, or pretends to produce, an alteration in the Primary World . . . it is not an art but a technique; its desire is *power* in this world, domination of things and wills" (64). In his letter to Waldman, Tolkien describes this "desire" as the result of a fall from goodness, reiterating its connection to domination and "coercing other wills" (145-6). Such a description accords neatly with the characteristics of the One Ring, the prime weapon of evil in Tolkien's trilogy. As Dickerson writes, "the power of the One Ring is the power to dominate other wills" (HJ 108). This is what Boromir means when he says the Ring will confer the "power of command" (FOTR 389) —as Dickerson notes (HJ 110), and also why Frodo can threaten Gollum, saying that he will command him to leap to a fiery death in Mount Doom (TT 626). It is why Gollum finally does perish in that manner after Frodo wields the Ring against him (ROTK 922). As Dickerson argues, such

a use of force to dominate other wills is seen by Tolkien as distinctly evil (HJ 114-125). Hence, one may question whether employing Enchantment in an exercise of power would be off limits in Middle-earth.

And yet, Tolkien's good characters *do* use magical power in occasional displays of force. As noted earlier, Gandalf blasts goblins with lightning in *The Hobbit*; he also makes a display of power against the Ringwraiths upon Weathertop. Moreover, as Frodo escapes across the ford into Rivendell, Elrond raises the river behind him while Gandalf hurls boulders down on his pursuers. Later on, Galadriel reveals that her ring of power allows her to spy out Sauron's intentions concerning the elves. Similarly, the Palantíri which appear in the trilogy are Seeing Stones fashioned by the elves for communication and for viewing far away lands. The craft that produced them may easily be identified as Enchantment and as useful for aesthetic appreciation, just as a tall tower may be used both to gaze in wonder upon the sea and to watch for the sails of enemies. Nevertheless, the Palantíri also become used for martial surveillance. The Phial of Galadriel is another matter as well: in the course of the story, it is used both to fend off the monstrous spider Shelob and to break free from Cirith Ungol. Further examples may be drawn from *The Silmarillion*, with Finrod who musters his power to resist Sauron "with a song of staying" (171) and with Lúthien and her enchanted cloak that she uses to breach the very court of Morgoth.

Dickerson takes up this question of power by highlighting his partial disagreement with T.A. Shippey's view of the subject, which holds that "all power" is "corruptive" and hence attempts to explain the danger and evil of the Ring. Dickerson demurs: "It is possible, Tolkien's narrative suggests, to be both powerful and good!"

Among his examples that follow, he includes the three elven rings of power, which remained uncorrupted by Sauron (HJ 88-9). According to him, it is not power itself that is evil, but “rather *power for the sake of power*—that is, power for no other reason than to *be* powerful and to *exercise* power. It is the idea of power as an end rather than a means.” The elven rings, he says, are always used towards “some other end, such as protecting the lives and freedom of others or preserving beauty and peace” (HJ 111). Dickerson’s conclusion thus centers the evil of the Ring in its ultimate focus on merely attaining power and in the consequent domination of other wills that comes with that attainment.

Thus, when Tolkien elsewhere writes that “its [Magic’s] desire is *power*” (OFS 64), one solution may be to interpret that “power” as the dominating, all-consuming lust described by Dickerson. Other uses of power, which are beneficent and not selfish, and which preserve the free will of the individual, may be classified as Enchantment. These uses may be forceful, if used to resist evil from dominating and subjugating others. In this way, Enchantment becomes not a mode of destruction, but a stay against that which would destroy. An analogy here may be drawn to just war theory, which characterizes Faramir’s approach to violence. As he tells Frodo, “I love not the sword for its sharpness nor the arrow for its swiftness. I love only that which they defend.”⁵ The power of Enchantment likewise may be seen as preserving the beauty and art which evil seeks to dominate; by so preserving them, Enchantment is identified with their goals rather than with destruction. The discussion of defensive force leads to another observation about the distinction between Enchantment and Magic with relation to the improvement of the

⁵ Dickerson notes the importance of this dialogue in his examination of Tolkien’s views on war (HJ 74).

world. Enchantment never coerces individuals or things towards improvement; at most, it restrains them from impinging upon the free development of others. Magic, however, in prioritizing quick results above all else, forces improvement (or what it sees as improvement) whether or not its object consents to the course of action.

With this distinction in mind, one may contemplate the somewhat cavalier way in which Dickerson has treated the three elven rings of power. He has presented them as uncorrupted by Sauron, used for good purposes—and that is true, in a sense. However, as Tolkien indicates, it is very nearly not true. In his letter to Waldman he writes:

But at Eregion great work began – and the Elves came their nearest to falling to ‘magic’ and machinery. With the aid of Sauron’s lore they made *Rings of Power* (‘power’ is an ominous and sinister word in all these tales, except as applied to the [the Valar]).

The chief power (of all the rings alike) was the prevention or slowing of *decay* (i.e. ‘change’ viewed as a regrettable thing), the preservation of what is desired or loved, or its semblance – this is more or less an Elvish motive. But they also enhanced the natural powers of a possessor – thus approaching ‘magic,’ a motive easily corrupted into evil, a lust for domination. (152)

Earlier, Tolkien refers to the Elvish actions of this period as “a sort of second fall or at least ‘error.’” Against the counsel of the Valar, they lingered in Middle-earth—though Tolkien does not view this as anything “wrong essentially.” Their true error lies in their response to the world that was changing around them: “They became sad, and their art (shall we say) antiquarian, and their efforts all really a kind of embalming” (151). The error or sin behind these actions is alluded to in the letter still earlier: Of the Elves,

Tolkien writes, “Their Fall is into possessiveness and (to a less degree) into perversion of their art to power” (146). In this case, the Elves’ love for the old beauty of Middle-earth resulted in “clinging to the things made as ‘its own’ (145); for the Elves had labored much for “the adornment of the earth” and grieved to see the “fading” of that adornment (151).

In this understandable spirit of possessiveness, the Elves created the rings to grant them power to preserve their work against the tides of time. However, as Tolkien states, their actions constitute merely “a kind of embalming,” or an artificial prolonging of something whose time has passed and should be permitted pass on. Such a motive is well-intentioned, but misguided and ultimately destructive, as evidenced by all the mortal ringbearers in the tale. For those who bear the rings long enough to show any significant effect, they experience incredibly lengthened lives. However, they also undergo a gradual and progressive “fading.” Hence Bilbo’s comment that he feels “like butter that has been scraped over too much bread” (FOTR 32). His life has been stretched beyond natural limits and, like anything spread over a wide enough area, has begun to disappear. Gollum’s five-hundred-year life with the Ring shows that such “fading” will not happen quickly, but his character in *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* is only a shadow of his former self, and effectively demonstrates the long-term results of possessing the Ring. The Ringwraiths themselves provide the best example. Nine mortal men each given one of the elven rings by Sauron, they have faded from all mortal sight and their forms can only be described by the shape of their black cloaks.

The example of the creation of the Rings of Power, this “second fall” of the Elves, reveals the precarious, dangerous possibilities whenever Enchantment is used as an

imposition of power for any purpose other than traditional artistry. It would be reasonable to assume that such caution should apply to uses in war, which is what Tolkien seems to suggest when he writes to Mitchinson: “But his *magia* he [Sauron] uses to bulldoze both people and things,” while “[t]heir *magia* the Elves and Gandalf use (sparingly)” (200). Other than directly for art, the Wise use *magia* “sparingly” because they are deeply aware of the perils involved, as illustrated above. There is also evidence that Tolkien rejected large displays of magical force for other reasons. One may take, for instance, his relation towards the “aeroplane,” especially when used as a weapon of war. It might seem (as it likely does to most people) that the aeroplane is a perfectly legitimate form of combat when used to resist evil and protect goodness. However, for Tolkien, its result has been “a mass-production of slaughter” (OFS 276). He speaks of the “hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children . . . blown to rags and burned, and half the remaining beautiful things of saner centuries with them.” (OFS 277).

And yet even these comments preceded the American deployment of the atom bomb against Hiroshima and Nagasaki. While aeroplanes he had characterized as “saurian monsters” (OFS 276), in his forward to the second edition of *Lord of the Rings*, he implies that the atom bomb stands in the same class of destructive evil as does the Ring (FOTR xiv-xv).⁶ In a 9 August 1945 letter to his son Christopher, he writes, “The news today about ‘Atomic bombs’ is so horrifying one is stunned.” He concludes by noting that “. . . He [God] does not look kindly on Babel-builders” (*Letters* 116). Babel, of course, refers to the attempt by man to reach beyond their natural, human power to

⁶ While implicitly comparing the evil of the two, Tolkien is very clear that the Ring is *not* an allegory for the bomb.

rival and usurp the authority of God. That Tolkien so viewed mechanical weapons of mass destruction, even when used for ostensibly good ends, sheds light on his reason for limited use of Enchantment in war, and also for why he equated Magic and the Machine—used for “bulldozing the real world” —with the forces of evil.

The Source of Power

Thus far, focus has been given to identifying basic characteristics of the good Enchantment and evil Magic in Tolkien’s works; both have been seen to draw from the same power and affect the world in categorically similar ways (through *magia* or *goeteia*). Their difference derives from moral questions about their motivation and use. Nothing has yet been said, however, regarding the derivation of such powers.

As stated earlier in the introduction, one significant distinctive of magic systems is their source: where they obtain the energy for their mysterious activities. In their book, *From Homer to Harry Potter*, Dickerson and O’Hara delineate several types of such systems that appear in modern fantasy (HHP 234-9). Magic may be either internally derived (where power resides within individuals) or externally derived (where individuals draw from powers outside of themselves). The latter category may be further broken down to the external inanimate (where such power is drawn from forces of nature) or the external personal (where such power is drawn from other beings). One might add to their categorization by dividing internal sources into those which are obtained genetically (i.e., materially) and those which are drawn from mysterious powers of the soul (i.e., spiritually). Once again, despite his lack of a formal magic system, Tolkien is not silent about how his world relates to these categories.

In examining sources of power, one may return to Tolkien's elven rings (all of them, not just the Three), which he says, "enhanced the natural powers of a possessor" (*Letters* 152). Since the rings and their power are magical, such a statement seems to assume that individuals *already* possess some similar source of power which is then "enhanced" by the rings. This would seem to demonstrate that Tolkien included some sort of internal power in his system of magic. Such a view is supported by the Mitchinson letter, where he states: "Anyway, a difference in the use of 'magic' in this story is that it is not to be come by by [sic] 'lore' or spells; but is an inherent power not possessed or attainable by Men as such" (*Letters* 200). His mention of "internal power" certainly seems to accord with the distinction made by Dickerson and O'Hara. However, his "not possessed or attainable by Men" provides an immediate difficulty, for some of these rings were gifted by Sauron to "nine mortal men"—sorcerer kings who would later become the fearsome Ringwraiths.

With these words one encounters a recurrent challenge when interpreting Tolkien: his tendency to revise or "retcon" elements of his created world to be more consistent with his philosophical leanings. (Major examples include reworking the solar myth which underpins the *Silmarillion* and rethinking his origins for orcs). Not surprisingly, the editor's endnote to this letter states: "Alongside the final paragraph, Tolkien has written: 'But the Númenóreans used "spells" in making swords?'" (*Letters* 445). Discrepancies like these testify to the importance of searching for the consistent thought-patterns and dispositions of Tolkien, which underlie his statements and artistic decisions. In this spirit, one may take the uncertainty voiced in the comment about Númenórean swords as indicative of a larger uncertainty and lack of finality regarding the magic of men in

general; therefore, such problems may be set aside as an anomaly to be explored later. What does not seem to be uncertain is Tolkien's emphasis on "inherent power" as a significant part of his story world.

Dickerson and O'Hara identify Gandalf as an example of this category, albeit only in passing (235). They devote a somewhat longer passage to examining the "inherent power" of Aragorn, evidenced especially in his role as a healer (235). Understandably, the authors have neither time nor space to consider the earlier mentioned problem with Aragorn as a mortal user of magical powers. Tolkien himself, however, addresses this difficulty in the Mitchinson letter, noting that Aragorn is of distant Elvish descent, and so "not a pure 'Man'" (*Letters* 200). In other words, his ancestry may allow him strange abilities not possessed by normal members of humanity.

However, a more interesting case not discussed by Dickerson and O'Hara is that of Glorfindel, an elf so powerful as to be among the few that might "ride openly against the Nine" (*FOTR* 205). When Frodo first sees him, it seems as if "a white light was shining through the form and raiment of the rider, as if through a thin veil" (204). Later, after his escape across the Ford of Rivendell, Frodo once again sees him as "a shining figure of white light" with the "small shadowy forms" of his companions (209). As Gandalf later explains, "those who have dwelt in the Blessed Realm⁷ live at once in both worlds, and against both the Seen and the Unseen they have great power" (216)—a designation that would include Glorfindel. Frodo's vision of him was "as he is upon the other side: one of the mighty of the Firstborn" (217). By "the Seen and the Unseen," Gandalf quite obviously means the material and the spiritual aspects of reality, a position

⁷ The realm of the Valar. Also called "Aman."

made clear by his connecting these two categories with different “worlds.” Such an interpretation is further supported by his earlier statement that Frodo was “half in the wraith-world” while wearing the ring (216). The same opposition between spiritual and material may be seen in the Waldman letter, where the Rings of Power have the effect of “rendering invisible the material body, and making things of the invisible world visible” (152). Therefore, by stating that Glorfindel was revealed “as he is upon the other side,” Gandalf indicates that the imagery of light is a visible display of Glorfindel’s inner being. As such light is used to connote the great power that Glorfindel wields against the Nine, one must reasonably assume that Glorfindel’s source of Enchantment is the power of his soul.

A note attached to the story of Finwë and Míriel in *Morgoth’s Ring* supports this view. Tolkien writes: “And those in whom the *fëa* [spirit] is strong and untainted, they say, appear even to mortal eyes to shine at times translucent (albeit faintly), as though a lamp burned within” (250). In other writings, Tolkien again refers to Glorfindel specifically, suggesting that the character in *Lord of the Rings* is the same Glorfindel who was slain during the fall of Gondolin, later reincarnated in the Blessed Realm by the Valar. In this version of his story, Glorfindel’s “spiritual power had been greatly enhanced by his self-sacrifice” when slain in the defense of fugitives from the doomed city (PME 381). In earlier notes, Tolkien also states that his long sojourn in the Blessed Realm, where the remaining elves dwelt in “primitive innocence,” also contributed to this great power (PME 378). Nor are these statements unaligned with Tolkien’s other developments of his cosmology. In another text from *Morgoth’s Ring*, he mentions that “The Elves certainly held and taught that *fëar* or ‘spirits’ may grow of their own life

(independently of the body), even as they may be hurt and healed, be diminished and renewed” (404).⁸ By this token, Glorfindel is a character of exceptional power in *Lord of the Rings* because his soul (the source of his power) has itself *grown* in the spiritually nourishing act of self-sacrifice and subsequent sojourn in the “holy land” of the Valar.

Using soul-power as a story element would actually accord with Tolkien’s Christian philosophical disposition, which must view mankind as a body/soul duality (as opposed to merely a material body). In this duality, belief in the immaterial mind or soul necessitates acceptance of some unexplained means by which the soul can physically affect matter: Thoughts must somehow cause neurons to fire in the brain, which then commands the body to move. It is this activity of the metaphysical soul upon physical matter that allows the concept of free will. Otherwise, one’s thoughts would be nothing more than the chemical processes in one’s brain.

In *The Problem of Pain*, Tolkien’s friend C.S. Lewis took this idea of soul-influence yet further with his formulation of the pre-Fall “Paradise man,” whose “consciousness ruled and illuminated the whole organism . . . His organic processes obeyed the law of his own will, not the law of nature” (593). For Lewis, the soul’s influence was not necessarily confined to affecting mental activity, but may have once ruled man’s entire physical form. One sees Tolkien take a similar approach to his elves.⁹ He writes:

⁸ *Fëar* is the plural of Tolkien’s word *fëa*, meaning “spirit.”

⁹ This similarity between the thought of Lewis and Tolkien on this point is also remarked upon by Fornet-Ponse (72).

The *fëar* of the Elves were destined to dwell in Arda [the world] for all the life of Arda, and the death of the flesh did not abrogate that destiny. Their *fëar* were tenacious therefore of life ‘in the raiment of Arda,’ and far excelled the spirits of men in power over that ‘raiment,’ even from the first days protecting their bodies from many ills and assaults (such as disease), and healing them swiftly of injuries . . . (MR 218-9)

Here Tolkien describes the power of the Elvish *fëa* over the material body, a strengthening of the physical aspect of the Elves with health and undying life within the existence of the world, much like Lewis’s “Paradisal man.”

To further extend this influence of the soul from individual Elven bodies to matter-in-general would not stretch believability. One finds, for example, that the power of the *fëa* is not confined for use within its individual person; an Elven child “draws nourishment” for its *fëa* “equally” from the *fëar* of both parents (MR 221). Tolkien also writes that “The Elvish *fëa* was above all designed to make things in co-operation with its *hröa* [body]” (MR 332). This statement may only mean that the *fëa* supplies the creative ideas and the body enacts them, or may refer more mystically to creative powers channeled from the soul in the fashioning of beautiful works. The latter interpretation certainly seems viable considering Tolkien’s larger discussion of the link between Enchantment and Art.

The substantial power of the Elvish *fëa* has other implications as well. When the longer passage above is read as indicating that the soul is the source of Elven Enchantment, one may see why Tolkien did not confer magical abilities to mankind. Elvish souls “far excelled the spirits of men in power over that ‘raiment’” which was

their bodies; because of this, they must have been able to manipulate matter to an extent that men could not match. Such a view is corroborated by Tolkien's statement that Morgoth "despised" men even more so than Elves, because of "their lack of physical force, or power over 'matter'" (MR 395). As a final point in favor of an argument for soul-power as the source of Tolkienian magic, one may recall that the greatest beings within Arda, the Valar and the Maiar, are beings of pure spirit who have subsequently taken on physical appearance. That their souls, therefore, must directly manipulate matter to do anything in the world goes without saying.

External Powers

In addition to power brought forth from within, Tolkien's world quite clearly includes other powers which are derived externally from the user. Examples include the Phial of Galadriel, Sam's magic rope, certain acts of Morgoth which dispersed his power, the vaguely suggested powers of Sauron as the Necromancer, and especially the One Ring. While Dickerson and O'Hara recognize that spells such as Gandalf's "act more to release [one's] own powers than to conjure up some external force" (HHP 235), these other examples are most certainly sources of external power.

Even as such, however, these sources bear closer resemblance to the power of Gandalf than may be at first presumed. Of this similarity, the Ring is an important instance. Recalling that in their categorization of magics, Dickerson and O'Hara have identified the *inanimate* and the *personal* as two variations of external sources, one may accordingly be tempted to identify the Ring as "inanimate." However, this is not so. The Ring is no mere lifeless object, but rather one in which Sauron "let a great part of his

inherent power . . . pass into” (*Letters* 153). The Magic of the Ring derives from the spirit of Sauron; it is therefore just as much a soul-power as that of Gandalf or the elves.

The activities of Sauron as Necromancer are a comparable instance: Tolkien describes how some elves, after death, refuse to come before the judgment of the Valar and so wander bodiless in the world, unable to be reincarnated (MR 223-4). In a search for power, some individuals have attempted “[t]o call to them . . . To attempt to master them and to make them servants of one’s own will.” To use spirits of the dead for magic is necromancy and a “wrong deed”; however, it reinforces the idea that much of the magical happenings in Middle-earth derive from soul-power.

Here one finds the *fëar* of elves once again working magic. Tolkien also mentions that “It is said that Sauron did these things, and taught his followers how to achieve them,” and that “the necromancers are of the host of Sauron” (MR 224). These statements may help to resolve some of the difficulties engendered by the existence of mortal magic users in Tolkien’s world, at least when they serve the side of evil. In this case, magic may be beyond the abilities of men to achieve solely as men, but not necessarily unattainable if the power comes from a source outside themselves. Or, as Tolkien wrote in his draft material to “On Fairy-stories,” “Faerie is the underlying power that the magician only taps or pretends to tap. On this theory it exists in itself – independent of the magician . . .” (OFS 268). In short, Tolkien seems to have always considered any mortal instances of magic to be derived externally from the user; moreover, he always viewed these instances negatively. Because of this, it seems reasonable to assume that Tolkien would have used the elves of “Faerie” as one source of magical powers for evil men, by means of necromancy. Mortals drawing forbidden magic from Faerie was already an idea that had

passed through his mind; drawing the same connection when he reached this new context of a wandering elven *fëar* would not have been difficult.

There is still another example of soul-power passing from an individual into the external world, permitting later acts of magic by other users. Tolkien refers to this instance as “Morgoth’s Ring” in analogy to the One Ring that would later be created by Sauron; for like Sauron, Morgoth let a great deal of his own soul-power pass from himself into the external world in a similar attempt at domination. However, Morgoth’s infusion of power attempted to permeate the *world* and not just one object, as Tolkien writes: “The whole of ‘Middle-earth’ was Morgoth’s Ring.” Exactly how Morgoth affected matter is not told, yet one reads that “[i]t was this Morgoth-element in matter, indeed, which was a prerequisite for such ‘magic’ and other evils as Sauron practiced with it and upon it” (MR 400). While not explicitly stated, such externalized soul-power might also provide another source of magic for mortal men.¹⁰

In contrast to these three preceding examples, Sam’s rope represents a category of magical items that proves troublesome to explain. As mentioned earlier, the rope is not only a well-crafted item, it is one that actually possesses the ability to untie itself when necessary. To some, this might suggest that the rope has some small power woven within it by the elves. The question then arises as to whether the craftsman imparted a measure of his *fëa* into his work to provide such power. If so, the oft-mentioned problem with mortal magic users immediately raises its head: As the fellowship prepares to depart Lothlórien, Galadriel tells Sam that, had she known of his interests earlier, her people

¹⁰ As noted in the *Tolkien Gateway* wiki entry for “Magic.” This is a source that parallels many of the independent conclusions of this thesis.

would have taught him the skill of crafting such rope. If this activity were one that involved genuine Enchantment, it would be impossible for a mortal to learn to practice without recourse to external powers.

While it would seem a tempting resolution, the exchange between Hobbit and Elf queen should not be written off as an anomaly, for the theme of elves instructing mortals in their crafts is one that runs throughout Tolkien's work. For example, he tells Waldman that "a recurrent theme is the idea that in Men (as they now are) there is a strand of 'blood' and inheritance, derived from the Elves, and that the art and poetry of Men is largely dependent on it, or modified by it" (*Letters* 149). In *Morgoth's Ring*, Tolkien extends this teaching of "art and poetry" even more broadly to "art and science" (405). Such a description may be taken to include all activities that fall under the idea of craftsmanship. As mentioned earlier, one especially finds this instruction by the Elves in *Smith of Wootton Major*, where Smith's skill at the forge grows incredibly after his sojourn in Faërie.

Yet, even though his abilities increase by this exposure, Smith will never be able to rival anything crafted by the fairies themselves. The same level of difference between human and Elven products would likely be true for Sam. This resolves the difficulty with mortals, but the original problem still remains: Whence comes the power for the Elves' rope? This is a concern which must be reexamined later.

On the surface level, the Phial of Galadriel may seem to present problems similar to Sam's rope. As an object external to its bearer, it certainly carries a power of its own and does not merely "act more to release [one's] own powers" as Dickerson and O'Hara

have said (HHP 235). However, one cannot trace even the majority of its effects back to any power imparted by its crafter, as may be seen in a brief examination.

From Galadriel's words, one may conclude that the Phial's virtue derives from the starlight of Eärendil, which is caught within it. With Bilbo's earlier song in Rivendell, one also learns that this star is really the ship of an ancient mariner, who now sails the skies with a Silmaril bound upon his brow as his source of light. The Silmarils themselves are jewels which have been filled with the light of Telperion and Laurelin, the two trees of Valinor that were later destroyed by Morgoth. Of this light, Tolkien says: "The Light of Valinor (derived from light before any fall) is the light of art undivorced from reason, that sees [things] both scientifically (or philosophically) and imaginatively (or subcreatively) and says that they are ['good'] – as beautiful" (*Letters* 148).

In a later formulation, Tolkien would derive this light from a still earlier source: "Varda [one of the Valar] has preserved some of the Primeval Light . . . The Two Trees are made" (MR 377). Within the story that follows this note, Ilúvatar—creator of all—is recorded as presenting this "gift" of light to Varda, one of the Valar: "thou shalt take into Eä [the universe] a light that is holy, coming new from Me, unsullied by the thought and lust of Melkor, and with thee it shall enter into Eä, and be in Eä, but not of Eä" (MR 380).

Originally, some of this light is used in the creation of the Sun, but its holiness is fouled by Morgoth. With part of the pure, remaining light kept by Varda, the Trees are then made. Similar to what has been seen earlier with Glorfindel and subsequent explorations of the Elven *fëa*, here are more associations between light and creative power, or rather, power used "subcreatively" (to borrow the term from Tolkien's letter). Varda's gift is used to fashion the Sun and the Two Trees for the earth. While similar in

description to this *fëa* and its abilities, the light of the Phial cannot be said to derive from the power of any created soul; as demonstrated by tracing its long history, this light came by many removes direct from Ilúvatar himself. The Phial's Enchantment is thus unique among magical items in the *Lord of the Rings*.

The Flame Imperishable

There is another association suggested by the Phial's light that has remained hitherto unexplored in this discussion: the connection with fire. As mentioned above, part of Varda's "Primeval Light" was set within the Sun, whose purpose was to provide "health and life and growth" "from its light" (MR 380). This description is of creative activity, nourished (at least in part) by the strength of the Sun, whose fire provides the means for heat, photosynthesis, and so on. The Silmarils also are said not only to be filled with light, but with an "inner fire" as well (S 67). Again, as evidenced by Tolkien's letter to Waldman, the Silmarils are linked strongly to the concept of subcreativity (*Letters* 148). Their fire is moreover compared to the souls of the Elves, while the crystal that houses this fire is compared to the Elven body (S 67). Similarly, the Elven *fëa* is designed to pursue subcreativity and is also associated with light. One might expect a similar association between the *fëa* and fire, following the parallel examples of the Sun and the Silmarils. Indeed, such is the case.

The first connection to be made between the soul and fire must set aside the elves completely, turning instead to the Ainur—purely spiritual beings of Ilúvatar's original creation—who would otherwise later become known as the Valar if they chose to enter Ilúvatar's (yet uncreated) world. The Ainur, however, are not just angelic worshippers, messengers, or warriors of God. After he has brought them into being (and prior to

creating anything else), Ilúvatar declares to them: “I will now that ye make in harmony together a Great Music. And since I have kindled you with the Flame Imperishable, ye shall show forth your powers in adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devices, if he will” (S 15). As each of the Ainur weaves together this melody, the course of creation and the history of the world is fashioned with all members each contributing some “adornment” of their own.

In Tolkien’s legendarium, this moment is *the* quintessential instance of the theme of subcreation which is woven throughout the tales of Middle-earth. As Dickerson notes, this capacity to subcreate stems from the Ainur’s kindling with the Flame Imperishable (HJ 117). One may compare Ilúvatar’s words to the earlier actions of Morgoth, who, before his fall, “had gone often alone into the void places seeking the Imperishable Flame; for desire grew hot within him to bring into Being things of his own” (S 16). In other words, created works may only attain “Being” through the Flame’s power. Hartley takes a similar view in his interpretation, stating: “the *fëa* depends upon the Secret Fire [Flame Imperishable] for its vitality”; nonetheless, he draws a distinction that Dickerson lacks: “Yet the *fëa* and the Secret Fire are not the same” (Hartley 103). Hartley continues, distinguishing that while the soul is “kindled” by the Flame, it is not the Flame itself (103). Instead, the Flame Imperishable (or the Secret Fire, as it is also named) is set by Ilúvatar into “the heart of the World,” giving to this new creation its being (MR 13-4).

According to Dickerson, since souls derive only from the Flame (and since souls are requisite for individual creativity), the scope of this kindling must include many races in Middle-earth: “men (and also elves and dwarves and the Ainur) have from Ilúvatar the gift of the Flame Imperishable (HJ 124). Setting aside for a moment the conflation

between the flame kindled and the Flame itself, one may note that Dickerson's statement is indeed supported by other lines of evidence in Tolkien's various texts. With regards to the Elves, for example, Hartley notes the imagery of fire used to describe the soul of Fëanor, who "lives 'as if a secret fire were kindled in him'; his eyes are 'piercingly bright' and he is 'driven by the fire of his own heart.'" He also notes that Fëanor's "name (*fëanaro*) literally means 'spirit-of-fire.'" Overall, his conclusion is that "the Secret Fire may also kindle an individual soul with particular brightness" (104).

To these examples, one might add the scene where Morgoth comes before Fëanor to tempt him away from the realm of the Valar: "But his cunning overreached his aim . . . and awoke a fire more fierce than he designed; and Fëanor looked upon Melkor with eyes that burned through his fair semblance and pierced the cloaks of his mind" (S 72).

Another retelling of this moment in *Morgoth's Ring* is even less ambiguous: "Then the fires of the heart of Fëanor were kindled, and his eyes blazed" (189).

In a context other than Tolkien's legendarium, description of a character whose "eyes blazed" or "burned" in wrath will most often be understood as a poetic license or "purple prose," depicting the intense inner emotions of the individual. However, Tolkien's is a world where even a Hobbit may perceive the Unseen soul, witnessing an Elf such as Glorfindel exuding light. These experiences are elsewhere described "as though a lamp burned within" the individual, suggesting most immediately images of light, but also intimating that a kind of fire provides its power (MR 250). Tolkien furthermore describes how, while all *fëar* are invisible to "bodily eyes," they are "clearly perceptible by direct awareness to other *fëar*" (MR 218). That Tolkien, in working out the implications of the Elvish soul, repeatedly refers to this concept of "direct awareness"

between spirits argues strongly for assuming that his opinion on the matter was set.¹¹ In that case, Morgoth would then have received more than just a suggestion of Fëanor's emotional vehemence and wrath; the fire he perceived would be a direct, "scientific" description of Fëanor's revealed soul.

In addition to these examples linking Elves to the Flame, one also encounters mention of how "the fire of their spirit" (MR 210) increases in "dominance" over their bodies, eventually "consuming" them so that only the *fëa* remains, with the Elven body continuing to exist only in "memory" (MR 219). Here is yet another instance that not only equates the *fëa* with fire, but one that depicts a marked effect of the spirit upon the material world as well. This interaction between the two different aspects of reality is an important point, and one that Hartley goes to considerable length to connect to the empowerment of the Flame.

As mentioned earlier, Dickerson discusses the spiritual/material interplay as well; however, in both *A Hobbit's Journey* and in *From Homer to Harry Potter*, he (along with O'Hara in the latter case) stops short of explicitly drawing any conclusion similar to Hartley. This is unfortunate, because where (at least in this article) Hartley pursues connection after connection until he stretches all believability past the breaking point, Dickerson generally demonstrates restraint and thoughtful insight. Unfortunately, in *A Hobbit's Journey*, this has resulted in leaving the role of the kindled flame to the provision of free will and the ability to think creatively, where he might have mentioned what power brings that creativity to pass. In *From Homer to Harry Potter*, Dickerson and O'Hara even quote the passage discussing the Ainur's kindling in their chapter on magic.

¹¹ See MR 212, 225, 228, 244.

However, they proceed to focus on Tolkien's words about the "powers" of the Ainur (S 15) with no discussion at all about the effect of the Flame itself (HHP 236).

While Dickerson and O'Hara have not seen fit to draw this connection, its truth seems obvious: that the Flame's kindling is the power behind the great abilities of the Ainur and the Enchantment of the Elves, and that the Flame confers this power via their souls. If so, then the old problem arises once more for Men: Why can they not perform acts of power with their souls, if indeed their souls are a kindling of the Flame as Dickerson suggests? The answer, perhaps, lies in the "Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth" and "The Tale of Adanel" in *Morgoth's Ring*.

As has already been stated, Tolkien conceived the *fëa* of Elves and Men as different: the *fëa* of Elves were more "tenacious" of their bodies and had more "power" over "matter." Men would tend to die more quickly; possibly, as has been argued, their lesser soul-strength could also be why they were unable to perform Enchantment. The "Athrabeth," however, seems to challenge this notion of human frailty as Man's intended condition. In *The Silmarillion*, one may recall, Tolkien had depicted the mortality of Man as "the gift of Ilúvatar" (S 42), yet in the "Athrabeth," the mortal woman Andreth argues: "We were not made for death, nor born ever to die. Death was imposed upon us." This alteration in Man's fate occurred "through the malice of the Lord of the Darkness" (309). As to what exactly this "malice" was, Tolkien explores one possibility in "The Tale of Adanel."

Much as in Genesis 3, the "Tale of Adanel" describes the seduction of Mankind by the Satan-figure Morgoth, whereupon Man is judged by Ilúvatar and becomes mortal. As Andreth relates:

Thereafter we were grievously afflicted, by weariness, and hunger, and sickness; and the Earth and all things in it were turned against us. Fire and Water rebelled against us. The birds and beasts shunned us, or if they were strong they assailed us. Plants gave us poison; and we feared the shadows under trees. (MR 348)

In another version of the story, Andreth suggests that the cause of this physical degeneration stems from the souls of Men:

Some men say that [Morgoth] blasphemed Eru, and denied his existence, or his power, and that our fathers assented . . . and that thereby our *fëar* denied their own true nature, and so became darkened and weakened almost to the death . . . And through the weakness of the *fëar* our *hröar* fell into unhealth, and lay open to all evils and disorders of the world. (MR 351)¹²

Tolkien writes something similar in another text, adding that “through this weakness [of their *fëar*] they lost the mastery of their bodies” (MR 354).

These three quotations are remarkable in what they suggest. One may infer, by reversing the consequences of this “Fall” in the first description provided by Andreth, that Men originally were not beset by such difficulties as “weariness” or “sickness,” or at least were much more resistant to them. “The Earth and all things in it” would have responded easily to their will. They would have been the masters of “Fire and Water,” communed with the “birds and beasts,” and lived in harmony with the vegetation of

¹² See *The Problem of Pain* for some interesting similarities between this passage and the speculations of C.S. Lewis (596).

nature.¹³ This attunement to the world around them proceeded by virtue of their *fëar*, which, as that of the Elves, provided “mastery of their bodies.” Indeed, by these descriptions, one begins to wonder if this *fëa* that was in them did not rival in abilities the *fëa* of the Elves. The Elf lord Finrod himself, upon grasping the implications of an immortal Mankind, declares to Andreth: “Therefore I say that if this can be believed, then mighty indeed under Eru were Men made in their beginning” (MR 318). Perhaps, then, Mankind could have once practiced Enchantment had they learned to do so. This would support Dickerson’s conclusion that Men were kindled with the Imperishable Flame.

Such a suggestion may appear to stretch believability, but it is supported by at least one other major consideration: As appears numerous times throughout his writings on the matter, Tolkien intended for Men to partake in the Second Music of the Ainur—the creation of the new, restored world after the end of the current one, broken and corrupted by Morgoth—to participate in the creation of “Arda Healed” (MR 318). The words of Ilúvatar himself, spoken at the beginning of time, demonstrate that kindling by the Flame is a necessary prerequisite to participation in the Music. It might therefore be easier to believe that Ilúvatar through his Flame once created Man with a soul of power, which was subsequently damaged so utterly that most of this power was lost, than to believe that Man was always frail and mortal, that the creative abilities of his soul were always limited to generating ideas in the mind, and that participation in this Second Music to come will mean nothing further than this same mental creativity.

¹³ Compare Tolkien’s statement that “the desire to converse with other living things” is “as ancient as the Fall” —at this point in history mankind experienced a “severance” that broke off their previous abilities of communication and left them wishing for the restoration of their original state (OFS 73-4).

However, in his commentary on the “Athrabeth,” Tolkien suggests that Mankind’s lesser control of their bodies preceded even Morgoth’s seduction, and in fact made their Fall possible (334), which would seem to argue against the possibility of any potent use of power on the part of Man. Nevertheless, even if they *were* weaker than the Elves in origin, their pre-Fall abilities must still have exceeded their present state (as Tolkien describes in the passages already referenced). Therefore it is hard to say with certainty whether or not Enchantment would have been attainable in their original nature. Regardless, as suggested above, participation in the Second Music seems to require some sort of direct power for shaping the world, so at the very least one must assume this power will be conferred to Men at this future time.

Because Tolkien’s intentions for the two Musics are intricately tied to his idea of creativity and the soul, exploring them further will help to illuminate the role Enchantment plays in his world, especially as it concerns Ilúvatar’s separate purposes for Men and Elves. Even so, a word must first be said about the Imperishable Flame and the Dwarves. Dickerson, as referenced above, includes them as recipients of kindling. However, from the texts sampled here, little reference seems to be made to the magical abilities of this race.

In one untitled text, Tolkien makes passing reference to their “‘magic’ skills” (PME 310), and in *The Hobbit*, Thorin’s company sings of how “[t]he dwarves of yore made mighty spells” (14). Not much more appears to be known about this aspect of their kind, a fact which is most likely due to their notoriously secretive way of life.¹⁴

¹⁴ In a footnote to one of his writings on the Dwarves, Tolkien says: “Indeed most of the references to Dwarvish history in Elven records are marked with ‘so said Legolas.’” Most of the knowledge

Nevertheless, since they are counted along with Elves and Men as the Children of Ilúvatar (S 44), one may likewise assume that kindling by the Flame applies also to them, especially as they are said to “love first the things made by their own hands” —a condition made possible only by a spirit of creativity. Moreover, as with both Men and Elves, they will advance Ilúvatar’s plan for a new, perfect world, “Arda Healed,” as Tolkien writes: “Then their part shall be to serve Aulë and to aid him in the remaking of Arda after the Last Battle” (S 44).

Perhaps, then, the Flame has also kindled a power in their souls to work magic in Middle-earth. However, one must note that Tolkien’s final formulations of the Dwarves describe them as having always been mortal (unlike his reassessment of original Man), which suggests that their spirits have never possessed as much power over matter as do the spirits of the Elves. Moreover, the Dwarves were not fashioned directly by Ilúvatar, but rather by the Vala Aulë; they are of Ilúvatar’s children only by adoption, and in the moment Ilúvatar gives them life there is the implicit understanding that while their “being” is a gift, they still suffer from the limitations of Aulë their maker. Ilúvatar states that “in no other way will I amend thy handiwork, and as thou hast made it, so shall it be” (S 44). This deficiency will later prove grievous to Aulë’s wife Yavanna, who laments that “the things that grow and live upon the earth they will not heed” (S 45). Thus, due to the limitations of the Dwarves inherent in their original creation, and coupled with the

about the Dwarves came through the singular relationship between Legolas and Gimli (PME 391). The paucity of information on Dwarven magical abilities is highlighted by the *Tolkien Gateway* wiki entry for “Magic,” which includes only a few (relatively insubstantial) comments on the Dwarves and their powers.

secrecy that shrouds the rest of their activities, little can be said with certainty about the nature of any magical abilities they might possess.

The Musics of the Ainur

In notes discussing the material of the “Athrabeth,” Tolkien briefly overviews the process by which the world in his myth came to be:

According to the *Ainulindalë* [the first part of the *Silmarillion*] there were five stages in creation. a. The creation of the Ainur. b. The communication by Eru of his Design to the Ainur. c. The Great Music, which was as it were a rehearsal, and remained in the stage of thought or imagination. d. The ‘Vision’ of Eru, which was again only a foreshadowing of possibility, and was incomplete. e. The Achievement, which is still going on. (MR 336)

This final stage would have begun as soon as Ilúvatar sent his Flame to burn in Eä, giving “Being” to his creation. The Valar subsequently enter this reality to work towards its completion, yet they proceed according to what they have already heard in their musics played before Ilúvatar. These compositions, woven together, constitute the “Great Music,” which directs the forming of the cosmos and governs the development and history of the world. In *The Silmarillion*, this Music is identified as “fate” (S 41). The outworking of these themes includes even the rebellious actions of Morgoth, whose musical dissonance results in evil within the created order (MR 405-6).

In response to this rebellion, Elves and Men (the Children) are introduced into the Music by Ilúvatar himself—none of the Ainur contributed to their creation (S 41). In the Waldman letter, Tolkien explains that the introduction of the Children was meant “partly to redress the evil of the rebel Melkor, partly for the completion of all in an ultimate

finesse of detail” (*Letters* 147). This literary purpose pairs with Tolkien’s hope for the real world, that humanity “may actually assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation” (OFS 79). Ilúvatar’s intention for the Children, therefore, is to heal the beauty that is broken and also to create beauty that is new.

Some Tolkien scholars, such as Flieger and Fornet-Ponse, have noted that Elves and Men differ in their respective relations to the Music. The key text that produces this discrepancy is the same as that referenced above where the Music is described as “fate”:

‘ . . . But the Quendi [Elves] shall be the fairest of all early creatures, and they shall have and shall conceive and bring forth more beauty than all my Children; and they shall have the greater bliss in this world. But to the Atani [Men] I will give a new gift.’ Therefore he [Ilúvatar] willed that the hearts of Men should seek beyond the world and find no rest therein; but they should have a virtue to shape their life, amid the powers and chances of the world, beyond the Music of the Ainur, which is as fate to all things else; and of their operation everything should be, in form and deed, completed and the world fulfilled unto the last and smallest.
(S 41-2)

Flieger reads this text to mean that only Men possess true free will; “all things else,” as Tolkien writes, are fated. Even the actions of the Elves are, in Flieger’s view, predetermined; though the Elves still do retain the “inner” choice of good or ill will when acting out their fate (MT [2012] 38).¹⁵ There is little that needs to be said on this account,

¹⁵ This thesis references two separate editions of this essay by Flieger, published in 2009 and 2012 respectively. They are marked accordingly.

as Flieger's notion has been thoroughly refuted by Fornet-Ponse,¹⁶ whose rebuttal essay provides a more satisfactory exploration of Tolkien's intentions for the Children.

Fornet-Ponse argues that Tolkien's views on "fate" differ from the rigid determinism proposed by Flieger: The Elves are bound to the Music in a relationship of "fate" because they are inherently *natural* creatures; i.e., made especially for the created world, which is governed by the Music. For this reason, Elves do not pass into an afterlife upon death, but rather are reincarnated; in contradistinction, Men are *supernatural*, and upon death, their souls leave this current world, never to return. Thus, Men are not "fated," ultimately, by the Music, because after death they pass beyond its governance. Fornet-Ponse demonstrates that such a reading is supported by the text, which pairs Men's "gift of freedom" with their mortality, contrasting this state with how "the Elves remain until the end of days" (S 42).

Yet, if one is to continue examining the implications of the Musics for Enchantment, there is still a need to identify the respective purposes for which Ilúvatar created Elves and Men, purposes which cannot be defined by merely stating facts about their longevity and physical characteristics. As Flieger recognizes in her essay, "the purpose of the Children—that is, both Elves and Men—to complete the design must be twofold in action, for otherwise there would be no necessity for two separate races" (MT [2012] 38). Flieger believes this "twofold" purpose to be the collision of Elven fate and the free will of Man, which will change the predetermined course of history and thus

¹⁶ Among other examples, Fornet-Ponse draws attention to Fëanor's slaughter of the Teleri and theft of their white ships. This moment could never have occurred through any 'inner' choice of good motives (68-9).

“revise” the Music. Flieger does not mention it, but this very question of “twofold” purpose is taken up by Tolkien in his commentary on the “Athrabeth.” He writes that in Finrod’s view

the condition of Men before the disaster (or as we might say, of unfallen Man) cannot have been the same as that of the Elves. That is, their ‘immortality’ cannot have been the longevity within Arda of the Elves; otherwise they would have been simply Elves, and their separate introduction later into the Drama by Eru would have no function. (MR 333)

Flieger must therefore be right in at least the first part of her assertion; namely, that while both are intended for the healing of Arda, Elves and Men function to effect this healing in different ways. As seen earlier, however, Flieger’s solution of rigidly determined Elves is problematic. Perhaps the greatest difficulty with this idea is that it would reduce the Elves to passive participants in the healing of Arda. This would effectively put them on par with the rest of Ilúvatar’s inanimate creation in terms of their ability to contribute to the healing; without any ability for them to make choices about their participation, there would be little difference between them and, say, a sword which a valiant man might use to conquer evil. Such an interpretation would be intolerable and certainly seems to run contrary to the vast majority of Tolkien’s writings.

In Fornet-Ponse’s view, though, the Elves are free-willed and active, beings whose free choices propel the restoration of the world. He writes:

Thus, it is possible to combine Flieger’s interesting suggestion [of “twofold” purpose] . . . with the freedom of both children since the task of the Elves may be to work for completion by producing beauty within Arda (so to speak: performing

the Music) and not leaving it while the task of Men is the completion of the Music. (Fornet-Ponse 82)

As regards the completion of this first Music, Fornet-Ponse seems to suggest a couple options for how Tolkien intended the role of Man to play out. The first is that Man would add to and complete the themes of history that the Ainur have already played in the Music before time began. If, as Finrod suggests, this Music ended before the fulfillment of Arda, then Men may indeed finish the Music from the point where the Ainur left off. The extent to which the Music reaches, however, is not quite clear, and so speculation that Man might add new notes of his own to the end of this preexisting theme remains uncertain.

The second option Fornet-Ponse considers is that the Music may indeed extend to the end of Arda; in this case Man's role would be to work out the final portion of the Music, which would fall to them. Finally, in either scenario, Men would afterwards participate in the Second Music, subcreating with the Ainur a new world. In the current Arda meanwhile, the Elves would also engage in working out the Music by "producing beauty." Thus, Fornet-Ponse roots the difference between these two races not in their capacity for free-willed action, but rather in the separate works they have been assigned to bring about the world's restoration and fulfillment.

If Fornet-Ponse is correct, then this key insight about Ilúvatar's purpose provides the best distinction between the magical potentials of Elves and Men: Elves were designed specifically for this earth, to bring "beauty" to it—hence their enchanting power. Meanwhile, Men were always intended to express the fullness of their creativity

in the world to come, which explains the different way their soul-power affects this current world.

Fornet-Ponse's view on Elven purpose is certainly borne out by the text. In *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien writes, "Ilúvatar made [the Elves] more like in nature to the Ainur, though less in might and stature" (S 41). The Valar, as earlier stated, entered Arda to work out the Music, bringing to pass the wonders they had sung before Ilúvatar. Since the Valar and the Elves are of a comparable "nature," considering the Elves' purpose to be an outworking of the Music similar to that of the Valar is not unreasonable. As already mentioned, the Elves *do* have a special power to achieve beauty; also, their "*fëa* was above all things designed to make things in co-operation with its *hröa*" (MR 332)—to perform acts of subcreating beauty is an essential aspect of how Elves were designed to operate.

Beyond even this purpose, however, one finds that Elves were created to prepare Men for their own role in Ilúvatar's overarching plan for the world. They are to introduce "art and science" (MR 405), and, as Tolkien wrote in his letter to Waldman,

to love the beauty of the world, to bring it to full flower with their gifts of delicacy and perfection, to last while it lasts . . . and yet, when the followers [Men] come, to teach them, and make way for them, to 'fade' as the Followers grow and absorb the life from which both proceed. (147)

Tolkien, in his "Athrabeth" commentary, expands upon the nature of this "making way" or transfer of duty from Elves to Men. The healing for which the Children were created, he says, "will come now by or through Men; but the Elves' part in the healing or redemption will be chiefly in the restoration of the *love* of Arda, to which their memory

of the Past and understanding of what might have been will contribute” (MR 343). The purpose of the Elves is to teach Men how they might heal the broken creation. This instruction involves not only imparting the knowledge and abilities of a craftsman, but also the craftsman’s heart—a love for the work of one’s hands and for the materials out of which that work is fashioned, leading one to embrace creativity (and not domination or destruction).

Thus the way is prepared for Men, to whom Fornet-Ponse assigns “the completion of the Music” (82), and also to whom Ilúvatar “gave strange gifts” (S 41). From the “Athrabeth,” one discovers just how “strange” these “gifts” are. It has already been said that one of the gifts is death, and also that this gift is connected with Man’s participation in the Second Music, which may itself be understood as a second gift. It has furthermore been noted that, according to Andreth, Mankind was once immortal; Finrod’s view that this immortality must have differed from Elven immortality has been mentioned as well.

Throughout all of his writings, Tolkien has always intended for Men to pass beyond this world after a (relatively) short span of life. This “fate” was part of Men’s nature from the beginning, given to them by Ilúvatar. However, the postlapsarian mode of this passing occurs by the failure of the body—slain through war, sickness, or age—upon which the spirit departs this world to be with Ilúvatar. As a Christian, Tolkien knew this present arrangement could not be considered as the original, divine intent for Man—to do so would be theologically unorthodox, since the Christian faith asserts selfhood as the unity of body and spirit. Thus, any arrangement wherein the spirit becomes separated from the body must be unnatural, and not a part of Ilúvatar’s original design.

To preserve the goodness of their original created nature, “death” for Men must therefore have necessitated their spirit and body remain unified in passing from this earth to the afterlife. When Finrod hears Andreth’s legend of once-immortal Mankind, such is the conclusion he reaches, adding the significant implication that since the body is composed of matter, a portion of this broken world would “be healed not only of the taint of Melkor, but released even from the limits that were set for it in the ‘Vision of Eru’” (MR 318). As Tolkien says later in his commentary, “‘assumption’ was the natural end of each human life” —a statement made in reference to the Catholic view of Mary, who was taken into heaven without the death of her body.

This healing of matter would then have been at least one means by which Man assisted in the effoliation of the created order. Multiple enrichment, the other purpose of Man, which Tolkien alludes to in “On Fairy-stories,” seems to be somehow connected with how Man raises matter to heavenly perfection. As Tolkien writes in the parting words of his essay: “All tales may come true; and yet, at the last redeemed, they may be as like and unlike the forms that we gave them[,] as Man, finally redeemed, will be like and unlike the fallen that we know” (OFS 79). Such a statement would remain cryptic if not illuminated by other sources; it would moreover be limited in scope, as Tolkien confines his comments here to stories. His short tale “Leaf by Niggle” both clarifies his intent and broadens its application.

In this work, Tolkien addresses the relation between art and the afterlife. The story is of a painter by the name of Niggle, who in his spare time works on painting a marvelous tree on a canvas in his shed. His neighbor, Parish, sees nothing useful in Niggle’s activities. Parish is more concerned with his garden, which can at least provide

him food. In the course of the tale, both men die and pass through a kind of purgatory before reaching heaven. When Niggle finally does enter Paradise, he encounters his very own tree—now real, and more complete than ever he had skill to produce. All the intricate details are “as he had imagined them rather than as he had made them” (110). As for the surrounding area, “nothing was wrong” with it, yet it still needed to be brought to completion (111). Together, Niggle and Parish begin to develop this space to its fullest potential. In the end, the area has become “Niggle’s Picture” —or rather all that Niggle had imagined his picture might become—and is becoming “Parish’s Garden” (114).

This story is just another version of Tolkien’s statement that “all tales may come true.” And just as Tolkien’s definition of Enchantment was examined earlier to demonstrate that it applies to all art forms and not just story-telling, this redemption of “all tales” in the afterlife should not be understood as limited to the redemption of tales alone. Niggle is a painter, in which function he represents all high arts. Parish, moreover, is a mere gardener—his inclusion extends Tolkien’s address to all of craftsmanship.

These two characters are, in other words, sub-creators of Heaven, a designation that reflects Tolkien’s intention for the Mankind of Middle-earth to participate in the Second Music of the Ainur. The significance of this view lies not only in the greatness of the assumed future activity, but also in that it assumes that the imagination and work of Men *now* will impact their experiences *then*. In this way, much as matter is taken up and perfected by unfallen Men in their passing, so also their work on earth will be carried into the world to come, where it can finally be made complete. One may even say that, with every creative thought and activity undertaken by Men in this life, they pen a note to that Second Music which they will sing with the Ainur at the end of time.

Writing of this event, Tolkien states: “Then the themes of Ilúvatar shall be played aright, and take Being in the moment of their utterance . . . and Ilúvatar shall give to their thoughts the secret fire, being well pleased” (S 16). This statement is remarkably similar to how Tolkien describes Elven Enchantment in his Waldman letter: “Their ‘magic’ is Art, delivered from many of its human limitations: more effortless, more quick, more complete (product, and vision in unflawed correspondence)” (*Letters* 146). Or, as he writes in his draft material to “On Fairy-stories,” a creative power that is “unbroken by the gap between vision and making” (222). In these instances, as well as in his discussion of the Second Music, one finds the same idea of the creative imagination as being translated directly, swiftly, and perfectly into the created work. The similarity suggests that, while the Elves have been gifted with Enchantment in this world, Men will possess like abilities in the life to come.

The Gift of “Being”

When one discusses the power to create—whether in connection to the Ainur’s role in fashioning the world, the Elves’ current role of Enchantment, or Man’s future role in the afterlife, there is a possibility of confusion about how the creative process occurs. In the case of both Musics, one finds that the performers cannot bring what they have sung into Being on their own, even though their Music is supposed to be an act of sub-creation (Hart 52). In both examples, Ilúvatar must “give to their thoughts the secret fire” (S 16) or “send forth into the Void the Flame Imperishable” (S 20). Dickerson has already pointed out that, by evidence of Aulë and the Dwarves, none of Ilúvatar’s progeny are able to “create beings having their own free will” (HJ 117)—in other words, beings kindled by the Flame. This would be an expected limitation on their creative powers.

However, one may further consider the example of Morgoth, who desires the Flame for himself because he wishes “to bring into being things of his own” (S 16). These specific desires of Morgoth differ from those of Aulë, for here Morgoth desires to make “things” whereas Aulë attempted to create free-willed *beings*. The statement about Morgoth, then, is more general; in accordance with what has already been said about the Music, it suggests that the power of kindled creatures is not sufficient to produce even inanimate creations without direct activity by the Flame itself. This would seem to contradict the notion that the kindling within the Ainur and the Elves confers physical power to sub-create new beauty, instead restricting their creative abilities to the mind while necessitating they wait upon the Flame to actualize their imaginings. And yet, the Valar and Elves are repeatedly depicted as exercising creative power over matter.

In answer to this difficulty, one must remember that, by the time that the Ainur begin to work in Arda and the Elves appear on the scene, Ilúvatar has already brought the raw material of the universe into being, from which subcreated beauty is then formed. Hence, one must distinguish between creative *development* and creation *ex nihilo*. Only Ilúvatar can perform the latter. This is especially evident in the aforementioned creation of souls, for these are not made from the stuff of the universe, but rather “come direct from Eru.” To illustrate the difference between these two types of creative activity, some of Tolkien’s unpublished material, quoted by Flieger in her essay on the Music, will prove helpful:

[O]ne of the Eldar would have said that for all Elves and Men the shape, condition, and therefore the past and future physical development and destiny of this ‘earth’ was determined and beyond their power to change, indeed beyond the

power even of the Valar, to alter in any large and permanent way. ([*Marginal note:*] They distinguished between “change” and redirection. Thus any ‘rational [?will-user] could in a small way move, re-direct, stop, or destroy objects in the world; but he could not “change” into *something else*. They did *not* confuse analysis with change, e.g. water/steam, oxygen hydrogen.) The Downfall of Númenor was ‘a miracle’ as we might say, or as they *a direct action* of Eru . . . (MT [2009] 158)¹⁷

The creation of the universe would thus be “*a direct action* of Eru” and any modification of it by his creatures would be an act of “analysis,” by which Tolkien means “the separation of the whole into its component parts” (Merriam-Webster).

This “analysis” is the means by which Enchantment operates. As noted earlier, Tolkien likened the linguistic potential for “combining nouns and redistributing adjectives” (OFS 64) to “an enchanter’s power” (41). To thus “take green from grass, blue from heaven, red from blood” (41) is to practice “analysis.” Recombining these elements in new and artistic ways is how Tolkien defines *sub-creation* (OFS 42, 64). Again, in the context of crafting stories, Tolkien describes sub-creation as a process which takes the elements of the “Primary World” and orders them in new “rearrangements” that still cohere with each other to produce “the inner consistency of

¹⁷ This quotation comes from the 2009 edition of Flieger’s essay. In the 2012 edition, Flieger excises Tolkien’s reference to “analysis” —presumably for brevity’s sake (MT [2012] 21). In both sources, the difficulty in readability stems from Flieger’s reproduction of Tolkien’s unpublished notes, which are themselves understandably rough and sometimes contain illegible handwriting. The bracketed editing is Flieger’s.

reality” —the feeling that the imaginary world is not forced, but rather makes sense (60). It may be hard to see how the qualification of “the inner consistency of reality” may apply to other, non-story forms of sub-creative art, but in truth it is not quite so difficult. For a story, arranging the material of the Primary World must result in this “inner consistency” because, for a story, such is what is necessary to achieve beauty. Accordingly, other art forms will have different requirements, though all will still participate in the same analysis and creative recombination of material from the Primary World.

A Conjunctive Sub-creation

Another, less visible consideration must be explored when examining how Enchantment and sub-creation are given “Being” by the Flame Imperishable, for to limit Ilúvatar’s work to merely providing the raw materials for creation would cast Tolkien’s cosmology as overly deistic. As evidenced by the “Athrabeth,” Ilúvatar did not just “wind up the world and walk away” as popular depictions of deism claim. Instead, Finrod declares that “Eru will surely not suffer Melkor to turn the world to his own will and triumph in the end.” Moreover, he says that Ilúvatar “is already in [Arda], as well as outside” (MR 322). In his commentary, Tolkien notes that Ilúvatar resides within Arda as the Flame Imperishable, which he sent into the universe in the beginning. This action, Tolkien says, “refers . . . to the mystery of ‘authorship,’ by which the author, while remaining ‘outside’ and independent of his work, also ‘indwells’ in it . . . as the source and guarantee of its being” (MR 345).

Given the presence of the Flame and Ilúvatar’s recognized commitment to his world, one may wonder if the Flame also actively works *through* creation to accomplish

the purposes of Ilúvatar in addition to upholding its existence. Actually, this idea should be *expected*: Since the Flame is equated with authorship, one should anticipate that it would act to guide the story of the world to the author's desired completion. After all, that is what authors do. As to the possible implications of this idea, an Elf may, for example, work out a small portion of the Music (i.e., the story) by crafting beauty with the power of his kindled soul; the Flame will work in conjunction with him in this endeavor, and the two will bring that beauty to pass.

By such activity, Ilúvatar would achieve one of the goals of what Tolkien calls the "creative desire"; namely, to produce "shared enrichment, partners in making and delight" (OFS 64). Hart seems to suggest such a process in his discussion of the "creative contribution" of the Ainur, which he says depends "equally upon [Ilúvatar's] continuing presence and action in, with, and under theirs" (52). And he certainly seems to be moving along a similar track when he describes "[a]rtistic making" as the act of "desiring nothing more than . . . the fulfillment of possibilities latent within [the world]" (52). While Tolkien never explicitly examined this idea in any official discourse, there are hints of such divine activity throughout his works.

One such example comes from the Waldman letter, where Tolkien writes that "the great policies of world history, 'the wheels of the world,' are often turned . . . by the seemingly unknown and weak—owing to the secret life in creation, and . . . the intrusions of the Children of God into the Drama" (*Letters* 149). The role of the Children in the Healing of Arda has already been discussed, but what this "secret life" is, he does not here explain. Elsewhere, he also speaks of how "the foundations of this world are good, and it turns by nature to good, healing itself from within by the power that was set there

in its making” —though it is possible that this passage refers to power set within the world via the sub-creative acts of the Valar, and not to the Flame Imperishable (MR 379). Nevertheless, it *does* demonstrate that Tolkien contemplated some kind of power that would reside in nature itself, and not just in the souls of individuals.

In his draft material for “On Fairy-stories,” one finds a significant number of musings about a similar latency within God’s created order. Milburn, for example, discusses how Tolkien originally intended to derive the magic¹⁸ of Faërie when he was first composing his seminal essay:

“In the Middle Ages,” writes Tolkien, “natural magic excluded the invocation or use of ‘spirits,’¹⁹ but included operations whose efficacy depended on occult power . . . occult because it depended on the use or tapping of the underlying powers of nature” (OFS 262). Such powers “must of course theologically considered derive ultimately from God,” but they “are inherent in the world as created, external to God” (268). It is here that Tolkien defines Faery as “the occult power in nature behind the usable and tangible appearances of things . . .”

(Milburn 56)

In positing the existence of “underlying powers of nature” that are “external to God,” Tolkien is still far from devising a system wherein these “underlying powers” actually refer to the indwelling of God himself. As evidenced by his statement, he is instead thinking through the relations between faeries, magic, and creativity, in which he

¹⁸ Milburn’s essay leaves Magic largely undifferentiated from Enchantment. Therefore, the lowercase rendering of “magic” can be interpreted in Milburn as either based upon the context.

¹⁹ Compare Tolkien’s discussion of necromancy in *Morgoth’s Ring* (223-5).

understandably takes into account medieval notions of the occult. However, in positing the occult as his source of magic, Tolkien begins to tread on the “theological thin ice” (CI 103) that he has traversed with other ideas as a sub-creator himself. Nonetheless, as in these other instances, he takes his moral responsibility seriously. Hart, speaking generally about Tolkien’s artistic disposition, notes that “there certainly *were* things that mattered to him . . . and applied a brake to his sense of imaginative license”: things, in other words, that dealt with “the basic nature of reality as he believed it to be” (43).

Accordingly, Milburn writes that this particular idea of the occult “seems to have troubled [Tolkien] when he began to consider it as a real possibility” (57). He then documents three prayers that Tolkien wrote into this draft-essay which “assert the preeminence of God,” and he follows with a demonstration of how Tolkien ultimately abandoned his device of occult power in favor of an explanation akin to Coleridge’s idea of the Imagination (58).

However, just because Tolkien may have “cleansed it of its ‘occult aspect’” (58), does not mean he necessarily abandoned the concept. When it came to weighing his ideas as a sub-creator against theological orthodoxy, Tolkien often seems to have tried to preserve both—rendering them compatible instead of discarding one or the other.²⁰ In this instance, Tolkien may have employed the Flame to rectify the opposition. He had been working with the idea of the occult in his essay, describing a magical energy that supposedly underlies all of nature. One may read the same designation, slightly modified, into Tolkien’s discussion of the Flame as “the mystery of ‘authorship.’” First, like the

²⁰ Such as in his thoughts on Elvish reincarnation (see Flieger, *CI passim*) or Morgoth’s corruption of the orcs (see Bergen *passim*).

“occult,” the Flame indwells the created world. It is also in some sense “external to God” —though in a unique mode. Tolkien writes that the Flame is “in some sense distinct from or within [Ilúvatar],” though, again, it is Ilúvatar’s means of indwelling his creation (MR 345). This differs from the “occult,” which is “external to God” in the sense that it is *not* God. Its powers are no more divine than are the energies of the Sun. The Flame, meanwhile, seems to be described *as* God; yet it is “distinct from or within” God. Such a statement can be identified as nothing less than a reference to the Holy Trinity of Christian faith, where the divine is said paradoxically to be one God who is three persons. God the Father is generally comprehended as transcendent, much as Ilúvatar remains “outside” of his creation. Meanwhile, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit both fulfill very immanent roles. The Son actually appears in Tolkien’s “Athrabeth” as well: Tolkien speaks of Finrod reaching “an imaginative guess or vision that Eru would come incarnated in human form” (MR 335).

For present concerns though, of special interest is the divine person of the Flame. Famously, Clyde Kilby has claimed that Tolkien himself identified this Flame with the Holy Spirit in one of their conversations (59). Evidence has borne him out, even though his statement came long before the publication of the “Athrabeth” and its accompanying commentary. By process of elimination, one may see that this Flame which is “distinct from or within” God must indeed be the Holy Spirit. Again, two of the Flames’ characteristics seem to echo Tolkien’s early evocation of the “occult.” Powers that were “underlying” in nature become instead a divine indwelling of nature; powers that were “external to God” are translated into the “complexity” (MR 335) of the Godhead.

These are not the only observations to support a connection between the Flame and Tolkien's earlier musings on magic. In some parts of his draft material, Tolkien seems to attribute his theory of occult power in the world to the presence of creatures (fairies) who would inhabit some portion of nature. With this form of the idea, occult power would in some sense be a soul-magic, proceeding as it would from the spirits of individual beings scattered throughout the created order; the example he provides is of a tree-fairy (or a dryad) . . . who aided as 'agent' in the making effective of the divine Tree-idea or some part of it, or of even of some one particular example: some tree. He is therefore now bound by use and love to Trees (or a tree), immortal while the world (and trees) last – never to escape, until the End. (255).

Quoting this passage, Milburn comments that "Such fairies are rather like the Valar" (57). Indeed, in Tolkien's works, the Valar are the most recognizable of Ilúvatar's offspring as "agents" of creation, and, like these fairies, they are "bounded in the World, to be within it for ever, until it is complete, so that they are its life and it is theirs" (S 20).

Nevertheless, Tolkien's draft material also seems to indicate some kind of power in creation that is external to these fairies themselves. He writes: "Faierie . . . has no exact or modern equivalent. Magic is often used but that is tainted . . . But in and by faierie fairies live. They do not exploit it. They have their being in it, and all their acts are 'fay'" (254). Elsewhere, in a passage already partially quoted via Milburn, Tolkien says further: "In essence faierie is the occult power in nature behind the usable and tangible

appearances of things which [the magician]²¹ may tend or pretend to tap, but in which and by which fairies have their being” (264). In these ideas, one finds that the magic of fairies is derived externally from them; the magic comes from *faerie*, a place wherein the fairies reside. Yet in a sense, this magic is also part of the fairies’ internal soul-power, for “by” the magic of *faerie* they also “have their being.” Tolkien seems to have envisioned a process whereby the two magic sources work in conjunction, pursuing (as Milburn demonstrates) creative activity: The fairies possess “the power to achieve beauty” (OFS 269) by “effortless production” (OFS 222-3; Milburn 61) —descriptions of efficacious artistry that closely align with Tolkien’s vision for the Elves of Middle-earth, as seen earlier in the Waldman letter. Quite obviously, since these acts are accomplished by created beings, they are acts of sub-creation, though they have not yet been tied to Tolkien’s theory of “analysis.”

Although Milburn has said that Tolkien cleansed his ideas of their “occult aspect” by adopting Coleridge’s philosophy on the powers of the Imagination, much remains to be said about Tolkien’s views on magic, things that Milburn may have noted but not explored. Only in passing does he mention the similarities between the Valar and fairies as “agents” in God’s creation. That Tolkien, between the Waldman letter and his draft material, describes fairy and Elven magic in the same terms of efficacious artistry is not mentioned at all. These are both examples of how Tolkien adapted his original ideas about magic and carried them over into his development of Middle-earth, still retaining

²¹ The word Tolkien intended here is missing; however, when compared with other versions of this statement that he makes throughout this material, he most certainly intended to include “the magician” as his contrast to fairies.

the basic principles of these ideas in the process. One might therefore expect some form of his original thoughts on sub-creation to appear in Middle-earth as well, where fairies use both their inner magic and the occult power of *faerie* to produce beauty. Indeed, this conjunctive, sub-creative process aligns quite closely with the aforementioned role posited for the Flame; one also may recall that the Flame is what gives the creative soul its existence, much as fairies derive their own being from *faerie* itself. If one may then draw this conclusion that the Flame is Tolkien's later, theologically refined development of his earlier posited "occult power," one must also accord that the Flame is active in Middle-earth beyond just providing the sustaining power for the universe.

Obviously, the activity of the Flame may take many forms. In the real world, for example, Christians would credit the Holy Spirit with influencing the hearts of men—and the same is probably true of Middle-earth. In the current context, however, of most interest is how the Flame participates in the creative process *externally* to the craftsman's own inner power. Again, another portion of Tolkien's draft material may be helpful in clarifying this question. He writes:

What is this *faerie*? It reposes (for us now) in a view that the normal world, tangible visible audible, is only an appearance. Behind it is a reservoir of power which is manifested in these forms. If we can drive a well down to this reservoir we shall tap a power that can not only change the visible forms of things already existent, but spout up with a boundless wealth of forms of things never before known – potential but unrealized. (270)

Again, Tolkien's depiction of this power has not yet reached the stage where he will replace it with the indwelling presence of Ilúvatar, else he would not speak so cavalierly

about “[driving] a well down to” it. However, this passage does demonstrate that Tolkien accorded this “reservoir” controlling power in how one experiences the “forms” of everything in the created order. It also suggests that within this “reservoir” resides “potential” for future creations of beauty. In a different, less pagan manner, these same ideas seem to reappear in the workings of Eä.

The *Telos* of Enchantment

In “The Music and the Task,” as already mentioned, Flieger discourses on the purposes for which Ilúvatar created Elves and Men. Using an idea that can be traced back to Aristotle, she considers these races in terms of their “teleological end” (14), discusses their “teleology” in terms of “purpose” and “fulfillment” (14), and recognizes that Tolkien’s grand narrative is progressing toward a final “telos” (36). Or, as she also says, Middle-earth moves towards an “intended but unforeseen apotheosis,” or a progression “from what it is to what it has the potential to be” (37). This (as is evident by its repeated use above) is known as the concept of *telos*, which refers to the “purpose, goal, or final end” of something, a quality Aristotle believed applies to all things in existence. An acorn is one example of this idea; inherent in its seed is the *telos* of becoming an oak tree (Clayton). Christian thought would agree with this concept, arguing that God has designed all parts of his creation with a certain *telos* as part of their being, according to which they are intended to act or develop.

One sees this idea especially throughout the writings of Tolkien collected by his son in *Morgoth’s Ring*. In one of these, entitled “Aman,” he addresses specifically the relation of Elves, men, animals, and plants to existence in the realm of the Valar. Here, Tolkien is concerned primarily with the different *natures* of these various groups, which

one might otherwise refer to as their *teloi*. Of the animals and plants, he writes that “each kind had, as on Earth, its own nature and natural speed of growth,” and later states that in this realm “no creatures suffered any sickness or disorder of their natures” (426). Instead, “all things [came] at last to fullness of form and virtue” (427). This final statement may be significant, since for Aristotle, “form” is “The way that [matter] is put together so that the whole it constitutes can perform its characteristic functions” (Cohen). When an object achieves its *telos*, as Aristotle wrote, “then it is in its form” (qtd. in Cohen). Tolkien’s description of this achievement as “fullness of form” only serves to underscore the sense of an inherent goal towards which this development has progressed until completion.

This text likewise addresses certain aspects of specifically Elven nature or *telos*—such as their unique relation to time (425-6)—and also mentions them reaching their “full maturity” (427), which is just another reference to the “fullness of form” already discussed. Little else needs to be said here on the nature of Elves and Men, save that Tolkien in this text equates their nature to the “‘doom’ of Eru,” which even the Valar “*could not alter*” (427). This “doom,” as another word for “fate,” is the same as has already been explored in Ilúvatar’s purposes for Elves and Men. Tolkien proceeds to show that, by these respective natures, Elves may reside in the realm of the Valar and not be harmed by the longevity that is bestowed to all creatures in that realm; however, men cannot, since their fate is to pass “beyond the world” (MR 427-30; S 41).

Other texts as well address this idea that all creatures possess an inherent nature special to their own kind, though perhaps most of Tolkien’s thoughts on the matter come concerning the Elves. These examples are long and intricate in their examinations, but considering them at length to draw out Tolkien’s concentration on *telos* will not be

necessary. That Tolkien spends an extraordinary amount of time attempting to clarify the implications of Elven nature provides ample evidence that the subject figured importantly in his mind. These instances of his thought include the texts: “Laws and Customs Among the Eldar” (MR 207-33), “Of Finwë and Míriel” (MR 205-7, 233-71), and the “Athrabeth” (MR 303-66).

With the discussion that Flieger devotes to *telos*, one may wonder if the purpose for which the created order was designed might relate in any way to the Music that Flieger also examines, especially when one considers that the creation is an outworking of the Music. This would be an accurate insight, but one that must also be clarified. Three different types of this *telos* may actually be identified in Tolkien’s cosmology. They are: Arda Unmarred, Arda Marred, and Arda Healed. The first of these has never existed in actuality; it refers to what Arda would have been and how it would have operated had Morgoth not sown discord in the original Music (MR 405).

In the case of the Finwë and Míriel story, considerations of Arda Unmarred play a large role in the great debate in the council of the Valar, where a decision must be reached to decide whether Finwë should be permitted to remarry after the death of Míriel, his wife. For Manwë, lord of the Valar, states that “Healing must retain ever the thought of Arda Unmarred,” and he wishes that Finwë would have chosen for his part to walk act according to this *telos* (MR 240).²² Ultimately, however, the council chooses to give full weight to the reality of Arda Marred, and to shape their judgment accordingly: In the original design, death would not have occurred, thus it would have been “unnatural” for

²² Though again, “*telos*” as a term is never mentioned, either in this instance or in any other of Tolkien’s fiction.

Elves to take a second spouse. Yet because the marring of Arda *did* bring the possibility of death, the nature of the Elves does not prohibit remarriage, though the Valar might counsel against it. Thus, one finds here two different forms of *telos* at work simultaneously.

A third form of *telos* is also present in Arda, one that looks “beyond the world.” For even if the first Music had not been marred by Morgoth, Tolkien suggests that it still would have been incomplete, necessitating the Second Music to bring ultimate fulfillment. Of that time, he writes: “Then the themes of Ilúvatar shall be played aright . . . for all shall then understand fully his intent in their part” (S 16). The implication is that in the first Music, the performers did not yet “understand fully.” This accords with Flieger’s observation that Tolkien’s creation is moving towards a future “apotheosis” — one not expressed in the first Music, for it is marred; and one not even identical to the hypothetical, unmarred Music, for, as Finrod says, “Arda Healed shall not be Arda Unmarred, but a third thing and a greater” (MR 318). As argued earlier, the creative activity of Man is already shaping this future world. Thus, one must also agree that this future *telos* is present in the current state of things as well.

Ultimately, though, all three forms of this *telos* must be said to reside in the mind of Ilúvatar. This may be seen in how the criteria for the Music’s final fulfillment is “his intent.” He is also depicted as teaching the Ainur the original theme which they would play, though they were given the opportunity of “adorning” it, “each with his own thoughts and devices” (S 15). Moreover, as Eru overcomes the discord thrust into the Music, he declares to Morgoth that “no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me” — Ilúvatar has so wrought his Music that Morgoth’s chords, meant to cause

disharmony, are instead woven into the larger theme to produce even greater beauty (S 17).

Ilúvatar, then, is the ultimate source of all three Musics—the intended Music (yet never realized), the first Music (marred by Morgoth), and the Second Music (which will fulfill all). As discussed earlier, Ilúvatar indwells his creation through the Flame, which is “the mystery of ‘authorship.’” This indwelling provides a plausible vehicle whereby each of these forms of *telos* are conferred upon the many different elements of creation, as the author himself tells the story he has written. Such an overarching *telos*, then, functions as a guide whereby Ilúvatar’s creatures work out his Music.

The *Dunamis* of Enchantment

Flieger has argued that one needs some kind of mechanism for change by which the world is moved towards its *telos* or apotheosis—so not only is it necessary that all things have an ultimate goal or purpose, there must also be some power by which that purpose is achieved. It has already been suggested that *telos* provides the guidance whereby the Children work through Enchantment or creativity to achieve the world’s apotheosis. Yet it seems as if the Flame may also be active in this aspect of sub-creation as well—in addition to its role as guide and originator of the materials used to fashion new beauty.

The suggestion that the Flame so participates comes from the Waldman letter, where Tolkien writes of how “the wheels of the world” are “turned” by “the secret life in creation, and . . . the intrusions of the Children of God into the Drama” (*Letters* 149). (After the long examination of conjunctive sub-creation, one may now see the significance of this pairing.) Here Tolkien seems to mean that there is something inherent

in nature that propels the progression of history. This sense appears in other writings as well, and leads to another one of Tolkien's major themes: the idea of *change*.

One reference to this idea comes with the late revisions that Tolkien was considering for his creation myth, where he toyed with the relation between the Valar's work and the change which is inevitable in the Earth. He writes: "Now one of the objects of the Trees (as later of the Jewels) was the healing of the hurts of Melkor, but this could easily have a *selfish* aspect: the staying of history – not going on with the Tale. This effect it had on the Valar" (MR 377).²³ In a different context, Tolkien reiterates the change-concept in one of his footnotes: "For it is indeed of the nature of Eä and the Great History that naught may stay unchanged in time, and things which do so, or appear to do so, or endeavor to remain so, become a weariness, and are loved no longer (or are at best unheeded)" (MR 382).

This latter quote suggests there is something in the nature of things that moves them onward—arguably, the "secret life in creation." Any attempt to halt change is to work against nature, and is therefore detrimental. As has been seen, resistance to change was the same shortcoming of the Elven rings, which were intended for "the prevention or slowing of *decay* (i.e., 'change' viewed as a regrettable thing)" (*Letters* 152). Like

²³ This idea of a deficiency in the Valar was not Tolkien's final word on the matter. Elsewhere, he advances a different notion, writing: "This appearance of selfish *fainéance* in the Valar in the mythology is . . . I think only an 'appearance.'" He proceeds to suggest that the perspective of fault was introduced somewhere in the process of composing these myths, which are actually tales by Men that have been derived from the Elves; the myths are thus "two stages removed from a true record" (401). However, one need not accept the deficient-Valar version of the story as final to extract the principle contained within.

Tolkien's thoughts on the Valar above, the Elves were attempting to exercise a minor "staying of history," impeding the progress of things towards their ultimate *telos*, and thus working against the inherent nature of what they sought to preserve. This is why Tolkien writes of this venture that "the Elves came their nearest to falling to 'magic' and machinery" (*Letters* 152). These examples seem to show that change is inevitable, and often will occur even independent of the actions of Elves or Men; something must therefore be driving this change aside from merely "the intrusions of the Children of God into the Drama."

This progression towards apotheosis may be compared to another of Aristotle's philosophical ideas, that of *dunamis*. According to Cohen,

Aristotle distinguishes between two different senses of the term *dunamis*. In the strictest sense, a *dunamis* is the *power* that a thing has to produce a change . . . So, for example, the housebuilder's craft is a power whose exercise is the process of housebuilding. But there is a second sense of *dunamis* . . . that might be better translated as 'potentiality' . . . A *dunamis* in this sense is not a thing's power to produce a change but rather its capacity to be in a different and more completed state.

This "more completed state" is also associated with *telos*, as Cohen later states: "Things that come to be move toward an end (*telos*)—the boy becomes a man, the acorn becomes an oak—and 'the actuality is the end [*telos*], and it is for the sake of this that the potentiality [*dunamis*] is acquired . . .'" The idea of conjunctive sub-creativity may thus be understood in terms of *dunamis*: Kindled souls, like the housebuilder referenced above, posses a "*power* . . . to produce a change," while simultaneously, the Flame

Imperishable represents a *dunamis* latent within the created order, providing the “potentiality” for things to progress towards their ultimate *telos*. Again, this progression towards apotheosis is necessary. As Tolkien writes, “Mere *change* as such is not represented as ‘evil’: it is the unfolding of the story and to refuse this is of course against the design of God” (*Letters* 236).

Finally, this idea of two active powers that work conjunctively for “the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation” also appears in Tolkien’s completed version of “On Fairy-stories,” as well as in “Leaf by Niggle.” In the former, one finds the already quoted passage that speculates: “All tales may come true” —a statement which has been shown to apply to all craftsmanship, not only tales. However, before they may “come true,” they must first be “redeemed.” This event will also alter them: “they may be as like and unlike the forms we give them” after their redemption occurs (OFS 79). Tolkien is here describing a two-fold process: Man creates stories; God “redeems” them or causes them to come into their fullest form.

This description fits well with the claim that Tolkien’s Flame Imperishable was meant to replace the “occult power in nature” that he had earlier considered. In Middle-earth, as has been said, the Flame Imperishable is meant to represent God, whose power in “On Fairy-stories” is seen to alter the forms of things to bring them to completion. Similarly, Tolkien describes his “occult power” in transformative terms; it can “change the visible forms” of things. Tolkien also seems to speak with longing when he describes “driv[ing] a well down to this reservoir” of power within nature to reach “a boundless wealth of forms of things never before known” (OFS 270). His desire for this reservoir of beauty seems to have been fulfilled in his thoughts about Heaven, where such

transformative work could be recognized as the prerogative of God, thus avoiding the fear of heresy.

Of course, any discussion of Tolkien's thoughts on Heaven should certainly include "Leaf by Niggle." As with "On Fairy-stories," conjunctive subcreation may also be seen in this story through the lens of God's involvement in the artistic endeavor: Niggle's tree is both "like and unlike" that which he had imagined on earth, for while everything appeared perfectly as he had once imagined, still more details adorned the real tree than he had been able to envision in his life. Segura argues that the tree's completion reflects the "redemption" that Tolkien discusses in "On Fairy-stories." It is a "gift," a "grace" which Niggle has been given, the fulfillment of a task he could not fulfill on his own (Segura 329-32).

Though he does not draw any connections to Middle-earth, Segura recognizes there are two creative powers at work in the story: Niggle paints, God completes. As he says, "grace counts on human co-operation to bear fruit" (329). Segura's exploration of "Leaf by Niggle" demonstrates that the active presence of God is vital for artistic creativity, so much so that he argues, "we must expand the notion of God not 'only' as Creator, but more precisely as *the* Sub-creator" (318). Or, to use terms discussed earlier, one might say that not only does God bring forth the raw materials of Creation, he is also constantly active in their development towards apotheosis. Again, this divine presence not only provides the goal towards which things progress, but also propels them along their journey.

The Growth of Enchantment

Not only are the means (*dunamis*) and the ultimate goal (*telos*) of this change important, but also the process by which that change takes place is integral to Tolkien's conception of Enchantment. Some small mention has already been made of the link between Coleridge and Tolkien in terms of their views on the creative imagination. Of the specific term for this coined by Tolkien, Milburn writes, "'this sub-creative art . . . ' can be none other than Coleridge's secondary imagination, which 'dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create' (60). Moreover, Milburn connects the magical powers of Tolkien's fairies to Coleridge's "synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination" (Coleridge 226; Milburn 62). In using this creative power, Coleridge states: "The poet, described in *ideal* perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity" (226). One will recall that Tolkien likewise focused on the soul as the center of creativity, quite literally according to "magical power" in the case of his Elves.

The connection between these two authors is important because Coleridge held to an organic theory of creativity. As Richter states:

The broad principle to which Coleridge appeals is that of *organic form* . . . he contrasts the merely mechanical form that it is possible to impose upon materials with the organic form that grows out of the nature of the materials themselves.

. . . If organic form is implicit in his definition of 'poem,' it is even more obvious that the distinction between organic and mechanical form is essentially that between imagination and fancy. Organicism is an essential characteristic of

the workings of the secondary imagination in recreating an idealized, unified, and coherent fictive universe. (221)

If, as Richter argues, organicism is the “essential characteristic” of Coleridge’s views on the creative imagination, then one might expect organicism to likewise figure into Tolkien’s own views on sub-creativity, given the connection between the imagination and the sub-creative already established by Milburn.

To explore this hypothesis, one might first examine Richter’s distinction between “merely mechanical form” on the one hand, which can be “impose[d]”, and the “organic form” on the other. Immediately, mention of the mechanical suggests comparison to Tolkien’s symbol of the Machine used for domination; in Coleridge’s case, the mechanical form similarly acts to “impose” upon the text. Richter also argues that the mechanical characterizes Coleridge’s definition of “Fancy” which, in contrast to the imagination, cannot creatively integrate ideas into “an idealized, unified, and coherent fictive universe.” Instead, as Richer explains, “Fancy . . . is an inferior activity,” one “describable in purely Lockean terms as the willful conjunction of ideas that are normally distinct (like placing an elephant’s head on the body of a camel)” (220). If such inartistic combinations are taken to be the usual purview of Fancy, then this term by Coleridge may easily be compared to the idea of *dissonance*, which is understandably also a major consideration of Tolkien, as the brokenness in Arda proceeds from discord sown in the Music.

Milburn treats with Coleridge’s idea of Fancy as well, citing Barfield’s interpretation of the term. In this view, Fancy may not be harmful per se, but may still become “debased,” withering creativity. The imagination, which Coleridge describes as

“vital [i.e., living],” is not active under a “debased” fancy, and so any potential, true creativity is made “essentially fixed and dead” (Coleridge 222; Milburn 63). In this scenario, it would seem that the only productions of Fancy would be the horrible dissonances suggested by Richter above.

Such a sterility of former creative powers is explicitly depicted in the character of Morgoth, who could create “naught that had life of its own, nor the semblance thereof . . . since his rebellion in the Ainulindalë before the Beginning” (S 48). As Christopher Tolkien comments, Morgoth “could only corrupt what was already living” (MR 123). This limitation seems to have extended beyond the normal inability of the Valar to make soul-endowed creatures, including instead plant and animal life as well. Through his Fall, his creative abilities became “barren” —he could not even produce biological offspring of his own (MR 405). In effect, he became “fixed and dead,” only able to produce a mockery of sub-creative activity, twisting things already in existence into a dissonance, but never able to achieve independent, unified, artistic creations. Tolkien writes that “even left alone he could only have gone raging on till all was leveled again into formless chaos” (396).

By contrast, the view of Enchantment that has been steadily argued for throughout this discussion coincides nicely with what one would expect if Tolkien meant for beneficent magical abilities to be seen through the lens of organic creativity and development. When one reads that, for Coleridge, the “form” a poem takes (i.e., specific rhyme scheme, meter, and so on) is “organic” when it “grows out of the nature of the materials themselves” (Richter 221), one finds something quite similar to the function of *telos* and *dunamis* in Middle-earth, where the change and development of each thing is

somehow related to what that thing *is* internally. Just as Coleridge's *organic form* does not force its content into written structures that would be unnatural to it, while the "merely mechanical form" does, so also is the difference between Enchantment and Magic, the latter of which operates by what Tolkien calls the "domination and tyrannous re-forming of Creation" (*Letters* 146).

This "tyrannous re-forming" may be likened to the twisted, "debased" form of Fancy discussed above. This is Magic, and, as Hart indicates, it acts as a dark mirror to sub-creative activity (46-7), even "re-forming" the created order as Enchantment does through *analysis* and recombination. The major divergence between these two terms is that Magic is "tyrannous" in performance: It forces its own will upon the object of its power. As the opposite to this practice, Enchantment must therefore be *not-tyrannous*, using its power in a way that accords with the nature of its object; or, as Coleridge might say, the Imagination creates new, unified form according to the nature of its materials. Hart would seem to agree. In contrast to "mere 'magic,'" he writes, "genuine sub-creative art . . . while it may result in secondary realities which are wholly unlike the "Primary World," is nonetheless always faithful to that same world and issues from a love of and respect for it" (49).

This distinction between good and evil uses of the world helps to explain why concern about environmental issues appears so often throughout Tolkien's work. Tolkien is not just concerned about powers that would dominate free willed, rational individuals like Elves and Men (though he probably would consider such domination to be the greatest evil). For Tolkien, nature itself can be dominated in a way that does not align with wholesome development. Curry indicates this point when he references Tolkien's

statement in “On Fairy-stories” that “the story-maker who allows himself to be ‘free with nature’ can be her lover not her slave” (OFS 69). For Curry, this means treating nature as something “other” than oneself (MVE 6), as a “subject” of unique existence in its own right (MVE 8), and not merely as an object to be used towards some other end. And lest one think that Curry, as a modern day pagan and astrologer, has taken Tolkien’s text too far than can bear up under examination, Tolkien himself writes that his Elves were intended to “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 from God in the same degree as themselves – not as material for use or as a power-platform” (*Letters* 236).

Here, one must again briefly return to Coleridge’s statement that “all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead” (222). Milburn, again paraphrasing Barfield, suggests that when the created order is treated as merely an object in this way, “anything that cannot be considered in such terms is denied even to exist” (63). This, Milburn argues, is what Tolkien meant when he wrote about Faery as deliverance from a mindset that focuses only on what may be “known, possessed, controlled” and which therefore views such things as “all that is worth being considered” (*Smith* 144; Milburn 63). Such was the mindset of Morgoth, arguably the prime exemplar of “debased” Fancy, which is characterized by “a vast demiurgic lust for power and achievement of his own will and designs, on a great scale.” He is so consumed with viewing matter as simply an object to further his personal goals that, as Tolkien writes, “It is probable that he was simply unaware of the minor or more delicate productions of Yavanna [one of the Valar]: such as small flowers” (MR 395).

Flowers, of course, contribute little to any aspirations for world domination. By contrast, Tolkien writes in his essay that creative fantasy or sub-creation—what he elsewhere describes as the human counterpart to elvish Enchantment²⁴—actually works to return this sense of *otherness* back to nature: “The gems all turn to flowers or flames, and you will be warned that all you had (or knew) was dangerous and potent . . . free and wild; no more yours than they were you” (OFS 68; Milburn 62-3). Here, the transformation of “gems” is an obvious depiction of the *analysis* and recombination of sub-creative activity. Tolkien pairs this event with the recognition on the part of the artist that nature is a subject in itself; all supposed objects “are no more yours than they were you.” Moreover, he writes that nature is “dangerous and potent,” suggesting a power for change and development all of its own (which one might call *organic*, as natural to itself), where the objects themselves become actors, and “all the locked things fly away like cage-birds” (OFS 68).

Fantasy, Enchantment, sub-creation—these are essentially organic, growing from the natures of their materials. As such, their products actually give a clearer view into the inherent natures of what they have transformed. As Tolkien says, “By the forging of Gram cold iron was revealed; by the making of Pegasus horses were ennobled; in the Trees of the Sun and Moon root and stock, flower and fruit are manifested in glory” (OFS 68). True creative power does not bend the created order to suit its own will; rather, it wills that the created order be fulfilled. In this example, the sword Gram is an organic development of “cold iron,” for Gram does not distort iron’s inherent nature, but rather

²⁴ “To the elvish craft, Enchantment, Fantasy aspires, and when is successful of all forms of human art most nearly approaches” (OFS 64).

“reveals” it in a way hitherto unknown. The same may be said of Pegasus and the Trees of the Sun and Moon. This type of activity represents, as Milburn also notes, “a love and respect for all things, ‘inanimate’ [like Gram] and ‘animate’ [like Pegasus and the Trees],’ an unpossessive love of them as ‘other’” (*Smith* 144; Milburn 62).

At this point, one may return briefly to the question of Sam’s rope. The suggestion was made earlier that its ability to untie itself could possibly stem from some small power woven within it by the Elves. Where this power comes from—whether by elven *fëa* or some other source—was left unexplored. Perhaps indeed the Enchantment of those items crafted by the Elves is lit by some spark of their souls, causing their works to surpass all creative capacities of Man. Tolkien’s focus, however, seems to center on the nature of these crafted objects themselves, rather than on the magical powers that imbue them with their abilities. The sword Gram, for example, is certainly a magical instance of sub-creative art. Yet one would be hard-pressed to describe just how its powers work, and where exactly those powers come from. The focus is rather on how it has been transformed by sub-creativity and “revealed” (OFS 68). Likewise, the parallel structures describing the other two items alongside Gram speak of things being “ennobled” and “manifested in glory” (OFS 68). Again, this is a depiction of movement towards greater fulfillment and higher development, a movement not limited to merely technical progress, but rather including the growth of something wonderful.

One may view Sam’s rope—and most (if not all) objects of elven artistry—in a similar light. To follow the creative process already established, the elven *fëa* would bring to bear its innate power when crafting this gift for Sam, working in conjunction with the power of the Flame. In keeping with the above examination of Gram, one may

furthermore conclude that questions about a source of power for the rope's abilities are now obsolete. Gram is not just any sword with magical powers tacked onto it; rather it is iron "ennobled." The same may be said of Sam's rope: through the elven craft, rope has become "manifested in glory." Its nature has been raised to a new form. Its powers are not an unnatural addition to an ordinary object; rather, they are abilities that flow from the rope's development. This sub-creative development is organic, and as such, any powers that emerge must necessarily be natural to the object itself.

Tolkien's Enchanted Tale

So far, argument has been made that Tolkien's comparisons between Enchantment and stories may also be extended to all forms of art and craftsmanship. Yet through Coleridge, attention may be drawn back to stories in themselves. It was his idea of the imagination that influenced Tolkien's views about art. Moreover, Coleridge was focused specifically on the poet and the poet's corresponding creative activity—with the imagination therefore as it is translated into speech. Tolkien also writes that "Fantasy . . . of all forms of human art most nearly approaches" the power of Enchantment possessed by the Elves (OFS 64). This "Fantasy," of course, is only a specific mode of story. From this statement and other aspects of Tolkien's work, one finds that there is a sense in which extending the term "Enchantment" to apply to all forms of art is not really a broadening of definition at all, but rather a narrowing. All of these modes of sub-creation—be they tale-making, jewel-crafting, painting, weaving, blacksmithing, or any other—are themselves only elements within the tale of history itself. In this sense, every aspect of reality is Story. This was an important idea for Tolkien; in the endnotes to "On Fairy-stories," he writes of how each individual tale is only a "fragment" taken from "the

seamless Web of Story” which is assumed to continue on even after the human author has laid down his pen.

The same discussion reappears in *The Two Towers*, where Sam has been talking about the legends of Middle-earth. Suddenly, realization strikes him:

“Why, to think of it, we’re in the same tale still! It’s still going on. Don’t the great tales never end?”

“No, they never end as tales,” said Frodo, “But the people in them come, and go when their part’s ended.” (TT 697)

Self-conscious recognitions of Story are more than just “a gentle running joke” or “mere playfulness,” as Flieger recognizes in one of her essays (TIB 41-2). Tolkien would later reference this scene with Sam in a letter to his son, Christopher: “For myself, I was probably most moved by Sam’s disquisition on the seamless web of story” (*Letters* 110)—which of course identifies this scene in the same terms used in “On Fairy-stories.” In Tolkien’s cosmology, this “seamless web” is known as “the Great Tale” and is the result of the Flame’s authorship as it indwells Eä. Comments about stories (like Sam’s, for example), may very well be intended as a joke, but yet they also transcend the level of humor to communicate a deep, theological significance that Tolkien felt about the real world and translated into the fictional world of his work.

In an earlier letter to Christopher, he envisions human lives similarly to Sam, as smaller tales that together constitute a larger one. As he says, “in some such way, we shall all doubtless survey our own story when we know it (and a great deal more of the Whole Story).” (*Letters* 107). Such a desire to “survey” the Great Tale of his own world echoes what he describes as one of the “primordial human desires” at the heart of Faërie:

“to survey the depths of space and time” (OFS 34-5). Such knowledge of the Tale is one of the main functions of the Elves in Arda Marred, especially due to their longevity which provides them millennia upon millennia to experience the outworking of the Story, and to remember. This is why Finrod will say of the Elves that “in memory is our great talent” (MR 319). No one perhaps demonstrates this statement so well as Legolas, who reveals that Elves do not sleep as human do, but rather enter their dreams to rest (TT 418-9). As Stoddard writes,

What is he dreaming of? Even human dreams are often memories, in fragmentary form; being consciously entered, Elven dreams must be less fragmentary, and Elves can dwell in them more fully than human beings can, so that whatever memories they hold are closer to a living, present experience. (154)

Even biologically then, Elves were designed for memory. Furthermore, Finrod concludes that this part of Elven nature must indicate in some way what the purpose of their race will be after the ending of Arda. In this text and elsewhere, Tolkien suggests that their fate (or fulfillment) will be in “surveying” the old Arda as a Tale, completed and whole, and that their purpose in the new Arda will be to sing the stories of that old world to Men (MR 319-20, 405).

And of course, in this time Men will be working out the Second Music and bringing Ilúvatar’s new Tale to pass. In the core of their beings, Tolkien has made Story integral to his Elves and Men.

The Spell

With this knowledge, then, one may better understand what Tolkien meant by placing his Elves in Middle-earth “to demonstrate the difference” between Magic and true artistry

(*Letters* 146). They are intended as much more than just a passing note on how the arcane powers of his world function. As Hart points out, Tolkien once wrote of his work that “the whole matter from beginning to end is mainly concerned with the relation of creation and making to sub-creation” (*Letters* 188). According to Hart, this statement reflects “a sustained, self-conscious and deliberate concern with a singular theological and aesthetic question . . . in terms of which his oeuvre as a whole, therefore, might be made sense of” (40). This question of how the activity of creatures relates to the Creator, as a unifying principle to Tolkien’s work, also underlies the idea of a Great Tale with parts that each individual has been assigned to play within it. Indeed, the two ideas are inherently similar, as the essential link between the Tale and sub-creation has been demonstrated already. The Enchantment and sub-creative activity of the Elves, then, as elements of the Great Tale and God’s creation, possess immense significance.

Moreover, Tolkien draws attention to how these masterful sub-creators, workers of power for the formation of beauty, are even sub-creations themselves—Elves are just another invention by Men (OFS 64). Here one encounters what Flieger calls “sub-sub-creation” (TIB 43), though in this context, Tolkien’s aim is higher and deeper than the scholarly conceit Flieger discusses in her essay. The Story consciously contemplated by Tolkien multiplies, reflects, and echoes through all: He himself was created with his own story in the Great Tale of God; all of his deeds become actions in that story. One such deed is to weave the world of his Elves, creatures from whom he says, “we may learn what is the central desire and aspiration of human Fantasy – even if the elves are, all the more in so far as they are, only a product of Fantasy itself” (OFS 64). *In so far as they are*, he writes. The Elves are *story* themselves, fashioned as masters of sub-creation

because they are fashioned out of Man's own desire to create, to produce story within their own history created by God. In turn, the Elves—creating, composing, enchanting, performing the Music—produce story themselves.

If the Great Tale is a “seamless web,” as Tolkien suggests, it must also be a three-dimensional one, stretching from God himself through Tolkien to the hand of Fëanor crafting the Silmarils, as well as all other characters besides. Tolkien's words, perhaps, summarize the connection between Enchantment and the Tale better than anything else. He writes: “Small wonder that *spell* means both a story told, and a formula of power” (OFS 48). For him, both parts of this definition combine to reflect the fantastic abilities of the Elves and other creatures of Middle-earth, forming the core of his vision for his sub-created world.

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Appendix: List of Abbreviations

“The Curious Incident of the Dream at the Barrow”	CI
“Fantasy and Reality”	FR
<i>The Fellowship of the Ring</i>	FOTR
<i>A Hobbit Journey</i>	HJ
<i>From Homer to Harry Potter</i>	HHP
<i>The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien</i>	<i>Letters</i>
“Magic vs. Enchantment”	MVE
<i>Morgoth’s Ring</i>	MR
“The Music and the Task” [2009]	MT [2009]
“The Music and the Task” [2012]	MT [2012]
“On Fairy-Stories”	OFS
<i>The Peoples of Middle-earth</i>	PME
<i>The Return of the King</i>	ROTK
<i>The Silmarillion</i>	S
“Tolkien and the Idea of the Book”	TIB
<i>The Two Towers</i>	TT