Spiritual Formation in Tolkien's Legendarium

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Abstract

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Adam Brent Shaeffer

In this thesis, I demonstrate that a consistent and powerful imagining of spiritual formation shapes Tolkien's legendarium, such that the world of Arda and its inhabitants are deeply marked by both dysformation and euformation, and this is not accidental. Because I am convinced that Tolkien's fiction is "capable of elucidating truth," I have focused on redescribing his world and characters in order to draw Arda's deep formational dynamics to the surface. I show that his legendarium in general and *The Lord of the Rings* in particular are compelling tales of formational imagination. I have not focused on drawing out moral implications for the primary world (though I do suggest the shape some implications might take), but have focused instead on Tolkien's sub-created world and allowed it to encourage our reimagining of formational possibilities. The first part of this thesis examines Arda in light of Tolkien's theory of sub-creation, demonstrating how Arda's marring offers a creative reimagining of sin and evil that shape the way he then imagines the potential for redemption. But Arda is more than just background; it has its own formational story in which the stories of characters moving toward euformation or dysformation make sense. In the second part of this thesis, I examine the formational journeys of Saruman, Gollum, and Frodo, demonstrating that each follows a path that shapes the way he interacts with the world. Where Frodo's euformation makes him more like the Elves, Saruman and Gollum's dysformation makes them like the orcs and wraiths respectively. Through their stories, Tolkien invites us to see Arda and its inhabitants as marred, yet capable of redemption. In attending to these things, I show that Tolkien's work of formational imagination can be read as a distinctive contribution to the theological tradition and deserves a place within its conversations.

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by

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Table of Contents

Abbreviations

Since I refer to Tolkien's primary works throughout this project, I have chosen to use in-line citations with abbreviated titles for ease of reference. With the exception of *On Fairy Stories* (where I cite paragraph numbers) and *Mythopoeia* (for which I cite stanza and verse), all references are to the page numbers of the listed volume.

L	*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).
LOTR	*The Lord of the Rings* (London: HarperCollins, 2004).
LTI	*The Book of Lost Tales, Part One* (London: HarperCollins, 2002).
MR	*Morgoth's Ring* (London: HarperCollins, 2002).
OFS	*On Fairy Stories* (London: HarperCollins, 2008).
S	*The Silmarillion* (London: BCA, 1994).
UT	*Unfinished Tales* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983).

Statement of Copyright

Acknowledgements

I'm sure many of my friends and colleagues would say that they love their supervisory team, but I'm convinced that my team was the best. Thank you, Mike and Frances. Our meetings never failed to encourage and challenge me, and they seldom failed to make me laugh. This process was an even greater joy because I got to do it in your company and with your guidance. I am especially grateful for your ability to see the heart of what I was trying to say and help me bring it to the fore where it belongs.

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But above all, to Renee. This really has been a grand adventure, and I am so thankful that we have been able to go on it together. These past three years have been a rich and sweet time for us as a family, and that is mostly thanks to you. You are, like Sam, the true hero of this story, and I can only say as Frodo did, "Adam wouldn't have got far without Renee." Though I don't know where our adventure goes from here, though I don't know if our story is one of there and back again, I do know that we're on this journey together, and all shall be well. I love you!

To Renee

Most beautiful of all the Children of Ilúvatar

To JJ and Hudson

May you only grow more fairspoken and more jovial and full of merriment . . .

for Chris

Behold! we are not bound forever to the circles of the world,

and beyond them is more than memory. Farewell!

Introduction

In the preface to the first volume of *The History of Middle-earth*, an enormous undertaking by Tolkien's son Christopher to present his father's work in all its complexity and distinctiveness, Christopher Tolkien comments:

> There are explorations to be conducted in this world with perfect right quite irrespective of literary critical considerations; and it is proper to attempt to comprehend its structure in its largest extent, from the myth of its Creation. Every person, every feature of the imagined world that seemed significant to its author is then worthy of attention in its own right . . . Such enquiries are in no way illegitimate in principle; they arise from an acceptance of the imagined world as an object of contemplation or study valid as many other objects of contemplation or study in the all too unimaginary world (*LTI*, 7).

This project proceeds in that very vein. I have endeavored to treat the elements of Tolkien's legendarium (the entirety of his mythopoeic writings, which form the background of *The Lord of the Rings* and encompass it) as significant and worthy of attention in their own right. But since Tolkien's legendarium and his various writings exploring it are so extensive, I have chosen to focus primarily on *The Lord of the Rings*.

In this thesis, I demonstrate that a consistent and powerful imagining of spiritual formation shapes Tolkien's legendarium. Since spiritual formation is something of a buzz-term right now, taking a moment to explain what I mean in using the term will set the stage for what follows. When I refer to spiritual formation, I recognize that "formation" is a rather ambiguous word. It does not necessarily denote growth or positive change, though common parlance often uses it in that positive sense. So, in the discussions that follow I will focus on both the positive and negative possibilities of formation. To do so, I will follow in Tolkien's footsteps and coin my own terms. Just as he referred to *eucatastrophe* and *dyscatastrophe* in his famous essay "On Fairy Stories" to denote the good and the bad catastrophe respectively, I will discuss spiritual formation in terms of *euformation* and *dysformation*, with euformation describing growth in holiness

and into the fullness of uniquely embodied creaturehood and dysformation pointing to the dissolution and degradation of moral identity.[1] These terms permeate the discussion that follows and their precise meanings will become clearer as this project progresses.

Tolkien's imagined world of Arda, its characters, and their stories have a profoundly formational nature – characterized by both dysformation and euformation – and this is not a peripheral feature. Tolkien was convinced that his legendarium is a form of "imagination capable of elucidating truth" (*L*, 189), and since I agree with him, this project redescribes his narrative, world, and characters in order to bring the deep formational dynamics to the surface. In doing this, I have not attempted to relay the groundwork established by so many in discussing the importance of bringing theology and literature into conversation with one another. Instead, I have taken that conversation and its value as givens, and aimed simply to dive right in. Additionally, I have not focused on drawing out moral implications for the primary world (though I do suggest the shape some implications might take), but instead I have focused on attending to Tolkien's sub-created world, drawing out the formational dynamics that shape it, and allowing those to provoke our reimagination of formational possibilities in the primary world. So, this project asks theological questions of Tolkien's fiction in order to demonstrate that his legendarium in general and *The Lord of the Rings* in particular offer a coherent and compelling vision of Christian spiritual formation.

Tolkien's Legendarium

In discussing the formative aspects of Tolkien's world of Arda, the most important element in framing the conversation is Tolkien's concept of sub-creation. Essentially, sub-creation for Tolkien refers to his interconnected beliefs that 1) God is

[1] Tolkien's use of "catastrophe" does not carry the current connotations of the word that suggest disaster and ruin and thereby only the negative potential in the word.

the Creator of all things; 2) God made the world and made it good; 3) God is the source of life and of being itself; 4) human creativity must always be set within that context; and 5) humanity can make things, real things, but we cannot Create. For Tolkien, "Creation" implies *ex nihilo*, but "creation" is made from pre-existing materials. So, only God can Create, where humans are restricted to sub-creating. This is, however, no shortcoming or flaw; it is simply part of the way things are. More than that, it is the proper mode of making for those who are made in the image and likeness of God, and it is our glory. Only the uncreated can create from nothing. Throughout this discussion, I will make use of Tolkien's description of the world we live in as the primary world and his imagined world as a secondary world. Tolkien saw his goal as a story-teller as participating in God's Creativity – participating in the Creativity of the One who made the primary world, by sub-creating a secondary world. Further, Tolkien believed that a deeply consistent secondary world, one that is intentionally and truthfully imagined, could induce secondary belief and need not require readers to suspend their disbelief in order to believe in the story while reading it. Because he aimed for such deep consistency, there are no elements out of place within it, no elements that would jar the reader out of the world while they are in it. In "On Fairy Stories" Tolkien writes that the willing suspension of disbelief

> does not seem to me a good description of what happens. What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful 'sub-creator.' He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true:' it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside. If you are obliged, by kindliness or circumstance, to stay, then disbelief must be suspended (or stifled), otherwise listening and looking would become intolerable. But this suspension of disbelief is a substitute for the genuine thing, a subterfuge we use when condescending to games or make-believe, or when trying (more or less willingly) to find what virtue we can in the work of an art that has for us failed" (*OFS*, 50).

In other words, Tolkien believed that while reading stories the reader should

never have to willingly suspend their disbelief; that would be a failure of the story-teller's art required by a loss of consistency within the secondary world. Instead, the imagined, or secondary, world would remain deeply coherent and never cause the reader to doubt the events while they read. This is one of the reasons why Tolkien spent so much time imagining and reimagining his secondary world and striving toward this deeply resonant consistency.

But sub-creation is not simply the process Tolkien engaged in, or a topic for his non-fictional reflections elsewhere; it is also a prominent theme *within* his legendarium. Arda is a sub-created world from its very conception.[2] Every moment of its creation is a sub-creative partnership between the Creator and the created. Its basic structure and its ongoing narrative are built around the radical importance and necessity of sub-creation. Because sub-creation, by its very nature, has God at its center, the world and all that is within it exists in fundamental relationship to the One who made it, and its existence is oriented toward that Maker. But this orientation and relationship is not one of force or coercion; it is one in which creaturely activity and divine agency occur simultaneously, which ensures that creatures are truly free and their actions really can shape the course of the world, but that God – or Eru – is still transcendent and unrestricted in his activity.

With this telos in place, it is natural to chart the course of the created order in terms of its tendency toward its purpose or away from it, and in Tolkien's legendarium the tendency of all matter within the fallen world is away from God without implications of Gnosticism or devaluation of embodied creaturehood. I will discuss the specifics of this in detail later, but for now, it is enough to acknowledge that Tolkien's sub-created world is portrayed as bearing in itself – at the most fundamental level –

[2] Arda is Tolkien's name for the world in which his mythology is set. Middle-earth is essentially a continent, or group of connected continents within Arda, and Arda itself exists within Eä, or the whole of creation. I discuss this in detail throughout Part I.

possibilities of formation and parasitic possibilities of dysformation.

To demonstrate this formational thread running through Tolkien's legendarium, I begin in Part I by focusing on the world of Arda. In Chapter 1, I retell some of Arda's story, following it from its conception, to its creation, and on to its marring by the diabolical agent, Melkor. Melkor's marring is a sub-creative one in that it affects the ongoing shaping of the world from that point onward. In Chapter 2, I discuss the marred world with particular emphasis on the relationship of providence to sin and death. I do this by drawing on Julian of Norwich's assertion that "sin is behovely" as a useful lens through which to read Tolkien's work since her concept of sin helps to explain how Tolkien can affirm the goodness of Arda Marred. The place of death within the legendarium is a connected idea, and the dialogue Tolkien provides in the *Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth* gives voice to conflicting perspectives on why humans within Arda Marred must die.

Even though Arda is marred, it still bears euformative possibilities in addition to its potential for dysformation. This is the focus of Chapter 3, which discusses the significance of place as a theological concept before concluding with a discussion of Arda's foreshadowed eschatological end. These chapters retell relevant sections of Arda's story in order to emphasize the nature of Tolkien's sub-created world. This retelling is set within the context and frame of Tolkien's presentation of sub-creation in his essay "On Fairy Stories" and his poem "Mythopoeia" primarily.

Where Part I presents the world of Arda as a creature in its own right, with a story of its own, Part II focuses on particular characters and their formation – comprised of both euformation and dysformation – within Arda Marred. Each of these characters is embodied within the marred world in a particular way and the lives they live are shaped by their particular situations and decisions. Because they are embodied, they display their euformation and dysformation in and through their particular narratives – in other

words, in their unique journeys through the interactions of character, circumstance, and place. Each of these pieces is significant for the formational stories his characters inhabit.

In this matter, it is apparent that Tolkien's intention to situate characters as embodied individuals within their particular circumstances satisfies Rowan Williams' definitions for theology: first that "theology must rediscover itself as a language that assists us in *being mortal*, living in the constraints of a finite and material world without resentment,"[3] and second that "Part of the task of a good theology and of a candid religious philosophy is, I believe, to reacquaint us with our materiality and mortality."[4] Tolkien's stories accomplish these tasks by focusing on how euformation and dysformation are worked out in embodiment, materiality, and mortality.

Each character I will discuss is embodied within the world of Arda, but Arda is more than merely setting. It is a character in its own right, and this is particularly evident in its unique formational arc. Like Adam and Eve in the narrative account of Genesis, Arda is conceived as a beautiful and perfect creature, but it is corrupted by the evil, sin, and rebellion of a satanic figure. Yet, like the story of humanity in the primary world, the narrative does not end there. Arda has an eschatological end, just as its inhabitants do, and a journey of formation between its creation and its end. Its history is foreshadowed and foresung by the Ainur, and its formational journey is a process of realizing the music and living it out in unique and particular ways.

With this foundation in place, and the nature of the world as a formational reality on the table, I proceed to discuss the story arcs of three significant characters in *The Lord of the Rings* to demonstrate how the threads of euformation and dysformation run

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[3] Rowan Williams, "The Suspicion of Suspicion: Wittgenstein and Bonhoeffer," in *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, ed. Mike Higton (London: SCM Press, 2007), 186.

[4] Rowan Williams, "Redeeming Sorrows: Marilyn McCord Adams and the Defeat of Evil," in *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, ed. Mike Higton (London: SCM Press, 2007), 271.

throughout the novel. These formational ends remain believable within the context of the story because they are grounded within the world as it has been conceived and presented. They fit within the world Tolkien has imagined and painstakingly crafted.

Chapter 4 follows the dysformative journey of the wizard Saruman. Because Saruman appears only sporadically throughout the narrative, his formative story arc is easy to trace. He is markedly different each time he appears and with each appearance he proves himself to be less and less like the particular kind of creature he was made to be. He forsakes his calling as an *Istar*, a wizard, to equip Elves and Men to resist Sauron's attempts to dominate and destroy. He forsakes them so completely, in fact, that he pursues his own agenda of domination and destruction, treating the world and its inhabitants as tools to accomplish his end of ruling the world. In choosing to follow in Sauron's dysformed footsteps, he forsakes his intended purpose and in doing so forsakes his nature. I begin by comparing Saruman to the other *Istari*, or wizards, sent to Middle-earth as he was – Radagast and Gandalf. I pay special attention to Gandalf because of the three he is the only one who stays faithful to his purpose and calling, and as such he demonstrates just how far Saruman has fallen. He works as a foil for Saruman's dysformative influence by creating euformative communities everywhere he goes. These communities are for the flourishing and thriving of all, and the freedom of all within them to be the unique kind of creature Ilúvatar intended them to be. But Saruman chooses instead to follow his own path and seeks to conquer Sauron by becoming him. As he walks down this path he descends in stages from angel to Númenórean (the most exalted and ennobled strand of humanity), from Númenórean to orc, and from orc to no-thing. In the final scenes before his death, he becomes orkish in all but physical appearance. His final physical state mirrors his spiritual state so closely that the hobbits watch as his dead body dissolves into dust in mere moments.

Saruman's story is tragic, because he falls so far and so completely, but his descent

toward orkishness – before becoming truly no-thing – is not the only dysformative pathway available to creatures within Arda Marred. Like Saruman's, Gollum's story is one of dysformation and the dissolution of moral identity. As the bearer of the One Ring for hundreds of years, its taint and corruption have worked on his mind and body, twisting him further and further from what he was made – as a Hobbit-like creature – to be. Gollum's emaciated and twisted frame is a powerful physical demonstration of the wasteland his soul has become. But where Saruman's journey is one of continued and increasing degradation, Gollum's story offers hope that dysformation is not the only spiritual end for creatures within Middle-earth. From the moment he enters Frodo and Sam's company, he becomes part of the euformative community of love and trust they share – albeit in complex and ambiguous ways – and this company changes him, opening him up to forgiveness, friendship, and restoration.

Sadly, Gollum cannot ultimately accept a place within this kind of community and chooses not only to forsake it, but to destroy it so he can reclaim the Ring as his own. Gollum's story takes center stage in Chapter 5. In this chapter, I paint a picture of Gollum as he has become and follow his tortured steps toward redemption before he falls off the knife edge into dysformation and despair. Gollum retreats from euformative community and in doing so returns to the formational trajectory he had been on: toward a wraithly, unnaturally extended existence devoid of all that is good or true or beautiful. He surrenders himself so completely to the Ring, that he has no self apart from it, and, in fact, no self at all as his identity has been fully subsumed by the Ring. These dysformational and euformational possibilities in Tolkien's secondary world – which are expressed in the terms of that world and its potential for magic rings and wraithly existence – illuminate possibilities in the primary world, where analogous possibilities can be seen in the terms of the world around us. But Tolkien does not present these possibilities in the form of a theory or an essay. Rather, he narrates them; and so, the

whole of Gollum's story, precisely as it happens within the context and terms of Arda Marred and including all the elements that cannot happen in the primary world, illuminates possibilities for euformation and dysformation in our world. When we take Gollum's story seriously, looking beyond the facets that are directly transferable back into the primary world, we can come to see those possibilities differently. Our imaginations are expanded so we can see analogous realities in our own lives: our own tendencies toward wraithliness, consuming obsessions, and the like.

Gollum's dysformative journey is poignant and devastating because he was so close to redemption. As Tolkien says in one of his letters, he was on the knife edge and really could have gone either way (*L*, 252). He is proof of the potential for creaturely euformation and dysformation. But more than that, his story arc is a case study in the interrelationship between creaturely freedom and divine providence, for it is ultimately the dysformed Gollum who achieves the quest's success and saves Middle-earth from Sauron's influence. This sudden eucatastrophic ending proves Gandalf's claim at the story's opening that "There was more than one power at work" (*LOTR*, 55).

Part II continues in Chapter 6 with an examination of Frodo's euformative trajectory. Frodo and Gollum are bound, inextricably, together. Many have commented that Gollum functions as Frodo's shadow, presenting the darkness to Frodo's light,[5] and so it is only natural that the final character analysis of this thesis will focus on the one who bears the Ring all the way to the Cracks of Doom. While, in many ways, Sam is the hero of *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo is unquestionably its main character. The entire story is structured around his journey, both toward Mount Doom and the Ring's destruction, but also as his euformative journey toward ennoblement.

This chapter traces Frodo's development from the novel's beginning when he

[5] Among others, see Rose A. Zimbardo, "Moral Vision in The Lord of the Rings," in *Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism*, ed. Rose A. Zimbardo and Neil D. Isaacs (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 72.

loudly exclaims that he wished Bilbo had killed Gollum when he had the chance, through to the story's end when he shows the same kind of pity to Gollum that Bilbo did, and thereby ensures the quest's success despite his inability at the end to see it through himself. I describe his journey as one characterized most deeply by his willingness to sacrifice much that is good in his life for the sake of others. In this, he clearly differs from both Saruman and Gollum, and demonstrates his euformation for all to see. As one who was shaped by euformative community, Frodo is uniquely equipped to follow in Gandalf's footsteps and create a similar kind of community around him, a community in which Sam is free to experience his own euformative journey and Gollum's redemption is a real possibility. Like the other characters I discuss, Frodo's outer appearance comes to match his inner reality. At several points in the story, characters observe a perceptible light emanating from Frodo's person, as though his euformation is a physical characteristic, not just spiritual. And yet, Tolkien presents Frodo's euformation as incomplete, since he is unable to rejoin the community of hobbits whereas Merry, Pippin, and Sam are. Frodo's euformation has made him more like the Elves than the other hobbits, and he, like the Elves, must leave Middle-earth to find the healing his body and soul so desperately need.

And so, the character analysis chapters in Part II proceed along a continuum of ennoblement, beginning with one who falls from exaltation to nothingness, through to one whose narrative flirts with euformation before settling into final dysformation and a complete loss of self, before ending with one who experiences deep, and yet incomplete, euformation as he sacrifices his place in the world so that others may enjoy it.

In the seventh, and final chapter, I use the depiction of deep sight discussed in Chapter 6 as a springboard to explore parallels between Tolkien's descriptions and the Christian tradition of the spiritual senses. Drawing primarily on Hans Urs von

Balthasar,[6] I attend to facets of the tradition that reappear in Tolkien's mythology before proceeding to describe elements of Tolkien's description that could helpfully enrich the tradition. While I do not claim that Tolkien intentionally set out to mirror this particular aspect of his spiritual heritage, I do see this as a helpful set of tools for insightful exploration of Tolkien's work that also has practical applicability in the primary world.

Research Context

The field of Tolkien studies is a diverse one, with emphases in literary studies, ecology, philosophy, linguistics, theology, and others. Many have written within the field, exploring particular facets of his legendarium with great insight and detail. Three of the foremost in the field at present are Jane Chance,[7] who reads Tolkien largely through a medieval lens; Verlyn Flieger,[8] who has analyzed Tolkien's mythology as presented in *The Silmarillion* and in the various draft versions of *The History of Middle-earth* volumes, and Tom Shippey,[9] whose expertise on Tolkien's works also stems from his training as a medievalist.

When it comes to theological engagement with Tolkien's works, there are a great

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[6] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics Vol. 1: Seeing the Form*, ed. Joseph Fessio S.J. and John Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), 365–425.

[7] Jane Chance, *Lord of the Rings: The Mythology of Power* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001); Jane Chance, *Tolkien's Art: A Mythology for England* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001); Jane Chance, ed., *Tolkien and the Invention of Myth: A Reader* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008); Jane Chance, ed., *Tolkien the Medievalist* (London: Routledge, 2002).

[8] In addition to several outstanding monographs such as: Verlyn Flieger, *A Question of Time: J.R.R. Tolkien's Road to Faerie* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2001); Verlyn Flieger, *Green Suns and Faerie: Essays on J.R.R. Tolkien* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2012); Verlyn Flieger, *Interrupted Music: Tolkien and the Making of a Mythology* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2005); Verlyn Flieger, *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2002); and Verlyn Flieger, *There Would Always Be a Fairy Tale: Essays on Tolkien's Middle-Earth* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2017), Flieger has also worked on critical editions of Tolkien's work such as: J.R.R. Tolkien, *Smith of Wootton Major*, ed. Verlyn Flieger, Pocket edition (London: HarperCollins, 2015); J.R.R. Tolkien, *Tolkien On Fairy-Stories*, ed. Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson (London: HarperCollins, 2008); J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun*, ed. Verlyn Flieger (HarperCollins, 2016); J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Story of Kullervo*, ed. Verlyn Flieger (HarperCollins, 2015).

[9] Shippey has written numerous articles and several monographs on Tolkien including: Tom Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (London: HarperCollins, 2010); Tom Shippey, *Roots and Branches* (Zurich: Walking Tree Publishers, 2007); Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth: How J.R.R. Tolkien Created a New Mythology* (London: HarperCollins, 2005).

number of popular works on the market today. Many have been done as a form of devotional guide to Middle-earth, but others aim to instruct readers on the theological ground of Tolkien's mythology. Among these Peter Kreeft[10] and Ralph Wood,[11] both of whom engage philosophically with the cultural impact of Tolkien in light of his devout Roman Catholicism, are prominent. Others include the late Stratford Caldecott,[12] who demonstrated the profoundly Roman Catholic nature of Tolkien's works; Alison Milbank,[13] who explores Tolkien's discussion of sub-creation as an avenue for approaching God and the need to re-enchant the world; and Brad Birzer,[14] who has explored the religious, and particularly Roman Catholic, imagery permeating Tolkien's mythology. The insights they have offered to the discussion within the field are widespread and valuable.

While I draw on the work of these scholars and writers in the pages that follow, I do not rely solely on the field of Tolkien studies. Instead, I draw upon the Christian tradition stretching from Augustine of Hippo to Rowan Williams, showing how Tolkien's fiction bodies forth a theological imagination with many points of contact with the wider theological tradition. I explore these points of contact as I bring Tolkien into conversation with other voices from the tradition.

For instance, in discussing Julian of Norwich in Chapter 2 and the parallels between her presentation of sin as behovely and Tolkien's depiction of a providential cosmos, I show how Tolkien's sub-creation mirrors the primary world and reimagines it.

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[10] Peter J. Kreeft, *The Philosophy of Tolkien: The Worldview Behind The Lord of the Rings* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005).

[11] Ralph C. Wood, *Gospel According to Tolkien: Visions of the Kingdom in Middle-Earth* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003); Ralph C. Wood, ed., *Tolkien among the Moderns* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015).

[12] Stratford Caldecott, *Secret Fire: The Spiritual Vision of J.R.R. Tolkien* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2003); Stratford Caldecott, *The Power of the Ring: The Spiritual Vision Behind the Lord of the Rings and the Hobbit* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2012); Stratford Caldecott and Thomas M. Honegger, eds., *Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings: Sources of Inspiration* (Zurich: Walking Tree Publishers, 2008).

[13] Alison Milbank, *Chesterton and Tolkien as Theologians: The Fantasy of the Real* (London: Continnuum-3PL, 2009).

[14] Bradley J. Birzer, *J.R.R. Tolkien's Sanctifying Myth: Understanding Middle-Earth* (Wilmington, Del.: ISI Books, 2003).

By maintaining the inner consistency of reality in this way, his fiction provokes readers to reimagine the primary world in analogous ways. He avoids allegory in his work, but maintains applicability as a separate end with equal or greater benefit. The idea of sin as behovely and that, in the end, all shall be well, allows Tolkien to explore the horrific, destructive, and apparently all-consuming effects of sin and evil in the world without ever allowing them to be on equal footing with Eru, the Creator.

In Chapter 7, my discussion of spiritual perception in the Christian tradition points to Tolkien's use of spiritual sight as a characteristic of those who have experienced euformative community and have been shaped by it. In drawing on a broad swath of the Christian spiritual and mystical tradition from Origen to Karl Rahner, I attend to the ways Tolkien's characters live out this potential for spiritual perception within his secondary world and the manner in which those demonstrations of spiritual sight fit within the story, adding to its inner consistency of reality. They occur within the context of a world set up with those kinds of capacities built in and available for all sentient creatures. It is simply part of the formational landscape that is Arda, even though Arda has been marred. By imagining his secondary world in this way, in terms consistent with the nature of that world and demonstrating a complex pattern of similarity and difference with the primary world, we are invited to reimagine the possibility of spiritual sight in our world. Here, again, rather than trying to explain how this all works theoretically, I show how it plays out in the practice of his fiction.

Throughout the discussions that occupy this study, I demonstrate that Tolkien's sub-creation – his work of formational imagination – can be read as a distinctive contribution to the theological tradition. While I show that his formational imagination is thoroughly informed by and consonant with his Roman Catholicism, I also show that it makes sense to bring his voice into conversation with others who explore a variety of shapes that formation can take. So, my focus is not on tracing sources and influences,

but on drawing Arda's deep formational dynamics to the surface and bringing Tolkien's imagination into a wider conversation, showing that it belongs there, and demonstrating that his legendarium powerfully elucidates truths of Christian spiritual formation.

PART I

In the first part of this thesis, I establish the groundwork on which the discussion in the second part will be situated. Since this project explores the way Tolkien's whole legendarium, and *The Lord of the Rings* in particular, is shaped by a theological and formative imagination, it is important to be clear from the outset what kind of world the story occupies and how that world both provides the setting for the story's plot and has a unique formative story of its own, complete with the potential for both euformation and dysformation.[1] In other words, I explore how the world itself is shaped, through and through, by Tolkien's formative imagination.

To do this, I begin in Chapter 1 by drawing out the importance of sub-creation and showing how the world that Tolkien imagines – Arda – has the potential to experience both growth and dissolution as part of its sub-created nature. This potential within Arda itself prefigures the same capacity within all of Eru's children, whether they be Elves, Men,[2] or Ainur (angels). In Chapter 2, I focus on divine providence within the legendarium, showing how Julian of Norwich's concept of sin as "behovely" provides a fitting context in which to understand how Tolkien can maintain that the marring of the world is not outside of Eru's providence, and that, in the end, the healed world will be greater than the unmarred world would have been. Finally, in Chapter 3, I discuss Arda's telos and its eventual end when all the marring and hurt will be healed. Each of these forms a significant part of the background in which the euformative and dysformative stories of *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings* take place. But Arda is not just background, it is not just a setting in which stories happen. It is a

[1] Patrick Curry sees the treatment of Arda as a character as fitting. See, for example, "It wouldn't be stretching a point to say that Middle-earth itself appears as a character in its own right. And the living personality and agency of this character are none the less for being non-human; in fact, that is just what allows for a sense of ancient myth, with its feeling of a time when the Earth itself was alive. It whispers: perhaps it could be again; perhaps, indeed, it still is." Patrick Curry, *Defending Middle-Earth: Tolkien, Myth and Modernity* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), 61.

[2] The term *Men* follows Tolkien's use and encompasses all of humanity, both male and female, within Arda. So, the term refers to one of the races Tolkien imagines inhabiting Arda alongside Elves, Dwarves, Hobbits, and others.

world with a story of its own, and that story prefigures and mirrors the stories I discuss in Part II.

Chapter 1. The Music of the Ainur

From the beginning, Tolkien portrayed his stories as set within a mythological pre-history of the world we inhabit.[1] This raised many difficulties for him in later years as he sought to make his sub-creation accord with both the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and of the physical sciences.[2] But it also reinforces the sense that Tolkien presents his secondary world as a way of reimagining the primary world. By positioning Middle-earth in this way, Tolkien's fiction raises the question of whether and how the primary and secondary worlds connect.

Arda is a place where embodied beings, regardless of how strange or familiar they are to us as readers, act within and react to the ongoing shaping of the world around them. They are participants in the world's story, actively ennobling or destroying it, healing or wounding it. Their ways of being in the world, marked as they are by a complex realistic-and-fantastic character, can open up our imagination of analogous ways of being in our world. The primary and secondary world differ in many ways, but it is the fruitful similarities that I will be exploring at length. In other words, because Tolkien imagines fantastic possibilities in a realistic world and realistic possibilities in a fantastic world, he illuminates features we might otherwise have missed. His characters' avenues of euformation and dysformation are open to us in ways analogous to the ways they were to them. There is hope and tragedy, despair and redemption in Arda and the

[1] He discusses this in many places throughout his letters. See, for instance, "The theater of my tale is this earth, the one in which we now live, but the historical period is imaginary" (*L*, 239) and "Mine is not an 'imaginary' world, but an imaginary historical moment on 'Middle-earth' – which is our habitation" (*L*, 244).

[2] Tolkien rethought many of his long-standing ideas (for instance: that Arda was a flat world prior to the fall of Númenor and that the sun and the moon were created from the fruit of two trees in Valinor). Throughout *Morgoth's Ring* his son chronicles and comments on Tolkien's explorations and rethinking of this matter, before concluding, "It may be, though I have no evidence on the question one way or the other, that he came to perceive from such experimental writing . . . that the old structure was too comprehensive, too interlocked in all its parts, indeed its roots too deep, to withstand such a devastating surgery" (*MR*, 383).

characters I will discuss in Part II are embodied within this world with all its sorrows and joys. Arda is a world where all is marred, and this marring is Tolkien's fantastic reimagining of the Christian concept of fallenness, where marring is analogous to fallenness and illuminates it, while remaining different from it.

Before I dive into the story of Arda, I will discuss Tolkien's theory of sub-creation and its significance for the stories I will consider in the pages ahead. As he wrote in the draft of a letter in 1954, "Since the whole matter from beginning to end is mainly concerned with the relation of Creation to making and sub-creation . . . it must be clear that references to these things are not casual, but fundamental" (*L*, 188). So, it is in Tolkien's conception of sub-creation that he provided the context for how his world would operate.

Sub-Creation

Sub-creation as a concept may be what Tolkien's essay "On Fairy Stories" is best known for, and it is of vital importance in understanding the nature of Arda.[3] In other words, in Tolkien's conception, the imagining of his legendarium is an act of sub-creation in the primary world, but he also imagines sub-creation as a process that occurs *within* his imagined cosmos. Sub-creation is both central to Tolkien's legendarium, and central to his understanding of human life in the primary world. He offers a glimpse into what it involves in his poem *Mythopoeia*:

> man, sub-creator, the refracted light

[3] "On Fairy Stories" presents the power of fairy-stories, which overlaps with the modern genre of fantasy, as offering three things: recovery, escape, and consolation. Tolkien describes these terms as follows. Recovery is a "regaining of a clear view. I do not say 'seeing things as they are' and involve myself with the philosophers, though I might venture to say 'seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them' – as things apart from ourselves" (83). Escape carries much of the definition others ascribe to escapism, but without the negative baggage. For Tolkien, escape is positive since it is escape *from* "things more grim and terrible," things like "hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, death" (96) and escape *to* clearer sight of what lies beyond these things. As for consolation, Tolkien has foremost in his mind the happy-ending of fairy tales, but with the unique aspect of *eucatastrophe*, which is "the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous 'turn' . . . a sudden and miraculous grace . . . giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief" (99).

> through whom is splintered from a single White
> to many hues, and endlessly combined
> in living shapes that move from mind to mind. (5.9-12)
>
> We make still by the law in which we're made. (5.18)

Here, Tolkien suggests that humans are prisms through whom the uncreated light of the Creator is refracted into many different hues through our sub-creative capacities. We make because we were made, and in doing so we participate with God in the ongoing creation of the world. We, as the uniquely embodied creatures we are, reflect God simply by being ourselves, but we reflect him further through our creative activities. As Tolkien explains in the essay: "we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker" (80).

By emphasizing that human creativity is derivative, Tolkien is claiming that we do not create *ex nihilo* and, indeed, we cannot. All human making finds its source in the primary world. In other words, creatures can only make using the materials around them, regardless of whether they make chairs or imaginary worlds. Rather than being a shortcoming, this is actually a gift. Through sub-creation, we take from what God has made and freely transmute it into other things. See, for example, the astounding monsters from Greek and Roman mythology that blend different, yet familiar, real-world creatures to form something new. Or even in something as simple as imagining a green sun or purple grass, we take what God has made, reimagine it, and make it strange. Human sub-creation is, like God's Creation, gratuitous. It is not necessary or merely functional. Like God's Creation, it is a gift. Other creatures may build nests or use tools, but their making is functional. While human creativity may be intended to accomplish particular ends, it cannot be reduced to mere functionality. We can make to delight ourselves and others and we alone of all the creatures under heaven bear this ability because we alone bear the image of our Maker and mirror his making with our

own.[4] By imaging God in this way, we prove ourselves to be both like him and dependent upon him.[5]

Since "liberation 'from the channels the creator is known to have used already' is the fundamental function of 'sub-creation', a tribute to the infinity of His potential variety, one of the ways in which indeed it is exhibited" (*L*, 188), we demonstrate our delight in what God has already made through our derivative making. By giving us all the materials of the primary world, God has provided ingredients capable of almost limitless combination; he has given us gifts that reflect, in this potential, his infinity. Our recombination of these ingredients explores and displays the potential variety within God's creativity, and so honors his infinity. Because of this, our sub-creativity contributes to God's ongoing creation of the world, and through it we can "assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation" (*OFS*, 106).

In fact, these sub-creative capacities are so integral to our nature in Tolkien's conception that redeemed humanity will continue to sub-create throughout eternity.[6] Through our participation in the ongoing creation in this way, we can experience redemption, which will happen "in a way fitting to . . . [our] strange nature" (104) and will prove that "all [our] bents and faculties have a purpose, which can be redeemed" (106).[7] Our sub-creating, in addition to being part of our particular nature as bearers of the image of God, can be a part of our redemption. It can be a means by which we

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[4] For more discussion on the *imago dei* and its relation both to the distinction between humanity and God and between humanity and other creatures, see Ian A. McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014); David Clough, *On Animals: Volume I: Systematic Theology* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012).

[5] Tolkien, *Tolkien On Fairy-Stories*, 281.

[6] In Paradise they look no more awry;
and though they make anew, they make no lie.
Be sure they still will make, not being dead,
and poets shall have flames upon their head,
and harps whereon their faultless fingers fall:
there each shall choose forever from the All (*Mythopoeia* 13.13-18).

[7] Tolkien clarifies his meaning in a 1944 letter to his son Christopher where he writes, "Man the story-teller would have to be redeemed in a manner consonant with his nature: by a moving story" (*L*, 100-101).

image God and experience renewal.

Since sub-creativity is part of our nature, it can become either euformed or dysformed. When we misdirect our sub-creative energies, we participate in our dysformation. This is, unfortunately, the tendency of all life within a fallen world, and since the marring of Arda is Tolkien's reimagining of fallenness, all the creatures of Middle-earth are similarly prone toward misdirected sub-creativity. But as we experience euformation, we also experience the restoration of our sub-creative potential to its proper mode and orientation. So, sub-creativity can also be a means by which we experience euformation. It is not just that being euformed is displayed through the redemption of our sub-creativity; but the activity of sub-creation itself can also – by the grace of God – contribute to our euformation. In both of these ways, sub-creativity is an arena in which the battle between euformation and dysformation is waged, both in the primary world and in Tolkien's secondary world. This is clearer in Tolkien's fiction that in his essay as I will discuss in more detail when I get to Melkor's fall in Chapter 2, but Melkor's fall in the *Ainulindalë* is portrayed as an active marring, not just of the physical world but also of the very activity of sub-creation itself.[8] From the moment of Melkor's marring, all sub-creativity within Tolkien's secondary world is also marred, but it can be redeemed.

This idea of sub-creation has deep roots in Tolkien's theological imagination – an imagination that he explores and expresses differently in his non-fiction and in his fiction, such that story-telling offered him deeper and more fertile ground to work with. As I will show, sub-creation is at Arda's heart, both regarding its own unique narrative and telos, and the role its creatures play in shaping and inhabiting it. To do this, I will examine Tolkien's creation myth, the *Ainulindalë*, to highlight how sub-creation

[8] Because of his evil influence in the world, Melkor gains the name Morgoth, "the Dark Enemy" (*S*, 31). Tolkien, and this essay, will refer to him by both names.

influences the potential for all of Arda to experience euformation and dysformation.

In the rest of this chapter I sketch the story of Arda, leaving some of the deeper discussions about its marring and its foreshadowed glory for Chapters 2 and 3. This focus on the fabric of Arda will prepare the ground for the following chapters, since the characters live as uniquely embodied individuals *within* Arda, complete with their own potential for growth or corruption that mirror Arda's potential for the same. I will show that Tolkien has imagined a world in which the possibilities of euformation and dysformation are deeply but clearly written in forms appropriate to it, and by imagining Arda in this way he has made it possible to imagine more deeply the analogous possibilities in our own world.

Eä

Tolkien begins his creation narrative at the same point the creation narrative in Genesis begins: with God, or in Tolkien's cosmology "Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Ilúvatar" (*S*, 15). But where Genesis details God's creation of the world as the first recorded act, in *The Silmarillion* Ilúvatar begins by creating the Ainur, who are "the offspring of his thought" (*S*, 15).[9] In the draft of a 1958 letter, Tolkien describes the Ainur as "rational spirits or minds without incarnation, created *before* the physical world" (*L*, 284, emphasis original) who have no bodies unless they choose to put them on in much the same way we put on clothing. Through the Ainur, Eä, "the world that is" (*S*, 20) is created. They are real agents in its making, though theirs is a sub-creative role in which they too make only in their own derivative mode.[10] Sub-creation is built into the

[9] Tolkien's presentation here, while not perhaps part of the mainstream of Christian tradition, is not out of bounds and finds support in both Augustine and Aquinas. In *City of God* 11.9 Augustine suggests that the creation of the angels is either encompassed under the broader category of the heavens in Genesis 1:1 or under that of light in Genesis 1:3. So, St. Augustine believed it was possible that angels were created before the physical world. In *Summa Theologica* 1.61-63 (but particularly in 1.61.3.a3), Thomas Aquinas also allows for this possibility.

[10] David Keck comments on the debate over the role of angels in the creation of the universe in church history. He notes that while Augustine read the "us" of Genesis 1:26-27 as a reference to God as a

fabric of the world from the beginning and represents an aspect of Ilúvatar's design. From the beginning, he intended for his creatures to make in their own particular fashion in imitation of the One who made them to be like him.

Ilúvatar's next act is to speak to his creations.

Make in Harmony a Great Music

He begins by "propounding to them themes of music; and they sang before him, and he was glad" (*S*, 15). He offered musical themes and invited them to sing the part he gave to each with their own voice and according to their own skill. Each voice is unique, singing the melody as only it can. At first each sang alone or with just a few others while the rest listened. Each Ainu only sang the part given to them because that was all they could understand of the mind of their maker. But as they listened to each other, they learned and grew in their understanding, both of Ilúvatar and of each other. They "grew but slowly" yet "as they listened they came to deeper understanding, and increased in unison and harmony" (*S*, 15). It is clear here that the music is Ilúvatar's and that, apart from his gift of it to them, they would have no melody to sing. So, when he discloses a new theme "greater and more wonderful than he had yet revealed" which amazes them with "the glory of its beginning and the splendor of its end," it causes them to bow before him in silence (*S*, 15).

But once again, Ilúvatar invites them to sing, to harmonize this time in the Great Music (*S*, 15). Even though they are now to sing together, he still invites them to reflect that particular facet of his mind represented in each of them as unique individuals,

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Trinity, "first century Jews, Barnabas (d. 61?), and perhaps Justin (ca. 100-ca. 165), had seen the *us* in terms of God's assistants, the angels. Similarly, for both the Aristotelians and Neoplatonists, some sort of spiritual beings were responsible for the creation of the material world." David Keck, *Angels & Angelology in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 20–21. Augustine addresses this argument by the Platonists in *City of God* 12.25, writing: "Certainly the angels (the Platonists prefer to call them gods) have their part to play, at God's command, or by God's permission, in relation to the creatures which are born in the world. But we do not call them creators of living beings any more than we call farmers the creators of crops and trees."

calling them to "show forth your powers in adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devices, if he will" (*S*, 15). Ilúvatar invites each of the Ainur to play the role of sub-creator in the making of this melody. They are to use their skills and talents to effoliate and enrich creation (*OFS*, 106). They are not mere players of a tune, like those who only play the notes on the sheets in front of them, but jazz musicians improvising on the theme according to their particular interests and strengths, adding their own stamp upon the melody while maintaining its beauty and unity. Ilúvatar allows his creatures the freedom to effoliate and enrich his theme according to their own thoughts and devices, but this does not imply that he has provided a mere outline and invited them to color it in. Rather, he has given them the complete picture, colors and all, but he uses the free exercise of their creativity to bring the complete picture into being. Ilúvatar is providentially guiding the whole music the Ainur produce, which will become clearer over the course of Part I, as he demonstrates to his creatures that "no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined" (*S*, 17). Kathryn Tanner describes the interplay between creaturely freedom and God's agency in this way:

> Talk of the creature's power and efficacy is compatible with talk about God's universal and immediate agency if . . . divinity is said to exercise its power in founding rather than suppressing created being, and created being is said to maintain and fulfill itself, not independently of such agency, but in essential dependence upon it.[11]

So, the Music remains Ilúvatar's, just as the Creation of the world is his, but this does not deny the part played by the Ainur in its making. As Tanner goes on to explain:

> A created cause can be said to bring about a certain created effect by its own power, or a created agency can be talked about as freely intending the object of its rational volition, only if God is said to found that causality or agency directly and

[11] Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 85.

> *in toto* – in power, exercise, manner of activity and effect.[12]

Using their sub-creative abilities, the Ainur sang, and their music "went out into the Void, and it was not void" (*S*, 15).[13] As the Void was filled, the world began to take shape, even though it would ultimately be spoken into existence by Eru alone. In the 1958 letter mentioned above, Tolkien explains:

> The Ainur took part in the making of the world as 'sub-creators': in various degrees, after this fashion. They interpreted according to their powers, and completed in detail, the Design propounded to them by the One. This was propounded first in musical or abstract form, and then in an 'historical vision' . . . The One then presented this 'Music', including the apparent discords, as a visible 'history' (*L*, 284).

It is apparent through these preliminary pieces from the *Ainulindalë* that the narrative Tolkien offers is more than merely an instantiation of the idea of sub-creation I have been discussing; it is an enrichment of that idea. Tolkien has provided a narrative picture that emphasizes the unique contribution of each sub-creator as an individual

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[12] Ibid., 86. Tanner continues to write that denying this and thereby refusing "to the creature the ability to act or produce effects by its own power" turns the creature into "the occasion for God's own creative action" and, in effect, no more than "the empty shell for an exercise of divine power" (86). Tolkien affirms the necessity for creaturely efficacy within the context of divine agency as the source of being itself.

[13] Tolkien follows Thomas Aquinas in maintaining God as the primary cause of all things, with creatures playing a secondary role such that God's purposes are achieved, in part, by the means of creatures' agency. For a good explanation of this idea of primary and secondary causation within creation see McFarland, *From Nothing*, particularly page 144: "While God, as primary cause, is the immediate cause of all created effects, in some cases God brings a particular created effect about through the actions of one or more creatures, which are thereby constituted as created (or 'secondary') causes of that effect." In this way, Eru is the primary and immediate cause of Eä, he has brought it about through his own creations, the Ainur, who play a secondary role in its creation. This is the heart of Tolkien's concept of sub-creation, that God is the primary cause of all things, even works of artistic imagination like Tolkien's *Ainulindalë* or *The Lord of the Rings*, while the human creator is the secondary cause. Rowan Williams's engagement with this point in Rowan Williams, "On Being Creatures," in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), 63–78 is helpful, particularly where he acknowledges the need for humanity to recognize both its dependence on God and the truth of our agency (70). The root of this need is in the reality that "the entire situation of the universe, at any given moment, exists as a real situation because of God's reality being, as it were, turned away from God to generate what is not God. And this is not an explanation (because the existence of the world is not a puzzling fact, as opposed to other, straightforward facts; it is all the facts there are), but a statement that everything depends on the action of God" (68). Kathryn Tanner's discussion of this point in the third chapter of Tanner, *God and Creation*, 81–119 is also particularly helpful. See, for instance: "The theologian should talk of created efficacy as immediately and entirely grounded in the creative agency of God . . . divine agency is required for any power, operation and efficacy of created beings; conversely, created beings . . . have power, to operate and produce created effects only as God's agency extends to them in those respects" (91) and "God grants us our own powers and in that sense works with us" while at the same time "God can work without us by creating a world that does not include creatures with power" (105).

given particular gifts by Eru, the power among them when their sub-creative faculties are exercised in harmony, and the way in which the sub-creation of each member is enriched in response to the sub-creation of others. Tolkien has taken his readers beyond mere theory, and given a narrative of how that theory might be played out in action. But before he proceeds to the actual creation, he first describes the introduction of discord into the music.

Melkor Mars the Music

As Eru listens to the music of the Ainur, enjoying its flawless beauty and the unique contributions each individual voice makes to the enrichment of the theme, a new desire rises in the heart of Melkor to "interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme" (*S*, 16). Melkor's aim in this was to "increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself" even though he had already received the "greatest gifts of power and knowledge" since he "had a share in all the gifts of his brethren" (*S*, 16).[14] Of all the Ainur, Melkor held the greatest potential to understand the scope and majesty of the Great Music since he shared in all the gifts given by Eru. His mind could comprehend more of the individual pieces than any of the other Ainur, and yet the desire to "bring into Being things of his own" grew within him and he began to doubt Eru's wisdom.[15] When Melkor brought some of these new imaginings into his

[14] These statements about Melkor's autonomous will find interesting parallels in Anselm of Canterbury, "De Casu Diaboli," in *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury*, trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 2000), 214–61. Anselm's text is structured as a discussion between student and teacher and in chapter four (223-5) the discussion revolves around the question of how the Devil sinned in willing to be like God. The Devil's sin, like Melkor's, was in "willing what he ought not to have and . . . not willing what he ought to have" (224). He sinned by expressing an autonomous will "subject to no one else," but that is not the proper place of any creature, "For it ought to be the characteristic only of God so to will something by an autonomous will that He is not subordinate to a higher will" (225). Anselm further claims that "by willing what God did not will him to will . . . he placed his will above the will of God" and sought not just to be like God, but to be greater than God (225). Melkor shares this desire, and in doing so parallels Milton's depiction of Satan who sought "with all his Host / Of Rebel Angels, by whose aid aspiring / To set himself in Glory above his Peers, / He trusted to have equal'd the most High" (*Paradise Lost*, 1.37b-40).

[15] Tolkien follows here in the footsteps of Thomas Aquinas who posits that Satan sought to be like God in his desire to create heaven and earth (ST 1a.63.3). Since Tolkien conceives the birth of Eä in sub-

song, the harmony was broken and discord entered in. The effects of this appear to be disastrous at first. Some of those nearest to Melkor "grew despondent . . . and their music faltered" (*S*, 16). Others picked up Melkor's melody and began to sing it, aligning their music with his rather than with Eru's. The ripples spread outward from Melkor and the original harmonious melodies "foundered in a sea of turbulent sound . . . until it seemed that about [Eru's] throne there was a raging storm, as of dark waters that made war one upon another in an endless wrath that would not be assuaged" (*S*, 16).

It is clear from the narrative that Melkor's rebellion and the ensuing discord are the result of his free choice.[16] Melkor's rebellion is portrayed in the narrative as making use of the freedom I discussed in the preceding section, but now it has been turned against Ilúvatar. Tolkien's narrative neither poses nor answers the question of how Melkor's secondary freedom to sub-create under Ilúvatar's primary sovereignty can become a freedom to *rebel*, except by identifying Melkor's motivations as founded upon an anthropomorphic understanding of freedom as the ability to choose between good and evil as described above. This fictional account does not hold up as a theoretical account of how divine and created agency relate when it comes to sin, nor does it try to. However, as I will explore below and in greater detail in Chapter 3, Tolkien's narrative *does* offer an account of how Ilúvatar remains sovereign, even over Melkor's rebellion.

After the discord arises, Ilúvatar rises from his throne, smiles at Melkor's rebellion, and lifts his left hand to introduce a second theme, like the first yet different.

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creative terms, he describes Melkor's sin as a desire to Create rather than to sub-create. I will return to this point later.

[16] In Anselm of Canterbury, "De Casu Diaboli," 261. Anselm writes of Satan's ability to will what he was not supposed to will and how this ability is a gift from God: "Indeed, the ability was only something good and was a free gift from God. And indeed, with respect to its being, the willing was something good; yet, since it was unjustly done it was evil; nevertheless, it was from God, from whom is everything that is something. Surely, someone has from God not only that which God freely gives but also that which he unjustly seizes with God's permission. And even as God is said to cause what He permits to occur, so He is said to give what He permits to be seized. Therefore, since with God's permission the evil angel, through robbery, used the ability freely given by God, he had the use – which is the same thing as the willing – from God. For to will is nothing other than to use the ability to will (just as to speak and to use the ability to speak are identical)" (261).

It is powerful and beautiful, yet the violence of the discord only increased and "Melkor had the mastery" (*S*, 16). So, Ilúvatar arises again, stern-faced this time, and lifts his right hand to introduce a third theme. Though it seems soft at first, it proves to be impossible to quench. The two musics, Eru's third theme and Melkor's increasingly unified theme, proceed before Eru's throne, "utterly at variance" with each other. Where Eru's is "deep and wide and beautiful . . . slow and blended with an immeasurable sorrow, from which its beauty chiefly came" (*S*, 16-17), Melkor's is "loud, and vain, and endlessly repeated" having "little harmony, but rather a clamorous unison as of many trumpets braying upon a few notes" (*S*, 17). Melkor's theme continues alongside Eru's, intertwining with it and trying unsuccessfully to drown it out. In fact, "its most triumphant notes were taken by the other and woven into its own most solemn pattern" (*S*, 17). And then, finally, Ilúvatar arises a final time, "his face terrible to behold," and raising both hands he brings forth one final chord, "deeper than the Abyss, higher than the Firmament," and suddenly the Great Music ends (*S*, 17).

At this point, Eä does not exist, and the Ainur do not yet know that there is any purpose to their singing aside from enriching Ilúvatar's theme. The Void is still void of physical substance though it has been filled with the sound of their song. This may seem like an unnecessary prologue to the actual creation of things, but by presenting the song as the creation of the world in potential, Tolkien has focused our attention firmly on the sub-creativity by which Eä is formed, on the origin of evil within that sub-creativity, and on Ilúvatar's redemption of that evil. By including this telling of Creation, Tolkien has emphasized the significance of sub-creation for the entirety of Eä's story, for he writes in an early draft of the Music of the Ainur recorded in the first volume of *The Book of Lost Tales* that the song of the Ainur is also the world's story unrolled like a vast tapestry proceeding from the mind of Ilúvatar and enriched by the angelic minds he has

created.[17]

It is notable that Tolkien's legendarium introduces discord and the fall before the physical creation of the world, though it is not unprecedented.[18] When Melkor inserted his own music into the theme, though he did not appear to recognize it at the time, he not only attempted to disrupt the music, but to disrupt the world's story and twist it into a form that magnified his part in its making. Since Melkor's fall predates the creation of Eä and occurs during the initial sub-creative stage, Melkor's fall is a sub-creative one – one in which the problem lies in the way he imagines and exercises his sub-creativity. Such a fall has dire consequences. Fundamentally, Melkor's fall affects the Ainur's sub-creative activity as a whole and it therefore affects the whole of the world they are making. Further, because they are making a world in which there will be further sub-creative agents (Elves and Men primarily), this marring will extend to mar the sub-creative capacity and activity of these creatures as well. The sub-creative task itself has been marred, but not ruined.

In the draft of another letter from 1958, Tolkien observes that his mythology both mirrors and reimagines the creation narrative as presented in the church's orthodox teaching:

> the rebellion of created free-will precedes creation of the World (Eä); and Eä has in it, sub-creatively introduced, evil, rebellions, discordant elements of its own nature already when the *Let it Be* was spoken. The Fall or corruption, therefore, of all things in it and all inhabitants of it, was a possibility if not inevitable (*L*, 286-287).[19]

But the *Let it Be* has not yet been spoken. The world does not yet exist in physical form, yet all is marred by Melkor. The state of sub-creation, and of the entirety of Eä, as

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[17] "Upon a time Ilúvatar propounded a mighty design of his heart to the Ainur, unfolding a history whose vastness and majesty had never been equaled by aught that he had related before" (*LTI*, 53).

[18] See for instance, Clifford Davidson, ed., *York Corpus Christi Plays* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2011), http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/davidson-the-york-corpus-christi-plays. where the first play is entitled "The Creation of the Angels and the Fall of Lucifer" and the second play is "The Creation through the Fifth Day."

[19] It is not the presence of the fall prior to creation that presents a reimagining of the biblical narrative, but rather that the world was not initially a perfect creation that was later cursed and marred.

marred but not ruined sets the stage for all that will follow: all the tragedy, destruction, and despair. It is because creation is marred from the beginning that the drama of the following stories is possible.

Even though the fall has already happened, Eru is still providentially guiding creation. Even though Melkor has introduced sin and evil into the Great Music, there is more to the story. But that does not discount the reality and permanence of Melkor's evil. The stories of *The Silmarillion* display the horrific depths into which Melkor's evil will drag the world. As Tolkien mused about Melkor and the marred state of Arda later in his life, he wrote that for Melkor "there was *no* 'repentance' or possibility of it: Melkor had abandoned forever all 'spiritual' ambitions, and existed almost solely as a desire to possess and dominate matter, and Arda in particular" (*MR*, 403). Melkor had forsaken the possibility for redemption by his own freely chosen path. He is captured and imprisoned in the early pages of *The Silmarillion*, but instead of growing repentance and a desire for restitution in his heart, his punishment only increased his bitterness and malice. As the narrative progresses, he is consumed more and more fully by his desires; and because those desires are impossible to fulfill, they sour into an all-consuming desire for destruction. He turns progressively further from Ilúvatar, until the very idea of his repentance becomes impossible for creatures to imagine. Melkor, and those who followed him, walked so far down the path of self-aggrandizement that there is no turning back.

It is appropriate at this point to briefly address one of the issues that many find with this depiction of Melkor, and this is the claim that Tolkien presents a Manichaean world – a world in which evil is a separate entity having a real existence of its own in direct, eternal opposition to God – an assertion which has been leveled against Tolkien since the 1950s. While there are many excellent treatments of this topic that discuss nuances in Tolkien's representation of evil as absence, as force, or as some inconsistent

hybrid between the two,[20] at this point I simply want to emphasize that while Melkor's evil has marred nearly everything, all that he has marred does not yet exist except in thematic, musical form. All the discord and disruption he has instigated will come to naught if Eru himself does not speak the words, "Eä! Let these things Be!" So, while Melkor's evil has real effects and the marred world will become reality, the marring can only have its effects by Eru's permission – and it has already been made clear in the music that the marring will not be the end of the story.

Behold Your Music!

There remains an intermediate step between the Music and Creation, however. Before Ilúvatar causes the world to be, he gives sight to the Ainur where before they

[20] For a few discussions on both sides of this topic, see: Annie Birks, "Sympathetic Backgrounds in Tolkien's Prose," *Hither Shore 11: Nature and Landscape in Tolkien*, 2014, 52–63; Patrick Curry, *Defending Middle-Earth: Tolkien, Myth and Modernity* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), 78; Flieger, *Splintered Light*; John William Houghton, "Augustine in the Cottage of Lost Play: The Ainulindalë as Asterisk Cosmogony," in *Tolkien the Medievalist*, ed. Jane Chance (London: Routledge, 2002), 171–82; Jonathan S. McIntosh, "The Flame Imperishable: Tolkien, St. Thomas, and the Metaphysics of Faerie" (Ph.D., University of Dallas, 2009), http://search.proquest.com/docview/304958538; Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth*; Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien*; and Ralph Wood, "Tolkien's Augustinian Understanding of Good and Evil: Why The Lord of the Rings Is Not Manichean," in *Tree of Tales: Tolkien, Literature and Theology*, ed. Trevor Hart and Ivan Khovacs (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 85–102. Shippey, most notably, sees in the Ring an attempt to blend the Boethian and Manichean philosophies. He points toward the necessity of two seemingly opposed responses to the Ring: passively resisting the temptation to use it, and actively attempting to destroy it (*Author of the Century*, 134-8). Wood refutes Shippey's claims, maintaining that "Tolkien is a radical anti-dualist whose Augustinian understanding of evil reveals it to be far more terrifying and dangerous than anything Manichaeism can imagine" ("Augustinian Understanding," 87). Wood sees in Shippey's argument a granting of autonomous will to the Ring, rather than seeing the Ring as revealing the fallen, but once good, mind behind its creation (93). While I see the force of Shippey's argument, I agree with Wood that Shippey has misinterpreted the evidence. Tolkien clearly presents Melkor's marring as a reality to be dealt with in Arda, but he routinely demonstrates, as I show, that evil has no existence of its own since it is not in Ilúvatar's nature. Rather, evil is a corruption of Ilúvatar's good creation, a twisting of the original theme, such that Melkor's evil cannot be conceived as having anything approaching equal status with Eru's goodness. Melkor's evil cannot happen if Ilúvatar does not maintain Melkor's freedom to act. Though David Bentley Hart does not weigh in on this debate, he does help the discussion when he writes: "to say that God elects to fashion rational creatures in his image, and so grants them the freedom to bind themselves and the greater physical order to another master – to say that he who sealed up the doors of the sea might permit them to be opened again by another, more reckless hand – is not to say that God's ultimate design for his creatures can be thwarted. It is to acknowledge, however, that his will can be resisted by a real and (by his grace) autonomous force of defiance, or can be hidden from us by the history of cosmic corruption, and that the final realization of the good he intends in all things has the form (not simply as a dramatic fiction, for our edification or his glory, nor simply as a pedagogical device on his part, but in truth) of a divine victory." David Bentley Hart, *The Doors of the Sea: Where Was God in the Tsunami?* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2005), 63.

could only hear, and shows them a vision of the world. Taking them into the Void, he offers them a play of light rather than of sound. Ilúvatar takes this step to show Melkor and all the Ainur, as I have already noted, "that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined" (*S*, 17).[21] The vision is intended to teach Melkor and bring him back to his intended purpose. Though neither it nor Ilúvatar's words were meant to shame him, Melkor feels shamed and out of this shame flows anger.[22] Nevertheless, Ilúvatar tells the assembled Ainur that each would find within the vision, "amid the design that I set before you, all those things which it may seem that he himself devised or added" and that Melkor would discover that all his secret thoughts were "but a part of the whole and tributary to its glory" (*S*, 17). Tolkien goes on to write that Ilúvatar revealed many things to them at that time, but he did not tell all that he knew. So, the Ainur know much of Arda's story, but there are some things they have not and cannot see, "for to none but himself has Ilúvatar revealed all that he has in store, and in every age there come forth things that are new and have no foretelling, for they do not proceed from the past" (*S*, 18).[23]

At this point the Ainur learn of the coming Children of Ilúvatar, Elves and Men, who are to inhabit the world they have been preparing with their song. Many of the Ainur loved the Children from the moment they saw them in the vision because they

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[21] For a parallel idea see *Summa* 2a2ae.25.11 ad. 3 which asserts that God turns even the demons' evil intentions to our benefit.

[22] Note, as before, that Tolkien is not offering a theoretical account for the way things are, but he *is* offering a story that operates on two different levels: one deals with the metaphysical structure of Arda and the other with anthropomorphized spirits whose reactions are psychologically recognizable to us.

[23] This statement finds an intriguing parallel in the *Ancrene Wisse*, which states that God does not reveal "His secret counsels and the hidden things of heaven" to all. Some things remain hidden in the mind of God until the fullness of time has come. Mary Salu, trans., *The Ancrene Riwle: (The Corpus Ms.: Ancrene Wisse)*, Exeter Medieval English Texts and Studies (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1990), 68. I have selected the M.B. Salu translation since Tolkien was directly involved with it throughout the first half of the 20th century.

were "things other than themselves, strange and free, wherein they saw the mind of Ilúvatar reflected anew, and learned yet a little more of his wisdom" (*S*, 18). The fact that the Ainur loved the Children for being other than themselves demonstrates, yet again, the importance of sub-creation. Even the world the Ainur have helped fashion is other than themselves, and many love it both for this reason and because of their part in its shaping. But they love the Children even more because the Ainur, too, are Ilúvatar's Children and yet they are distinct from and other than these Children who are to come.

As the desire to enter this vision grows within the Ainur, Ilúvatar takes the vision away and for the first time the Ainur become aware of the Darkness (*S*, 19). Where, prior to the vision of Arda, the Ainur had no sight, now that the vision has been removed their sight remains, but they find nothing on which to turn their gaze. Though nothing physical exists from their song, they have seen their Music's purpose: a world, the life of that world, and the world's story. The vision suggests that what they have been sub-creating can and will have an existence of its own apart from them. They love it for this reason, and even with the vision removed "many of the most mighty among them bent all their thought and their desire towards that place" (*S*, 18). Chief among these is Melkor, who desired to enter Arda in order to "subdue to his will both Elves and Men . . . and to be called Lord, and to be a master over other wills" (*S*, 18).

Much of the story so far has been concerned with desire: both appropriate and inappropriate. This is significant because both the fallen and unfallen Ainur are exercising their will and desire for Arda, and this is good since they were meant to be part of it. But where the unfallen Ainur desire it appropriately, Melkor does not. His desire is good, as is his desire for Arda, but the way he desires it is not. The end for which the Ainur desire Arda shapes the narrative going forward.[24]

[24] See Anselm of Canterbury, "De Casu Diaboli," 224. The teacher in Anselm's text says of Satan's disordered will, or desire, "Therefore, he sinned by willing something beneficial which he did not possess and was not supposed to will at that time but which was able to increase his happiness." For Anselm, too,

Let These Things Be!

With the vision gone, many among the Ainur grew troubled. But Ilúvatar knows their desire and grants it. He speaks the words, and the world springs into being.

> *Eä!* Let these things Be! And I will send forth into the Void the Flame Imperishable, and it shall be at the heart of the World, and the World shall Be; and those of you that will may go down into it (*S*, 20).

The world that had begun as majestic music before becoming an entrancing vision has at last become reality. Ilúvatar is clearly the primary cause of Eä and all it contains, just as he is the primary cause of the Ainur themselves. Tolkien's Ilúvatar is like the God he believed in as a devout Roman Catholic. He is not one thing among many; he is completely other than his creation and yet he sustains and upholds it by his thought and his word.[25] Tolkien makes this clear in several other passages, but two of the clearest can be found in the first volume of *The Book of Lost Tales* and in the *Athrabeth*. There, Tolkien writes, "Ilúvatar is the Lord for Always who dwells beyond the world; who made it and is not of it or in it, but loves it" (*LTI*, 49), and "Eru is One, alone without peer, and He made Eä, and is beyond it" (*MR*, 321). No creature, not even the greatest of the Ainur, can create from nothing. At best they can sub-create, effoliating and enriching creation with the creativity they have been given.

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desire is not evil, it is the way in which desire is expressed and the end it seeks to accomplish that makes it evil.

[25] This touches on a central facet of the Christian tradition. God is no creature as we are, but is rather an entirely other kind of being. Tolkien would affirm along with David Bentley Hart that God is not to be imagined "as some finite cause among the world's other causes – a particular world agency – who must occupy a place in the sequence of natural events akin to that of a shifting tectonic plate." Hart, *The Doors of the Sea*, 10. For another excellent discussion of this topic, see Tanner, *God and Creation*., particularly: "Finite beings within the world are specifically identified in virtue of the particular qualities which characterize them and by which they differ from other beings. God, as transcendent, is beyond those relations of identity or opposition, and is therefore not to be characterized in terms of particular natures in contrast to others. It is common to say, instead, that God is radically distinct from the non-divine simply through 'himself'" (57); "God *is* what creatures only *have* because of a real distinction between their essences and existence" (58); and "If God's agency must be talked about as universal and immediate, then, conversely, everything non-divine must be talked about as existing in a relation of total and immediate dependence upon God. Non-divine being must be talked about as always and in every respect *constituted* by, and therefore *nothing apart from*, an immediate relation with the founding agency of God" (84).

Tolkien writes that "When the One . . . said *Let it Be*, then the Tale became History, on the same plane as the hearers; and these could, if they desired, *enter into it*" (*L*, 284, emphasis original). Aside from Melkor and his jealousy, the rest of the Ainur who choose to enter Eä, and are thereafter called the Valar and the Maiar,[26] do so out of love for the world being fashioned and a desire to prepare a place for the Children to come.[27] They love the world they have helped to make and choose to enter it so that they might bring the story told in the Music into being and shape the world according to what they remember of the Music. But when Melkor enters Eä, he does so to actively mar the others' work, just as he actively marred the Music. As Tolkien writes at the close of the Ainulindalë,

> the Valar endeavored ever, in despite of Melkor, to rule the Earth and to prepare it for the coming of the Firstborn; and they built lands and Melkor destroyed them; valleys they delved and Melkor raised them up; mountains they carved and Melkor threw them down; seas they hollowed and Melkor spilled them; and naught might have peace or come to lasting growth, for as surely as the Valar began a labor so would Melkor undo it or corrupt it. And yet their labor was not all in vain; and though nowhere and in no work was their will and purpose wholly fulfilled, and all things were in hue and shape other than the Valar had at first intended, slowly nonetheless the Earth was fashioned and made firm" (*S*, 22).

The late Stratford Caldecott proposed that Melkor marred the Music out of frustration that he was a creature and could not create *ex nihilo*, writing, "This is precisely what frustrates Melkor, and brings about his downfall. He wants to create *ex nihilo*, and this leads him – when he is unable to do so – to destroy what does exist in order to 'clear the slate', as it were, for his own productions."[28] In other words, Melkor acts from the same

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[26] In Tolkien's legendarium, 'Valar' means, "those with power" and refers to the great among the Ainur who "entered into Eä at the beginning of time" (*S*, 353). The Maiar are "Ainur of lesser degree than the Valar" (*S*, 339).

[27] In another letter, Tolkien writes, "The uncorrupted Valar . . . yearned for the Children before they came and loved them afterwards, as creatures 'other' than themselves, independent of them and their artistry, 'children' as being weaker and more ignorant than the Valar, but of equal lineage (deriving being direct from the One); even though under their authority as rulers of Arda." (L, 285). Tolkien writes that "because they were drawn into the World by love of the Children of Ilúvatar, for whom they hoped, they took shape after that manner which they had beheld in the Vision of Ilúvatar, save only in majesty and splendor" (S, 21). Both the bodies they take on and their freedom to relinquish those bodies are significant for the discussion ahead.

[28] Stratford Caldecott, "New Light: Tolkien's Philosophy of Creation in The Silmarillion," *The Journal of Inklings Studies* 4, no. 2 (October 2014): 83. Keck demonstrates a similar distinction in the Christian

place that humanity does in the primary world: one, as Rowan Williams writes, of a "deeply rooted aversion to our own creatureliness."[29] Elsewhere Williams writes, "God and the created order . . . cannot be moments in one story. But the dependence of creation upon God is the free bestowal of God's life *in* the forms of finitude, with all their historical and conditioned diversity."[30] This is what Melkor most deeply resents: that he is finite and thereby dependent on Eru for his very being and existence. He does not have life in himself, but rather partakes in the life of Eru.

Since Melkor cannot accept his created nature, he proves himself a nihilist, who would rather nothing existed than that anything should exist outside of his power or control.[31] Tolkien draws our attention to this in the seventh essay gathered into the section entitled "Myths Transformed" in *Morgoth's Ring*. Near the essay's beginning, Tolkien expounds on Morgoth's fall and his motivations toward destruction. He eloquently and movingly depicts the tragedy of Melkor's fall and its ultimate futility. One portion, in particular, is worth quoting at length:

> This [endeavor to break wills and subordinate or absorb them before destroying their bodies] was sheer nihilism, and negation its one ultimate object: Morgoth would no doubt, if he had been victorious, have ultimately destroyed even his own 'creatures', such as the Orcs, when they had served his sole purpose in using them: the destruction of Elves and Men. Melkor's final impotence and despair lay in this: that whereas the Valar (and in their degree Elves and Men) could still love

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tradition stretching from Augustine to Peter Lombard to Bonaventure, that "the angels and demons can create an object to the extent that a human can craft a piece of pottery. The potter 'creates' an object in that he has brought a new thing out of an existing thing, but he has not created an object *ex nihilo*. Neither angel nor human can accomplish such a feat." Keck, *Angels and Angelology*, 21–22. Augustine comments in *On the Trinity* 3.8.13, "As therefore we do not call parents the creators of men, nor farmers the creators of grain – although it is by the outward application of their actions that the power of God operates within for the creating of these things – so it is not right to think not only the bad but even the good angels to be creators." Peter Lombard covers the same ground, recapitulating Augustine, in *Sentences*, II, d. 7, c. 8.

[29] Williams, "On Being Creatures," 77.

[30] Rowan Williams, "Balthasar on Difference," in *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, ed. Mike Higton (London: SCM Press, 2007), 80. Tanner makes a similar point when she writes, "created being becomes what it is and this all the more fully, not by way of separation or neutrality from God, but within the intimacy of a relationship to divinity as its total ground." Tanner, *God and Creation*, 85.

[31] In *Morgoth's Ring* Tolkien writes, "when Melkor was confronted by the existence of other inhabitants of Arda, with other wills and intelligences, he was enraged by the mere fact of their existence, and his only notion of dealing with them was by physical force, or the fear of it. His sole ultimate object was their destruction" (395). He expands on this point in a footnote where he writes that if the small acts of other sub-creators "were forced upon his attention, he was angry and hated them, as coming from other minds than his own." In yet another case, he writes that Melkor "had no 'plan': unless destruction and reduction to *nil* of a world in which he had only a share can be called a 'plan'" (*MR*, 397).

> 'Arda Marred', that is Arda with a Melkor-ingredient, and could still heal this or that hurt, or produce from its very marring, from its state as it was, things beautiful and lovely, Melkor could do nothing with Arda, which was not from his own mind and was interwoven with the work and thoughts of others: even left alone he could only have gone raging on till all was levelled again into a formless chaos. And yet even so he would have been defeated, because it would still have 'existed', independent of his own mind, and a world in potential (MR, 396).[32]

By narrating the nature of evil through Melkor, Tolkien has made what can be an abstract and difficult theological account more graspable. But by doing so in terms of Melkor's anthropomorphized psychological narrative, he also demonstrates what this evil looks like in minds like ours and thereby helps us to identify the ways we can think and act like he does. Since Melkor is a creature and is thereby limited, he "could only ruin or destroy or corrupt the forms given to matter by other minds in their sub-creative activities" (*MR*, 395). Slowly the world takes shape and a place is prepared for the coming Children. But this world is marred from the outset, and all the drama and tragedy that will follow occurs within that marred context.

[32] Hart explores evil's intrinsic nihilism when he writes, "Evil . . . consists not in some other separate thing standing alongside the things of creation, but is only a shadow, a turning of the hearts and minds of rational creatures away from the light of God back toward the nothingness from which all things are called. This is not to say that evil is then somehow illusory; it is only to say that evil, rather than being a discrete substance, is instead a kind of ontological wasting disease. Born of nothingness, seated in the rational will that unites material and spiritual creation, it breeds a contagion of nothingness throughout the created order . . . all minds are darkened, all desires are invaded by selfishness, weakness rapacity and . . . the lust to dominate – and thus tend away from the beauty of God indwelling his creatures and toward the deformity of nonbeing." Hart, *The Doors of the Sea*, 73.

Chapter 2. Life in Arda Marred

Even after the Valar enter Arda, their sub-creative activity continues. They strive against Melkor's ongoing corruption to form the world while they are in it, for when they first arrived "it was as if naught was yet made which they had seen in vision, and all was but on point to begin and yet unshaped . . . and the Valar perceived that the World had been but foreshadowed and foresung, and they must achieve it" (*S*, 20).[1] Even though the initial beauty is marred by Melkor, no one can alter the Music without becoming Ilúvatar's instrument "in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined" (*S*, 17). Arda is a world governed by redemptive providence that creatively turns evil will to good ends. As such, Tolkien emphasizes that at the end of all things, Arda Healed will be greater than Arda Unmarred could have been. For the marring was not accomplished in Ilúvatar's despite and will be folded into his greater design. Arda Marred – simply by being itself, even as characterized by pain, suffering, loss, and death – is his creation and all shall be well. I will discuss this in greater detail later.

Ilúvatar provides an example of this in a conversation with the Valar Ulmo, who is responsible for making and governing all water within Arda.[2] He draws Ulmo's attention to the bitter cold Melkor has brought about and to its result, which was completely unintended by Melkor's bitterness or arrogance. Even the freezing cold cannot destroy the water Ulmo cherishes, nor can it obscure its beauty. If not for the

[1] As Rowan Williams said of the primary world, so too might Tolkien say of Arda Marred: "'The divine' is not present in creation in the form of 'hints of transcendence,' points in the created order where finitude and creatureliness appear to thin out or open up to a mysterious infinity, but in creation being itself – which includes, paradigmatically, creation being itself in unfinishedness, time-taking, pain and death." Williams, "Balthasar on Difference," 80.

[2] Each of the Valar are responsible for the aspect of Arda that was present within their part of the Great Music. Thus, Ulmo is responsible for the water, Manwë has charge of the wind, and Varda's power is in light.

cold acting upon Ulmo's waters, there could be no snow or frost. Melkor thought, too, of terrible heat and fire, yet even these cannot quench the sea or its music, and in fact, if not for the heat there would be no clouds sailing in Manwë's winds. So, what Melkor intended for destruction has resulted in providentially guided sub-creation, for, as Ulmo freely admits, "neither had my secret thought conceived the snowflake, nor in all my music was contained the falling of the rain" (*S*, 19). Further, what Melkor intended to cause division and disunity has instead brought the works of Ulmo and Manwë into closer interaction than they had before. This inspires Ulmo to seek Manwë so that the two of them might make new melodies in harmony together for Ilúvatar's delight (*S*, 19). All of Melkor's works, though they take shape as forces of evil within the world, will be enfolded in Ilúvatar's providential ordering, and even that which amounts to Melkor's greatest evil can one day be redeemed and restored; but before their restoration, even they will be turned against him and put in service to Ilúvatar's musical theme. As Tolkien elsewhere writes, "it was the essential mode of the process of 'history' in Arda that evil should constantly arise, and that out of it new good should constantly come. One special aspect of this is the strange way in which the evils of the Marrer, or his inheritors, are turned into weapons against evil" (*MR*, 402).[3] This is not an attempt to minimize the horrific effects of evil or to paint those effects in pretty colors. Tolkien is not claiming that the beauty of ice and snow is morally equivalent to the torture of innocents, but I will return to this later.

In *Morgoth's Ring*, Tolkien explores the nature of evil in Arda, particularly in

[3] Tolkien also writes, "evil labors with vast power and perpetual success – in vain: preparing always only the soil for unexpected good to spout in" (*L*, 76). This echoes Aquinas's quotation from Augustine, "Almighty God would in no wise permit evil to exist in His works, unless He were so almighty and so good as to produce good even from evil" (1.22.2). It also finds a significant parallel in Julian of Norwich, who I will discuss in more detail shortly. In Julian's vision Christ says, "See, I guide everything to the end to which I ordained it from without beginning by the same power, wisdom, and love with which I made it" (57, LT 11). See also Salu, *The Ancrene Riwle*, 55., which claims that "The evil man contributes willy-nilly to the good. All that the evil and the wicked do for the sake of evil is profitable to the good." There are several examples of this in *The Lord of the Rings* as well. For just three, see 834, 926, and 931.

relation to Melkor's corruption.[4] He writes, "To gain domination over Arda, Morgoth had let most of his being pass into the *physical* constituents of the Earth – hence all things that were born on Earth and lived on and by it, beasts or plants or incarnate spirits, were liable to be 'stained'" (*MR*, 394-395). He later describes the fallen nature of Arda, or Arda Marred, as "Arda with a Melkor-ingredient" (*MR*, 396) and notes that

> Outside the Blessed Realm, all 'matter' was likely to have a 'Melkor ingredient'. And those who had bodies . . . had as it were a tendency, small or great, towards Melkor: they were none of them wholly free of him in their incarnate form, and their bodies had an effect upon their spirits (*MR*, 401).

In this depiction, all are stained by Melkor's dissemination of himself throughout Arda's physical matter, and because of this all are pulled, in body as well as in spirit, toward Melkorism and its associated evils. So, Gandalf can say, without exaggeration, "Always after a defeat and a respite, the Shadow takes another shape and grows again" (*LOTR*, 51). This pull toward Melkorism is a bedrock reality of Arda. In this manner, Tolkien is able to narrate a version of the fall that affects all creatures just as it does in traditional Christian theology, but without articulating the fall of humanity and thereby running the risk of turning his story into an allegorical version of the account in Genesis. By reimagining the fall in this manner, he establishes a narrative that, with all its differences from the orthodox account, also acts as a commentary upon it, and offers a potentially illuminating reshaping of our imagination in relation to the fall. It accomplishes this by defining Melkorism, and thereby the nature of sin, as fundamentally distorted sub-creativity. In placing Melkor's rebellion center-stage, Tolkien enables us to imagine sin

[4] Tolkien comments that "Evil is fissiparous. But itself barren" (*MR*, 405). By this, he is asserting that, at least within the world of Arda, evil is inclined to divide or multiply into separate groups or parts, but cannot itself generate any new thing. Tolkien continues to show how these connected ideas make sense of the presence of evil creatures within Middle-earth. "Out of the *discords* of the Music – sc. not directly out of either of the themes, Eru's or Melkor's, but of their dissonance with regard one to another – evil things appeared in Arda, which did not descend from any direct plan or vision of Melkor: they were *not* 'his children'; and therefore, since all evil hates, hated him too. The progeniture of things was corrupted" (*MR*, 405-406). So Melkor did not create evil creatures, but those creatures were, in a sense, approved by Ilúvatar when he spoke the Music into existence as the physical world. I will return to this idea when I come to the discussion of Saruman in Chapter 4.

from a new paradigm different from the model of Adam and Eve. This reimagining reshapes the kinds of sin we focus on and draws our attention to the place of sub-creativity within the legendarium.

It is this facet of Tolkien's mythology that leads Verlyn Flieger to assert that "Tolkien's is a far darker world than that envisioned by Christianity and lacks the promise and the hope that the older story holds out."[5] While I disagree with Flieger's conclusion, particularly about the mythology's lack of promise and hope, she is right in affirming that deep, persistent, and powerful darkness is part of the created order, and that "imperfection enters the song in the very singing of creation with the disharmony of Melkor, and this Music sets the tone for all that is to follow."[6] The fact that darkness and disharmony are prevalent does not negate the hope built into the fabric of Arda Marred.[7] I will discuss one method of making sense of this inherent darkness in theological terms a little later by exploring a parallel with Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*, but for the time being I will let the tension linger.

This is the context in which the action of the legendarium takes place. The grand story of Arda's history unfolds entirely within Arda Marred.[8] Despite the darkness that has marked the legendarium thus far, at its eschatological conclusion, Arda *will* be euformed and healed. The marring means that the course of history can only be what Tolkien called a "long defeat" since creatures are incapable of solving the problem on

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[5] Flieger, *Interrupted Music*, 140.

[6] Ibid. For instance, see "I have spoken words of hope. But only of hope. Hope is not victory. War is upon us and all our friends, a war in which only the use of the Ring could give us surety of victory. It fills me with great sorrow and great fear: for much shall be destroyed and all may be lost. I am Gandalf, Gandalf the White, but Black is mightier still" (*LOTR*, 500).

[7] Tolkien regularly encourages his readers toward hope. For a moving example, see Aragorn's introduction of the story of Beren and Lúthien, where he says, "It is a fair tale, though it is sad, as are all the tales of Middle-earth, and yet it may lift up your hearts" (*LOTR*, 191). See also: "The world is indeed full of peril, and in it there are many dark places; but still there is much that is fair, and though in all lands love is now mingled with grief, it grows perhaps the greater" (*LOTR*, 349).

[8] 'Arda Unmarred' did not actually exist, but remained in thought – Arda without Melkor, or rather without the effects of his becoming evil; but is the source from which all ideas of order and perfection are derived" (*MR*, 405). Notice that Tolkien emphasizes that Arda Unmarred is not Arda without Melkor entirely, but rather without the effects of his fall. Melkor is essential to the shaping of Arda (whether Unmarred or Marred).

their own.[9] But that long defeat will eventually end due to Ilúvatar's providential work within history, and as I have already mentioned, one of the key features of Arda's healing is that Ilúvatar will turn Melkor's evil toward good ends. He will take up all the discordant notes into his own grand theme and prove, as he says, "that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined" (*S*, 17). Tolkien elaborates on this in *Morgoth's Ring*: "'Arda Healed' is thus both the completion of the 'Tale of Arda' which has taken up all the deeds of Melkor, but must according to the promise of Ilúvatar be seen to be good; and also a state of redress and bliss beyond the 'circles of the world'" (405). He will take up all the deeds of Melkor into his own music, and at the end of days it will be seen that somehow the result is good; in fact, Arda Healed will be "greater and more fair" than Arda Unmarred would have been (*MR*, 245 and 318).

This is consistent with Ilúvatar's inviolable ability to create *ex nihilo* along with its implications about creaturely sub-creativity, which is so deeply significant to Ilúvatar's design, that even when his creatures misdirect their sub-creative energies, he does not overrule them. He allows them the freedom to make, even when the results are evil. This does not imply, as I have already discussed, that evil is somehow able to exercise creative agency within Arda. At the end, all will be taken up, and the whole Tale of Arda will be seen to be good.

Time will prove that it was better for the world to be marred than unmarred since Arda Healed will be greater than Arda Unmarred would have been.[10] But this line of

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[9] Tolkien cites his Roman Catholic faith as the foundation for this belief when he writes, "Actually I am a Christian, and indeed a Roman Catholic, so that I do not expect 'history' to be anything but a 'long defeat' – though it contains (and in a legend may contain more clearly and movingly) some samples or glimpses of final victory" (*L*, 255).

[10] Kevin R. West describes this as "some final state of felicity, felicity surpassing even that of the originally unmarred world." Kevin R. West, "Julian of Norwich's 'Great Deed' and Tolkien's 'Eucatastrophe,'" *Religion & Literature* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 32.

reasoning requires a way forward, a way to make sense of Melkor's corruption – along with all the darkness and misery that come with it – in light of the eschatological promise. By bringing Tolkien's mythology into conversation with the mystical vision of Julian of Norwich, such a way forward exists.

Sin is "Behovely"

The assertion that Arda Healed will be greater than Arda Unmarred would have been finds a powerful parallel in Julian's vision as recorded in both the Long and Short texts of her *Revelations of Divine Love*.[11] Kevin R. West observes this parallel between Tolkien's mythology and Julian's vision, though he emphasizes a different, though very intriguing, element of the parallel than I will here.[12] In the twenty-seventh chapter of the Long Text of her *Revelations* Julian says that in her vision of Jesus, she was told that "all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." But more than that, the Lord tells Julian that "Sin is behovely."

I affirm – along with Rowan Williams,[13] David Bentley Hart,[14] Stanley Hauerwas,[15] and others – that this does not, and indeed cannot, make suffering and evil okay. While it is "fitting," as I will discuss below, it is still sin; it is still evil; it is still destructive; and it is still undesirable. But, as Hart writes, "even if by economy God can bring good from

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[11] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Barry Windeatt (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[12] West examines Tolkien's concept of eucatastrophe, particularly his assertion that the gospel offers the greatest and most complete eucatastrophe (*OFS*, 104-106), in light of Jesus's great deed in Julian's vision. West explores the possibility of universal salvation as a true eucatastrophe to Christian eschatology, and while he does not claim Tolkien would agree with the proposal, he does suggest that using Tolkien's definition of eucatastrophe and his assertion of the gospel's eucatastrophic nature almost demands a better possible eschatological end than damnation for some and salvation for others. While the emphasis is different from mine, the article sets up the conversation between the two writers. West even states that "it is impossible to think that he [Tolkien] did not know her work and know it well. As editor of the thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse* ("Guide for Anchoresses"), and as the recipient of a "sudden vision" while praying before the Blessed Sacrament (*L*, 99), Tolkien would seem predisposed to take more than a passing interest in a fourteenth-century East Anglian anchoress and mystic" (30).

[13] Williams, "Redeeming Sorrows."

[14] Hart, *The Doors of the Sea*.

[15] Stanley Hauerwas, *Naming the Silences: God, Medicine, and the Problem of Suffering* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

evil; it can in no way supply any imagined deficiency in God's or creation's goodness; it has no 'contribution' to make."[16] But Ilúvatar can and will bring even the most disparate themes together into one. He will make all things well, and no theme can be played in his despite. If evil is truly the absence of good, then the truest remedy for it is not to obliterate it – to make it as though it never existed – but to redeem it: to turn what was evil and thereby nothing into a good that thereby exists. If evil is an absence or an emptiness, then its defeat will be found in filling what was empty, so that where an absence was, something now resides. As Hart writes,

> Christian thought, from the outset, denies that (in themselves) suffering, death, and evil have any ultimate value or spiritual meaning at all. It claims that they are cosmic contingencies, ontological shadows, intrinsically devoid of substance or purpose, however much God may – under the conditions of a fallen order – make them the occasions for accomplishing his good ends.[17]

But, what exactly does it mean that sin is befitting or "behovely?" Denys Turner explores Julian's intended meaning through a parallel Latin term used by Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure: *conveniens*, which essentially means that something "'fits', it is 'just so' and that there is something it fits with."[18] The term, therefore, is often translated as "necessary," but Turner argues that particular translation over-simplifies the rich meaning the original word contains.[19] Paul Gondreau sees a similarly expansive definition for the term and writes that "In Thomas's vocabulary, then, *conveniens* signifies not only fittingness but also coherence, or even ordered beauty."[20] Yes, necessity is

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[16] Hart, *The Doors of the Sea*, 74.

[17] Ibid., 61.

[18] Denys Turner, "'Sin Is Behovely' in Julian of Norwich's Revelations of Divine Love," *Modern Theology* 20, no. 3 (2004): 409.

[19] See, for example, the glossary to Barry Windeatt, ed., *English Mystics of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 301.

[20] Paul Gondreau, "Anti-Docetism in Aquinas's *Super Ioannem*," in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 271–72. Thus, Thomas uses *conveniens* to describe Christ's incarnation throughout ST 3a.1 in particular, which addresses questions about "*De Convenientia Incarnationis*." For example, see ST 3a.1.1.ad 2: "To be united to God in unity of person was not fitting [*conveniens*] to human flesh, according to its natural endowments, since it was above its dignity; nevertheless, it was fitting [*conveniens*] that God, by reason of His infinite goodness, should unite it to Himself for man's salvation."

inherent within the idea of *conveniens*, but that begs the question of what one means by "necessity." Turner argues that

> the understanding of the *conveniens* within high medieval theology was of what we might call a 'narratival' kind, or perhaps equally, of an 'aesthetic' kind. Think of it this way: the *conveniens*, that which is 'behovely', possesses not a law-like intelligibility – of that kind which one provides when explaining something against the background of the causal mechanisms and sequences which generate it, but rather that which you provide for a particular event, or kind of event, when you provide a place for it within a particular individual's story. It is *conveniens*, therefore, not on account of being explained by a universal and timeless causal hypothesis, but on account of its fitting within a narrative bound by the particularities of time and place. We grasp the *convenientia* of an event when we grasp how it is 'just so' that it should happen that way, that 'just so' being something which we see when we have got hold of the plot which makes it just right that it should happen thus.[21]

Essentially, Turner writes that we should understand Julian as saying that sin is necessary in aesthetic terms rather than logical terms. It is "just so" or necessary in the same way the events or plot points of a story are necessary. As Turner continues:

> For even if everything in a narrative could have, logically, been otherwise, when we say of what does happen that it happened *convenientius*, we say, because we see, that it was just right that it should happen so, and not otherwise. It 'fits'. There is a plot to it. Its contingency is not that of the arbitrary.[22]

This is not to suggest that evil is somehow acceptable or appropriate, that simply because the narrative ends beautifully any amount of horrendous evil along the way is somehow good. This is the heart of Ivan Karamazov's forceful and moving argument against Christianity in *The Brothers Karamazov*. For Ivan, no matter the beauty or glory of the ending, no matter the healing and hope the story's end will contain – and he does grant that world history will end there[23] – nothing can make the suffering of innocents

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[21] Turner, "Sin Is Behovely," 415–16.

[22] Ibid., 416.

[23] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Everyman, 1997). For Ivan's acknowledgement of the eschatological end of humanity, see: "Oh, Alyosha, I'm not blaspheming! I do understand how the universe will tremble when all in heaven and under the earth merge in one voice of praise, and all that lives and has lived cries out: 'Just art thou, O Lord, for thy ways are revealed!'" (207). However, Ivan continues shortly after with his personal rebellion: "I absolutely renounce all higher harmony. It is not worth one little tear of even that one tormented child who beat her chest with her little fist and prayed to 'dear God' in a stinking outhouse with her unredeemed tears! Not worth it, because her tears remained unredeemed. They must be redeemed, otherwise there can be no harmony. But how, how will you redeem them? Is it possible? Can they be redeemed by being avenged? But what do I care if they are avenged, what do I care if the tormentors are in hell, what can hell set right here, if these ones have already been tormented? And where is the

acceptable.[24] This assertion of *conveniens* is not an attempt to justify suffering and evil, rather, it is a sweeping gesture toward God's providential ordering of creation, his position as its primary cause, and the fullness of his redemptive work within the story itself. In Tolkien's words, it affirms that the Music is Eru's and no theme can be played in his despite, and at the end, evil will not be left standing.

Turner presents another example to help illuminate his point, this time in terms of a Rembrandt painting. He writes that when we consider this painting it becomes clear that

> the patch of shading at the bottom right-hand corner . . . could, of course, have been otherwise; and it is neither here nor there whether, had Rembrandt painted it otherwise, we would or would not have to describe it as a variation of the same individual painting, or as a different individual painting. For what matters from the standpoint of logic alone is that one way or the other the presence of that patch of shading in the picture is contingent: it is so and it might not have been so, it is purely a matter of the artist's choice. And yet from another point of view that perspective of formal logic – that anything at all in the painting could have been otherwise – seems to miss the point, which is, rather, that nothing at all could have been otherwise, everything is exactly as it should be, everything in that painting is perfectly appropriate, right, fitting, meet, just, beautiful and, in a word, *conveniens*. So it is contingent, in the sense that you would have no sense of there being anything missing had we the painting without the patch of shading, and there is no antecedent requirement that it should be there in the bottom right-hand corner; but . . . when we look at the painting we can see that it has to be exactly as it is, but in a sense of 'has to be' that has nothing to do either with analyticity or with natural necessity.[25]

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harmony, if there is hell? I want to forgive, and I want to embrace, I don't want more suffering. And if the suffering of children goes to make up the sum of suffering needed to buy truth, then I assert beforehand that the whole of truth is not worth such a price . . . I don't want harmony, for love of mankind I don't want it. I want to remain with unrequited suffering. I'd rather remain with my unrequited suffering and my unquenched indignation, even *if I am wrong*. Besides, they have put too high a price on harmony; we can't afford to pay so much for admission. And therefore I hasten to return my ticket. And it is my duty, if only as an honest man, to return it as far ahead of time as possible. Which is what I am doing. It's not that I don't accept God, Alyosha, I just most respectfully return him the ticket" (207-8).

[24] Ibid. Ivan rebels against the idea that evil is somehow a fundamental and necessary part of the grand plot of history, and so he fiercely denounces the Christian faith in Part 2, Book 5, chapters 3-5 (193-224). The interaction between Ivan and Alyosha in these chapters revolves around "the nature is of God's relation with the world . . . of accepting God and the world and the problem of what sort of life such acceptance would entail." Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction* (London: Continuum, 2010), 8. Essentially, Ivan will not accept an eschatological hope that allows the torture and abuse of children to be redeemed and forgiven because he sees in that "a God who has need of suffering and death, who 'chooses' them as the instruments of a perfect and universal design that – but for them – could not be realized" (Hart, *The Doors of the Sea*, 68). What Ivan is missing is the reality that God's providential, redemptive work within human history is "a contrary history that pervades and that will finally overwhelm the world of our fallenness" (Ibid).

[25] Turner, "Sin Is Behovely," 416–17. Turner's depiction here might suggest a justification of evil in

So too, sin is *conveniens* or "behovely." It fits in the plot of humanity's story, but that does not mean things *had to* be this way. There is no element of logical necessity to sin, especially considering evil's lack of substance, but narratively they are essential.[26] This is not to say that if Melkor had not rebelled and pursued thoughts of his own devising, that anything would have been lacking. In this sense, reality is, by definition, *conveniens* because it is the story we – or the characters in Arda – are living in. It is only in experiencing the narrative of life in a marred world that we can make the kind of comparison being discussed. Imagining a world without sin allows us to see that God's redemption results in greater glory and that sin was narratively essential to that glory. Ilúvatar could have prevented the marring of Arda, just as God could have prevented sin and evil. But Ilúvatar did not, just as God did not. But why?

Julian asks this question as well, but calls it folly: "in my folly, I had often wondered . . . why, through the great foreseeing wisdom of God, the beginning of sin was not prevented; for then, it seemed to me, all would have been well."[27] Julian's folly exists, not in her belief that God could have done this, but in believing that only by preventing the beginning of sin could all have been well. The problem in Julian's thinking was the belief that only in a sin-free world could all things be well instead of seeing

> that in whatever world God has created, 'all manner of thing would be well'; consequently, in a world in which there is sin, in which sin is inevitable, all can be well too, and sin's inevitability is part of the picture, or if you like, part of that

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light of the beauty that will come, that is troubling. However, he has carefully couched his terms to discourage this kind of reading, and sets the context for this analogy by continuing: "the *conveniens* is something which may be determined only in relation to the particularities of a narrative plot" (417). By emphasizing the particular narrative plot in which sin, suffering, and evil are set, Turner affirms Julian's depiction of sin as behovely or *conveniens* for the particular narrative that is human history, and this can only be determined once the full story has been told. And that full story, which is the history of our world and the history of Arda, is a history that has "the character of salvation" (417). Though we might, along with Rowan Williams in his discussion of Marilyn McCord Adams, question why we are evaluating a small patch of a painting in the first place. Williams, "Redeeming Sorrows," 260.

[26] Julian follows the ancient tradition of asserting that evil is merely the privation of the good, and as such has no real substance or being. About half way through chapter 27 of her Long Text, Julian observes, "But I did not see sin, for I believe it has no kind of substance nor share of being, nor could it be recognized except by the suffering it causes." Norwich, *Revelations*, 75.

[27] Ibid., 74 (LT 27).

plot, of all manner of thing being well.[28]

Turner believes that this "is the theological meaning of 'behovely' and of *conveniens*: that sin is 'behovely' means that sin is needed as part of the plot – or, if you like, that the plot needs sin."[29] He proceeds to explain that in Julian's thinking "it is only if we know that everything that happens, for good or ill, is part of the plot which God has scripted, that we can know that it is *conveniens* that it did happen."[30]

It follows for Turner's reading of Julian, and applies to this portion of Tolkien's mythology, that "the amount and intensity of sin in the world is exactly right, exactly as it should be, *conveniens*, 'behovely': none of it necessary, all of it freely done, and all of it part of the plot, all of it part of what was intended."[31] This is suggested in Ilúvatar's sanctioning of the marred world, though I believe caution is necessary in using the terms spelled out by Turner. This is, in part at least, to ensure the free will of Eru's creatures as Tolkien explains in one of his letters:

> Free Will is derivative, and . . . in order that it may exist, it is necessary that the Author should guarantee it, whatever betides . . . When it is 'against His Will,' as we say, at any rate as it appears on a finite view. He does not stop or make 'unreal' sinful acts and their consequences. So in this myth, it is 'feigned' (legitimately whether that is a feature of the real world or not) that He gave special 'sub-creative' powers to certain of His highest created beings: that is a guarantee that what they devised and made should be given the reality of Creation. Of course within limits, and of course subject to certain commands or prohibitions. But if they 'fell,' as the Diabolus Morgoth did, and started making things 'for himself, to be their Lord,' these would then 'be,' even if Morgoth broke the supreme ban against making other 'rational' creatures like Elves or Men. They would at least 'be' real physical realities in the physical world, however evil they might prove, even 'mocking' the Children of God. They would be Morgoth's greatest Sins, abuses of his highest privilege, and would be creatures begotten of Sin, and naturally bad. (I nearly wrote 'irredeemably bad;' but that would be going too far. Because by accepting or tolerating their making – necessary to their actual existence – even Orcs would become part of the World, which is God's and ultimately good) . . . That God would 'tolerate' that, seems no worse theology than the toleration of the calculated dehumanizing of Men by tyrants that goes on

[28] Turner, "Sin Is Behovely," 418.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 419.

today (*L*, 195).[32]

The free will of Eru's creatures, and his guarantee of that free will, has consequences in the very shape of the world. That Eru tolerates their free actions, even when they bring corruption and dissolution, means that he has allowed their creaturely agency to have sub-creative reality. What his creatures purpose comes to be. This means, as Hart writes, that "God may permit evil to have a history of its own so as not to despoil creatures of their destiny of free union with him in love, but he is not the sole and irresistible agency shaping that history according to eternal arbitrary decrees."[33] Creaturely agency can function as a contradictory force within Arda, but only because Eru both permits and upholds that freedom.

Ilúvatar, like God in the primary world, does not override his creatures' freedom. He does not need to. In fact, he honors and defends it.[34] He can and will bring all their sub-creative efforts into harmony with the Great Music he is personally orchestrating. So, even Melkor's marring can be fitting given its place in the story, and yet, it is only apparent how it can be *conveniens* when the whole of Arda's story is in view.[35] It is because of Ilúvatar's redemptive action in Arda Marred – and only because of it – that the marring can be behovely or *conveniens*. Ilúvatar, in his providence and grace, freely *makes* Melkor's rebellion fitting. In this way, drawing on Tolkien helps to make sense of Julian, just as drawing on Julian helped to make sense of Tolkien. By interpreting *conveniens* in terms of Tolkien's creation of his legendarium, we can see that Tolkien's

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[32] Tolkien elsewhere asserts the free will of created beings by speculating, "Of course, I suppose that, subject to the permission of God, the whole human race (as each individual) is free not to rise again but to go to perdition and carry out the Fall to its bitter bottom (as each individual can *singulariter*)" (L, 110).

[33] Hart, *The Doors of the Sea*, 87.

[34] When it comes to the value of free will and sub-creativity, for Tolkien, as for Hart, "either one embraces the mystery of created freedom and accepts that the union of free spiritual creatures with the God of love is a thing so wonderful that the power of creation to enslave itself to death must be permitted by God; or one judges that not even such rational freedom is worth the risk of a cosmic fall and the terrible injustice of the consequences that follow from it" Ibid., 69.

[35] As Hart writes, "In the end of all things is their beginning, and only from the perspective of the end can one know what they are, why they have been made, and who the God is who called them forth from nothingness." David Bentley Hart, "God, Creation, and Evil: The Moral Meaning of *Creatio ex Nihilo*," in *The Hidden and the Manifest: Essays in Theology and Metaphysics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 339.

narration of evil and its redemption – rather than any abstract justification of evil – enables us to take seriously, and see more deeply into, what Turner has written about sin's place within the plot of history. So, Tolkien can affirm Julian's point more directly and forcefully in narrative terms than she can in theoretical terms. By telling the story of a world in which horrific evil happens, where life is marred by tragedy and defeat, Tolkien's resolute portrayal of the evilness of evil emphasizes the glory of its redemption.

At the end of Arda Marred, when at last it becomes Arda Healed, all the Children of Ilúvatar – whether Elves or Men or Ainur – will see that it has been made better so. They will see that Arda Marred was proceeding in conjunction with the Great Music. And yet, at no point, does Tolkien suggest that the evil occurring within Arda Marred is anything less than evil, the suffering any less real. It is a fine line to walk, but Tolkien does it carefully and deliberately. He does not minimize the pain and sorrow and evil of life lived in Arda Marred. Similarly, Julian's confidence that all will be well

> is not based on some refusal to see sin, and its evil, in the stark light in which . . . we must do so today; nor does her conviction . . . reduce in any measure the freedom of the acts with which we resist or submit to evil as the case is.[36]

In fact, she is quite clear about sin's devastating power: "we see evil deeds done and such great harm inflicted that it seems impossible to us that any good could ever come out of this."[37] But, as West explains, "from Julian's perspective it is both untoward and futile for us to speculate as to *how* God will make all things well; rather, we are simply to trust that he *will*."[38] So, too, with Tolkien. He never describes what the end of Arda will be, or how it will be greater, but those living in Arda Marred must trust that it will be so.[39] They must see the world as Boff suggests, by viewing "the present on the basis of

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[36] Turner, "Sin Is Behovely," 420.
[37] Norwich, *Revelations*, 80 (LT 32).
[38] West, "Great Deed," 29.
[39] Tolkien's position is Julian's in that it also "entails a final outcome better than original sinlessness." Ibid., 33.

the future, the process underway on the basis of its joyful culmination."[40]

Reading Tolkien through the lens of Julian provides a key to unlock some of the mysteries of how Arda Healed could be better than Arda Unmarred could have been, without arguing that sin is somehow good or desirable – in other words, that the fall of Melkor was not, in fact, evil. Yet, without Melkor's sub-creative fall, there would not be a story for Tolkien to tell, as he observes in one of his letters: "There cannot be any 'story' without a fall – all stories are ultimately about the fall – at least not for human minds as we know them and have them" (*L*, 147). As fallen creatures, our stories must engage with a fallen world in order to be comprehensible. So Melkor's fall and the marring of Arda is narratively necessary – they fit just so. This emphasizes Ilúvatar's providential ordering of the world and the power of his theme to take up all other themes into itself. I will return to the significance of providence again in a moment, but before I do, I want to point out that it is this taking up that makes Sam's query near the end of *The Lord of the Rings* into a kind of prophecy. He wonders aloud, "Is everything sad going to come untrue? What's happened to the world?" (*LOTR*, 951). The sad things will come untrue, but they will still have happened. Arda's history will not change, and it is, perhaps, in this way that Arda Healed will be greater than Arda Unmarred could have been.

Julian's depiction of sin as "behovely" also lays some helpful groundwork for explaining Tolkien's conflicted presentation of human death in his legendarium. For, it is in his explorations of human death as opposed to Elvish deathlessness that he narrates his characters' responses to the providential ordering I have discussed. The narrative groundwork he has laid shows that, in Hart's words, "there is nothing, not even suffering or death, that cannot be providentially turned toward God's good ends. But . . . in another and ultimate sense, suffering and death – considered in themselves –

[40] Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997), 152.

have no true meaning or purpose at all."[41] So, it is to this topic that I will now turn my attention.

Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth

Up until the publication of *The History of Middle-earth*, the standard treatment of death within Tolkien's legendarium was given from an Elvish perspective. But Tolkien presented an alternate take in a piece called the *Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth* (*MR*, 301-366).[42] It comes in the form of a dialogue between the Elf Finrod and the human Wise-woman Andreth. Their discussion revolves around immortality and deathlessness, including the idea that death is a divinely granted gift as opposed to the consequence of a fall. In the dialogue, Tolkien does not answer the questions his characters pose, and he does not give special weight to either of their arguments. Instead, he explores the consequences of both views through their encounter.

The piece leads off with the revelation that "according to the lore of the Edain"[43] the human body was not naturally short-lived, but "had been made so by the malice of Melkor" though it is at first unclear to the Elves if by this Men meant that the change was due to the marring of Arda as a general reality or if they saw in it "some special malice against Men as Men that was achieved in the dark ages before the Edain and the Eldar met" (MR, 304). Finrod is clear on the fact that all matter within Arda is marred, as I have already discussed, but the Elves do not see this marring as the cause of humans' shorter lifespan. They believe this lifespan is intrinsic to their created nature, just as it is for the world's flora and fauna (*MR*, 308). Tolkien has this view in mind in his 1954 letter to Robert Murray, S.J. when he writes,

> the point of view of this mythology is that 'mortality' or a short span, and 'immortality' or an indefinite span was part of what we might call the biological

[41] Hart, *The Doors of the Sea*, 35.
[42] Christopher Tolkien dates the piece to 1959, though he is not certain.
[43] The Edain were the first Men to populate Middle-earth. The Eldar, or Firstborn, are the Elves.

> and spiritual *nature* of the Children of God, Men and Elves (the firstborn) respectively, and could *not* be altered by anyone (even a Power or god), and would not be altered by the One, except perhaps by one of those strange exceptions to all rules and ordinances which seem to crop up in the history of the Universe, and show the Finger of God, as the one wholly free Will and Agent (*L*, 204).[44]

In a subsequent footnote following shortly from the passage above, Tolkien goes into further detail regarding the role of death in his sub-creation.

> But the view of the myth is that Death – the mere shortness of human life-span – is not a punishment for the Fall, but a biologically (and therefore also spiritually, since body and spirit are integrated) inherent part of Man's nature. The attempt to escape it is wicked because 'unnatural', and silly because Death in that sense is the Gift of God (envied by the Elves), release from the weariness of Time. Death, in the penal sense, is viewed as a change in attitude to it: fear, reluctance. A good Númenórean died of free will when he felt it to be time to do so (*L*, 205).

The view of death presented in this letter is the Elvish perspective, and is the one espoused by Finrod. In fact, Finrod says that "*death* is but the name that we give to something that [Melkor] has tainted, and it sounds therefore evil; but untainted its name would be good" (*MR*, 310). But Andreth denies this saying that "Men are not now as they were, nor as their true nature was in their beginning," and even more strongly, "We were not made for death, nor born ever to die. Death was imposed upon us" (*MR*, 308), and finally more strongly yet, "we knew that in our beginning we had been born *never to die*. And by that, my lord, we meant: *born to life everlasting, without any shadow of any end*" (*MR*, 314 emphasis original). This upsets Finrod, primarily because it seems to ascribe more power to Melkor than is his due (*MR*, 312). But it also upsets him because Andreth cannot know the Elvish longing for release that comes of being forever tied to the circles of the world without any clear or definite hope of escape. This is the fate of the Eldar, but the Edain have been promised freedom from the bounds of the world, and, at least in Arda Marred, this freedom can only be found after death. Neither can fully understand the other and both envy the fate that Ilúvatar has decreed for the other

[44] Tolkien adds a footnote to qualify this statement: "The story of Beren and Lúthien is the one great exception, as it is the way by which 'Elvishness' becomes wound in as a thread in human history" (L, 204).

and their people. The Elves long to be released from the circles of the world and the Men long to remain forever within them. And this is the root of the world's breaking in Second Age.

Finrod questions Andreth pointedly, observing that, to the Elven mind, it is inconceivable that Melkor had the power "to doom the deathless to death, from father unto son, and yet to leave to them the memory of an inheritance taken away, and the desire for what is lost . . . None could have done this save the One" (*MR*, 313). Finrod does not limit Melkor's ability to pervert an individual or even to deceive an entire people group, but he claims that Melkor cannot fundamentally and permanently change the nature of an entire race. That kind of sweeping change would require the sanction and power of Eru himself to accomplish. From there, Finrod follows with a question that pierces to the heart of the matter. He asks, "what did ye do, ye Men, long ago in the dark? How did ye anger Eru? For otherwise all your tales are but dark dreams devised in a Dark Mind" (*MR*, 313).[45]

Tolkien does not settle the debate between Finrod and Andreth or wrap up the discussion with a definitive answer; he leaves their questions unanswered.[46] Of the two characters, Finrod seems better equipped to know the whole story due to his close association with the Valar, yet he gives Andreth the benefit of the doubt and continues

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[45] Finrod also sees this exile from Eru, this angering of the One, as connected to the felt distance Men experience from the Valar. If what Andreth claims is true and if Finrod's postulate is also true, then it naturally follows for him that "out there in ages long past ye may have put yourselves out of their care, and beyond the reach of their help" (*MR*, 314). However, this is not the only explanation Finrod offers. As one who has sat at the feet of Manwë and Varda in the light of the two trees, he has a deeper and wider grasp of the Music than Andreth does, and so he posits that perhaps humans "were not a matter that [the Valar] could govern" because "ye were too great" (*MR*, 314). He describes them as "Sole masters of yourselves within Arda, under the hand of the One" and in this way, they are unique among the creatures of Arda (*MR*, 314).

[46] In the draft of a 1954 letter Tolkien writes, "Since 'mortality' is thus represented as a special gift of God to the Second Race of the Children . . . and not a punishment for a Fall, you may call that 'bad theology'. So it may be, in the primary world, but it is an imagination capable of elucidating truth, and a legitimate basis of legends" (*L*, 189). Shortly after writing this letter Tolkien wrote in a November 1954 letter to Robert Murray, S.J., "Men have 'fallen' – any legends put in the form of supposed ancient history of this actual world of ours must accept that – but the peoples of the West, the good side are Re-formed. That is they are the descendants of Men that tried to repent and fled Westward from the domination of the Prime Dark Lord, and his false worship" (*L*, 203-4).

to explore the differences between their perspectives. This is especially fitting since the conversation between them seems to be Tolkien's attempt to reconcile the existing mythology with his Roman Catholic beliefs. Finrod appears willing to continue in part because he recognizes both similarity and difference between Elven and human souls, such that those of Men "are not, as [theirs], confined to Arda, nor is Arda their home" (*MR*, 315). Yet, this poses a new difficulty for Finrod because Andreth asserts that it is not just their souls that are not at home in Arda, but their bodies also. Finrod would much rather believe that the Númenórean option to give back the gift of life in their own timing is the natural state of human bodies, that being fashioned out of Arda Marred, their bodies cannot possibly live beyond it. They must end just as Arda Marred must end. But Arda will one day be euformed and healed, and it is from this hope that Finrod sees the glimmer of an answer to their questions. He suggests that perhaps the soul will eventually take the body with it, and "Thus would Arda, or part thereof, 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' of which the Valar speak" (*MR*, 318).

So, the eventual renewal of human bodies along with their souls may prove to be an integral part of the healing of Arda. It may be part of the redemption and restoration of what was broken and marred. It may be, as Finrod continues to say, that this "was the errand of Men, not the followers, but the heirs and fulfillers of all: to heal the Marring of Arda, already foreshadowed before their devising; and to do more, as agents of the magnificence of Eru: to enlarge the Music and surpass the Vision of the World!" (*MR*, 318). And to the great astonishment of Finrod, the Eldar too might be destined to play a part in that music. Though the only hints of their ultimate destiny have been of their ending along with Arda Marred, at Andreth's words Finrod catches a glimpse of Arda Healed:

> and there the Eldar completed but not ended could abide in the present for ever,

> and there walk, maybe, with the Children of Men, their deliverers, and sing to them such songs as, even in the Bliss beyond bliss, should make the green valleys ring and the everlasting mountain-tops to throb like harps (*MR*, 319).

Finrod sees that perhaps the Elves will continue into Arda Healed, though no longer as those for whom the world was intended, but as guests in a world intended for – and, in a sense, healed by – Men.

While the *Athrabeth* demonstrates Tolkien's continued thinking on the nature of human mortality, ultimately what matters for him is the way in which it is experienced. Whether mortality was intended as Ilúvatar's gift to Men, or their natural immortality was withdrawn because of an undescribed fall in the past, their present mortality is the issue. Tolkien does not aim to present death as either originally good, though now marred and *only for that reason* characterized by pain and suffering, or as a curse, and therefore *inevitably* characterized by pain and suffering. Instead, Tolkien explores this intriguing ambivalence about death in fictional form through the encounter between opposing perspectives, acknowledging that there is something good in death since it marks a transition between one state of being and another, while acknowledging the horrible pain and suffering that accompany it.[47] According to Paul Griffiths, this kind of ambivalence toward death is characteristic of Roman Catholic thinking, but needs to be re-emphasized in contemporary discussions.[48] Griffiths sees ambivalence as the proper way of considering death since it acknowledges that while death is the consequence of the fall, it is also a transition into eternal life. Both realities must be held together. We must hold the sides together in tension, balancing "the view that death is a horror to be

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[47] This tension is characteristic of the *Akallabêth*, the story of Númenor's downfall (*S*, 257-282). The Númenóreans chafed at their limited lifespan, for "they were mortal still, though their years were long, and they knew no sickness, ere the shadow fell upon them" (*S*, 261). This is still true even after the drowning of Númenor and persists into the kingdom of Gondor as Faramir explains, "Death was ever present, because the Númenóreans still, as they had in their old kingdom, and so lost it, hungered after endless life unchanging" (*LOTR*, 678). The Númenóreans despise the limit on their lives, envying the Elves their longevity, and desiring "limitless serial longevity" rather than the true immortality that awaits them beyond the walls of the world (*L*, 267).

[48] Paul Griffiths, "The Catholic Ambivalence Towards Death," July 6, 2010, http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2010/07/06/2946279.htm.

lamented and staved off" with "the view that death is a friend to be welcomed."[49] When Griffiths wrote his article in 2010, he saw the emphasis from Roman Catholic moral theologians on "the importance of staving off death" rather than on "the importance of learning how to welcome it." Tolkien's fictional engagement with this idea through the interaction between Elvish and human perspectives allows him to explore the dual realities of death and offer a corrective to this overemphasis on the good of staving it off. Through the Elves, he narrates a "perception of what *death* – not being tied to the 'circles of the world' – should now become for Men, however it arose" (*L*, 285-6). The key point here is in the words: "what death . . . should now become for Men." By examining death through the perspective of creatures whose relationship to it is entirely different from our own, Tolkien allows us to consider it afresh and explore how we might live in relation to it. For, according to the Elves, it does not matter how human mortality came about, but simply that it did. To use Julian's terms, Tolkien's Elves might say that human death is "behovely" or *conveniens*; it fits within the story of Arda Marred.

Though it does not necessarily align with orthodox theology, it is still "an imagination capable of elucidating truth" (*L*, 189). It offers an opportunity to reimagine our response to death in the primary world. Regardless of how human death came into being, it is now a settled reality for all mortals and rather than receiving it as a curse, Men can receive it as a gift. Tolkien continues:

> A divine 'punishment' is also a divine 'gift', if accepted, since its object is ultimate blessing, and the supreme inventiveness of the Creator will make 'punishments' (that is changes of design) produce a good not otherwise to be attained: a 'mortal' Man has probably (an Elf would say) a higher if unrevealed destiny than a longeval one (*L*, 286).[50]

We, too, can come to view death as a kindness, as release from a world marred beyond

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[49] Allen Verhey has concerns with viewing death as a friend to be welcomed. See, Allen Verhey, *The Christian Art of Dying: Learning from Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 94, 96, 98, 107, 108, 143, and 183.

[50] By bracketing "punishment" as he does, Tolkien leaves room for different interpretations of the nature of death, freeing it from the need to mean something or serve some sort of divine purpose.

our ability to repair it, as the chance to give back the gift as Aragorn does, or as freedom from suffering and death – which Hart and Hauerwas present as having "no true meaning or purpose at all"[51] and for which "there is no 'explanation.'"[52] This does not mean that we admire death; it is still far too painful and often traumatic for both those who are dying and those who remain behind for that to be appropriate. As Stephen Sykes observes, "Part of the discipline of pain and death is to let them be what they are, and not to falsify their reality by a specious prettiness."[53] While we do not admire death, we also do not need to fear it. Just because life is good and is a gift from God does not mean that life within Arda Marred is the highest good.[54] Aragorn, and those of Númenórean descent who share his appropriate ambivalence toward death, recognizes that "In sorrow we must go, but not in despair. Behold! we are not bound forever to the circles of the world, and beyond them is more than memory" (*LOTR*, 1063).

For humanity, both in Arda Marred and in the primary world, there is something beyond death. Though Men might rather live on in Arda Marred as the Eldar do, their destiny is greater and higher than that; it is to leave the world and in leaving it to assist in its healing and enrichment.

Providence

Regardless of which view of death characters favor, it does not alter the fact that Ilúvatar is providentially working within the world he has created. As Michael J. Brisbois observes, "the entirety of Middle-earth's nature is an expression of divine will" which is "the result of providential design and control."[55] I will discuss the moral implications of

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[51] Hart, *The Doors of the Sea*, 35, see also 44, 68–69, 87, and 91.

[52] Hauerwas, *Naming the Silences*, 78, see also 35 and 49. Hauerwas continues to write that when confronted with the suffering and death of children "we rightly see and feel that such suffering has 'no point'" (78).

[53] Stephen Sykes, *Power and Christian Theology* (London: Continuum, 2006), 133.

[54] As Verhey writes: "life is a great good, but not the greatest good" and our own survival ought not "become the law of our being." Verhey, *The Christian Art of Dying*, 392.

[55] Michael J. Brisbois, "Tolkien's Imaginary Nature: An Analysis of the Structure of Middle-Earth,"

Arda's providential nature in subsequent chapters, but at this point it is important to note that while Tolkien does not ever explicitly discuss Ilúvatar's providential activity within Arda more broadly, or Middle-earth specifically, his narrative is layered with hints of Ilúvatar's activity as he providentially guides the course of events according to the Music that only he understands.[56] This taking up of all the discordant themes into his own encompasses both the previous discussion of sin as "behovely" and the nature of human death in Arda Marred.

Before I get too far into a discussion of Tolkien's work, let me pause here to expand on the notion of providence for a moment. As I have tried to make clear, Tolkien is not concerned with offering a sense of progress or forward movement in history. This is not what Ilúvatar's providential activity within history is about. Arda's history may have a shape in the Great Music, but that shape is categorically not one of progress; rather, it is a long, slow, defeat because neither Arda Marred, nor its inhabitants can free themselves from the pervasive consequences of sin.[57] Yet, Tolkien still affirms the providential hand of God at work in the primary world and in his secondary world. As Hart writes,

> God has willed his good in creatures from eternity and will bring it to pass, despite their rebellion, by so ordering all things toward his goodness that even evil (which he does not cause) becomes an occasion of the operations of grace. And it is only [this] view that can accurately be called a doctrine of 'providence' in the properly theological sense.[58]

The Silmarillion looks the horrors of Melkor's marring full in the face, and those

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Tolkien Studies 2, no. 1 (2005): 201–2.

[56] I will limit my discussion here to *The Lord of the Rings*, since it, unlike *The Silmarillion*, does not feature Ilúvatar as a named character within its narrative. Further, since it was completed and published by Tolkien himself, the narrative it offers is a finished one, whereas the narrative in *The Silmarillion*, which had undergone years of tinkering and rethinking, was still in some ways a document in flux when Tolkien died.

[57] In his recent book on providence, Vernon White has a similar trajectory in view. He sees real challenges to the doctrine of providence in the recent events of human history, and writes that these events have forced us to reconsider "facile readings of a linear progressive history and corroded faith in easy big stories of progress (whether religious or secularized)." Vernon White, *Purpose and Providence* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 19. See also, Hart's discussion of *The Brothers Karamazov* in Hart, *The Doors of the Sea*, 36–44.

[58] Hart, *The Doors of the Sea*, 82.

horrors play out in the pages of *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien presents Ilúvatar's role in Arda as the One who draws all the disparate themes together into a unified whole, with each part fitting just so. In doing this, he never denies the horror of what Melkor has done or discounts the steady stream of tragedies that follow from it. He does not deny what Hart affirms of primary reality, that "all the splendid loveliness of the natural world is everywhere attended . . . by death."[59] But he does affirm that the Music is Eru's alone, and no music can be played in his despite. Just as Rowan Williams suggests that we ought not understand God's providential activity in history as something akin to reactive damage control, neither does Tolkien suggest this kind of role for Ilúvatar who, like God in our primary reality, does not just "[step] in 'after' we have been allowed a certain amount of exercise of our created liberty."[60] The Music is his alone, and he takes up all creaturely evil, no matter its degree and severity, weaving it into his theme. This is what I mean by providence.[61]

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien establishes the providential nature of life within Arda Marred very early on. As Gandalf tells the story of the Ring to Frodo, he observes that "It was the strangest event in the whole history of the Ring so far: Bilbo's arrival just at that time, and putting his hand on it, blindly, in the dark" and makes the case from this timely occurrence that "There was more than one power at work" (*LOTR*,

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[59] Ibid., 50.

[60] Williams, "Redeeming Sorrows," 266.

[61] David Bentley Hart explores the nature of providence in greater detail, writing, "Providence . . . is so transcendent of the operation of secondary causes – which is to say, finite and contingent causes immanent to the realm of created things – that it can at once create freedom and also assure that no consequence of the misuse of that freedom will prevent him from accomplishing the good he intends in all things. This is the same as saying that the transcendent act of creation, though it grants existence to creatures out of the plenitude of God's being, nonetheless brings forth beings that are genuinely other than God, without there being any 'conflict' between his infinite actuality and their contingent participation in it. As God is the source and end of all being, nothing that is can be completely alienated from him; all things exist by virtue of being called from nothingness toward his goodness; every instance of finite becoming or thought or desire subsists in the creature's 'ecstasy' out of nonbeing and into the infinite splendor of God. And it is for just this reason that providence does not and cannot in any way betray the true freedom of the creature: every free movement of the will is possible only by virtue of the more primordial longing of all things for the beauty of God . . . and so every free act – even the act of hating God – arises from and is sustained by a more original love of God." Hart, *The Doors of the Sea*, 83–84.

55). Frodo does not understand Gandalf's meaning since Tolkien is quite clear that there is no acknowledged worship of the One, or even any recognition of him as such, in Middle-earth (*L*, 193-194). So, Gandalf must clarify for Frodo saying, "Behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker. In which case you also were *meant* to have it" (*LOTR*, 56, emphasis original). Here Tolkien provides a clear indication of the providential nature of Arda without explicitly using the word. If Bilbo was *meant* to find it and Frodo was *meant* to have it, then the obvious question seems to be, meant by whom? Though the answer to this question is clear today thanks to the wealth of Tolkien's posthumously published works, without the benefit of these other volumes, there is no clear answer.

In case the reader missed the first hints, Tolkien uses the same language of intention rather than chance when the hobbits meet up with Gildor and his kin, seemingly by accident. Frodo stays up late into the night talking with Gildor, giving and receiving news. At the close of their conversation Gildor mirrors Tolkien's reticence in observing that "In this meeting there may be more than chance; but the purpose is not clear to me, and I fear to say too much" (*LOTR*, 84). We know from what Tolkien has written in *The Silmarillion* that as an Elf, Gildor knew of Eru's providential activity, but he chooses not to be more open about whose purpose is being fulfilled in their meeting while explicitly denying that it was merely a chance encounter. There is direction and intention at work behind the scenes of Middle-earth and the Elves know this. So, too, does Tom Bombadil. After he rescues the hobbits from Old Man Willow, he tells them, "Just chance brought me then, if chance you call it. It was no plan of mine, though I was waiting for you" (*LOTR*, 126). Tom is the oldest creature within Middle-earth. As he tells the hobbits later, he was there before Melkor came in from the outside, back when there was only darkness, but it held no fear (*LOTR*, 131). Tom knows that Arda is

a governed world.

Another acknowledgment of Ilúvatar's providential guidance comes during the Council of Elrond in Rivendell. Elrond has seen the reigns of Melkor and of Sauron, and has also seen their defeat. While Elrond was born in Middle-earth and therefore has not seen the Valar, he is immediately descended from those who have. This, in part, is the reason for his much vaunted and valued wisdom. As he convenes the Council, he uses even stronger providential language than Gandalf does,

> That is the purpose for which you are called hither. Called, I say, though I have not called you to me, strangers from distant lands. You have come and are here met, in this very nick of time, by chance as it may seem. Yet it is not so. Believe rather that it is so ordered that we, who sit here, and none others, must now find counsel for the peril of the world (*LOTR*, 242).

Elrond recognizes that they were called, though none of them recognized this when they went. The language of calling more strongly emphasizes the presence of One who calls than Gandalf's language of intention, but just as Gandalf refrained from speaking of Ilúvatar, so too Elrond is vague about who it was who called them there. Instead, Elrond observes the distance they have travelled and their unfamiliarity with one another and the apparently random chance that has gathered them in this particular place at this particular time. Yet it is not so. Their coming was ordered and orchestrated by the One who is actively composing the Great Music of history within Arda Marred, even though each person in attendance is there by his own free will.

Aragorn uses similarly strong language. When Frodo asserts that the Ring rightly belongs to Aragorn since he is descended from the last person to possess it, the ranger replies: "It does not belong to either of us . . . but it has been ordained that you should hold it for a while" (*LOTR*, 247). Aragorn was fostered in Rivendell and sojourned for many years in Lothlórien. He knows the lore of the Elves, both as one raised by them and as one descended from the kings of Númenor who, like Elrond, trace their lineage

to Eärendil the Mariner.[62]

Each of these examples comes from book one of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, which is the first of six parts comprising *The Lord of the Rings*. These discussions, each of which point toward the providential ordering of Arda, feature prominently here at the beginning so that in all of what follows, Tolkien's readers will be aware that, as Gandalf said, "There is more than one power at work." That is, of course, not to say that these assertions of providence only occur at the novel's beginning. There are a great number of passages in which characters recognize that Arda is structured so that Ilúvatar's activity works in conjunction with creaturely freedom.[63] Even though the fight is against a very real, and very terrible, evil, there is One who stands above even Sauron. And He is ordering all things together toward the end He has envisioned – an end that will be great and glorious.

In the primary world, explicit signs of providential ordering point toward the deeper reality that God has ordered the world in a way that is mirrored by an author writing a novel.[64] The author orders the story in such a way that we as readers can speak of things within the story as being *conveniens*, but Tolkien affirms that even the author of

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[62] Eärendil plays a significant role in the legendarium, both as one of the few Half-Elven and as the one who sailed West to make the plight of Elves and Men known to the Valar and thereby brought about Melkor's downfall (*S*, 246-255).

[63] See also: "It's my doom, I think, to go to that Shadow yonder, so that a way will be found. But will good or evil show it to me?" (*LOTR*, 604). This reference to "doom" is equivalent to claiming that something is fated to happen, or that it is ordained by "the Authority" as Tolkien says in several of his letters. For an example of this see: "If you seem to have stumbled, think that it was fated to be so" (*LOTR*, 681). This usage of "fated" mirrors Frodo's use of "doom" to denote something that must be. For one more instance, see: "Suddenly a sense of urgency which he did not understand came to Sam" (*LOTR*, 942). This sense of urgency directly corresponds to the peril of his friends at the Black Gate. If Sam did not feel this urgency, it is possible within the context of the story that the Ring could have been destroyed, but too late to save their friends. So, in the providential ordering of the world, Sam feels an urgency to act, and act quickly, so that his friends would be saved, though he knows nothing of their peril. This particular dimension of providence mirrors the words of Rowan Williams nicely: "If there are moments when the act of God is recognized more plainly than it is in others, or when the subject senses a closeness to the underlying act of God that has the effect of prompting, warning, reassuring or guiding, we are not to think of the fabric of the finite order being interrupted, but rather of the world being such that, given certain configurations of finite agencies, the texture of the environment is more clearly transparent to the simple act of divine self-communication." Williams, "Redeeming Sorrows," 268–69.

[64] Tolkien himself uses this analogy to speak of God in several letters. See, for example, his references to "the supreme Artist and the Author of Reality" (*L*, 101) and "the Writer of the Story" (*L*, 252).

such a story still operates as a sub-creator.[65] So, Tolkien's explicit pointers to the providential ordering of life in Arda are also fulfilled by him in his sub-creative role as one who gives the story a plot in which coincidence and eucatastrophe both have their place in ways similar to yet distinct from their place in the primary world.

[65] In the draft of a letter from 1956, Tolkien refers to himself as "a transcendent Sub-creator in this little world" (L, 232), by which he means that in relation to Arda, he is above it and outside of it while still being a sub-creator of this little world rather than its Creator. He later references an encounter he had in Oxford that further rooted him in the reality of his sub-creative role as the author of *The Lord of the Rings*, an encounter in which he was asked, "Of course you don't suppose, do you, that you wrote all that book yourself?" Tolkien replied that he did not suppose he was and was never able to suppose otherwise afterward (L, 413).

Chapter 3. The Euformation and Dysformation of Arda

Most of the chapters that follow focus on Tolkien's presentation of spiritual growth, or euformation, and spiritual corruption, or dysformation. But it is important to note that the potential for individuals to experience euformation or dysformation is not divorced from Arda's potential to undergo the same things. It is part of the Great Music, built into the fabric of Arda, that all those with thought and volition can move down one path or the other, toward wholeness or dissolution – but Arda itself displays both wholeness and dissolution, and the battle between them. In its euformation and dysformation it exerts its own agency and shapes the paths of the characters who inhabit it in much the same way that the Old Forest shapes the hobbits' pathway through it (*LOTR*, 114-122). In the discussion that follows, I present several landscapes that move in one direction or the other due, in part, to the Ainur's agency and to the euformation or dysformation of their inhabitants. And just as the chapters in Part II present the potential for dysformed individuals to experience euformation and redemption, so this chapter points toward landscapes and settings that display the same. But let me first take a moment to discuss the theological significance of "place" as an introduction to Arda's formational capacities.

The Significance of Place

Since Tolkien's characters are embodied individuals, the subject of place must necessarily arise. Having a body implies having it in a particular place at a particular time. In this section I discuss the importance of place as a theological term by bringing into conversation with Tolkien's mythology the work of three different authors: Mark

Wynn,[1] Walter Brueggemann,[2] and Leonardo Boff.[3]

One of the first items to note when discussing "place" as a theological concept is that it does not just refer to a location or a context, but also to a medium.[4] This means that events, like stories, do not just happen within a place, but that the place is an integral part of the story; it facilitates the story and makes it possible.[5] This mirrors the role of Arda as a character in Tolkien's mythology. Since it has its own story arc, complete with its own telos, it is more than just a context in which events occur. It is the medium by which Tolkien's story can be told. As I have already noted, Arda is more than just background; it is, in many ways, an active participant in the narrative. And because it is the medium of the story, a participant in that story, and not just the context, it can "[epitomize] or [body] forth in miniature some fundamental truth concerning the nature of things in general."[6] For example, since all of Arda is marred, each place is also marred and prone to corruption. Whether that fundamental truth is bodied forth in the exceptional and fragile absence of corruption in Lothlórien and Rivendell, in the corruptibility of Isengard and the Shire, or in the absolute corruption of Mordor, each place presents a particular take on a fundamental truth of Arda Marred.

Another feature that flows from the significance of place as medium is that all creatures are rooted within a particular place and their narrative is connected to it. This is evident when it comes to the Shire and the Hobbits, but, as I will discuss below, it is even more evident with the Elves because for them, "places are significant as the bearers of history."[7] Wynn describes this function of place as being a "storehouse of

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[1] Mark Wynn, *Faith and Place: An Essay in Embodied Religious Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[2] Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (London: SPCK, 1978).

[3] Boff, *Cry of the Earth*.

[4] Wynn, *Faith and Place*, 82.

[5] Ibid., 81.

[6] Ibid., 36.

[7] Ibid., 40.

memory"[8] through which people encounter their past. This encounter does not happen in the mind alone,[9] but through a first-hand encounter with a place.[10] In other words, memory can be so intimately connected to a place that those who enter it can, in some way, remember significant events from its past. These may include memories of violence or joy, of peace or destruction, and people can both access and take part in these memories by entering that place.

Place functions in an analogous, though "magical," way throughout *The Lord of the Rings* and the Elves are most uniquely suited to interacting at this level. They can perceive this kind of history, this kind of emplaced memory; they can tap into it and learn from it. Tolkien presents an imaginative illumination of the truths Wynn explores in Legolas's first encounter with the forest of Fangorn, which he clearly perceives as old, angry, and watchful (*LOTR*, 490-491). He is sensitive to the land in ways that the others are not and can access real storehouses of memory contained within places. And because places can serve as storehouses of memory, both in their own right and in terms of cultural memory, they are vehicles for encounter with the narrative of Arda's past. This, once again, is especially true for the Elves, whose hope and joy is in their past, and not in their future. They look to the past as the place where their greatest days reside, and so these storehouses of memory are significant markers for them of where they have been as a people and what they were intended to do within Arda.

Brueggemann picks up on a similar idea when he writes that "Place is a space which has historical meanings, where some things have happened which are now remembered and which provide continuity and identity across generations."[11] Further,

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[8] Ibid., 42, 86, and 97.

[9] Wynn recognizes this encounter when he writes that "the possibility that the meaning of events which have occurred at a particular site, including events of religious significance, can be stored up and then encountered there – where the language of 'encounter' signifies that these embodied meanings are 'presented' to us, rather than simply being entertained in thought." Ibid., 15.

[10] Ibid., 42.

[11] Brueggemann, *The Land*, 5.

these places are marked as sites in which "important words have been spoken which have established identity, defined vocation, and envisioned destiny."[12] Though he does not point toward places as storehouses of memory in the way Wynn does, he does gesture toward the way places bear the history of deeds done and lives lived in them. For Brueggemann, it is not the places that store the memories, but the people whose stories have been shaped by those places. Place is more than just the context in which stories occur, it is the medium.

Because place serves as a storehouse for memory and a reminder of identity, in Tolkien's sub-creation, just as in Brueggemann's discussion, all creatures within Arda Marred are, in some sense, defined by and reliant upon place. It is fitting to extend Brueggemann's assertion that "a sense of place is a human hunger"[13] to all the peoples of Middle-earth. Each of the races demonstrates this hunger. The Hobbits feel at home in the Shire and long to return to it when they are away. The Dwarves desire to reclaim their ancestral homelands is first documented in *The Hobbit* with the quest of Erebor – to reclaim the Lonely Mountain from the dragon Smaug – and then in *The Lord of the Rings* in their quest to reclaim Moria from the orcs who have overrun it. The Elves, too, have their kingdoms, their places of safety, each of which has a distinct character.[14] But more powerful and characteristic than these is the call of the Sea and their longing for the West.

Brueggemann's depiction of the land as both gift from God to Israel and as a temptation finds a parallel in the Elves' connection to Middle-earth.[15] They, like the people of Israel, see the land as a gift and they, also like the people of Israel, recognize that this gift has been given for a purpose. The Elves' unique calling and purpose within

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 4.

[14] *The Silmarillion* tells of three Elven kingdoms (Gondolin, Doriath, and Nargothrond) that are particularly suited to the Elves and their unique nature.

[15] Brueggemann, *The Land*, 53–59.

the marred world is to sub-creatively euform it according to their gifts and talents. They are to effoliate and enrich it as only they can. Yet the land is a constant temptation to them as they are drawn to embalm the past and fix it as an immutable present as they do in Lothlórien.[16] Tolkien describes this Elven tendency in one of his letters:

> They wanted the peace and bliss and perfect memory of 'The West', and yet to remain on the ordinary earth where their prestige as the highest people, above wild Elves, dwarves, and Men, was greater than at the bottom of the hierarchy of Valinor. They thus became obsessed with 'fading', the mode in which the changes of time (the law of the world under the sun) was perceived by them. They became sad, and their art (shall we say) antiquarian, and their efforts all really a kind of embalming – even though they also retained the old motive of their kind, the adornment of the earth, and the healing of its hurts (*L*, 151-152).[17]

This is not Ilúvatar's intention for the land. It is meant to change and develop, just as all creatures are meant to change and develop.[18] But the Elves know that despite their love for the land, they will eventually lose it. They must give it up so that Men can have it. In this, they prefigure the sacrifice of Frodo that I will discuss in Chapter 6.

This idea of place as a gift has direct impact on the way we are to live with and within the land. Brueggemann points toward humanity's responsibility to care for the land, to steward and protect it. Boff picks up this point and runs with it, but Brueggemann's portrayal has significant application for this discussion. He writes that the "land is not fully given over to our satiation. Land has its own rights over against us and even its own existence."[19] The land is not ours, just as it is not the Elves'. They know that they are stewarding, safeguarding, and effoliating the world for the sake of the Men who will inherit it from the Fourth Age onward. But beyond that, the Elves

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[16] "In Middle-earth, it is the Elves whose nostalgia is the strongest – both in the sense of yearning for the past and attempting to maintain that past now, in places like Lothlórien and Rivendell." Curry, *Defending Middle-Earth*, 1998, 54.

[17] For a fascinating discussion of the ways in which Galadriel both exemplifies this Elven desire to embalm the past and yet subverts and redeems it see Sarah Workman, "Female Valor Without Renown: Memory, Mourning and Loss at the Center of Middle-Earth," in *A Quest of Her Own: Essays on the Female Hero in Modern Fantasy*, ed. Lori M. Campbell (McFarland, 2014), 82–91.

[18] In Boff's terms, this means that all of creation "is in evolution: it comes from the past, is embodied in the present, and opens to the future." Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, 25.

[19] Brueggemann, *The Land*, 63–64.

recognize what we might refer to as "the sacred" within the land. They see that it has an existence of its own, a story of its own, that includes the sentient races but does not depend upon them. When the Elves are gone, the land will continue. Even if Sauron had been successful in reclaiming the Ring and had wreaked havoc and destruction upon the land, despoiling it of all that was good or true or beautiful in it, still the land would exist. Still it would still have its own story, its own telos, and its own eschatological hope of freedom from bondage.[20]

Boff sees similar themes at work in our relationship to nature in the primary world. His picture of how humanity ought to interact with the world mirrors Tolkien's in that he sees our purpose as further developing it rather than manipulating it.[21] According to Boff, rather than bringing utilitarian, anthropocentric assumptions to bear upon the world, we are to steward it, care for it, and effoliate it.[22] The world, whether Arda Marred or the primary world, has a right to exist, to have its own present and future, just as it had a past apart from its inhabitants.[23] We are not to interact with the world as Saruman does, who does not care for growing things beyond how they can be made to serve his purpose, who will plunder the land for fuel to feed the fires of his industry as his mind of metal and wheels seeks to turn the natural order to his advantage. Saruman sought to subjugate the earth, to master it, and bring it to heel. His aim was to turn the natural world into a machine entirely directed to his service, reducing what was unmistakably other to a mere appendage of his will. He had no sense of the world's co-existence with him, only of its existence for him. I will return to these

[20] Remember Tolkien's statement that Melkor's nihilism is ultimately fruitless because he cannot unmake creation. Even if Arda were undone, still the raw materials would exist as something other than himself.

[21] "Instead of manipulating reality for their own enjoyment or dominating aspects of nature, human beings should learn to manage or deal with nature by obeying the logic of nature itself, or starting from within it, unleashing what is found seminally within it, and always in view of its preservation and further development." Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, 4.

[22] Ibid., 7.

[23] Ibid., 7 and 33.

points in Chapter 4.

No, for Tolkien as for Boff, Brueggemann, and Wynn the land is autonomous from us and has its own right to exist. The Valar know this and love Arda as something "other than themselves, strange and free" (*S*, 18). Boff especially affirms the land's independence from us, and suggests that we ought to love it as another of God's good creations, caring for it as it cares for us. This is the natural mode of interacting with the earth, for the reality is that we share its fate.[24] So too, the inhabitants of Middle-earth share Arda's fate. If the land is ruined under the misguided rule of Sauron or Saruman, the people will suffer along with it. But if the land thrives, as it does under the hand of the Hobbits and Elves, the people too will thrive. Tolkien acknowledged the reality Boff would later address, that "we are individuals (as in some degree are all living things) but do not, cannot, live in isolation, and have a bond with all other things, ever closer up to the absolute bond with our own human kind" (*L*, 399). This is the root of the desire Tolkien writes of in 'On Fairy Stories" to commune with the beasts (*OFS*, 96). Tolkien sees in this desire a carryover from a state of harmony with nature before the fall. And while we cannot regain that harmony since the fall has permanently marred our relationship to the world around us, we can change the ways we interact with it moving forward. We can enrich it and steward it, caring for the creatures humanity once lived in harmony with, safeguarding them and their right to an existence of their own. In other words, Men can learn to live as Elves in the world, caring deeply for the land and helping it to flourish. The key is to learn as the hobbits do throughout their journeys in *The Lord of the Rings* "without entirely losing their native hobbitish simplicity," and to arrive at "an Elvish realization of the nature and value of the essentials of the natural world."[25]

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[24] Ibid., 14.
[25] Curry, *Defending Middle-Earth*, 1998, 155.

But to live in this way Men must learn to see the land, the plants, and the trees as the Elves do. Men must learn from the Elves who "have a devoted love of the physical world, and a desire to observe and understand it for its own sake and as 'other' – sc. as a reality derived from God in the same degree as themselves – not as a material for use or as a power-platform" (*L*, 236).[26] Tolkien presents this kind of perspective shift when Frodo enters Lothlórien and, for the first time, finds delight in the living tree itself (*LOTR*, 351). Frodo's response is of an Elvish cast, but without losing his unique hobbitish perspective. Sam's reaction to Lothlórien mirrors Frodo's, but finds its own unique expression. He says, "If there's any magic about, it's right down deep, where I can't lay my hands on it, in a manner of speaking" (*LOTR*, 361). Sam is exactly right. The magic is there, in Lothlórien as in the wider world of Arda, but it is down in the very heart of the land and cannot be separated from it. We ought not follow in Saruman's footsteps and break a thing just to find out what it is made of. Aragorn sees the land as Sam does and tells the Rider of Rohan that "The green earth . . . is a mighty matter of legend, though you tread it under the light of day!" (*LOTR*, 434). The key lesson these characters have learned is that "Real wisdom consists in knowing one's own limits, in accepting human nature as it is and its place in a world which is not our possession."[27] Arda does not belong to them; it has a life and a story of its own; it has its own unique theological significance as a storehouse of memory and the medium through which their life stories can be told. These characters have learned what it is to be embodied in a particular place at a particular time.

The importance of recognizing the world as something other than ourselves, as a

[26] Aragorn demonstrates this kind of recognition of the world as a unique other with its own story when he says of the wind on Caradhras, "There are many evil and unfriendly things in the world that have little love for those that go on two legs, and yet are not in league with Sauron, but have purposes of their own. Some have been in this world longer than he" (*LOTR*, 289).

[27] Natalia Gonzaléz de la Llana, "Man, Nature and Evil in The Lord of the Rings and La saga de los Confines," *Hither Shore 11: Nature and Landscape in Tolkien*, 2014, 111.

creature with its own story and purpose shapes Tolkien's portrayal of life within Arda Marred. It is to the ways that characters either live in line with the insights above or in opposition to them that I will now turn my attention. For it is in characters' modes of being within the world that they demonstrate Arda's capacity for both euformation and dysformation. Their actions both affect the land and are affected by it. The land comes to reflect the character of its inhabitants, and will in turn push them further toward that end. In other words, places are corrupted or ennobled by their occupants – and by the Valar's continued sub-creative shaping of Arda – and places give back to their inhabitants, encouraging their flourishing or dissolution.

One of the chief themes of *The Lord of the Rings* is that of ennoblement, or in this essay's terms, euformation. But the question begged by this chapter is whether *places* can be ennobled. It is clear from the narrative and from the presentation of Arda Marred in the preceding sections that places, like people, can be dysformed. They can be damaged and corrupted, possibly to the extent that healing is not possible. But can a place become so corrupted that its cleansing is beyond the scope of what Elves or Men can achieve? It is obvious from the narrative that the Shire can become Mordor, but can Mordor be healed so that it becomes something like the Shire?[28]

Mordor

There are numerous places that become corrupted by the presence of evil. Natalia González de la Llana observes that: "The landscapes where the dark forces are dominant in *The Lord of the Rings* are horrible places where nothing grows, where Nature has been destroyed and substituted, like in Isengard, by technological 'progress,' and

[28] "This is worse than Mordor!" said Sam. "Much worse in a way. . ."
"Yes, this is Mordor," said Frodo. "Just one of its works. Saruman was doing its work all the time, even when he thought he was working for himself" (*LOTR*, 1018).

where decent human labor has been exchanged for cruel slavery."[29] In other words, these are places where sub-creative craftsmanship has been replaced with repetitive drudgery.

Aside from the obvious example of Mordor, which I will return to in a moment, Tolkien also describes Torech Ungol, the dead marshes, Orthanc, Mirkwood, the Barrow-Downs, and the Shire itself. These are all places that were corrupted by the evil that occurred in or occupied it. Mirkwood was a lovely, green forest before Sauron dwelt there as the Necromancer. Shelob befouled Torech Ungol with her evil and spite. The dead marshes are a haunted place after the deaths of so many Elves, Men, and orcs in ages past. Orthanc and the Shire were actively spoiled by Saruman. Barrow wights turned the Downs into a haunted land of fog and fear.[30] Of all these, only Orthanc and the Shire are fully healed within the bounds of Tolkien's story. Treebeard and the ents make the land around Orthanc what it once was before Saruman ravaged it, though in the minds of the ents it can never be the same since so many of their friends were felled by orkish axes. The Shire is healed with remarkable speed thanks to Galadriel's prescient gift to Sam and his generous, open-handed use of it (*LOTR*, 1023). He wants to heal and restore his home to what it used to be, and so he is motivated to spend the precious gift to benefit not just the *people* of the Shire, but the *land* of the Shire itself. As a gardener, Sam knows that the land requires a faithful and loving hand to help it thrive, and in thriving it will provide for those who depend upon it. Through Sam, Tolkien advocates a paradigm of stewardship rather than dominion, such that those who thrive within the land are those who care for it.

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[29] Gonzaléz de la Llana, "Man, Nature and Evil," 108. Patrick Curry also observes this dynamic when he observes that Mordor is "an utterly authoritarian state, with a slave-based economy featuring industrialized agriculture and intensive industrialism – 'great slave-worked fields away south,' while 'in the northward regions were the mines and forges' – all of which is geared toward military production for the purpose of worldwide domination." Curry, *Defending Middle-Earth*, 1998, 52.

[30] Jonathan Nauman offers an insightful and engaging discussion of the Downs in Jonathan Nauman, "Old Forest and Barrow-downs: A Natural Prelude to The Lord of the Rings," *Hither Shore 11: Nature and Landscape in Tolkien*, 2014, 18–31.

But as for the other tainted places, Tolkien does not portray their full restoration. Through the timely intervention of Tom Bombadil the spell of malice, fear, and death on one of the Barrows is broken, but that is only one out of many and Tom shows no desire to attend to the others in similar fashion. Their restoration is incomplete – but healing is possible. There is hope that Mirkwood will not always be infested with giant spiders and other evil creatures, but we do not see that hope fulfilled, and neither do we see Shelob cast out of Torech Ungol so her taint can be cleansed, nor are the dead marshes cleared. That is not to say that they cannot be healed given time and effort, but Tolkien does not imagine that healing; the healing he imagines remains incomplete.

When it comes to Mordor, there seems to be little hope that it can ever become wholesome again. Sauron has followed in Melkor's nihilistic footsteps, turning from seeking dominion to seeking destruction. Melkor's wickedness corrupts Sauron who corrupts Saruman in turn. The model each of them follows is "to smash nature and the world into submission," which "is an offense to the moral fabric of Middle-earth, for to desire the domination of nature implies the desire to dominate the will of God."[31] Those who seek mastery over the physical world[32] – and failing that, seek its utter annihilation – prove themselves to be directly opposed to the stewardship paradigm Tolkien has established.[33] Sauron's vision for Arda is "one of death and environmental degradation" in which all that is good and beautiful would die.[34]

Gandalf confirms Theoden's worry "that much that was fair and wonderful shall pass for ever out of Middle-earth" with the words, "The evil of Sauron cannot be

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[31] Brisbois, "Imaginary Nature," 203.

[32] This desire for domination is especially evident in the reality that "The landscape features in Mordor tend to be the product of human (or humanoid) activity, acting against nature rather than in harmony with it." Alan Turner, "Tolkien's Living Landscapes," *Hither Shore 11: Nature and Landscape in Tolkien*, 2014, 16. It is this facet of acting against nature rather than in harmony with it that is most telling for this discussion.

[33] As González de la Llana notes, "the characters' attitude towards their environment is not just a small characteristic of their personality, but a sign of their morals and spiritual height." Gonzaléz de la Llana, "Man, Nature and Evil," 114.

[34] Brisbois, "Imaginary Nature," 210.

wholly cured nor made as if it had not been. But to such days we are doomed" (*LOTR*, 550).[35] This is, at least in part, because Ilúvatar still upholds his creatures' sub-creative freedom, even when it results in destruction. Later, when Frodo, Sam, and Gollum finally approach the Black Gate, they "come to the desolation that lay before Mordor: the lasting monument to the dark labor of its slaves that should endure when all their purposes were made void; a land defiled, diseased beyond healing – unless the Great Sea should enter in and wash it with oblivion" (*LOTR*, 631-2). Notice that the only alternative to perpetual corruption is oblivion, the sinking beneath the waves. This is what happened to Beleriand back in *The Silmarillion*, though Beleriand was not a tainted or corrupted place. It contained many Elven sanctuaries, but in the Valar's final battle with Melkor – who had become less than he once was and taken the name of Morgoth – when at last he was cast down, the fair and lovely land of Beleriand was a casualty (*MR*, 403), sinking beneath the waves in the turmoil of angelic battle. Tolkien explores the reasons behind this in *Morgoth's Ring*, noting that where

> Sauron's, relatively smaller power was *concentrated*; Morgoth's vast power was *disseminated*. The whole of 'Middle-earth' was Morgoth's Ring . . . Unless swiftly successful, War against him might well end in reducing all Middle-earth to chaos, possibly even all Arda . . . But the dilemma of the Valar was this: Arda could only be liberated by a physical battle; but a probable result of such a battle was the irretrievable ruin of Arda. Moreover, the final eradication of Sauron (as a power directing evil) was achievable by the destruction of the Ring. No such eradication of Morgoth was possible, since this required the complete disintegration of the 'matter' of Arda (400).

The Valar knew the result of their war against Morgoth would be, at best, the partial destruction of Middle-earth, which is the reason for their delay in fighting him. If they waited too long, Morgoth's power over the matter of Middle-earth would have become even more complete. But if they did not wait long enough, they had no hope of defeating him. As Tolkien explains:

> The last intervention with physical force by the Valar, ending in the breaking of

[35] The emphasis here is on the present. Gandalf is not claiming that Sauron's evils are beyond healing. They may be beyond healing in this age, but beyond that he does not comment.

> Thangorodrim, may then be viewed as not in fact reluctant or even unduly delayed, but timed with precision. The intervention came before the annihilation of the Eldar and the Edain. Morgoth though locally triumphant had neglected most of Middle-earth during the war; and by it he had in fact been *weakened*: in power and prestige (he had lost and failed to recover one of the Silmarils), and above all in mind. He had become absorbed in 'kingship', and though a tyrant of ogre-size and monstrous power, this was a vast fall even from his former wickedness of hate, and his terrible nihilism. He had fallen to *like* being a tyrant-king with conquered slaves, and vast obedient armies (*MR*, 402-403).[36]

So, Morgoth could be defeated without the complete destruction of the matter he had tainted, but some of that matter had to be destroyed to beat him. The land he had called home had to be removed from Middle-earth because of how deeply he had corrupted it. Just as he had placed himself beyond repentance and had to be removed from Middle-earth, so too his fortress had to be removed (*MR*, 403). So, too, has Mordor been spoiled beyond repair. Or has it?

Tolkien mulled over this question for years, wondering to what extent Arda Marred could be restored. Given his conception of matter itself within Middle-earth as marred and bearing Morgoth's taint to a greater or lesser degree, it is understandable that he was forced to wonder. He was asking big questions of his sub-creation and did not land on a clear answer. But he does offer hope for restoration through places that experience euformation and growth thanks to their inhabitants. These are in direct contrast to the ruin that is Mordor, and give glimpses of what Arda Healed might be like. While space does not permit a thorough discussion of each locale, I will briefly introduce the two Elven kingdoms of Lothlórien and Rivendell, both of which are set apart from the rest of Arda, having been ennobled by their inhabitants.[37]

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[36] Thangorodrim is the name of Morgoth's stronghold in the North of Middle-earth.

[37] The examples of Gondolin, Doriath, and Nargothrond mentioned earlier are all set apart and ennobled by the Elves. Gondolin and Nargothrond are hidden kingdoms until treachery betrays their location, and Doriath is protected by a Maian spell that prevents evil from crossing its borders.

Lothlórien[38]

Lothlórien is undoubtedly a peaceful and beautiful place. It is one of the few places where Arda's grandest and most majestic trees, the mallorns, flourish. Their presence is indicative of the kind of place Lothlórien is. When it comes to Lothlórien, Tolkien draws the connection between people and place in explicit terms through the mouth of Sam, who says of the Elves who live there: "they seem to belong here, more even than Hobbits do in the Shire. Whether they've made the land, or the land's made them, it's hard to say" (*LOTR*, 360). It seems that both statements are equally true. The Elves have made the land what it is, but the land has also uniquely shaped the Elves.

But what exactly have the Elves shaped the land into? Brisbois sees in the descriptions of Lothlórien a clear depiction of the space as "a cathedral, a holy sanctuary."[39] This element of holiness seems strongly supported by Frodo's first reflection on the land:

> Frodo stood awhile still lost in wonder. It seemed to him that he had stepped through a high window that looked on a vanished world. A light was upon it for which his language had no name. All that he saw was shapely, but the shapes seemed at once clear cut, as if they had been first conceived and drawn at the uncovering of his eyes, and ancient as if they had endured forever. He saw no color but those he knew, gold and white and blue and green, but they were fresh and poignant, as if he had at that moment first perceived them and made for them names new and wonderful. In winter here no heart could mourn for summer or for spring. No blemish or sickness or deformity could be seen in anything that grew upon the earth. On the land of Lórien there was no stain (*LOTR*, 350).

One can imagine Tolkien writing this with a passage from *On Fairy Stories* in mind. There he writes that the possibility for recovery inherent within fantasy can empower us to "look at green again, and be startled anew (but not blinded) by blue and yellow and red" (82). This is Frodo's experience of Lothlórien. He encounters nature afresh, because Lothlórien itself is fresh and new, though pervaded with an ancient air. As

[38] Even though Lothlórien is only in focus from 333-89, it is referenced regularly through the remainder of *The Lord of the Rings*.

[39] Brisbois, "Imaginary Nature," 207.

Brisbois observes, we catch "a glimpse of the holy, as expressed through the natural perfection of Lórien."[40] The connection between ennoblement and holiness warrants more attention here since Tolkien explicitly draws it in a 1956 letter writing that *The Lord of the Rings* is "primarily a study of the ennoblement (or sanctification) of the humble" (L, 237). Sanctification refers to the process of, literally, setting something apart for a special purpose, but as a theological term it means to acquire holiness or sanctity. And holiness is often equated in the Bible with being spotless and free from blemish or stain.[41] Since Tolkien chose to describe Lothlórien as free from blemish, sickness, deformity, or stain, it seems clear that he intends to portray the land as holy, as sanctified, as ennobled – as euformed. It is a place of rest where the Fellowship can recover from Gandalf's tragic death and be "healed of hurt and weariness" (*LOTR*, 359). This in turn brings their emotional wounds to the surface where they too can be healed through songs of mourning.

Yet, while in Lothlórien Tolkien presents the epitome of a euformed landscape, there is a sense in which Lothlórien is unnatural. The progression of time is altered there, for mortals as for Elves, as is apparent in Sam's inability to figure out what day it is based on the cycles of the moon (*LOTR*, 388-9). As Frodo tells Sam, "In that land, maybe, we were in a time that has elsewhere long gone by. It was not, I think, until Silverlode bore us back to Anduin that we returned to the time that flows through mortal lands" (*LOTR*, 388). Lothlórien is out of joint with the world surrounding it and even it cannot resist Sauron indefinitely. It is also, perhaps, the place that most clearly demonstrates the Elves' folly. Their desire to preserve a place inviolate has caused them to embalm the past rather than allow the world to grow and change. As Tolkien wrote, "Children are meant to grow up, and not to become Peter Pans" (*OFS*, 62). So, too,

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[40] Ibid.

[41] For just a few examples see Colossians 1:22; Ephesians 1:4 and 5:27; and 2 Samuel 22:24.

Arda is meant to grow up and not become Peter Pan. It is meant to mature, but the Elves have stopped that from happening. So, Lothlórien offers a portrait of the Elves' potential to ennoble Arda and of their temptation to arrest its natural processes of change and thereby extend their time within it.

Rivendell[42]

While Lothlórien is removed from Arda's normal flow of time, Rivendell at least remains part of the world as it ought to be. It is protected and separate, but not in the kind of inaccessible way that Lothlórien is. It, too, is a place of rest and refreshment, but its primary purpose seems to be like that of a library or university, where knowledge and history can be shared and explored in company with those who were present when it happened. Rivendell also demonstrates the Elves desire to protect the past, to safeguard memory and enshrine it, but Rivendell still actively participates in the wider workings of the world.

On the Hobbits' first pass through Rivendell (*LOTR*, 219-81), their fellowship of four turns into a fellowship of nine and their journey is extended beyond the original plan. Originally, they were only tasked with taking the Ring to Elrond and no more. But it becomes apparent, after Frodo has recovered from his wounding at Weathertop, that he has been set apart to bear the Ring on the quest to destroy it. When at last the Hobbits return to Rivendell (*LOTR*, 985-8), they are given the chance to rest and celebrate, enjoying the comforts only it can provide. As Sam observes, "we've been far and seen a deal, and yet I don't think we've found a better place than this. There's something of everything here, if you understand me: the Shire and the Golden Wood and Gondor and kings' houses and inns and meadows and mountains all mixed"

[42] As with Lothlórien, Rivendell's significance spreads well beyond the few pages describing the Hobbits' visit.

(*LOTR*, 986). In offering some of everything, it can provide true respite for all the good-hearted creatures of Middle-earth. And in doing so it acts as more than just as a small sample of Arda Healed; instead, it acts as a kind of microcosm wherein the whole of Arda Healed is reflected in a limited space.

Both kingdoms provide the kind of peace and safety that is truly precious within Arda Marred. In some ways, they both represent the Elvish desire to embalm the past, though they do so in different ways and to different degrees. But they both give a glimpse of what the Elves can accomplish with a place, transforming it into something uniquely suited to them in beautiful ways. Lothlórien's golden, soft-hued beauty is timeless and safe from all incursions, and Rivendell's microcosmic nature emphasizes what is worth ennobling in a world that is deeply marred, but not completely ruined. Both kingdoms offer hope for Arda's eventual healing, despite the reality that both must eventually pass away. And in offering this hope, they point toward the promise that one day Arda will be healed, that Melkor's marring will be taken up into the Great Music and all shall be well. It is to this final hope that I will now turn.

Arda Healed

Though Arda is thoroughly marred, it is not ruined. There is hope for its restoration and redemption, even if some places appear to be beyond repair.[43] The hope held out for their future offers the same hope for the creatures who live within the marred world. They, too, are marred and prone to act like Melkor, but they, too, can be euformed. They are not beyond Ilúvatar's power to redeem, though they can hinder their own restoration through their free will.

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[43] Tolkien also provides examples of the healing and restoration of Man-made places, not just natural ones. The city of Minas Tirith provides a powerful glimpse into Arda's potential to be healed and renewed. After Aragorn's coronation, all within the city "was healed and made good, and the houses were filled with men and women and the laughter of children, and no window was blind nor any courtyard empty; and after the ending of the Third Age of the world into the new age it preserved the memory and the glory of the years that were gone" (*LOTR*, 968).

But this begs the question of how Arda can be healed and restored if all matter contains a degree of Melkor within it. It seems that for its healing to be accomplished, the Melkor-element must be removed, but the difficulty of accomplishing this, as I mentioned earlier, is the reason behind the Valar's delay in warring with Melkor. In defeating him the first time, a large swath of Northern Middle-earth was drowned beneath the sea. To finally defeat him, removing his influence entirely from the material of Arda would seem to necessitate the complete destruction of Arda and its remaking, but this cannot be the case since the sub-creative task of Elves and Men is to effoliate and enrich creation. Enriching Arda would only have temporary results if Arda's destruction was necessary, and it seems Tolkien was aware of this. He even provided an explanation for how Ilúvatar could heal Arda without overriding Melkor's misguided sub-creativity:

> Melkor was not Sauron. We speak of him being 'weakened, shrunken, reduced'; but this is in comparison with the great Valar. He had been a being of immense potency and life. 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.[44] The dark spirit of Melkor's 'remainder' might be expected, therefore, eventually and after long ages to increase again, even (as some held) to draw back into itself some of its formerly dissipated power. It would do this (even if Sauron could not) because of its relative greatness. It did not repent or turn finally away from its obsession, but retained still relics of wisdom, so that it could still seek its object indirectly, and not merely blindly. It would rest, seek to heal itself, distract itself by other thoughts and desires and devices – but all simply to recover enough strength to return to the attack on the Valar, and to its old obsession. As it grew again it would become, as it were, a dark shadow, brooding on the confines of Arda, and yearning towards it (*MR*, 404).

By presenting the possibility for Melkor's disseminated self to coalesce and gradually regain some semblance of its former majesty, Tolkien has, perhaps, imagined a way for matter itself to be redeemed. If Melkor's fractured psyche gathers itself together

[44] Tolkien qualifies this in a marginal note suggesting that the relative greatness of the spirit is determinative for its ability to recover and be renewed. This begs the further question of whether there is a spirit to the world itself, a spirit of Arda that is in some way determinative of its ability to be restored (*MR*, 407).

from all the places it has been disseminated, then matter will gradually become free of that Melkor-element that has stained and corrupted it from the beginning. Without the Melkor-element in all matter, Arda itself will be freed from his influence and with Melkor's final defeat at the end of days, Arda's potential for release and redemption can be realized. Tolkien has left a way forward to the eschatological end he had envisioned that does not violate the inner consistency of reality that was so essential to his work, one that would essentially allow evil to undo itself. But this eschatological hope does not negate the painful reality of life lived within Arda Marred. A deep and abiding sense of loss permeates Arda dating back to Eru's third theme in the *Ainulindalë*. There is an immeasurable sorrow blended into Eru's theme, but it is from this that its beauty chiefly comes. This sorrow and loss stem, at some level, from Melkor's fall and the subsequent loss of Arda Unmarred. Though the unmarred world never physically existed, it could have, and all of Eru's children recognize this. The Ainur and the Elves see it most clearly, but Men, as represented in the *Athrabeth*, feel it just as keenly.

Tolkien connects this loss and sorrow to what he perceived as an innate sense of exile experienced, even if unconsciously, by all of humanity in the implicit loss of humanity's original Edenic home. He writes, "We shall never recover it, for that is not the way of repentance, which works spirally and not in a closed circle; we may recover something like it, but on a higher plane" (*L*, 110). Just as Tolkien believed this to be true in the primary world, so too he believed it to be true in his sub-created world. Arda Unmarred could not be achieved, could not be regained because it never existed outside of the Music. And so, Arda Healed will not be Arda Unmarred, but instead it will be a transition to something new, something better, something higher, that will somehow prove that Arda's story is, in fact, *conveniens*. The way of redemption is not to make it as though evil had never been, but to make what was marred more beautiful for having been so. And so, at the end of days, even the marring of Arda will prove to be part of

the Ainur's effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation.

When it comes to the healing of Arda Marred and its transformation into Arda Healed, Tolkien stresses that it is a taking up of the marring, not an eradication of it. In this, Tolkien seems to assert along with Rowan Williams that when we speak of the relationship between human suffering and the unimaginable good of eternity with God, we must maintain that

> the subject remains what he or she has become as a result of the experiences of this life; the possibilities that lie open are defined by a particular history . . . Otherwise, we should have to suppose that the post-mortem identity had suddenly ceased to be the identity constructed by this history and no other.[45]

In other words, if Arda's marring were not taken up into the Great Music – and in that sense redeemed – then it would cease to be Arda when it is finally healed. It would become a new creation, but this would negate Arda's history and Tolkien simply does not envision this. After the end of days, it will only be apparent that Arda Healed is greater if the marred world is made whole with its whole history intact. As Finrod says to Andreth:

> For Arda Unmarred hath two aspects or senses. The first is the Unmarred that they discern in the Marred, if their eyes are not dimmed, and yearn for, as we yearn for the Will of Eru: this is the ground upon which Hope is built. The second is the Unmarred that shall be: that is, to speak according to Time in which they have their being, the Arda Healed, which shall be greater and more fair than the first, because of the Marring: this is the Hope that sustaineth (*MR*, 245).

This healing will mark the fulfillment of the eschatological future mentioned only briefly in the *Ainulindalë*, that as wonderful as the Great Music was, a better music will one day be made. And this future music will involve all the Children of Ilúvatar, not just the Ainur:

> it has been said that a greater still shall be made before Ilúvatar by the choirs of the Ainur and the Children of Ilúvatar after the end of days. Then the themes of Ilúvatar shall be played aright, and take Being in the moment of their utterance, for all shall then understand fully his intent in their part, and each shall know the comprehension of each, and Ilúvatar shall give to their thoughts the secret fire,

[45] Williams, "Redeeming Sorrows," 263.

being well pleased (*S*, 15-16).

The world will be remade. What was broken will be healed. What was lost will be found. The Melkor-ingredient will be removed from matter, but the history as sung in the Great Music will still have happened. The sadness and pain will still have happened, and will still have shaped all of those who have lived upon Arda Marred. But when the greater music is sung, all will see their part in the song and how it fits with all the other parts. They will see how their story mattered, with all that it contained.

And so, it is not just the creatures who inhabit Arda that have their own telos and story arc. Arda has its own plot and narrative to live out, though none but Ilúvatar know the specifics. He calls his children to play a part in crafting that plot; he calls them to sing their part in the Great Music that is Arda's history. It is up to each person – whether Ainur, Elf, or Human – to bring the song into being, to embody it, and fulfill it.

Conclusion

As the late Stratford Caldecott wrote, the story of Arda "describes ways of behavior, ways of thinking and being in the world, that apply to our own."[46] Arda is not *just* an imagined world. Since Tolkien believed that all sub-creation was derivative, finding its inspiration and foundations in the primary world, the ways his characters think and live as uniquely embodied individuals within the world of Arda Marred are analogous to the ways that humans can think and live as uniquely embodied creatures in the fallen primary world around us. Tolkien's story is not an allegory, but it does apply to the world we live in.[47] This idea of applicability is significant because it, in some ways,

[46] Caldecott, "New Light: Tolkien's Philosophy of Creation in The Silmarillion," 79.

[47] Tolkien comments on this distinction in several of his letters. See for example: "I do not like allegory (properly so called: most readers appear to confuse it with significance or applicability) but that is a matter too long to deal with here" (*L*, 297-8); "That there is no allegory does not, of course, say that there is no applicability. There always is. And since I have not made the struggle wholly unequivocal . . . there is I suppose applicability in my story to present times" (*L*, 262); or, "There is a 'moral,' I suppose, in any tale worth telling. But that is not the same thing [as Allegory] . . . Of course, Allegory and Story converge, meeting somewhere in Truth. So that the only perfectly consistent allegory is a real life; and the

transcends ideas of allegory. Applicability is what happens when a story is told truly and worked out consistently, even when the world presented is a fantasy. The applicability Caldecott, and Tolkien himself, see in his story provides the foundation for the discussion in the chapters that follow.

By presenting a world that has been marred, but which can also, ultimately, be healed, Tolkien has created a context in which his characters can also experience healing; they too can move from marred and dysformed to healed and euformed. This is a world in which Frodo and Faramir's conversation about the potential for Gollum's redemption fits because his redemption is possible. In this scene, Frodo asserts that Gollum is "not altogether wicked" and Faramir agrees, but with qualifications: "Not wholly, perhaps . . . but malice eats it like a canker, and the evil is growing" (*LOTR*, 691). There is room for Gollum's restoration, just as there is for his further corruption. As a creature embodied within this particular world, the pathways of euformation and dysformation are both open to him, just as they are for every creature that lives within Arda Marred.

And so, hope and despair continue to live side-by-side, even after the Ring's destruction. The dual capacity for euformation and dysformation remains within every creature who draws its life and sustenance from Arda Marred. Since Tolkien imagines his world in this way, he narrates evil as a corruption of good and as truly evil; he narrates its multiple redemptions in time as true redemptions that providentially work with and transform the evil, yet remain markedly incomplete; and he narrates an echo of lost peace while quietly hinting at future fulfilment. Ultimately, life within Arda Marred can only be a long, slow defeat since mortal power cannot defeat evil and heal what is marred. But God can, and according to Tolkien, he will. But that is a story awaiting its fulfillment in the primary world, just as it was in Arda Marred.

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only fully intelligible story is an allegory" (*L*, 121).

PART II

In the second part of this thesis, I build upon the foundation established in Part I. The whole of Arda is shaped by Tolkien's theological imagination – an imagination which is capable of elucidating truth – and so are the individual characters who inhabit it. As such, their lives reveal the potential for euformation and dysformation through all their uniqueness and particularities. Each of the three characters in focus demonstrates different facets of creatures' formational potential. I draw out the differences between their journeys, while also pointing to their similarities.

In Chapter 4, I attend to Saruman's dysformative journey, one that is characterized by his pursuit of domination and power over others. Saruman's spiritual trajectory is one of steady decline into deeper and deeper depravity, until, in the end, there is nothing left. From Saruman, I turn my attention in Chapter 5 to examine Gollum's narrative. Where Saruman's story is one of escalating dysformation, Gollum's is marked by signs of euformation, of increasing wholeness, until it all comes crashing down. Despite Gollum's sad end, through him Tolkien emphasizes the euformative potential for even the most depraved and debased within Arda Marred, even if that euformation remains precarious and ambivalent. I conclude my character examinations with a closer look at Frodo in Chapter 6. Frodo's story stands in stark contrast to the preceding two since his journey is marked by greater and greater euformation, though it comes with a cost. But thanks to the euformative communities that surround him, he is sanctified along his difficult road and his way of being in the world steadily changes. He begins to look at and experience the world differently and I discuss one of the key features of this in Chapter 7: the possibility for spiritual perception. This final chapter explores the tradition surrounding the spiritual senses in Christian theology before suggesting ways that Tolkien's narrative and the tradition can helpfully enrich one another.

Chapter 4. Saruman: From *Istar* to No-thing

Saruman, like all the *Istari* (or wizards), is a Maia sent to Middle-earth by the Valar to aid the Children of Ilúvatar in their battle against Sauron.[1] As one sent in this manner, he is likely uncorrupted and unseduced by Melkor upon his entry into Middle-earth, yet he leaves Middle-earth as one who has been utterly corrupted – as one of the great forces of dysformation and evil in Arda. In this chapter, I trace the course and nature of his corruption to show one of the ways Tolkien imagines the process of dysformation and its resultant state. Comparing Saruman to the other *Istari* – Gandalf and Radagast – who resist such dysformation throws his corruption into stark relief.

The Istari

The *Istari* were sent to Middle-earth as emissaries of the Valar, "and their proper function, maintained by Gandalf, and perverted by Saruman, was to encourage and bring out the native powers of the Enemies of Sauron" (*L*, 180). They "came out of the Far West and were messengers sent to contest the power of Sauron, and to unite all those who had the will to resist him; but they were forbidden to match his power with power, or to seek to dominate Elves or Men by force and fear" (*LOTR*, 1084). But they did not come in their natural angelic forms; instead they came

> clad in bodies as of Men, real and not feigned, but subject to the fears and pains and weariness of earth, able to hunger and thirst and be slain; though because of their noble spirits they did not die, and aged only by the cares and labors of many long years (*UT*, 389).

They were sent in this way

> to limit and hinder their exhibition of 'power' on the physical plane, and so that they should do what they were primarily sent for: train, advise, instruct, arouse the hearts and minds of those threatened by Sauron to a resistance with their own

[1] As a Maia, he was an actual participant in the Great Music and helped to shape Eä in accordance with his abilities.

strengths; and not just to do the job for them (*L*, 202).[2]

In addition to the dangers of hunger, thirst, and death to which their bodies were subjected, they also risked their souls. Tolkien alludes to this when he writes, "strange indeed though this may seem, the *Istari*, being clad in bodies of Middle-earth, might even as Men and Elves fall away from their purposes, and do evil, forgetting the good in the search for power to effect it" (*UT*, 390). Elsewhere Tolkien describes the potential fall of the *Istari* as sin and the "chief form this would take . . . would be impatience, leading to the desire to force others to their own good ends, and so inevitably at last to mere desire to make their own wills effective by any means. To this evil Saruman succumbed. Gandalf did not" (*L*, 237).[3] They could, in effect, empower resistance to Sauron by succumbing to the very use of power they were sent to combat. They could fall away, could choose evil by intent or omission, just as all of Ilúvatar's children could. As embodied participants in the life of Arda Marred, they took on forms constituted by its physical materials, and so, the Melkor-element inherent within all marred matter was now, in a new way, something within themselves that they had to contend with.[4]

But their embodiment was necessary if they were to live within the communities they were sent to foster and to participate in them for the good of all. This was the

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[2] One example of this occurs just before the hobbits return to the Shire and Gandalf says, "I am not coming to the Shire. You must settle its affairs yourselves; that is what you have been trained for . . . it is no longer my task to set things to rights, nor to help folk to do so. And as for you, my dear friends, you will need no help. You are grown up now. Grown indeed very high; among the great you are, and I have no longer any fear at all for any of you" (*LOTR*, 996). In this, the Maiar mirror their creator who, as I previously discussed, honors and dignifies the free agency of his creatures by allowing and causing their sub-creative activities to have real effects. Ilúvatar does not do the work for his creatures, but he is always at work along with the free exercise of their sub-creative inclinations.

[3] Sykes sees this potential for all in positions of power: "the temptations and dangers attending positions of leadership are virtually inseparable from them." Sykes, *Power and Christian Theology*, 151.

[4] Tolkien writes, "these wizards were incarnated in the life-forms of Middle-earth, and so suffered the pains both of mind and body. They were also, for the same reason, thus involved in the peril of the incarnate: the possibility of 'fall', of sin, if you will" (*L*, 237). While this might suggest a gnostic account of the material world wherein embodiment is the source of evil, for Tolkien the problem is not in having bodies, but in having bodies constituted by the marred matter of Arda. As Tolkien writes, "all things that were born on Earth and lived on and by it, beasts or plants or incarnate spirits, were liable to be 'stained'" (*MR*, 395). Tolkien elaborates elsewhere: "But in this 'mythology' all the 'angelic' powers concerned with this world were capable of many degrees of error and failing between the absolute Satanic rebellion and evil of Morgoth and his satellite Sauron, and the faineance of some of the other higher powers or 'gods'. The 'wizards' were not exempt, indeed being incarnate were more likely to stray, or err" (*L*, 202).

intended outworking of their mission. They were not sent to fight Sauron using a power like his or to dominate Ilúvatar's children as Sauron sought to do. They were sent to empower creaturely resistance to that kind of power, and that had to be accomplished from the inside, so to speak. To empower communities to fight against Sauron without mimicking him, they had to be participants within those communities so their voices would be heard and heeded, able to persuade Elves and Men to freely chosen participation.[5] Only then could they equip those communities to flourish and thrive in defiance of Sauron's will to dominate and oppress. In other words, they were sent to encourage the growth of *euformative communities* in which each member would be equipped to fulfill her part, great or small, in resisting Sauron. The *Istari* are therefore

> forbidden to reveal themselves in forms of majesty, or to seek to rule the wills of Men or Elves by open display of power, but coming in shapes weak and humble were bidden to advise and persuade Men and Elves to good, and to seek to unite in love and understanding all those whom Sauron . . . would endeavor to dominate and corrupt (*UT*, 389).[6]

This is faithfully embodied in Gandalf, but rejected in Saruman, and distorted in Radagast. In fact, Tolkien notes that, "of all the *Istari*, one only remained faithful" (UT, 390). This chapter attends to where Saruman went wrong, but a brief exploration of Gandalf's faithfulness set against Radagast's errors will set the stage for who the *Istari* were intended to be and what they were to accomplish.

When Radagast arrived in Middle Earth, he "became enamored of the many beasts and birds that dwelt in Middle-earth, and *forsook Elves and Men*, and spent his days among the wild creatures" (*UT*, 390, emphasis mine). Tolkien was a great lover of nature so Radagast's error is not in his absorption in the natural world. This is further

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[5] Saruman's power rests, primarily, in his voice. I will discuss this power and its corruption in more detail later in this chapter.

[6] The way the *Istari* were to use power is reminiscent of Augustine's description of the way power should be used within the church, not out of "a lust for domination but from a dutiful concern for the interests of others, not with pride in taking precedence over others, but with compassion in taking care of others." St. Augustine, *City of God: Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin, 1984), 19.14.

emphasized by Gandalf's appreciation for the natural order. But as the previous passage indicates, Radagast loves nature to the exclusion of humanity and elves. It is not that he dislikes them; rather, he simply ignores them. His focus on the animal kingdom prevents him from engaging in the affairs of Elves and Men and thereby from influencing their fight against Sauron except in a peripheral way – and that only by accident. He falls beneath Sauron and Saruman's notice except as a tool to be manipulated.[7] Saruman scorns Radagast while talking to Gandalf, calling him "Radagast the Bird-tamer! Radagast the Simple! Radagast the Fool!" (*LOTR*, 258). While this ridicule is spiteful and belittling, it does stem from a place of wisdom in which Saruman recognizes, without recognizing the same error in himself, that Radagast has lost sight of his mission. He has focused on the birds and beasts when his mission was also to the people. In other words, Radagast has chosen a set of relationships that are, in one sense, *simpler* than the relationships with Elves and Men to which he was called. Animals do not require encouragement in a task; rather they simply need his protection and fellowship. Radagast stays out of the involvement in, and negotiation of, the complex and shifting patterns of human and elvish relationships into which the *Istari's* mission inevitably leads them. While Radagast's mind does not become like Saruman's nor his interactions with the world focused on domination and destruction, he is prevented from accomplishing his purpose.

Gandalf, on the other hand, is an active participant in the major events of the Third Age. He is Sauron's enemy, "opposing the fire that devours and wastes with the fire that kindles, and succors in wanhope and distress; but his joy, and his swift wrath, were veiled in garments grey as ash, so that only those that knew him well glimpsed the flame that was within" (*UT*, 391). He assists Elves and Men at every crucial juncture and

[7] Tolkien notes that if Sauron considered the *Istari* at all, his attention would have turned to Saruman and Gandalf because they were concerned with people, and "it is more profitable (more productive of power) to become absorbed in the study of people than of animals" (*MR*, 397).

because of his faithfulness he is sent back after his body's demise, but he has become "a radiant flame (yet veiled still save in great need)" (*UT*, 391). He is faithful to his mission, attending not just to the great and powerful in Rivendell, Lothlórien, and Gondor, but to the meek and lowly in Hobbiton and Bree. He is concerned with all of Ilúvatar's children and their ability to thrive in a hostile world. He leads the fellowship that sets out to destroy the Ring and literally provides their light in the darkness. Through his agency and his power to bring euformative community everywhere he goes, Rohan rises to aid Gondor in their hour of need.

This has always been Gandalf's role, even back in Valinor when he was known as Olorín. Tolkien writes that Olorín was the wisest of the Maiar and

> though he loved the Elves, he walked among them unseen, or in form as one of them, and they did not know whence came the fair visions or the promptings of wisdom that he put into their hearts . . . and those who listened to him awoke from despair and put away the imaginations of darkness (*S*, 30-1).

An earlier draft of this passage makes the connection more explicitly, emphasizing his role in encouraging the Elves to fulfill their sub-creative calling:

> Those who hearkened to him arose from despair; and in their hearts the desire to heal and to renew awoke, and thoughts of fair things that had not yet been but might yet be made for the enrichment of Arda. Nothing he made himself and nothing he possessed, but kindled the hearts of others, and in their delight he was glad (*MR*, 147).

So, Gandalf's agency is not primarily one that competes with the agency of others, but encourages it.

Gandalf intends to accompany Frodo all the way to Mount Doom, but his encounter with a Balrog, a Maia like Gandalf but one corrupted by Melkor, prevents this. Gandalf gives his life to save his companions, and this is a real sacrifice for him even considering his angelic nature,

> since it was a humbling and abnegation of himself in conformity to 'the Rules': for all he could know at that moment he was the *only* person who could direct the resistance to Sauron successfully, and all *his* mission was vain. He was handing over to the Authority that ordained the Rules, and giving up personal hope of success. That I should say is what the Authority wished (*L*, 202).

Gandalf knows that he is not called to produce or guarantee the missions' success, and thereby *possess* it. In his wisdom, he refuses the temptations to place himself center stage and to regard his role as necessary.

Because of this, he is sent back "for a brief time, until [his] task is done" (*LOTR*, 502).[8] His faithfulness is honored and since "the crisis had become too grave and needed an enhancement of power," (*L*, 202) upon his return he is no longer Gandalf the Grey, but Gandalf the White, or "Saruman as he should have been" (*LOTR*, 495). In faithfulness and surrender to God, "Gandalf sacrificed himself, was accepted, and enhanced, and returned" (*L*, 202). Gandalf ultimately succeeds in his mission because he kindles and organizes a powerful "train of human resistance," a *euformative community*, that he must then release into "other mortal hands" (*L*, 203). This is the task set before the *Istari*, but only Gandalf remains faithful to it (*L*, 203). Yet, it is not only the task that matters, but also the way it is accomplished. So, the *Istari's* mission is not just to empower resistance to Sauron, but to do it in such a way that they do not claim center stage and that those they empower do not become mere tools.

Where Gandalf accomplishes his mission and pursues it in the intended ways, Radagast fails by pursuing a lesser mission, though at least he does not seek to dominate or manipulate others as Saruman does. When I trace Saruman's story below, I will show that not only does he fail to empower resistance to Sauron (and, instead, seeks to be like him), he also plots, as Treebeard observes, "to become a Power" (*LOTR*, 473). In

[8] Nowhere does Gandalf specify *who* sent him back, but Tolkien does in one of his letters. He writes that Gandalf "was sent by a mere prudent plan of the angelic Valar or governors; but Authority had taken up this plan and enlarged it, at the moment of its failure" (*L*, 203). In a brief narrative sketch described in *Unfinished Tales*, Manwë specifically selects Gandalf (Olorín) for the task because he knows he is suited to it (*UT*, 393). Gandalf proves the wisdom of Manwë's choice by responding "that he was too weak for such a task, and that he feared Sauron" and Manwë recognizes that this is "all the more reason why he should go" (*UT*, 393). Gandalf's concern is appropriate since Sauron is of a higher order of Maiar than any of the *Istari* (*L*, 243). The Valar's plan was wisely employed, but even that was not enough. Ilúvatar himself stepped in and took up the Valar's plan, furthering it along and sending Gandalf back to finish the task he started. Tolkien seems to think this should be clear since the Valar's "business is only with this embodied world and its time" (*L*, 203) while Gandalf passed "out of thought and time" (*LOTR*, 502).

Morgoth's Ring, Tolkien explains that "Sauron had, in fact, been very like Saruman" in that both shared a desire for organization that, if unmarred, would have been "for the good of all inhabitants of Arda" (396).[9] But rather than using this likeness to better understand and combat Sauron, he chose to follow in his dysformative footsteps. Saruman succumbs to the temptation to achieve the good he intends by exercising power over others rather than in cooperation with them.

Saruman appears in *The Lord of the Rings* on four separate occasions, and in each of them his dysformation becomes more pronounced. In each scene, it is clear that he has become less than he was before and less than he was intended to be. Though he begins as a Maia, wise and powerful within Middle-earth, by the end he becomes nothing but smoke dissolved on the breeze. The rest of this chapter traces Saruman's gradual dysformation from Maia to human, from human to orc, and from orc to disembodied and rejected spirit.

Orcs, Rings, and Technology: The Strip-Mining of Creation

Where the following sections of this chapter will focus largely on Saruman's narrative, this particular section is only minimally a retelling of Saruman's story. Instead, it circles a set of topics in which the nature of Saruman's dysformation is laid bare: orcs, the Ring, technology, and the stripping of creation. Here, I show that, in depicting Saruman's relation to each of these, Tolkien takes us deep into the particular form of corruption that besets Saruman.

Tolkien establishes two primary *dysformational* trajectories in *The Lord of the Rings* which I will characterize as orkishness and wraithliness.[10] Both are corruptions of what

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[9] Patrick Curry describes the dysformed exercise of this desire as working "to turn everywhere into one empire, ruled by one logic in accordance with one Will. The result of this apparent unity, which can only 'succeed' by being brutally enforced, would be utter fragmentation and isolation, a barely suppressed war of all against all." Curry, *Defending Middle-Earth*, 1998, 160.

[10] This discussion will be limited to *The Lord of the Rings* since the patterns of *dysformation* are repeated there across a broader swath of characters.

creatures are intended to be, and both end with the creature's reduction to nothingness, though they are distinct paths. Where Gollum follows the path of wraithliness, Saruman's trajectory is toward orkishness.[11] His journey down this path revolves around the kind of power he exercises, which, as I have already said, is always power *over* another; power as domination; power for which others are ever only tools to be used or subjects to be controlled; and, ultimately, power that tips over into a lust for destruction as it comes to hate its own dependency on these tools or subjects because they can never be merely that, but always retain a nature of their own as things other than himself. For Saruman, as for Melkor and Sauron before him, there *must* be nothing that does not serve as a tool. Leonardo Boff could have easily been describing Saruman in his discussion of power and its relationship to the natural world:

> The issue is the will to power as domination. This will to domination is sometimes manifested as annihilating the power of the other (oppression), sometimes as subjecting it (subordination), and sometimes as co-opting and harnessing it (hegemony). Power is established as the point around which everything is organized. This domination strategy stirs the impulses to command everything, control everything, force everything, make everything fit, and subject everything.[12]

Saruman, like Melkor before him, pursues this kind of power. He will do whatever he feels he must in order dominate and control everything toward the end he envisions.

Becoming like Melkor and Sauron in this way led Saruman to mimic their way of being in the world. Just as they conceived of and bred the orcs – initially, to mock Ilúvatar and defile his children, but later as servants of their will and infantry for their wars of destruction (*MR*, 420) – so Saruman bred the Uruk-hai as tools of domination and destruction. Just as the orcs are Melkor's "greatest Sins, abuses of his highest privilege, and would be creatures begotten of Sin, and naturally bad" (*L*, 195), so the Uruk-hai are Saruman's "wickedest deed" and represent the depths of his dysformation.

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[11] Both Boff and Sykes allude to Valerie Saiving's distinction between masculine sin with its drive for power and feminine sin with its loss of identity, though neither directly references her. I discuss this distinction as it relates to the difference between Saruman and Gollum's desire for the Ring in Chapter 5.

[12] Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, 74.

Tolkien says this explicitly in *Morgoth's Ring* where he writes,

> Men could under the domination of Morgoth or his agents in a few generations be reduced almost to the Orc-level of mind and habits; and then they would or could be made to mate with Orcs, producing new breeds, often larger and more cunning. There is no doubt that . . . Saruman rediscovered this, or learned of it in lore, and in his lust for mastery committed this, his wickedest deed: the interbreeding of Orcs and Men, producing both Men-orcs large and cunning, and Orc-men treacherous and vile (418-419).

Treebeard makes a similar comment about the depravity of breeding the Uruk-hai, calling it a "black evil" and recognizes them as the offspring of Men and orcs (*LOTR*, 473). This is why, unlike the orcs of Mordor, they can walk in the light of day.[13] Saruman intentionally breeds them this way, so that they will better fit into his plans for domination. He has crafted them as particular tools to suit his purpose.

But the Uruk-hai are not Saruman's *only* evil. Neither do they demonstrate the only way he attempts to be like Melkor and Sauron. During the Council of Elrond, Gandalf describes his most recent encounter with Saruman, an encounter in which Saruman "wore a ring on his finger" (*LOTR*, 258) and referred to himself no longer as Saruman the White, but as "Saruman the Wise, Saruman Ring-maker, Saruman of Many Colors" (*LOTR*, 259). Not only has Saruman been breeding and dominating orcs of his own design, he has been trying to craft his own rings of power.[14] This is yet another

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[13] While it might appear that orcs becoming more "mannish" is a good thing, that it offers an opportunity for euformation beyond mere orkishness, this is simply not the case. Interbreeding orcs and humans, and thereby increasing their ingenuity, does not improve their station; it only gives them new means of pursuing cruelty and destruction. They are no better off for their newfound mannishness because being human does not guarantee that euformation will occur. The Uruk-hai are no less prone toward Melkorism than Sauron's orcs whose "distinguishing characteristics are a love of machines and loud noises (especially explosions), waste, vandalism and destruction for its own sake; also, they alone torture and kill for fun." Curry, *Defending Middle-Earth*, 1998, 41. The Uruk-hai are no better. Their desire for destruction is just as strong, and this desire reflects the mind of their maker, demonstrating how Saruman's thinking has taken on a Melkorish cast tending toward destruction. Ultimately, Saruman will be no better these, the creatures that mark his greatest evil.

[14] Tolkien speculates on what would have happened if the Ring had been used against Sauron in the "Foreword to the Second Edition" of *The Lord of the Rings*. Sauron "would not have been annihilated but enslaved, and Barad-dûr would not have been destroyed but occupied. Saruman, failing to get possession of the Ring, would in the confusion and treacheries of the time have found in Mordor the missing links in his own researches into Ring-lore, and before long he would have made a Great Ring of his own with which to challenge the self-styled Ruler of Middle-earth" (*LOTR*, xxiv). Elrond describes a similar result when he says, "If any of the Wise should with this Ring overthrow the Lord of Mordor, using his own arts, he would then set himself on Sauron's throne, and yet another Dark Lord would appear. And that is another reason why the Ring should be destroyed: as long as it is in the world it will be a danger even to

attempt to dominate and impose his will upon others, exerting power over them and over the world. Tolkien makes this point in a marginal note found in *Unfinished Tales*, where he observes that Saruman lost his integrity

> by purely personal pride and lust for the domination of his own will. His study of the Rings had caused this, for his pride believed that he could use them, or It, in defiance of any other will. He, having lost any devotion to other persons or causes, was open to the domination of a superior will, to its threats, and to its display of power (413).

At first, Saruman desires power in order to accomplish the task for which he was sent, but eventually he wants it simply for its own sake.[15] And his desire for the Ring marks a crucial step in that journey: he desires the Ring because it will confer still greater power for his task, yet the Ring is, precisely, the embodiment of *Sauronic* power: it works *only* by domination. In desiring the Ring, which "is altogether evil" and "the very desire of it corrupts the heart" (*LOTR*, 267), Saruman is now nakedly desiring to dominate (a form of power incompatible with his real task). An extended quotation from Gandalf's encounter with Saruman emphasizes this sad reality:

> I looked then and saw that his robes, which had seemed white, were not so, but were woven of all colors, and if he moved they shimmered and changed hue so that the eye was bewildered.
>
> "I liked white better," I said.
>
> "White!" he sneered. "It serves as a beginning. White cloth may be dyed. The white page can be overwritten; and the white light can be broken."
>
> "In which case it is no longer white," said I. "And he that breaks a thing to find out what it is has left the path of wisdom" (*LOTR*, 259).

Saruman has forgotten the good in the search for power to effect it. He is seeking to become a Power – one who moves and shapes the course of history – and in doing so has left the path of wisdom. His mind of metal and wheels has been churning away at a project in direct contradiction to the sub-creative task he was created to perform –

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the Wise" (*LOTR*, 267).

[15] For Saruman, as for the primary world in Boff's perspective, "The fact is that power has come to stand for itself. Power has emerged as an end in itself." Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, 73.

both in the Great Music and in the ongoing fashioning of Arda. He is not seeking to effoliate creation, only to subjugate it.

In pursuing power in these ways, Saruman has turned against the task for which he was originally given his power. The particular manner in which he has rejected his task involves a contrast between a sub-creative power that works *with* the grain of things and a power that seeks to override the grain because it desires materials entirely subordinated to its will – that possess no character of their own that could resist its will. It is telling that his most significant acts of making are not of new things; they are imitations of what Sauron has already accomplished – both in the fashioning of new rings of power and in the breeding of the Uruk-hai. The only new developments for which he can take credit are weapons of modern warfare.[16] These "advances" and their lack of beneficial utility highlight Tolkien's prejudice against mechanization and modernization, especially as they become integrated into warfare. As González de la Llana points out, "The use of technology as a way of ruling over Nature and using its resources for egoistic purposes is clearly criticized in Tolkien's work through the figure of Saruman, whose lust for power makes him lose the right path."[17] Through the use of technology, Saruman works against the grain of creation, exercising power over the world – breaking and remaking it according to his will – rather than working with the grain and effoliating it. Boff describes this kind of interaction with the earth in the primary world as an "anti-ecological paradigm of dominating power that has the effect of a killing machine spreading destruction."[18] This paradigm is emphasized in Saruman's dismissal of nature except as a tool and in the distinction González de la Llana observes between good and evil characters in the legendarium: "Negative characters like the Orcs

[16] See the "fire of Orthanc," which is some form of explosive the Uruk-hai use to breach the walls of Helms Deep (*LOTR*, 537). Another modern weapon devised by Saruman is a kind of "liquid fire" used to slow the Ents' attack on Orthanc (*LOTR*, 568).

[17] Gonzaléz de la Llana, "Man, Nature and Evil," 108.

[18] Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, 74.

show an absolute lack of respect for Nature and, among Men and Wizards, we can also identify a contrast between those who feel near to it and those who despise it, Gandalf and Saruman being a clear example of this dualism."[19] Saruman clearly does not respect or do justice to the particular character of Arda as something other than himself, and so he can only see it as something that must be brought to heel.

Saruman is not interested in nature except so far as it can provide the raw materials he needs for his quest of domination. Boff would criticize Saruman for his failure to respect nature's integrity as something other than himself, as an autonomous creature with its own right to exist. He would decry Saruman's strip-mining and forest-clearing, his flagrant pollution and wanton destruction. The Ents respond to Saruman's destruction and treachery much as Boff would. As shepherds of the trees, as those who know the long, individual names of each tree in their forests, the Ents are enraged by Saruman's treatment of their friends. But to Saruman, all trees are the same: they are lumber and fuel for his fires, nothing more. This is why Saruman had not accounted for the Ents in all of his scheming, because they, like Hobbits before the Ring was found, were too close to nature to warrant his attention.

He follows so closely in Sauron's footsteps that he turns a beautiful land into an image of Mordor, a land so thoroughly ruined that some, Gandalf included, doubt it can ever truly be restored (*LOTR*, 550). The contrast between what Isengard was and what it has become is stark. The following passage from *The Lord of the Rings* emphasizes the dysformation of Saruman's mind and his corruption of what was once good and beautiful:

> A strong place and wonderful was Isengard, and long it had been beautiful . . . But Saruman had slowly shaped it to his shifting purposes, and made it better, as he thought, being deceived – for all those arts and subtle devices, for which he forsook his former wisdom, and which fondly he imagined were his own, came but from Mordor; so that what he made was naught, only a little copy, a child's model or a slave's flattery, of that vast fortress, armory, prison, furnace of great

[19] Gonzaléz de la Llana, "Man, Nature and Evil," 104–5.

> power, Barad-dûr, the Dark Tower, which suffered no rival, and laughed at flattery, biding its time, secure in its pride and its immeasurable strength (555).

Saruman has so rebelled against his purpose and calling, that he has willfully forsaken his unique identity in pursuit of a 'better' one. If he cannot gain mastery over Middle-earth as Saruman, then he will become Sauron. Instead of helping Elves and Men to resist Sauron's domination, he will dominate them himself. Instead of encouraging euformation and sub-creative flourishing, he causes dysformation and destruction. He has even gone so far as to torture and destroy the hills just as Sauron has done (*LOTR*, 266). Thankfully for the land, Saruman's destruction is recent enough that the damage can be undone by the Ents and their herd of trees, but given enough time Isengard would have been a mirror of Mordor. His mistreatment of Isengard goes beyond simple disregard, to become hatred and physical violence directed toward the land itself.[20]

Not only has he rejected his purpose of empowering Elves and Men to resist Sauron, he has sought to become another Sauron. In not just failing to serve, but refusing to serve, he has followed Sauron into depravity. This will be more pronounced in his second appearance within the narrative.

The Voice of Saruman

When Gandalf next encounters Saruman, the fallen wizard is still operating from a position of power, but his borders have closed in on him. He still believes he is in charge because he does not know what has taken place in Gandalf. Saruman has been too deluded by his insularity and hunger for power to see the reality as it stands. Tolkien comments that Saruman "fell from his high errand, and becoming proud and impatient and enamored of power sought to have his own will by force, and to oust Sauron; but

[20] Again, Boff provides fitting words to describe Saruman's dysformation: "power and domination have displaced life from its absolutely central place and have set themselves up as an absolute reference point. Life is turned into a mere function." Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, 74.

he was ensnared by that dark spirit, mightier than he" (*UT*, 390). He has become an unwilling and rebellious puppet of Sauron, one clearly not on the same level as his master. Ironically, by aiming to become a new Sauron, and seeking to elevate himself above the station assigned to him, he has made himself less than he was intended to be. In the beginning, he was created as a unique spirit, made to be himself in a particular way. To become anything other than that is to be less than Ilúvatar intended. In seeking to corrupt and distort humanity, he has become distorted and corrupted himself. He has drawn others down into dysformation along with him, making them less than they were intended to be. In rejecting the Valar's express command to refrain from dominating Elves and Men by force or fear and from matching Sauron's power with his own, he has forsaken what made him an *Istar*.[21]

Though Saruman has become far less than he was intended to be, he still retains the power of his voice, through which, as Aragorn says,

> "he had power over the minds of others. The wise he could persuade, and the smaller folk he could daunt. That power he certainly still keeps. There are not many in Middle-earth that I should say were safe, if they were left alone to talk with him, even now when he has suffered a defeat. Gandalf, Elrond, and Galadriel, perhaps, now that his wickedness has been laid bare, but very few others" (*LOTR*, 567).

But in this case Aragorn is unaware of the change that Saruman has wrought within himself, and while his words are true of who Saruman was, they ascribe more power to the lessened Saruman they will meet than he actually possesses. Saruman's dysformation has weakened the tool for which he was best known, though it still retains some power. When at last Saruman speaks, his voice is revealed as low and melodious, "its very sound an enchantment" (*LOTR*, 578). As Aragorn predicted, his words seem wise and

[21] Sykes offers a helpful clarification on power when he observes that "there is no necessary connection between the terms 'power' and 'force' . . . The concept of power itself is morally ambivalent." Sykes, *Power and Christian Theology*, 102–3. For Saruman and the *Istari* to have power is a morally ambivalent thing, but to use that power to exert force upon others, to dominate or manipulate them, is morally wrong.

call others to agree with him. But his words are born of dysformation and corruption.

The contrast between Saruman and Gandalf is marked. Where Saruman speaks in pleasant-sounding words, exerting his subtle power over all who attend to his voice, Gandalf stands "silent as stone, as one waiting patiently for some call that has not yet come" (*LOTR*, 579). Saruman, even in the simple act of speaking, breaks apart community and subjects others to the force of his will. With his voice, he "corrupted the reasoning powers" (L, 277) of his hearers, persuading them to see the world as he desired. His voice carries the weight of his lost devotion to others, and engenders the same loss in them. His voice is, in a sense, Saruman's Ring. It is where his power is concentrated and it is the tool he uses in imitation of Sauron's Ring. While it is unable to live up to the task since Saruman is not the equal of Sauron, it can still prove more than most mortals are able to resist. As Tolkien writes, "none were unmoved; none rejected [his voice's] pleas and its commands without an effort of mind and will" (*LOTR*, 578). There are different degrees of effectiveness however. Most remember his voice, if they remember it at all, as "a delight to hear . . . all that it said seemed wise and reasonable;" for many "the sound of the voice alone was enough to hold them enthralled; but for those whom it conquered the spell endured when they were far away, and ever they heard that soft voice whispering and urging them" (*LOTR*, 578). Saruman uses his voice to coerce, just as Sauron used the Ring to dominate. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, the Ring subsumes the identity of its wearer, making all those who bear it into Sauron's tools. Saruman's voice aims for the same end, but it is unable to dominate as completely as Sauron could. Saruman only exercises that kind of power over those who are conquered by his voice. No one leaves an encounter with him unaffected, but not all are dominated by his will. As Tolkien comments in a 1958 letter, "It was always open to one to reject, *by free will and reason*, both his voice while speaking and its after-impressions" (*L*, 277). Through Saruman, Tolkien presents a contrast between the kind

of voice that invites real response – characterized by the give and take of conversation, the offering and evaluating of claims and arguments, in other words, the kind of voice Gandalf brings – and the kind of voice that seeks to prevent real response. Ultimately, this reflects a contrast between two kinds of relationship, and two kinds of community, and that is true before one even considers the *content* of Saruman's speech, which seeks to break the fellowship of others in order to make them malleable to his will (just as he broke trees to make lumber and hills to make rubble). Those who hear his voice retain the ability to reject his words, but the same cannot be said for those who surrender to the Ring; once it has gained possession of someone, they cannot relinquish it even if they want to.

Tolkien narrates this power of Saruman's voice over Théoden's men:

> It seemed to them that Gandalf had never spoken so fair and fittingly to their lord. Rough and proud now seemed all his dealing with Théoden. And over their hearts crept a shadow, the fear of a great danger: the end of the Mark in a darkness to which Gandalf was driving them, while Saruman stood beside a door of escape, holding it half open so that a ray of light came through (*LOTR*, 579).

His voice breaks down the community of trust and respect that has been forged in battle and bloodshed. These men were saved from a horrible rout and almost certain death just days before by the very Gandalf Saruman's voice is enticing them to distrust. Hearts of gratitude and respect are being replaced with suspicion and fear. This is a tangible signal of Saruman's departure from the path set out for him, and evidence of the corrupting power of his voice. In this Saruman mimics the evil of Sauron. As Haldir tells the fellowship on the borders of Lothlórien, "Indeed in nothing is the power of the Dark Lord more clearly shown than in the estrangement that divides all those who still oppose him" (*LOTR*, 348). Sam touches on this same point after being taken captive by Faramir and his men saying, "it's a pity that folk as talk about fighting the Enemy can't let others do their bit in their own way without interfering. He'd be mighty pleased, if he

could see you now" (*LOTR*, 665).[22]

But Gimli breaks the spell with gruff words that reveal the truth, "The words of this wizard stand on their heads . . . In the language of Orthanc help means ruin, and saving means slaying, that is plain" (*LOTR*, 579). Gimli's interjection reminds everyone, even if only momentarily, of the bonds that link them and of the great harm Saruman has brought into their land. Saruman is not used to seeing his enchantments fail, and in his angry response he inadvertently reveals a fleeting glimpse of his true self, lessened from what it once was. Gimli's interjection frees Théoden's nephew Éomer to speak, and his words also remind everyone of Saruman's evil, particularly Théoden, who says, "You are a liar, Saruman, and a corrupter of men's hearts . . . were you ten times as wise you would have no right to rule me and mine for your own profit as you desired" (*LOTR*, 580). Though Théoden does not know why the *Istari* were sent, he does know that Saruman's exercise of power over others and his efforts to strip-mine the world for his own benefit are evil. He sees the difference between the two wizards. As the power of Saruman's voice unravels, his true self reveals itself once more, this time as an angry snake "coiling itself to strike" (*LOTR*, 580-1). Saruman loses control of his voice, and those who were previously enticed by it "[shudder] at the hideous change" (*LOTR*, 581). But Saruman masters himself and gathers his power for one final attempt to dominate and persuade, but this time he aims higher: he aims for Gandalf. This final use of his voice as a weapon offers an even clearer glimpse into its dysformative power:

> So great was the power that Saruman exerted in this last effort that none that stood within hearing were unmoved. But now the spell was wholly different. They heard the gentle remonstrance of a kindly king with an erring but much-loved minister. *But they were shut out, listening at a door to words not meant for them: ill-mannered children or stupid servants* overhearing the elusive discourse of their elders, and

[22] Faramir touches on this point too in discussing his people's failings. He says, "But in Middle-earth Men and Elves became estranged in the days of darkness, by the arts of the Enemy, and by the slow changes of time in which each kind walked further down their sundered roads. Men now fear and misdoubt the Elves, and yet know little of them. And we of Gondor grow like other Men, like the men of Rohan; for even they, who are foes of the Dark Lord, shun the Elves and speak of the Golden Wood with dread" (*LOTR*, 679).

> wondering how it would affect their lot. Of loftier mold these two were made: reverend and wise. It was inevitable that they should make alliance. Gandalf would ascend into the tower, to discuss deep things beyond their comprehension in the high chambers of Orthanc. *The door would be closed, and they would be left outside* (*LOTR*, 581-2, emphasis mine).

Where Gandalf creates communities where people can grow into their true selves, Saruman's voice creates barriers. Where Gandalf encourages fellowship, Saruman brings division.

But then Gandalf laughs, breaking the power of Saruman's voice as effectively as casting the Ring into the furnace of Mount Doom, not in mockery but in genuine amusement at Saruman's attempt, and informs Saruman of the change in their respective situations. He says, "I fear I am beyond your comprehension. But you, Saruman, I understand now too well" (*LOTR*, 582). Had Saruman not fallen so far, he would have understood who Gandalf has become, but his inability emphasizes his diminishment. Saruman no longer recognizes the kind of power Gandalf has: the power that works *with* others, and the power that is willing to sacrifice itself – and he cannot understand that Ilúvatar has, in a sense, vindicated that kind of power by sending Gandalf back. Saruman no longer recognizes the true nature of power or where it lies.[23]

Yet, Saruman is not beyond hope. Gandalf sees this, even if no one else does, and so he extends to Saruman the opportunity to repent and receive mercy. He pleads with Saruman, careful not to exert his power to coerce a decision, saying,

> But listen, Saruman, for the last time! Will you not come down? Isengard has proved less strong than your hope and fancy made it. So may other things in which you still have trust. Would it not be well to leave it for a while? To turn to new things, perhaps? Think well, Saruman! Will you not come down?" (*LOTR*, 582).

Even considering how debased and dysformed Saruman has become, clemency is still

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[23] Rather than acting as a Maia, Saruman acts like a human. Appendix A of *The Lord of the Rings* presents the point at which Saruman "began to behave as a lord of Men" (*LOTR*, 1067). Because Saruman sets himself up as a lord of Men, he becomes no more than that. In this, he follows the example of Melkor, who "had become absorbed in 'kingship,' and though a tyrant of ogre-size and monstrous power, this was a vast fall even from his former wickedness of hate, and his terrible nihilism. He had fallen to like being a tyrant-king with conquered slaves, and vast obedient armies" (*MR*, 403).

available. He still has the chance to enter the life-giving, euformative community Gandalf brings, but Saruman cannot bring himself to accept the offer. He hesitates and "Before he could conceal it, they saw through the mask the anguish of a mind in doubt, loathing to stay and dreading to leave its refuge" (*LOTR*, 582). Saruman has already been shown "that the power of his voice [is] waning" (*LOTR*, 584), but even that is not enough to tip the balance. When he speaks, his voice – once melodious, powerful, and sweet – has become "shrill and cold" (*LOTR*, 582). Pride and hatred win their short-lived battle against uncertainty and guilt.

And so, Gandalf makes the offer a second time, extending to Saruman the chance to walk away a free man should he so choose, but the opportunity comes with conditions. Saruman must surrender Orthanc and his staff (the mark of his position as one of the *Istari*). Even stripped of office and much of his power, "Great service he could have rendered," but instead he chooses to withhold his help (*LOTR*, 584). And in so choosing Saruman scorns the offered forgiveness for "He will not serve, only command" (*LOTR*, 584). His decision made, he turns to leave. He will not humble himself, and so he will be humbled by another.[24]

At last, Gandalf exerts his power. This breaker of community, this sower of dysformative seeds, cannot be allowed to continue in this manner. Gandalf commands Saruman to return, and Saruman has no choice except to obey. He turns back, and "as if dragged against his will" returns to the encounter (*LOTR*, 583). There is no getting around the fact that Gandalf exerts power *over* Saruman here, but there is a clear

[24] Saruman's response contrasts sharply with Boromir's (*LOTR*, 414). Where Saruman refuses the offer of mercy and will not admit to his wrongdoing and sin, Boromir repents and confesses his sin without being pressed. His time within a euformative community has prepared him to admit his guilt and expose it so that fellowship can be restored before he dies. Gandalf points to Merry and Pippin's place within the community as agents of euformation, particularly for Boromir, saying "It was not in vain that the young hobbits came with us, if only for Boromir's sake" (*LOTR*, 496). It is telling that Aragorn – Boromir's king and a priest of sorts since the role of king and priest were "identical in Númenórean ideas" (*L*, 206) – absolves Boromir, acclaims his heroism in protecting Merry and Pippin to the end of his strength, and promises to fulfil the task for which Boromir left Minas Tirith. Gandalf, as a representative of the Valar, has the same power in relation to Saruman, but Saruman will not humble himself.

difference between Gandalf's use of power and Saruman's. Clearly, for Tolkien, such power is not completely avoidable in a marred world – but the context for and the limits upon it in Gandalf's case distinguish it sharply from Saruman's. He is not in the habit of unveiling his power, and only does so when the situation calls for it.[25] In other words, he does dominate Saruman for a few moments, but not in order to possess him. He recognizes, as Augustine did, that there is nothing wrong with power in itself, rather "the fault is in the soul which perversely loves its own power,"[26] which Saruman clearly does. So, Gandalf denounces Saruman, exposing his sin for all to see. Again, I quote at length to emphasize the power of what occurs.

> "You have become a fool, Saruman, and yet pitiable. You might still have turned away from folly and evil, and have been of service. But you choose to stay and gnaw the ends of your old plots. Stay then! But I warn you, you will not easily come out again. Not unless the dark hands of the East stretch out to take you. Saruman!" he cried, and his voice grew in power and authority. "Behold, I am not Gandalf the Grey, whom you betrayed. I am Gandalf the White, who has returned from death. You have no color now, and I cast you from the order and from the Council."
>
> He raised his hand, and spoke slowly in a clear cold voice. "Saruman, your staff is broken." There was a crack, and the staff split asunder in Saruman's hand, and the head of it fell down at Gandalf's feet. "Go!" said Gandalf. With a cry Saruman fell back and crawled away (*LOTR*, 583).

Saruman will not willingly admit to his wrongdoing, repent, and surrender his staff, so Gandalf unveils himself and reveals the new reality with which Saruman must account. He strips Saruman of his rank, his position, his power, and in doing so effects a permanent change in him. Yet, even in this, Gandalf has been seeking to foster euformative community. He has sought to bring Saruman back into a community that would thrive with his wisdom and stand a greater chance of success. But even in rejection, Gandalf will do no harm to Saruman. He will not dominate Saruman or force him to help, saying "I will do nothing to him. *I do not wish for mastery.* What will become

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[25] Gandalf reveals his power on several occasions, but always when confronting evil directly (*LOTR*, 809-810, 820, 837-838, and 852).

[26] *City of God*, 12.8.

of him? I cannot say. I grieve that so much that was good now festers in the tower" (*LOTR*, 585, emphasis mine).[27]

In Tolkien's legendarium, outer appearance matches inner reality, and so when the characters next encounter Saruman he is visibly diminished. But because the change is still recent, his appearance does not yet fully reflect his dysformed soul. He retains only the power of his voice, but even that is significantly weakened. He can no longer command or seduce the minds of the unwilling, but over the willing his voice still holds power. Though he has become, in effect, a Man, he is more like the Númenóreans – who are more ennobled than other mortals and have greater native abilities – than like other mortals.[28] Tolkien demonstrates their ennoblement through the deep-sightedness of Denethor (*LOTR*, 757; 1055-6) and his son Faramir (*LOTR*, 689),[29] but more so in Aragorn who is more like the first Númenóreans than any since his ancestor Elendil (*S*, 303). So, even though Saruman has essentially become a Man, he still has greater innate power and skill than all but the most ennobled. He has fallen far, but he has not yet hit bottom. He has chosen isolation and captivity, imprisonment in close quarters with his equally dysformed henchman, Wormtongue. This community, if one can even call it that, has just as much influence on his continued dysformation as does his rejection of Gandalf's offered forgiveness and mercy.

Saruman reaps the consequences of his actions during his captivity. For, just as the euformative communities that emerge around Gandalf (and later around Frodo as I discuss in Chapter 6) encourage their members to grow into their true selves, the dysformative community Saruman makes draws out the ugliness and death resident

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[27] Boff acknowledges the potential to use power as Gandalf does, to build community, establish relationship, and support mutual flourishing: "The will to power is not necessarily perverse. It can mean the will to be, to defend one's integrity, and to establish a possible relationship, a relationship of sharing, synergy, and self-limitation of power in order to live with other powers." Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, 74.

[28] The Númenóreans were granted "wisdom and power and life more enduring than any others of mortal race" in honor of their service in defeating Melkor (S, 260).

[29] I discuss this in greater detail in Chapter 7.

within its members; it reveals the extent of the Melkor-element inherent within their physical bodies. At the conclusion of Saruman's story, Tolkien shows that death has been at work within Saruman for years, claiming ever more of him as he descends further into wickedness and sin. His community with Wormtongue, rather than encouraging growth and transformation, only drags them both into further degradation and dysformation.

Human No Longer

The characters next encounter Saruman and Wormtongue near the story's end. Aragorn has been crowned king, the fellowship has dispersed, and the hobbits are on their way to Rivendell with Gandalf and Galadriel. The company approaches Saruman on the road where he appears as a beggar dressed in rags of indeterminate color, but Gandalf recognizes him even so. He has lost the semblance of lofty humanity he once bore, leaving him as no more than a mere mortal in appearance rather than a mortal of Númenórean stature. Saruman as he appears here inspires neither fear nor awe. Instead, even the hobbits look on him with pity (*LOTR*, 984). His time locked away in dysformative community with Wormtongue has eaten away at the last remaining vestiges of his greatness, leaving him "utterly humbled" (*UT*, 391). Humbled though he is, Saruman still believes he is a shaper of world events and that the company has been pursuing him. Galadriel attempts to convince him otherwise to little effect, yet she and Gandalf both extend mercy to him. Both offer their help and friendship if he is willing to accept it. Galadriel sees in this seemingly chance meeting a final, providential chance for Saruman to repent, but Saruman rejects both offers and even expresses gladness that there will be no further chances saying, "If it truly be the last, I am glad . . . for I shall be spared the trouble of refusing it again" (*LOTR*, 983). His persistent rejection of the invitation to join a euformative community and experience the restoration his soul truly

needs provides the final push in his dysformation. Gandalf recognizes how far Saruman has fallen, but also acknowledges his remaining potential to cause harm, "But alas for Saruman! I fear nothing more can be made of him. He has withered altogether. All the same . . . I fancy he could do some mischief still in a small mean way" (*LOTR*, 984). Petty meanness is all that is left to Saruman. There are no more grand schemes for world domination or mass subjugation. There is no more setting himself up as a Power. He has withered altogether, in body and in soul, and no great acts are left for him.

He who was once an angelic being of majesty and power has become no more than a Man. Though Tolkien portrays him in beastly terms at several points, even the beasts who lack a knowledge of good or evil have more sense than to pursue the destructive path he resorts to. These beastly descriptors warrant further attention before I move on, however. As I noted above, during the encounter at Orthanc, Saruman is described as a coiled snake, and his servant Wormtongue follows suit, becoming no better than his name. Tolkien offers another instance of the potential for rational creatures to act in beastly fashion through his depiction of the Mouth of Sauron, who was once a Númenórean but chose to surrender himself to the Dark Lord so fully that he gave up his name and identity as anything other than the messenger of Sauron:

> Then the Messenger of Mordor laughed no more. His face was twisted with amazement and anger to the likeness of some wild beast that, as it crouches on its prey, is smitten on the muzzle with a stinging rod. Rage filled him and his mouth slavered, and shapeless sounds of fury came strangling from his throat (*LOTR*, 891).

In this description, the Messenger bears little resemblance to the Man he once was. But this potential also finds interesting parallels in *The Ancrene Riwle* and in Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. In part 4 of *The Ancrene Riwle*, which is concerned with the various temptations that accost Christians, the author characterizes the seven deadly sins as beasts such as "the Lion of Pride, the Serpent of venomous Envy, the Unicorn of Wrath, the Bear of deadly Sloth, the Fox of Covetousness, the Sow of Gluttony, the

Scorpion with its tail of stinging Lechery."[30] The author proceeds to elaborate on each of these sins and their beastly qualities and associates a host of other sins to the seven listed as their offspring (86-92). But prior to this, near the beginning of part 3, the author prepares the reader for this characterization writing:

> An angry woman is a she-wolf, an angry man a wolf, or a lion or a unicorn. As long as her anger lasts . . . in God's sight she is just like one who has been turned into a wolf; to His clear hearing she has the voice of a wolf . . . Man is gentle by nature. As soon as he loses his gentleness he loses the nature of a man, and the sorceress Anger transforms him into a beast.[31]

Boethius writes in the same vein, but clearly depicts the degrading influence of sin as reducing people to the level of beasts:

> whatsoever is at all is one, and that unity is goodness, by which it followeth that whatsoever is must also be good. And in this manner, whatsoever falleth from goodness ceaseth to be, by which it followeth that evil men leave to be that which they were, but the shape of men, which they still retain, showeth them to have been men: wherefore by embracing wickedness they have lost the nature of men. But since virtue alone can exalt us above men, wickedness must needs cast those under the desert of men, which it hath bereaved of that condition. Wherefore thou canst not account him a man whom thou seest transformed by vices. Is the violent extorter of other men's goods carried away with his covetous desire? Thou mayest liken him to a wolf. Is the angry and unquiet man always contending and brawling? Thou mayest compare him to a dog. Doth the treacherous fellow rejoice that he hath deceived others with his hidden frauds? Let him be accounted no better than a fox. Doth the outrageous fret and fume? Let him be thought to have a lion's mind. Is the fearful and timorous afraid without cause? Let him be esteemed like to hares and deer. Is the slow and stupid always idle? He liveth an ass's life. Doth the light and unconstant change his courses? He is nothing different from the birds. Is he drowned in filthy and unclean lusts? He is entangled in the pleasure of a stinking sow. So that he who, leaving virtue, ceaseth to be a man, since he cannot be partaker of the divine condition, is turned into a beast.[32]

The point of these passages, and their parallels in Tolkien, is not so much to belittle beasts or minimize their goodness as creatures with the right to a life and story of their own – though a fuller theology of animals might make us pause before using the same

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[30] Salu, *The Ancrene Riwle*, 86.

[31] Ibid., 54.

[32] Boethius, *Tractates, De Consolatione Philosophiae*, trans. H. F. Stewart and E. K. Rand, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918), 318–21.

language ourselves.[33] Rather, these passages emphasize the distinction between humanity and beasts, and emphasize the loss of that distinction due to sin. Both texts cited above make it clear that we can lose our way and thereby lose our nature. Tolkien narrates this potential in his characters, but he also takes it a step further. If Men can lose their nature and become beastly, they can also lose their nature and become orkish. This is the level to which Saruman descends.

He has been withered beyond the repair of any dwelling in Middle-earth and has become kindred in spirit if not in body to the Uruk-hai he bred and dominated. He, like Melkor before him, has lost sight of his sub-creative calling and has come to "like smashing, hurting, and defiling as such" (*L*, 200), because they aim to be exercises of absolute power *over* things. When the hobbits return to the Shire, they find it utterly changed. Merry and Pippin see a land akin to the ruined Isengard; Frodo and Sam see the wastes of Mordor. But it is Frodo who sees most deeply, connecting the devastation around them to its source saying, "Yes, this is Mordor . . . Just one of its works. Saruman was doing its work all the time, even when he thought he was working for himself" (*LOTR*, 1018). Saruman has been working to remake the land around him into an image of Mordor, giving his followers orders to "hack, burn, and ruin" (*LOTR*, 1013). Farmer Cotton observes of the destruction: "There's no longer even any bad sense in it. They cut down trees and let 'em lie, they burn houses and build no more" (*LOTR*, 1013). He has merely come to delight in smashing, hurting, and defiling for their own sake. When at last the hobbits are free to rebuild and repair the damage it quickly becomes apparent that "The trees were the worst loss and damage, for at Sharkey's bidding they had been cut down recklessly far and wide over the Shire . . . this hurt would take long to heal" (*LOTR*, 1022). Saruman's destruction of the Shire mirrors

[33] If, for instance, we read passages like these with the work of David Clough in mind. See, Clough, *On Animals*.

Melkor's nihilism and Sauron's ruination of all he touches. It shows that he, like Melkor and Sauron, hates all that he cannot control. The land remains beyond his ability to dominate – despite the Melkor-ingredient inherent in it – and is a source of joy for others, so it, and others' relation to it, must be ruined as completely as he can manage. He will torture and destroy it as Sauron did to Mordor. But, of course, it must be strip-mined first, so that nothing "useful" remains.

He tries to make the land his tool, and uses others as his tools to accomplish this. But, as I have already noted, he also wants to demonstrate that it cannot resist him, and that he can be its despot. He, like Melkor and Sauron before him, never dirties his hands with the actual work of sullying the land.[34] No, he delegates that task to those he has dominated and coerced and in doing so further sullies and ruins them.[35] His followers take part in his work and are dysformed along with him. Chief among these, and an excellent example of the point, is Wormtongue. In many ways, Wormtongue is a poor imitation of Saruman. He too uses the power of his voice, but rather than accomplishing his own will, he can only serve the will of Saruman: "poisoning your thought, chilling your heart, weakening your limbs . . . dulling men's wariness, or working on their fears" (*LOTR*, 521). He uses his voice at Saruman's bidding to accomplish what Saruman's voice itself would accomplish if he were present. He has already fallen far, but trapped in dysformative "community" with Saruman in the tower of Orthanc, he is altogether withered along with his master. After Frodo gives Wormtongue leave to refresh himself within the Shire before leaving, Saruman tells of his servant's exploits, revealing how

[34] In the case of the Shire, Saruman even works through the proxy of a false identity, going by the orkish name of Sharkey (*LOTR*, 1018). It is ironic that the one who has sought to become like Sauron and Morgoth in making new orcs to match his intent and purpose more closely, ends up being named by them. The naming of someone or something implies a relationship of greater to lesser, or of higher to lower. By accepting a name from the orcs, Saruman has effectively placed himself below them, and made himself worse than them. Further, in this Saruman mirrors the Mouth of Sauron (*LOTR*, 888-892), who loses his identity and his name in service to dysformation.

[35] Tolkien elsewhere observes that "A man who wishes to exert 'power' must have subjects, who are not himself. But he then depends on them" (L, 279).

debased he has become: "Worm killed your Chief, poor little fellow, your nice little Boss . . . Stabbed him in his sleep, I believe. Buried him, I hope; though Worm has been very hungry lately. No, Worm is not really nice" (*LOTR*, 1020). Saruman here uses what remains of the power his voice once held to reduce Wormtongue still further: to deny him any independence, any reality outside of what Saruman has made him – to deny that there is anything left to redeem.

After Frodo has banished him from the Shire, Saruman threatens the hobbits with a curse upon the land, daunting many within earshot, but Frodo sees through his lies, and sees him for what he has become as well as what he once was. He says, "Do not believe him! He has lost all power, save his voice that can still daunt you and deceive you, *if you let it*" (*LOTR*, 1019 emphasis mine). That the hobbits even have a choice in the matter, to let it daunt and deceive or not, demonstrates how far Saruman has fallen. His power was once nearly irresistible, but now even the lowliest can resist. And though he has become an orc in spirit, even this lessened stature will fall away. He has made his choice and will follow it to the bitter end; for clinging to life, even such a lessened life, "to its basest dregs is the way of the sort of person he had become" (L, 277).

After Saruman exposes Wormtongue's deeds and kicks him when he's down, Wormtongue snaps, draws a knife, and slices Saruman's throat. Saruman has related to Wormtongue by dominating him, and teaching him to dominate others – to treat them as tools, or even as fuel. But that same will is now turned against Saruman himself – and note that Wormtongue, as he seeks to throw off Saruman's domination by the same means that Saruman has taught him, attacks the source of Saruman's power: his voice. And it is in Saruman's death that his true nature is exposed. In one of the most striking passages in the whole of *The Lord of the Rings* the hobbits witness Saruman's soul leaving his body as "a grey mist . . . rising slowly to a great height like smoke from a fire" (*LOTR*, 1020). It looks to the West, to the land from whence it came, but "out of the

West came a cold wind, and it bent away, and with a sigh dissolved into nothing" (*LOTR*, 1020). Saruman's soul is here rejected by those who sent him to Middle-earth and his passage back to the uncorrupted lands is denied.[36] As Tolkien elsewhere describes it, "his spirit went whithersoever it was doomed to go, and to Middle-earth . . . came never back" (*UT*, 391). He is effectively dead and gone.[37]

But lest we forget that in Tolkien's legendarium outer appearance mirrors inner reality, his soul's true state is revealed in the corruption of his body. Frodo looks away from Saruman's rejected and dispersed spirit to the body before him "with pity and horror, for as he looked it seemed that long years of death were suddenly revealed in it, and it shrank, and the shriveled face became rags of skin upon a hideous skull" (*LOTR*, 1020). Frodo sees that death had long been at work in Saruman's body, just as it had been in his soul. And so, his withered soul is at last reflected in the sudden withering of his corpse.

Conclusion

Saruman began as a sub-creator and participant in the Great Music that shaped Eä. He entered Middle-earth as one called to exercise his sub-creative power for the sake of others. He received his power from Ilúvatar and was meant to exercise it *for* others so that they, in turn, could exercise their power as *from* Ilúvatar and *for* others as well. His power, and the power he was to encourage others to use, was intended to be for the healing of Arda. But he forsakes his calling and chooses a path of domination instead. He sets himself up as a Power, breeding his own orcs and fashioning his own rings. He strip-mines creation to further his selfish ambitions. He seeks to be Sauron,

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[36] See: "Here the image of Saruman trying to obtain forgiveness from the Powers of the West is easily detectable. And judging by the cold wind from the West which dissolves his figure and by his sigh of despair, it seems too late for him to benefit from their clemency." Birks, "Sympathetic Backgrounds," 54.

[37] Tolkien is committed to the immortality of spirits. In his letters he writes, "The indestructibility of *spirits* with free wills, even by the Creator of them, is also an inevitable feature, if one either believes in their existence, or feigns it in a story" (L, 280).

rather than Saruman, and he ends up being neither. He ends as a breaker of community, as a faithless despot desiring only power over others so that he might exert his destructive and dysformative will, and ultimately as no-one and no-thing – his body withered and his spirit rejected.

Saruman misuses the sub-creative power he was given. He chooses his course, willfully forsaking the path of wisdom. He was given the power of a persuasive voice for the sake of his euformative task, but as he sought more power for that task, his voice became a tool of domination. It became, in effect, his Ring and the tool in which all his power was concentrated. In doing so, he gradually became less and less intelligible as the kind of creature he was made to be. After falling so far, it is no longer possible to look at Saruman and learn what it is to be a Maia, or a Man, or even an orc. In the end, Saruman loses everything. But the tragedy lies, also, in the plain fact that it did not need to be this way. Saruman could have repented and offered his aid in the fight against Sauron. He had the opportunity while holding Gandalf prisoner. He had the opportunity again in his confrontation with Gandalf after the cleansing of Isengard. He even had the chance on the road out from Isengard, but chose instead to persist in dysformation and bitterness. He followed his chosen course down through orkishness to its bitter, empty end.

Chapter 5. Gollum and the Hope of Euformation

Where Saruman's dysformation took him from Maia to orc to no-thing, Gollum's trajectory is more complicated. It is not a steady movement in one direction, like Saruman's. Rather, Gollum's story narrates the potential for euformation, even for those who seem to be beyond redemption. Since, as I will discuss below, Gollum's is a fractured self split between Sméagol, the hobbit-like creature he was, and Gollum, the twisted and corrupted creature he has become, his story of euformation and dysformation involves movement between these two identities. For a time, he experiences euformation and his Sméagol-self rises to the surface, only to disappear by the story's end. Gollum's story also differs from Saruman's in that Saruman becomes orkish toward the end, but Gollum becomes wraithly. I will discuss the difference between these two possibilities below.

Gollum's journey offers a way of imagining dysformation appropriate to the world he inhabits, but that also has illuminative potential for modes of dysformation in the primary world. Tolkien's portrayal of wraithliness – as exemplified by the Ringwraiths (or Nazgul), Gollum, Bilbo, and Frodo – is characterized most clearly by a loss of identity. This is the first difference between Gollum's and Saruman's trajectories. As I discussed in Chapter 4, Saruman's path is marked by an over-assertion of self in which his only mode of relationship is one of power over others. Saruman follows Sauron in this, whereas Gollum – like the Ringwraiths – loses all sense of self as an individual apart from the Ring. In Tolkien's secondary world this dysformative narrative is accompanied by a loss of corporeality, such that those who bear the Ring will eventually fade from corporeal existence entirely. They lose their individuality and personhood to the power of the Ring as it dominates and transforms them into

something both like and unlike its maker. Within the world of Arda Marred, where outer appearance mirrors inner reality, this dysformative potential fits within and is consistent with Arda's nature and structure as discussed in Part I.

In the discussion that follows, I will trace Gollum's story in much the same way as I traced Saruman's. I will attend to what is spiritually and corporeally true of him. In much of what follows I will emphasize the euformative dynamics at work within his soul before his final turn toward dysformation and the attending renunciation of the euformative community that had invited him in.

From Hobbit to Wraith: Sméagol Becomes Gollum

Around five hundred and sixty years before the tale begins in *The Lord of the Rings* and nearly five hundred years before Bilbo's tale in *The Hobbit* (*LOTR*, 1087-90), Sméagol was a hobbit-like being living in community with others like himself. Though naturally cruel of heart and mean-spirited, Sméagol was only unusual for being more inquisitive and curious-minded than the rest of his community, "interested in roots and beginnings" and focused on the earth below rather than the sky above (*LOTR*, 53). When the One Ring surfaced from the Great River in the hands of Sméagol's friend Déagol, Sméagol immediately coveted it and demanded that Déagol surrender it as a birthday present. When Déagol refused, Sméagol murdered him, took the Ring as his own, and hid his friend's body where no one would find it. So, the Ring prompts a hobbit-like creature, normally known for their peacefulness, to commit murder and then to cover it up. Already, the Ring has taken latent potentialities in Sméagol's character – like his mean-spiritedness and cruel-heartedness, both of which are ordinary vices in their own ways – and exploited them, magnifying and distorting them out of proportion. It has already twisted him.

He quickly discovered that the Ring made him invisible and he turned his curious

and inquisitive mind toward discovering the darkness and secrets others wished to keep hidden. The Ring gave him "power according to his nature" (*LOTR*, 53), corrupting what was already resident within him. Unsurprisingly, his family and friends quickly tired of his sneaking and spying and forced him into exile, calling him *Gollum* because of his new-found habit of gurgling to himself. After seven years, hating the sun and the thought of encountering others who might see him for who and what he was, he followed a stream into the darkness and shadows beneath the Misty Mountains where he would remain for close to five hundred years, unnaturally preserved by the Ring and twisted progressively further from what he was intended to be.

Those who bear the Ring are gradually brought under the domination of Sauron and through the dysformed relationship that results they are remade into something increasingly like the one who rules them. They fall victim to the verse inscribed upon the Ring:

> One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,
> One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them (*LOTR*, 50).

In bearing and wearing the Ring, they come to be ruled by and bound to the darkness of Sauron. This is the epitome of dysformation in Tolkien's mythology. Since Sauron has already followed Melkor into the dysformative depths, his efforts to twist others into following him on his path of dysformation is an act of warfare against the created order and intention of Ilúvatar.

Sauron is a schemer and organizer, one who works best behind the scenes to orchestrate and enact the evil intentions and desires of Melkor, but as he grows in power he grows further removed from those he controls and those he fights against, just as Melkor did. The creation of the One Ring is the culmination of his movement away from real encounters since it gives him power over others from the safety and isolation of his fortress. But this process does not come without risk or cost. The final

section of *The Silmarillion* explains:

> Now the Elves made many rings; but secretly Sauron made One Ring to rule all the others, and their power was bound up with it, to be subject wholly to it and to last only so long as it too should last. *And much of the strength and will of Sauron passed into that One Ring*; for the power of the Elven-rings was very great, and that which should govern them must be a thing of surpassing potency . . . And while he wore the One Ring he could perceive all the things that were done by means of the lesser rings, and he could see and govern the very thoughts of those that wore them (*S*, 287-288, emphasis mine).

To dominate those who bore the other rings of power, Sauron had to invest the Ring with a great deal of himself.[1] This is why the Ring seems to have agency of its own and Gandalf can say, "It was not Gollum, Frodo, but the Ring itself that decided things. The Ring left *him*" (*LOTR*, 55). The Ring bears much of Sauron's power and will – after all he never meant to be separated from it – and so it acts as a kind of proxy, mediating his presence and intentions. And so, it does to others what Sauron would do to them: twist and dysform them, dominating and subduing them until they are expended and reduced to nothing. But along that trajectory toward dissolution, the bearers come to resemble Sauron – most clearly in the Ring's power to make its wearer invisible since the power of invisibility can effectively cut off relationships by preventing real encounters with others – while becoming his inverse images, slaves to his mastery.

Ring-bearers come to prefer darkness for its ability to keep them hidden and give them control – of a fundamentally different kind from that which Saruman exercises – over potential encounters with others, but this only drives them to isolation and loneliness.[2] This is evident in Gollum, who acknowledges his loneliness in his initial encounter with Frodo and Sam (*LOTR*, 614). Further, this blocks a ring-bearer's access to *euformative* encounters and stunts their ability to grow. As Joanna Collicutt says, in

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[1] In placing so much of himself into the Ring, Sauron became dependent upon it and vulnerable should he ever lose it. This is why destroying the Ring results in Sauron's permanent defeat.

[2] See Kreeft, *The Philosophy of Tolkien*, 181. Kreeft sees an intrinsic link between invisibility and isolation saying, "Invisibility means isolation. God alone can endure this (and only because He is a Trinity of persons, a society in Himself). He is God alone; there is no other. Yet He is other in himself and never alone. God *is* a community. That is why He needs no community, as we do."

terms that appear to match Tolkien's instincts, formation (euformation, in the terms of this thesis) is inherently corporate while isolation is inherently dysformative.[3] For Gollum, this dysformation is demonstrated in a complex mixture of assertion and disappearance. Twisted by the Ring from the moment he encounters it, Gollum both asserts himself violently against the potentially euformative community of which he is a part, irreversibly breaking it in the process, and hides himself from that community. He murders his best friend Déagol to gain the Ring, but then he must cover up that deed to avoid punishment. While his mean-spirited nature suggests that he already fit uncomfortably within that community, potentially viewing it as a rival or threat, the Ring ensures that he cannot see it any other way. So, the options for fight or flight become, under the Ring's influence, his only conceivable options.

This desire to hide has a real effect upon Sméagol's body and soul, just as it does on everyone who bears one of Sauron's rings.[4] As their bodies become invisible while wearing it, they also become gradually less real and more shadowy even when they are not using it. But this transition toward the shadows, toward hiddenness, and toward a wraithly existence is a diminution of what it is to be a creature made in and for community. It is a move away from being to non-being, from reality to unreality. In Augustinian terms those who bear these rings become, in effect, no-thing. This is emphasized in Gollum's life, which is unnaturally stretched and preserved by the Ring, even after he has lost it. In Tolkien's conception, each kind of creature in Middle-earth has a natural life span "integral to its biological and spiritual nature" (*L*, 155) and even if

[3] Joanna Collicutt, *The Psychology of Christian Character Formation* (London: SCM Press, 2015), 8.

[4] The distinction between Sauron's rings (those given to Men and Dwarves) and the Elven rings is significant because Sauron had no part in creating the Elven rings and so only those who bear his rings are twisted in this way. In the case of Men, their desire for power and mastery and long-life is twisted into the endless serial longevity of the Nazgul and the kind of power represented by their leader the Witch King of Angmar. In the case of the Dwarves, their inherent drive toward wealth and mastery over the elements is twisted into an insatiable greed they cannot resist. Gandalf says of the Elven rings that they "have never been lost, and they endure no evil" (*LOTR*, 59). The Elven rings demonstrate the end for which such devices were made. The Elves, Galadriel in particular, use their rings to protect the land and help it flourish. They are to magnify the Elves' sub-creative powers to further ennoble and euform Arda.

something alters that span, it cannot result in any improvement to the quality of life experienced. Tolkien writes that this span "cannot really be *increased* qualitatively or quantitatively; so that prolongation in time is like stretching a wire out ever tauter, or 'spreading butter ever thinner' – it becomes an intolerable torment" (*L*, 155).[5] In other words, while a ring-bearer's life will become longer, it will not become better. It will not be filled with more enjoyment, more growth, more achievement, or more fulfilling relationships; instead, it will be as if the existing stock of such possibilities is stretched out over a vastly longer span. Both body and soul will eventually thin to the point of non-existence. They become like the Nazgul, enslaved to the power of the rings and less than shadows of what they were meant to be and what they previously were. It is in the Nazgul that the principle of outer appearance mirroring inner reality is most clearly demonstrated. Their pursuit of power and their resulting enslavement to Sauron have so twisted their souls that their bodies have lost all substance. They no longer have corporeal bodies to speak of and no longer seem to be capable of the kinds of life which bodies make possible.[6]

This enslavement touches on another of the key features of wraithliness: the loss of identity. Ring-bearers gradually lose their identities as the Ring subsumes them. The Ring becomes Precious and it becomes not just another to whom they speak, it becomes an integral part of their identity. This is clear in Gollum who repeatedly speaks to the Ring, but also speaks in plural terms including himself within the identity of the Precious. He has become the Ring because the Ring has consumed the better part of his identity. Gollum even goes so far as to respond to Frodo's use of the name Sméagol by

[5] Tolkien paraphrases Bilbo here, who after around sixty years as the ring-bearer, said to Gandalf, "I feel all thin, sort of *stretched* . . . like butter that has been scraped over too much bread" (*LOTR*, 32)

[6] Germaine Paulo Walsh sees this physical dissolution as paradigmatic for all the evil creatures within Tolkien's mythology. She writes, "All of the evil characters in the *legendarium* undergo a process of physical alteration, losing their original beauty and wholesomeness, and this loss is a sign of more fundamental loss of the capacity for wisdom and sympathetic understanding, for creativity, for love and friendship." Germaine Paulo Walsh, "Philosophic Poet: J.R.R. Tolkien's Modern Response to an Ancient Quarrel," in *Tolkien among the Moderns*, ed. Ralph C. Wood (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 24.

saying, "Don't ask Sméagol. Poor, poor Sméagol, he went away long ago. They took his Precious, and he's lost now" (*LOTR*, 616).[7]

Since the Ring is a distillation of Sauron's power, a localized embodiment of himself, when Gollum and others lose themselves to the power of the Ring they are in effect losing themselves to Sauron – they are being remade in his image, but only incompletely so, and this is intentional. To be truly remade in Sauron's image would result in a little despot: someone who thought as Sauron thought and acted as Sauron acted. While there are elements of this evident in Gollum's thinking and behavior, these particular facets of Sauron's personality – particularly as demonstrated by Sauron's desire for domination – are more clearly evident in Saruman. But the kind of remaking that happens to a ring-bearer differs from what happens to Saruman because a ring-bearer becomes subservient to and dominated by Sauron. They become his slaves; extensions of himself that obey his will and fulfill his purposes without question or hesitation.[8] The formational implications of this are dramatic. Where primary world euformation involves proper subordination of the disciple to Christ as Lord, the dysformation in view here is a distorted subordination that results in a complete loss of autonomy and individual identity. A Christian is to be Christ's image-bearer in the world, accomplishing his purposes and living out his mission and values. Rowan Williams describes it as "the identification of his *will* with God's: what he effects is what God effects, his acts are, as it were, God's, while still remaining his."[9] It is a process by which "we more and more become reflections of God's selfless love"[10] and are "more

[7] Though, as I will discuss below, Frodo refuses to believe that Sméagol is truly gone and due to Frodo's kindness and pity, Sméagol gradually begins to reemerge and even to become the dominant personality once more. This demonstrates that Gandalf's small hope for Gollum's redemption is well-founded (*LOTR*, 59).

[8] This kind of domination, as I have already mentioned, is also evident in the orcs and their complete subservience to Sauron's will.

[9] Rowan Williams, "The Philosophical Structures of Palamism," *Eastern Churches Review* 9, no. 1–2 (1977): 41.

[10] Mike Higton, *Difficult Gospel: The Theology of Rowan Williams* (London: SCM Press, 2011), 54.

and more mastered by the reality [we are] exploring,"[11] but this mastery is "not in violent overthrow or colonization, but in and through one's own action, one's own dedication to it."[12] Comparing the two kinds of subordination makes clear how dysformative Sauron's influence is. It becomes clear that where devoting oneself to Christ, whose power is entirely shaped by love, is utterly different from devoting oneself to Sauron, whose power is (just like Saruman's) primarily a form of domination.

Domination had been Sauron's aim throughout his sojourn in Middle-earth. Initially, his corruption was on behalf of another, twisting those under his power toward the worship of Melkor and proposing to them that Melkor was on equal footing with Ilúvatar himself. He could deceive and coerce Elves and Men by taking on a fair appearance and sharing his vast knowledge with them – it was this tactic that resulted in the creation of the rings of power. But during the Second Age, with the downfall of Númenor, Sauron's embodied form was destroyed and Sauron himself was thereby weakened and prevented from appearing in fair guise ever again. So, his tactic changes to gaining worshippers for himself (*L*, 243-244). Because he could no longer operate as he once had, his only remaining route to power was through domination. The rings remain his tools to exercise dominion, and they do this by eroding the ring-bearers' sense of self. This loss of selfhood brought on by the rings is perhaps the strongest mark of their dysformative power. As Collicutt notes, "growth involves becoming more fully ourselves across all aspects of our lives."[13] In other words, what happens to ring-bearers is the opposite of growth. Instead of becoming more fully themselves, their identity is lost within that of another. And as I will discuss below, in Gollum's case not only is he unable to become more fully himself, he effectively becomes two separate selves bound in love and hatred of the Ring.

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[11] Ibid., 54–55.
[12] Ibid., 55.
[13] Collicutt, *The Psychology of Christian Character Formation*, 77.

This sense of identity and selfhood is not some kind of personal possession prior to relationship. Rather, since all creatures in Arda Marred are made to be in relationship, identity is deeply connected to the kinds of relationships they are involved in. Identity is discovered in relationships where each individual has a place, where they can see how to give to others and receive from them.[14] They offer the euformative opportunity to exercise one's gifts and talents, which may have been discovered through the relationships themselves, in service of others such that people are as they appear to be. They are empowered to live and act out of a place of health and safety. Dominating relationships undermine creatures' ability to develop and discover their identity because they push toward dishonesty and disintegration. The dysformed servant of the Ring is never as they appear. An encounter with them is really an encounter with Sauron.

But the effects of the Ring's dysformative power vary from subject to subject. As Tolkien wrote in a draft of a 1958 letter, the lure of the Ring's power "leads the small to a Gollum, and the great to a Ringwraith" (*L*, 286). Since Gollum is a being of little innate power or strength, the Ring's corrupting influence can only dysform him so far. He is corrupted beyond recognition, but he does not become a Ringwraith; that is reserved for the human kings who accept Sauron's rings. This is somewhat counterintuitive. If becoming wraithlike involves, in some sense, the loss of one's personal power as Sauron annexes it, it seems that the greater one's innate power, the less likely one would be to become a wraith. But the opposite seems to be the case. Instead, the more independent power someone has, the more susceptible he is to the temptation to exercise that power as domination of another; and the more one dominates another using a ring of power, the more one is dominated by Sauron. The wisest of those who encounter the Ring – Gandalf (*LOTR*, 61), Aragorn (*LOTR*, 247),

[14] This is one positive aspect of the role of class in Tolkien's depiction of the Shire: everyone there knows where they fit within the pattern of relationships established by the class structure.

Elrond (*LOTR*, 267), Galadriel (*LOTR*, 365), and Faramir (*LOTR*, 681) – recognize this and can resist the temptation it poses, because they see the Ring for what it is, not just a tool of power but a personal force that will corrupt all who wield it. Even humble Sam sees this truth during his short time as ring-bearer and resists the lure to claim its power as his own (*LOTR*, 900-1).

Ironically, this loss of self is accompanied by an increased focus on the self and a strengthened desire to protect the self from others. This is evident in Sauron's flight from real encounters. By hiding in darkness and shadow, Sauron's focus has shifted from outward to inward. This self-referentiality is evident in Gollum too. His life has become so consumed by the Ring that when he is forced back out into the wider world, he is completely unprepared to encounter communities of real others. But his inward focus is only encouraged by the interactions he does have with those he meets outside. He is tortured in Mordor. He is captured by Aragorn and dragged to the Elves who imprison him. Once he is set free by agents of Mordor and continues to pursue the Ring, he does so in secrecy and shadow, speaking only to himself and the Precious he has lost. Each of these contribute to the Ring's corrupting work within him, driving him to ever increasing degrees of misery. Gollum himself recognizes this (*LOTR*, 615), but so too does Gandalf, who explains,

> He was altogether wretched. He hated the dark, and he hated the light more: he hated everything, and the Ring most of all . . . He hated it and loved it, as he hated and loved himself (*LOTR*, 55).

This self-loathing only drives him further inward.[15] It further inhibits his ability to experience euformative community and erodes any remaining sense of himself as a creature apart from the Ring. Gollum knows what the Ring has done to him, knows that he has become a shadow of his former self, but the Ring has so overcome him that he

[15] For further examination of the role of negative emotions in turning us inward and conversely of positive emotions turning us outward see chapter 8 in Collicutt, *The Psychology of Christian Character Formation*, 112–24.

has no choice but to love it. It has, after all, become the most important piece of himself and as Gandalf further observes, Gollum has "no will left in the matter" (*LOTR*, 55).

In losing himself, Gollum, and all those who succumb to the Ring, does not truly live, he merely subsists. As Gandalf says, "A mortal, Frodo, who keeps one of the Great Rings, does not die, but he does not grow or obtain more life, he merely continues, until at last every minute is a weariness" (*LOTR*, 47). It is clear from Gollum's emaciated frame and twisted mind that he is not thriving. As a self, he has thinned past the point of recognition. The Ring has come to dominate his thoughts and has become the foremost aspect of himself. He has no relationships with others and resists encounters with them – encounters which could stimulate growth and change if he allowed them – and even if he did permit encounters with others, he is so hidden that he has become virtually unknowable. It is nearly impossible for him to look beyond himself, and when he does it is only to attend to his body's physical needs. He is a living creature by the Ring's preserving power alone and the life he does have is not true life at all. It is a shadow, a ghost, of the life he sees, and grows to long for, when he is forced into community with Frodo and Sam.[16]

But despite all this, Sméagol is not entirely subsumed. There is still a trace of that hobbit-like creature buried deep within his shrunken self. Gandalf sees this, saying "Even Gollum was not wholly ruined . . . There was a little corner of his mind that was still his own, and light came through it, as through a chink in the dark: light out of the past" (*LOTR*, 55); Frodo sees this; and even Sam sees this before the end, despite his long-standing hatred and mistrust of Gollum (*LOTR*, 944). And this is the foundation for Gandalf's pity for the miserable Gollum. He sees the anguish of his soul and recognizes that the existence of that sliver of Sméagol that remained "would only make

[16] Tolkien presents a further manifestation of this after Frodo's wounding on Weathertop. Yet, as Gandalf speculates and as I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 6, Frodo's virtue and the trajectory of his spiritual journey would have resulted in a vastly different end from Gollum's.

the evil part of him angrier in the end – unless it could be conquered. Unless it could be cured . . . Alas! There is little hope of that for him. Yet not no hope. No, not though he possessed the Ring so long, almost as far back as he can remember" (*LOTR*, 55). Gandalf holds out hope for Gollum's redemption, even while acknowledging how unlikely it is, saying, "I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it" (*LOTR*, 59).[17] He has compassion for Gollum because he knows that the Ring "was eating up his mind . . . and the torment had become almost unbearable" (*LOTR*, 55), and since Gollum has not thinned entirely – he has not faded completely and become wholly wraith-like – there is still hope for his euformation and return to a hobbit-like existence.

From Wraith to Hobbit and Back Again

As I mentioned above, Frodo does not give up hope for Sméagol's restoration. He believes that somewhere within Gollum's emaciated body and soul, Sméagol still lives – that he is not lost no matter how vehemently Gollum asserts that he is. Perhaps this belief is founded in hope, for Frodo cannot help but see his own potential future whenever he looks at Gollum. But more likely it is born out of the same pity and mercy that stayed Bilbo's hand from slaying Gollum when he had the chance (*LOTR*, 59). It is the empathy of the Elves who allow him freedom to climb trees even while he is their captive. It is the clear sight of Gandalf that recognizes the tragedy of so complete a corruption of any of Ilúvatar's children.

Each of these attributes contribute to Frodo's response when the two finally meet. At that point, Frodo has already been the ring-bearer for more than seventeen

[17] Gandalf's hope for restoration passes to the Elves entrusted with watching Gollum and keeping him captive. Legolas shares that Gollum's escape was possible because Gandalf had encouraged them to hope as he did. He says, "Gandalf bade us hope still for his cure, and we had not the heart to keep him ever in dungeons under the earth, where he would fall back into his old black thoughts" (*LOTR*, 255).

years (*LOTR*, 1091), the most recent six months of which have been the heaviest and most wearying, since he has been actively working toward the Ring's destruction, fleeing from danger and pursuit, mourning the loss of loved ones, recovering from a mortal wound, and fending off the constant temptation to put on the Ring and give in to its seductive promise of power. Though he has not borne it nearly as long as Gollum had, Frodo knows the weight and corrupting influence of the Ring. His meeting with Gollum is his first and only encounter with someone who truly understands what he is experiencing. Recognizing this opens Frodo to empathy for the shriveled Gollum.

Collicutt helpfully defines empathy as "the ability to see and respond to another as if she were akin to me"[18] and goes on to observe that "empathy requires a shift to the perspective of the other – walking a mile in his shoes – and so it is more than simply seeing a likeness between us."[19] As Frodo comes to know Gollum more and more deeply, empathy and pity grow within him; he sees how similar they are and can inhabit Gollum's perspective, just as Gandalf hinted he might near the story's beginning (*LOTR*, 59). It is empathy and pity that form the basis for the unique *euformative* community Gollum reluctantly joins. It is worth noting that empathy and pity are not the common responses to Gollum, even within the community he joins. Sam distrusts Gollum immediately (*LOTR*, 615) and never ceases to distrust him through the rest of their time together, even if he does come to pity him.[20]

The difference between Sam's and Frodo's responses to Gollum seems to have

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[18] Collicutt, *The Psychology of Christian Character Formation*, 182.

[19] Ibid., 183.

[20] On the path up to Mount Doom, when Sam has the chance to kill Gollum, Tolkien describes the growth of pity in Sam's heart: "Sam's hand wavered. His mind was hot with wrath and the memory of evil. It would be just to slay this treacherous, murderous creature, just and many times deserved; and also, it seemed the only safe thing to do. But deep in his heart there was something that restrained him: he could not strike this thing lying in the dust, forlorn, ruinous, utterly wretched. He himself, though only for a little while, had borne the Ring, and now dimly he guessed the agony of Gollum's shriveled mind and body, enslaved to that Ring, unable to find peace or relief ever in life again" (*LOTR*, 944). It is noteworthy that Sam's pity for Gollum does not grow until after Sam's mistrust pushes Sméagol back into the darkness and returns Gollum to dominance.

two roots. I have already discussed the first – that Frodo can pity Gollum as a fellow ring-bearer – but the second rests in Sam's position on the outside of that relationship. Frodo can refuse direct confrontation with Gollum as the one primarily under threat, though he does use the Ring to cow Gollum at the beginning of their journey together, and can choose to follow a different path of engagement with the dysformed slave of the Ring. Sam, on the other hand, sees himself as Frodo's protector and cannot simply refuse to confront the danger to his master and friend. Sam's loyalty is to Frodo, even at the expense of himself, and so his antagonism toward Gollum takes the shape of enmity toward his friend's enemy. Even so, Sam trusts and supports Frodo in his decision to welcome Gollum in, and in doing so he unintentionally models for Gollum what it is to be part of euformative community. Tolkien does not offer a moment by moment description of their journey, but transitions from dysformation to euformation are seldom quick or seamless, especially in a case like Gollum's. And even though Sam does not trust Gollum, he still invites him into the community in very tangible ways. For instance, when Sam offers to cook and season some rabbits that Gollum caught, it is telling that despite the extent to which Sam dislikes Gollum he is still included in the offered meal (*LOTR*, 654). It is not made to exclude Gollum, but to bring him in. Gollum's refusal to partake is one of the small steps on his return journey from Sméagol to Gollum, but I will discuss that in more detail below.

The defining moment of this stage in Sméagol's story is the oath he swears upon the Ring. It begins this journey because the Ring, of all items in Arda, is most inclined to bind those who swear upon it because its power always leads toward domination and enslavement. Frodo warns Sméagol that the Ring will hold him to his oath, but it will also try to twist and pervert it (*LOTR*, 618). Of course, Frodo is eventually proven right, but initially all is well. As Sméagol ascends, he regains substance and intelligibility. The identity that was subsumed and buried rises to the surface once more. What was lost has

been found. This is clear in the first moment Gollum suggests swearing upon the Ring: "'Sméagol,' said Gollum suddenly and clearly, opening his eyes wide and staring at Frodo with a strange light. 'Sméagol will swear on the Precious'" (*LOTR*, 618). In effect, he has sworn by the power of the Ring itself, to let Sméagol come back to the surface. The wide light-filled eyes and the clear speech are very unlike the Gollum they had just met, as is his speaking to Frodo and Sam directly, rather than mumbling only to his Precious. His personality reemerges from the darkness and shadow where it has hidden for centuries and over time he discovers that he has a place within this little community. This process begins after he swears by the power of the Ring, an oath which Frodo believes to be trustworthy despite its dangers. With Frodo's trust won, the Elven rope is removed from Gollum's ankle and

> From that moment a change, which lasted for some time, came over him. He spoke with less hissing and whining, and he spoke to his companion direct, not to his precious self. He would cringe and flinch, if they stepped near him or made any sudden movement, and he avoided the touch of their elven-cloaks; but he was friendly, and indeed pitifully anxious to please. He would cackle with laughter and caper, if any jest was made, or even if Frodo spoke kindly to him, and weep if Frodo rebuked him (*LOTR*, 618-9).

Initially the switch from Gollum back to Sméagol radically changes his behavior. There is a lightness to him that was previously absent and it is born from being welcomed into a community in which he is trusted and allowed to play a part. For the first time in a long time, he has something to contribute to another, and the simple act of looking outward plays an integral part of his growth. Frodo and Sam both see the change, though Frodo holds greater hope that the change will last. This is not Frodo ignoring the facts or hoping without foundation. It is not blindness to reality or the potential for evil. Rather, he recognizes that the change in Gollum is still new and that old habits die hard, as Sam is quick to remind him, but he trusts for the time being in the power of Gollum's oath. He says, "There *is* a change in him, but just what kind of a change and how deep, I'm not sure yet . . . I don't think there is any need for fear – at

present" (*LOTR*, 623). Frodo repeatedly chooses to show mercy and hospitality and draws Sméagol to the surface in doing so, welcoming him with each step he takes. And though Gollum remains the same cringing and grotesque figure outwardly, the inward changes taking place are evident in his growing confidence in Frodo's trust and appreciation.

The divide between Gollum and Sméagol also takes on a new dimension, an outward manifestation witnessed by Sam in the shadow of a mound of slag. As they take what time they can to rest, Sam wakes to a strange scene:

> Gollum was talking to himself. Sméagol was holding a debate with some other thought that used the same voice but made it squeak and hiss. A pale light and a green light alternated in his eyes as he spoke (*LOTR*, 632).

Note that Tolkien narrates the split in his personalities both by referring to him as Gollum *and* Sméagol, and by describing the fluctuations of his voice and the light of his eyes. Additionally, one of his hands reaches for the Ring whenever Gollum speaks, but when Sméagol speaks the hand is jerked back as though Sméagol is physically restraining Gollum from grasping for it (*LOTR*, 633). Tolkien does not describe what life was like for Gollum when he was alone, so it is unclear if this conversation between selves is new, but in Gollum's scenes up to this point, he has only manifested one voice, one personality, one eye-color, and his habit of speaking only to the Precious, the Ring-self he has been for centuries, is well-established. So, there is evidence that what has been an internal distinction between Gollum and Sméagol, becomes externalized due to Gollum's entrance into this euformative community.

After that episode, Sméagol guides them through the Dead Marshes and up to the Black Gate because that is what Frodo asked. But when he realizes what their real aim is, he offers them a different way. Of course, that way is through Shelob's lair, but it is possible at this stage in his journey, despite Gollum's forcefulness in pushing Sméagol to claim the Ring as his own (*LOTR*, 633), that he hopes to guide them safely through

rather than to betray them. When Gollum suggests the way through Shelob's lair, Sméagol seems genuinely horrified at the thought. He protests against hurting Frodo because of his kindness, yet his journey into the light is still tenuous enough that he caves in to Gollum's pressure and both hands reach for the Ring.

Even so, he seems more comfortable and confident in his own skin, assured of his place within the group. He knows that Sam distrusts and dislikes him, but he grows ever more secure in Frodo's trust, kindness, and mercy, just as Sam has. This is why he feels so deeply betrayed by Frodo's role in his capture by Faramir's men (*LOTR*, 687-8). Just when he is letting his guard down and allowing himself to feel at home in Frodo's and Sam's company, they do to him what he has always believed they would: participate in his mistreatment – even if only by being present, just as everyone else has in recent memory. The deep hurt he experiences is one proof of just how close he was to redemption. Even though he has at some level always believed that Frodo and Sam would wound him, he was beginning to trust them. His heart was opening and softening, if not to 'the other' broadly conceived, at least regarding one of the two others in his company.

His opportunity to repent of his wickedness and turn to the light is real. His opportunity for redemption was no illusion or wishful thinking. Frodo's pity, mercy, encouragement, fellowship, and trust very nearly succeeded in healing the wounds that so marred Sméagol's soul. This means that his eventual rejection of the chance for euformation is equally real. What is most remarkable about this opportunity is that it is a true chance at growth. He is not merely offered the chance to return to who and what he was before the Ring crossed his path.[21] No, his body is too wasted for that and as Tolkien notes in his unsent letter to Michael Straight in early 1956, "The domination of

[21] In the same way that Arda Healed is different from Arda Unmarred, but instead takes its whole history into account and redeems it, Sméagol has become a particular person through his ordeals, and his redemption would take up all of that rather than making it as though his pain had never happened.

the Ring was much too strong for the mean soul of Sméagol. But he would have never had to endure it if he had not become a mean sort of thief before it crossed his path" (*L*, 234-5). Sméagol can grow and become more than he was before and change for the better. In other words, he can experience euformation. But as a creature with free will, he can choose to accept or reject this opportunity. Sadly, he rejects it, but he does not do so outright. Rather he delays his decision until his rejection seems inevitable. As Tolkien describes it, "By temporizing, not fixing the still not wholly corrupt Sméagol-will towards good in the debate in the slag hole, he weakened himself for the final chance when dawning love of Frodo was too easily withered by the jealousy of Sam before Shelob's lair. After that he was lost" (*L*, 235).

This passage emphasizes Gollum's role in his own euformation. It is not something that happens to him, but involves his own work and determination; it is, like all sub-creative activity, a collaboration. The moment Tolkien is referring to is perhaps the most tragic and poignant scene in the story. Sméagol sneaks away from Frodo and Sam for a time on their trek up to Shelob's lair and when he returns, he finds them both asleep, with Frodo's head resting in Sam's lap. The scene is moving and powerful enough to warrant full inclusion here:

> And so Gollum found them hours later, when he returned, crawling and creeping down the path out of the gloom ahead. Sam sat propped against the stone, his head dropping sideways and his breathing heavy. In his lap lay Frodo's head, drowned deep in sleep; upon his white forehead lay one of Sam's brown hands, and the other lay softly upon his master's breast. Peace was in both their faces.
>
> Gollum looked at them. A strange expression passed over his lean, hungry face. The gleam faded from his eyes, and they went dim and grey, old and tired. A spasm of pain seemed to twist him, and he turned away, peering back up towards the pass, shaking his head, as if engaged in some interior debate. Then he came back, and slowly putting out a trembling hand, very cautiously he touched Frodo's knee – but almost the touch was a caress. For a fleeting moment, could one of the sleepers have seen him, they would have thought that they beheld an old weary hobbit, shrunken by the years that had carried him far beyond his time, beyond friends and kin, and the fields and streams of youth, an old starved pitiable thing.
>
> But at that touch Frodo stirred and cried out softly in his sleep, and immediately Sam was wide awake. The first thing he saw was Gollum – 'pawing at master,' as

> he thought.
>
> 'Hey you!' he said roughly. 'What are you up to?'
>
> 'Nothing, nothing,' said Gollum softly. 'Nice master!'
>
> 'I daresay,' said Sam. 'But where have you been to – sneaking off and sneaking back, you old villain?'
>
> Gollum withdrew himself, and a green glint flickered under his heavy lids. Almost spider-like he looked now, crouched back on his bent limbs, with his protruding eyes. The fleeting moment had passed, beyond recall (*LOTR*, 714-5).

This scene presents Sméagol[22] as the wise see him – and as Frodo comes to see him: weary, bent, and broken; an outsider longing to be fully and finally included. He yearns for what Frodo and Sam share, what Frodo has been offering him all along the way, but "the clumsiness in fidelity of Sam" pushes "him over the brink, when about to repent" (*L*, 234). This was Sméagol's final chance, not because Frodo would not have forgiven him and accepted him back, but because his resistance to the pull of the Ring is too weak to withstand Sam's continued mistrust and anger. After this, Sméagol is truly lost. His resistance is too meager, and as Tolkien noted, his will to do the good too malleable to endure. So, Sméagol recedes forever and Gollum once again becomes the ruling – and final – personality.

Yet that is not the end of the story. Gollum may have succumbed finally to his evil and all-consuming desire for the Ring, but since Arda is a providentially ordered world, even the free exercise of his perverted will for evil ultimately accomplishes something good. As Frodo says to Sam after the Ring's destruction, "But for [Gollum], Sam, I could not have destroyed the Ring. The Quest would have been in vain, even at the bitter end. So let us forgive him! For the Quest is achieved, and now all is over" (*LOTR*, 947).[23] Truly, even Gollum's evil proves to be *conveniens* as it too is taken up into

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[22] Though it is significant to acknowledge that Tolkien was not systematic about these matters and so it is only the name "Gollum" that appears throughout this passage.

[23] In a draft of a letter from 1963, Tolkien explores how the Quest might still have been accomplished had Sam's pity for Gollum come sooner. In it he acknowledges that neither Frodo nor Gollum could be wholly free from the domination of the Ring and would never have been able to willingly destroy it, but

Eru's providential ordering of all things.

The Ends of Evil

The dysformative pathways presented in these first two character studies find an illuminating parallel in the differences between masculine and feminine sin discussed by Valerie Saiving Goldstein in her 1960 essay "The Human Situation." While I am not claiming that Tolkien was a secret feminist or that Gollum is presented in a feminine light, I am noting not only that Saiving's portrayal of the difference between the masculine and feminine forms of sin corresponds to the difference between Saruman and Gollum's dysformative journeys, but also that in Tolkien's portrayals of the two characters he offers ways of imagining the territory of domination (orkishness) and negation (wraithliness) that are both subtle and complex. He narrates the reality that "within our limited human freedom we may act either to renounce that freedom and become less than a free human being or exaggerate that freedom and act like little gods."[24] Both choices are within the realm of human potential and both are dysformative. In Tolkien's presentation, Gollum's temptation resembles Saiving's portrayal of feminine sin as he renounces his freedom – or, more chillingly, has it stripped from him by the Ring. Saruman, on the other hand, fits Saving's paradigm of masculine sin as he exaggerates his freedom and pretends to be a god.

In her article, Saiving interacts with the work of Reinhold Niebuhr to demonstrate that his depiction of sin is not as universal as he imagines. Rather than describing all of

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had Sméagol's euformation continued, "Certainly at some point not long before the end he would have stolen the Ring or taken it by violence (as he does in the actual Tale). But 'possession' satisfied, I think he would then have sacrificed himself for Frodo's sake and have *voluntarily* cast himself into the fiery abyss. I think that an effect of his partial regeneration by love would have been a clearer vision when he claimed the Ring. He would have perceived the evil of Sauron, and suddenly realized that he could not use the Ring and had not the strength or stature to keep it in Sauron's despite: the only way to keep it and hurt Sauron was to destroy it and himself together – and in a flash he may have seen that this would also be the greatest service to Frodo" (*L*, 330).

[24] Ronald H. Ston, "Reinhold Niebuhr and the Feminist Critique of Universal Sin," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 28, no. 1 (2012): 93.

humanity, it describes a masculine temptation toward an over-assertion of the self. This is evident in her description of Niebuhr's view of sin as:

> the self's attempt to overcome . . . anxiety by magnifying its own power, righteousness, or knowledge. Man knows that he is merely a part of the whole, but he tries to convince himself and others that he *is* the whole. Sin is the unjustified concern of the self for its own power and prestige; it is the imperialistic drive to close the gap between the individual, separate self and others by reducing those others to the status of mere objects which can then be treated as appendages of the self and manipulated accordingly.[25]

In exploring her argument more than 50 years later, Gary Dorrien helpfully rephrases her take on Niebuhr's view of sin: "In refusing to accept his dependence, he pretends to be adequate unto himself and thus puts himself in God's place. He keeps others at a distance, makes himself the center of the universe, seeks power over others, and usurps God's authority."[26] These are fitting descriptions of how Saruman interacts with the world and mirrors Treebeard's assessment that he does not care for growing things except as far as they can serve his desires (*LOTR*, 473). Though Treebeard is referring specifically to plants, his insight is just as applicable to all that lives and grows – people included. Saruman seeks to dominate all he encounters, and if that fails to destroy it. Saruman will be ruler of all he surveys or he will burn it to the ground. If others cannot be made into appendages of his will then they must be removed. This is also Sauron's tactic, and Tolkien shows us how Saruman follows in Sauron's footsteps through "The Scouring of the Shire" (*LOTR*, 998-1020). But as Saiving argued in her seminal essay, how can this model of sin account for people who have no interest in power? As Jodie Lyon observed: "Saiving's experience taught her that women rarely suffered from delusions of grandeur or a will-to-power that sought to dominate the other, but were more likely to sin through . . . a failure to take responsibility for themselves."[27] This is a

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[25] Valerie Saiving Goldstein, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *The Journal of Religion* 40, no. 2 (1960): 100.

[26] Gary Dorrien, "Realist Binaries and the Borders of Possibility," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 28, no. 1 (2012): 87.

[27] Jodie L. Lyon, "Pride and the Symptoms of Sin," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 28, no. 1 (2012):

fitting description of Gollum's narrative.

His story is different from Saruman's in that he does not display signs of "will-to-power, exploitation, self-assertiveness, and the treatment of others as objects rather than persons."[28] He does not want to rule the world, to manipulate or dominate others except in small-scale, almost incidental, ways. Gollum does not seek power, prestige, or mastery; rather he wants to know others' secrets and to observe the world rather than participate in it. Through this pursuit, his agency and individuality are stripped from him by the Ring's malicious influence so that he has no identity or desire apart from the Ring's. His temptation is, like the feminine form of sin explored by Saiving, to allow the Ring to steal so much of himself that none of his uniqueness remains; instead of being a fully embodied individual in relationship with others, he becomes "merely an emptiness, almost a zero, without value" to himself and to his fellow creatures.[29] He becomes a wraith even while maintaining a physical body. He depends on the Ring for his self-definition such that he has no self apart from it. Saiving describes this as an "underdevelopment or negation of the self."[30]

But as I have already mentioned, both Saruman and Gollum end up in the same place despite the different forms their sins take. Jodie Lyon's concluding remarks on the symptoms of sin in Saiving and Niebuhr are especially pertinent here since she emphasizes that both temptations are "a preoccupation with the self, whether an overglorification of the self or an attempt to bury the self . . . Different symptoms, same disease."[31] Lyon reminds readers that while Saiving's distinction is true and it is important to recognize that not everyone will be tempted toward self-aggrandizement,

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[28] Goldstein, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," 107.

[29] Ibid., 108.

[30] Ibid., 109. Lyon characterizes this as "[suffering] from a lack of self rather than an excess of self," Lyon, "Pride and the Symptoms of Sin," 99, and Miguel A. De La Torre calls it "the failure to be a self," Miguel A. De La Torre, "Mad Men, Competitive Women, and Invisible Hispanics," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 28, no. 1 (2012): 123.

[31] Lyon, "Pride and the Symptoms of Sin," 101.

both paths end at the same destination. This is clear in Tolkien's depiction of dysformation. Regardless of whether the self is over- or under-asserted, the dysformed self ends up as no-thing. In Saruman's case, his spirit is dispersed and prevented from returning to the Undying Lands. Though he was once a Maia of great power and wisdom, he becomes nothing at the story's conclusion. Gollum, too, descends to nothingness. The Sméagol-self that had once been ascendant is smothered and reabsorbed by the Ring-self, leaving Gollum as nothing more than a tool of the Ring – a self-less appendage to its all-consuming desire.

Through these two characters Tolkien narrates the difference between the masculine and feminine forms of sin Saving argues for, but without the gendered element. Despite the different forms their sins take, both characters end up losing their identity. In both cases, they become something other, something less. And in both cases what they become is something closed off from the euformative potential of encounter with others. Saruman has opportunities for euformation, but shuns them. Euformative community does not fit within the paradigm he has set up for himself. There is no room for community when dominion is the goal, unless that "community" is one in which he alone is dominant and can command others.

Gollum, on the other hand, sought safety and security against those who, like Saruman, would dominate him and seek to master him. He lost himself to the greater power of the Ring in his desire for security and safety from others. Community, while he was driven away from it by the Ring's corrupting influence, still had a place in his paradigm. Real community could promote the kind of security and freedom he desired. This reflects Tolkien's belief that individuals "do not, cannot, live in isolation, and have a bond with all other things, ever closer up to the absolute bond with our own human kind" (*L*, 399). His desire for community of some kind is evident in the conversations he has with himself – the dialogues between Slinker and Stinker, which I have already

mentioned. If Gollum's temptation is to vacate personal responsibility and lose himself in another, at least another is required. This leaves him open, even if only slightly, to community and thereby to the potential for euformation and healing.

So, in Gollum's case, dysformation is characterized by the loss of identity, the loss of distinction between selves. It is further marked by the consumption of oneself by someone or something else. For Saruman, and those who follow his path, the quest for dominance and power consumes them. They find the power they seek, but not in the way they imagined. For Gollum, and those whose lives have a similar trajectory, they are so focused on the freedom offered by the Ring – and that freedom has different connotations for all who desire it: for Gollum, it is freedom from outside influence, whereas for the Nazgul it is freedom from death – that the pursuit consumes them.

Conclusion

The hope for euformation I have extended in this chapter, even though it is not realized in the end, will bear fruit in the chapters that follow. While Gollum ends his life in a place of dysformation and despair, the euformative community of which he was a part still goes on and its other members experience the gifts of fellowship and freedom Gollum desired. Except, where Gollum pursued them, and pursued his selfish dreams for a future, through the power and influence of the Ring, Frodo and Sam attained them by sacrificing themselves and surrendering their dreams for a future.

Chapter 6. The Suffering and Euformation of Frodo Baggins

If, as Tolkien asserted, the primary narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* is "a study of the ennoblement (or sanctification) of the humble" (*L*, 237), it is time to look at Frodo Baggins. Where Saruman and Gollum's stories were characterized by dysformation, Frodo's story is one of increasing euformation, ennoblement, or sanctification. Where Saruman and Gollum were concerned with possessing the Ring, Frodo only wants to destroy it. As Frodo himself says at the beginning of their journey, "Bilbo went to find a treasure, there and back again; but I go to lose one, and not return, as far as I can see" (*LOTR*, 66). And it *is* a treasure, though a dangerous one. Through Frodo's quest Tolkien presents the "study of a hobbit broken by a burden of fear and horror – broken down, and in the end made into something quite different" (*L*, 186).

Unlike with Saruman and Gollum's stories, Tolkien narrates the entirety of Frodo's journey, and so we witness his transformation all along the way. We see him at the beginning: a typical hobbit, enjoying the comforts of his stable and prosperous life, without any grand ambitions, but still longing for something more. We see him agree to take the Ring on a perilous journey, to leave friends and comforts behind, to renounce his place in the world in exchange for uncertainty, fear, and loss. We see him continue his journey of ennoblement from a position of humility,[1] and we see him suffering under the burden of the Ring, and we see this suffering cause a light to grow steadily stronger within him.[2] We see him stagger onward as the Ring grows heavier and exerts

[1] Tolkien sees in Frodo's humble acceptance of his "selection" as ring-bearer the most desirable attitude toward becoming a hero which mirrors the traditional formal refusal of those selected to become bishops: "*nolo heroizari* is of course as good a start for a hero, as *nolo episcopari* for a bishop" (*L*, 215).

[2] "[Sam] was reminded suddenly of Frodo as he had lain, asleep in the house of Elrond, after his deadly wound. Then as he had kept watch Sam had noticed that at times a light seemed to be shining faintly within; but now the light was even clearer and stronger . . . He shook his head, as if finding words useless, and murmured: 'I love him. He's like that, and sometimes it shines through, somehow" (*LOTR*, 652).

its will against his own. We see Frodo briefly unveiled, the outer matching the inner for a few moments (*LOTR*, 618 and 944), as his inner brightness shines out in contrast to Gollum's shrunken, shadowy self. We see the malevolent will of the Ring finally overcome him at the Cracks of Doom as he claims it – or, worse yet, is claimed by it. We see him after his eucatastrophic success, "pale and worn, and yet himself again; and in his eyes there was peace now, neither strain of will, nor madness, nor any fear" (*LOTR*, 947). We see him during the scouring of the Shire: grown, not in body like Merry and Pippin but, in spirit. We see him struggle and fail to put down roots in the Shire once more, suffering the lingering effects of the Ring's corrupting influence and his several wounds. Finally, we see him depart from Middle-earth forever, sailing West with Gandalf, Galadriel, Elrond, and Bilbo – who, like Frodo, went not just as a reward for his service to the world as Ring-bearer but also as "a purgatorial (but not penal) sojourn" (*L*, 386) to finally erase the Ring's lingering mark upon his soul (*L*, 328).[3]

What makes Frodo's experience of euformation (first in Gandalf's company[4] and later in Sam's[5]) most moving is that he could have followed in the dysformative paths of

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[3] One example of the Ring's influence over Bilbo occurs in Rivendell after Bilbo asks to see the Ring. After Frodo pulls the Ring beyond Bilbo's reach, "To his distress and amazement he found that he was no longer looking at Bilbo; a shadow seemed to have fallen between them, and through it he found himself eyeing a little wrinkled creature with a hungry face and bony groping hands. He felt a desire to strike him" (*LOTR*, 232). Another example is not just his advanced age, but also the pride he took in it. Gandalf says, "But as for his long life, Bilbo never connected it with the ring at all. He took all the credit for that to himself, and he was very proud of it" (*LOTR*, 47).

[4] And it is significant that even when Frodo is no longer in Gandalf's presence, their time together continues to have euformative power in his life. When Frodo has the chance to order Gollum's death at the hands of Faramir's men, he chooses not to for a variety of reasons, one of which is that he knew "quite clearly that Gandalf would not have wished it" (*LOTR*, 687).

[5] One of the markers of euformative community is its influence on all members of the fellowship. It is not just Frodo who grows and changes, but Sam too. Frodo sees his first glimpse of this after their encounter with Gildor and the Elves. When asked what he thought about the meeting, Sam gives a surprisingly astute and deep-sighted answer into the nature of Elves and their life in Middle-earth. At which point:

"Frodo looked at Sam rather startled, half expecting to see some outward sign of the odd change that seemed to have come over him. It did not sound like the voice of the old Sam Gamgee that he thought he knew. But it looked like the old Sam Gamgee sitting there, except that his face was unusually thoughtful.

'Do you feel any need to leave the Shire now – now that your wish to see them has come true already?' he asked.

'Yes, sir. I don't know how to say it, but after last night I feel different. I seem to see ahead, in a kind of way. I know we are going to take a very long road, into darkness; but I know I can't turn back. It isn't to see Elves now, nor dragons, nor mountains, that I want – I don't rightly know what I want: but I have something to do before the end, and it lies ahead, not in the Shire. I must see it through, sir, if you

Saruman and Gollum. He could have become orkish as Saruman did or wraithly as Gollum did. Gandalf acknowledges this potential when he confronts Frodo about his lack of pity for Gollum. He says of Gollum's tale, "I think it is a sad story . . . and it might have happened to others, even to some hobbits that I have known" (*LOTR*, 54). Gandalf sees clearly that the Ring could have, and indeed would have, done the same in Bilbo's life if he had continued to possess it, and by implication he proposes that the same can happen to Frodo. But instead of presenting a cautionary tale that traces the dysformation of yet another character into a distorted image of creaturehood, Tolkien offers a glimpse of the ennoblement that is still possible within Arda Marred. He narrates the way euformation happens within a community and not apart from it, and shows that even if life in Arda Marred is (as I have already discussed) always a long, slow defeat, the hope of restoration remains.

In this chapter, I explore Frodo's unique euformative journey, a journey characterized by suffering, community, and weakness. Frodo's path of euformation involves a willingness to suffer in pursuing the good of what he loves, even though that will be costly; but more than that, he pursues that good for the benefit of others and not for himself. On his journey, Frodo is formed by the community he joins, but he also becomes a source of euformative community for others. But neither of these happens because Frodo exercises heroic strength; rather they happen in the context of his weakness and neediness – they happen through the operation of grace. It is in this weakness that Frodo's journey stands apart from Saruman's and Gollum's. He does not seek to exercise power *over* another as Saruman does, or to fade away as Gollum does. Unlike Saruman, he acts out of love for something without pursuing it for himself, without seeking to claim that good as his own. And unlike Gollum, Frodo is capable of self-sacrifice without any hatred of his own hobbithood – of food, of company, of

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understand me" (*LOTR*, 87).

laughter. Because he acts out of love for these things, he gives them up for their own sake, and not because they are holding him back from heroic self-abnegation as an end in itself. Yet, Frodo's euformation remains incomplete; he cannot fully rejoin the community he left behind – whereas Sam can and does as someone fully embodied, fully enfolded in community, and fully himself in his place amongst others in the world. Frodo's wounds require a healing that Middle-earth cannot provide, and so even though his story exemplifies the ennoblement of the humble, it does so only imperfectly. His journey does not reveal the whole arc of euformation.

A Willingness to Suffer

Frodo is an everyman, a hero out of a fairy-story rather than out of the epic mold he is thrust into. His journey is one of transformation and growth of the same kind we experience in everyday living. His euformation is gradual, happening bit by bit over the course of his year-long "journey from light into darkness – and out again,"[6] such that while "Frodo is changed . . . he is yet the same."[7] He experiences true euformation, so that even as he is transformed, he remains Frodo. He is changed, but not unrecognizably so.

If, in the end, he is "made into something quite different" (*L*, 186), what exactly is that? Tolkien offers an answer when he allows us to see Frodo through Faramir's and Sam's perspectives. Faramir recognizes Frodo's ennoblement and comments that "there is something strange about you, Frodo, an Elvish air, maybe" (*LOTR*, 668). Sam also sees the resemblance when he thinks Frodo is dead and looks at him by the light of Galadriel's phial, "and in that light Frodo's face was fair of hue again, pale but beautiful

[6] Verlyn Flieger, "Frodo and Aragorn: The Concept of the Hero," in *Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism*, ed. Rose A. Zimbardo and Neil David Isaacs (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 125.

[7] Ibid., 135.

with an Elvish beauty, as of one who has long passed the shadows" (*LOTR*, 733). It is easy for Sam to see in this just the peace and rest of death, however since Frodo has not died but is rather comatose, it is actually providing a glimpse of the ennobled soul manifesting in Frodo's physical appearance. As I will discuss later, Frodo's growth toward Elvishness is not normative of euformation within Middle-earth.[8] Others who experience euformation do not necessarily demonstrate the same kind of transformation.

The Elvish cast of his transformation is just one unique aspect of his euformative journey, the defining texture of which is of suffering and loss. Frodo's experience of suffering is also not normative for euformation. Tolkien does not present his suffering as good in itself, though he does observe that "the essence of a *fallen* world is that the *best* cannot be attained by free enjoyment . . . or by what is called 'self-realization' (usually a nice name for self-indulgence, wholly inimical to the realization of other selves); but by denial, by suffering" (*L*, 51). Tolkien does not sacralize suffering (there is perhaps too much of the hobbit to Tolkien's character – too much simple enjoyment of company and comfort, of food and drink – to allow him to go too far down the path of sacralizing it), but he does acknowledge that it is inevitable in a fallen world and will affect the ways we live. Euformation happens in light of it, while not depending on it. So, Tolkien does not present it as *making* Frodo noble, or as the badge of his euformation. It is a price he pays, but no more. So, Tolkien avoids the troubling conclusions Karen Kilby sees in Balthasar's theology, wherein he demonstrates "A proclivity to cast suffering in a positive light, and to link, faith, love, and obedience with

[8] Even if Frodo becomes more like the Elves, he remains a hobbit, though one with Elvish characteristics. Though ennobled, sanctified, and euformed, he will still die as all Men must (*L*, 328). Tolkien describes this growth in Elvishness as part of Ilúvatar's intention for humanity's ennoblement. Tolkien makes much of the marriages between Elves and Men in his legendarium. Through them, Elvishness enters human genealogy and passes on the calling to effoliate and enrich creation.

self-loss, self-abasement, even something like annihilation of the self."[9] Suffering is not a necessary step along the euformative journey, even if it is characteristic of Frodo's.

In this section I explore the unique texture of Frodo's euformative journey through two of its most significant features: 1) Frodo goes not to gain a treasure, but to lose one; and 2) Frodo leaves the Shire in order to save it, but not for himself.

To Lose a Treasure, Not to Gain One

Frodo's journey is to lose a treasure, not to gain one. The Ring is, arguably, the most precious and valuable item in all of Middle-earth, if not in all of Arda. In it rests the power to shape the future of the world, to further its marring or to forestall it for a time. Though it will inevitably corrupt its bearer as I have already discussed, its lure for the good-hearted of Middle-earth is that good could be accomplished through it. So, the quest to destroy the Ring is a quest of constant denial, of refusing the temptation to seize the Ring and use it to do good, knowing that it will inevitably lead to dominating and coercing others. This was Saruman's temptation and he could not resist it, and Frodo must constantly fight this same battle. Frodo recognizes the Ring's value and importance, but also recognizes that its power is too great and too dysformative to use safely.

For Frodo to seek the Ring's destruction is a real sacrifice, a real loss, and must be accompanied by real suffering. As I discussed in Chapter 5, the Ring becomes part of its bearer's identity, gradually working to subsume that identity within its own. To seek its destruction, even with so little hope of success, is akin to seeking his own death. Though he had only borne the Ring for around twenty years, it had a firm hold on

[9] Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2012), 115. Kilby further describes this tendency in Balthasar, writing, "Self-abnegation, loss of self, and sacrifice of the self, are constantly to the fore in Balthasar's presentation of faith and the Christian life – and these not just as the vocation of some, or as things that faith might sometimes require, or as things that the Christian must when necessary embrace willingly, but as essential, constitutive, defining components of Christian faith and life" (117).

Frodo's mind and will. This is clear in Frodo's reluctance to let it out of his possession for even a moment. When Gandalf asks to see the Ring, it seems to grow heavy in Frodo's hand, "as if either it or Frodo himself was in some way reluctant for Gandalf to touch it" (*LOTR*, 49). This reluctance becomes even more plain when Gandalf throws the Ring into the fire and Frodo scrambles to remove it before Gandalf *commands* him to wait. As Gandalf's and Frodo's conversation ends he encourages Frodo to try throwing the Ring away, casting it off as he wishes to do, but

> when [Frodo] took it out he had intended to fling it from him into the very hottest part of the fire. But he found now that he could not do so, not without a great struggle. He weighed the Ring in his hand, hesitating, and forcing himself to remember all that Gandalf had told him; and then with an effort of will he made a movement, as if to cast it away – but he found that he had put it back in his pocket (*LOTR*, 60).[10]

The Ring has a hold on Frodo's heart and soul, and that hold will only grow stronger the longer he carries it.

While Frodo received three physical wounds on his journey – the knife wound on Weathertop, the sting from Shelob, and the loss of his finger on Mount Doom, none of which will fully heal within Middle-earth (*LOTR*, 1025) – they are not the most grievous of his wounds. Though the loss of his finger is the most obviously incurable wound, it is the least troubling. The wound of the Morgul knife causes him the greatest physical pain across his remaining years in the Shire, as he experiences it afresh each year on the day he received it. But so too does the loss of the Ring. Each year, on the anniversary of its destruction, Frodo becomes physically ill (*LOTR*, 1024 and 1025) because "It is gone forever . . . and now all is dark and empty" (*LOTR*, 1024). He feels it like the loss of one facet of himself. Like his hand is now missing a finger, his soul is now missing part of

[10] At the council of Elrond, it becomes clear this scene echoes one from long ago. Gandalf shares some of what Isildur wrote after observing that the writing on the Ring has faded. He speculates that perhaps by casting it back into a fire the writing would reappear, but he concludes, "I will risk no hurt to this thing: of all the works of Sauron the only fair. It is precious to me, though I buy it with great pain" (*LOTR*, 253).

itself. This wound, while being the least visible and least comprehensible to his friends, is the most devastating. It is the wound that necessitates his sojourn in the Undying Lands.

Even though Sam feels Frodo's departure across the sea like a real wound in his soul, Frodo tells him, "You were meant to be solid and whole, and you will be" (*LOTR*, 1026) and "You cannot be always torn in two. You will have to be one and whole, for many years. You have so much to enjoy and to be, and to do" (*LOTR*, 1029). So too, Merry's and Pippin's grief over the loss of Théoden and Denethor heals with time. They too are solid and whole for many years. They too, have much to enjoy and to be and to do. But Frodo does not. His losses are permanent and he can never be made whole, at least not in Middle-earth. But not so for Sam. Sam's life is saved on Mount Doom so that it can go on in pleasant domesticity for many years to come. Frodo never hoped for that kind of future for himself, and he does not receive it. Instead, he must leave Middle-earth, surrendering his future there in the hope of receiving the healing his soul most truly needs. Again, this is a price Frodo must pay, which is not good in itself. So, Tolkien does not align "on some very fundamental level love and sanctity with suffering" as Balthasar does.[11]

To Save the Shire, but Not for Himself

Though he doesn't know it, Sam predicts exactly this end. In his famous musing on the kind of story he and Frodo are in he says,

> We hear about those as just went on - and not all to a good end, mind you; at least not to what folk inside a story and not outside it call a good end. You know, coming home, and finding things all right, though not quite the same – like old Mr. Bilbo (*LOTR*, 711).

[11] Kilby, *Balthasar*, 119. Kilby continues to note that "Something similar can be found in late medieval thought and practice, and in strands of Counter-Reformation and nineteenth-century piety. On the other hand, to develop such alignment is by no means an instinct which has characterized the *whole* of the Christian tradition: it is largely absent from the Fathers and from Thomas, for instance" (119).

Sam sees that Bilbo lived through a particular kind of story, one that had a good end both when looked at from the outside and from the inside. Bilbo went there and back again, returning wealthier, wiser, and richer in real relationships. Sam knows that when they return, if they return, they will be different and the Shire will not seem to them as it once did. It will still be their home, but it and they will be changed. Frodo, too, sees this and knows that the kind of homecoming Bilbo enjoyed will not be his. Toward the novel's end he says to Sam, "There is no real going back. Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same; for I shall not be the same. I am wounded with knife, sting, and tooth, and a long burden. Where shall I find rest?" (*LOTR*, 989).

Frodo is too damaged and wounded to enjoy the fruit of his labors. I will discuss his wounds in more detail shortly, but they have bearing here in limiting Frodo's options for the future. They effectively prevent him from putting down roots in the Shire as Sam does. His place is no longer there, but elsewhere. In part, this is because no one there can understand what he has been through. Sam received a small taste of what bearing the Ring felt like, but he did not bear it long enough for it to attach to his soul like a parasite, symbiotically feeding upon his life and spirit to animate its dysformative energies. Though Frodo is loved, he is not known in his hometown. In truth, he has always been an outsider in Hobbiton, and once Bilbo left for Rivendell at the beginning of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Frodo began to grow increasingly restless. Even then, some part of him recognized that Hobbiton was not truly his home. From the start, he has been less than completely at home in the Shire because of what he has learned from Bilbo. He is restless because he is aware of a wider world, and aware of something of that wider world's story. After his long and painful journey, it becomes clear that he has no home this side of the Undying Lands. He cannot know the fellowship of those who understand his burden outside of a community of fellow sufferers. So, he sets sail into the West with those who have borne the rings of power: Bilbo, Gandalf, Galadriel, and

Elrond. Each knows the weight and temptation of the rings. Each knows the sorrow of losing their place in the world.[12] They, like Frodo, no longer belong in Middle-earth and must sail into the West.

Yet, this facet of Frodo's story is not characteristic of euformation more broadly. In other words, Tolkien does not blur the boundary between love and loss.[13] They need not go together. Sam, too, experiences euformation, but rather than needing to go into the West, he becomes more fully embodied and ensconced in the Shire, living a full and rich hobbit life. In this case, Frodo's euformation is incomplete. Yet, Frodo clearly wants to save the Shire because he loves it and its people. Though Hobbiton was not necessarily his home, the Shire was. It was the land of his people and he loved it. In good Hobbit fashion, he valued the land that supported and nourished him, and did not want to see it ruined or corrupted. He feels the taint of Saruman's corruption as deeply as the rest of his friends, and desires just as strongly to see it cleansed and made whole once more. Tolkien comments on this love in one of his letters, writing,

> Frodo undertook his quest out of love – to save the world he knew from disaster at his own expense, if he could; and also in complete humility, acknowledging that he was wholly inadequate to the task. His real contract was only to do what he could, to try to find a way, and to go as far on the road as his strength of mind and body allowed. He did that (*L*, 327).

Tolkien wants his readers to see that Frodo did everything within his power to accomplish the quest, and that is all anyone could have asked of him. No one, after bearing the Ring across the miles between the Shire and Mordor would have had the strength of will to cast it into the fire from which it came. This is not to suggest that Frodo exhibited some sort of heroic strength or resilience that made him more fit than others for the task.[14] He was chosen for it, and he was the most fitting instrument, but

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[12] With the Ring's destruction, the Third Age ends, and with it the time of the Elves and the *Istari*.

[13] Kilby sees this blurring in Balthasar's theology and wrestles with it: "The highest love of God and the greatest misery of the world are reconciled in his thought by introducing elements of misery, destruction, and loss into the conception of love itself." Kilby, *Balthasar*, 122.

[14] Tolkien is careful to emphasize Frodo's status as the one chosen for the task, but also as one who

not because of any superiority or excellence he possessed.

When Frodo accepted the quest, he recognized that its success would not ensure his ability to enjoy the victory. He knew he would have to suffer and possibly lose the land he loved in order to see it saved. In humility, he acknowledged that he was not up to the task, and in effect entrusted himself into the hands of others to see the quest completed – entrusted himself into the hands of the providence Gandalf repeatedly revealed to him. Frodo does this; he gives up the Shire so that others can enjoy it. Sadly, most of those who get to enjoy it know nothing of what he endured so they might have that chance. The Hobbits of the Shire are enamored with Merry, Pippin, and even Sam, because they orchestrate the Scouring of the Shire. The Hobbits see the heroism and stature of these three, and rightly honor them and listen to them, but because Frodo's slow and quiet heroism took place beyond their borders it is also beyond their ability to understand. And so, Frodo receives no honor in the Shire, even though he is largely responsible for its safety and salvation. He was willing to sacrifice himself to save those who would never know he had given up anything. This is why, after the Shire is clean and clear once more,

> Frodo dropped quietly out of all the doings of the Shire, and Sam was pained to notice how little honor he had in his own country. Few people knew or wanted to know about his deeds and adventures; their admiration and respect were given mostly to Mr. Meriadoc and Mr. Peregrin and (if Sam had known it) to himself (*LOTR*, 1025).

It is easy to admire Merry and Pippin, after all they had grown to tremendous size – by Hobbit standards – thanks to the Ent draught (*LOTR*, 561-2, 955, 981) – and their martial prowess is well beyond what is normal for the peace-loving Hobbits. But Merry

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does not fit the heroic mold. In doing so, he avoids conflating his selection with heroism in the way Mike Higton suggests Rowan Williams might, "As it stands, he runs the risk of proposing a kind of spiritual heroism – not, of course, a heroism of successful and achieved purity, but a heroism of open-eyed acknowledgement of failure and finitude, a heroism of moral anguish." Higton, *Difficult Gospel*, 36. Rather than a journey marked by heroic action, Frodo and Sam's journey is often about the mundane placing of one foot in front of the other on a long and arduous quest.

and Pippin have lost very little; they have not sacrificed as Frodo has. Both lost their liege-lord, and for both the loss *is* painful, but that was no sacrifice; they did not willingly lay down or sacrifice in the way that Frodo did. They are given respect and honor within the Shire, and so, too, is Sam who essentially becomes mayor for life. But not Frodo. He retreats into quiet and solitude; he retreats, in other words, into the shadows in accordance with the Ring's dysformative influence on his soul. I will discuss the Ring's lingering taint below, but suffice to say at this point that Frodo does not escape his extended encounter with its evil unscathed.

Euformative Community

While Frodo's willingness to suffer characterizes his euformative journey, so too does the presence of euformative community.[15] As I have already mentioned, Frodo is shaped by the euformative community around him (by the Shire, by Bilbo, by his hobbit companions, by the Fellowship, by Gandalf, by Sam), but he also becomes an agent of euformative community for others, particularly for Sam and Gollum. So, he is formed by euformative community into the kind of person who extends that community to others. This opening out is part of the deep dynamics of euformation. In this section I examine the kinds of euformative community Frodo has been part of, the ways he perpetuates these kinds of community, and the ways his brokenness prevents him from fully integrating back into euformative community after his journey has ended.

The Communities that Formed Him

Three key relationships form Frodo into the hobbit he is, and each of these relationships shapes his ability to extend euformative community as the story

[15] Boff offers helpful insight again when he observes that the human spirit "always coexists as a node of relationships; the self is constituted on the basis of an interplay with others with which it engages in reciprocity and complementarity." Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, 161.

progresses. The first of these is his relationship with Bilbo, who becomes a kind of adoptive father to Frodo after his parents' death. Through Bilbo, Frodo's eyes are opened to the world beyond the Shire's borders. Bilbo, after all, has been on adventures and hosted both Elves and Dwarves in his home. Frodo comes to see the panorama of people and places that make up Middle-earth, and so he is prepared for his time in the house of Elrond and the Council that follows. The Shire does not normally encourage hobbits to look beyond, and there is an element to this that is good and right since the Shire is so uniquely suited to hobbit-kind, but because Bilbo has himself experienced life beyond the Shire's borders, he can point Frodo's attention outward. Frodo, in turn, indirectly brings these broadened horizons back to the Shire with him after his quest is completed. So, Frodo has been formed into a certain kind of person by his fellow hobbits in the Shire, but he has been even more deeply formed as the nephew of Bilbo Baggins (who has been taken by Gandalf out into the wide world), and who, it seems, by means of stories and songs, has done much to shape Frodo's attitudes toward the world around him.

But, as I have already discussed, Frodo's regular interactions with Gandalf have prepared him to experience euformative community and be its agent. As one who brings this community with him and forms new ones all around, Gandalf's company may have the most significant impact on who Frodo becomes. At the story's beginning, Frodo regrets that Bilbo did not kill Gollum when he had the chance, but Gandalf rebukes him and introduces him to a new way of seeing Gollum:

> Pity? It was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need. And he has been well rewarded, Frodo. Be sure that he took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity (*LOTR*, 59).

He shows Frodo that Gollum was once a hobbit too, and no matter the differences between them, Gollum also has the potential for ennoblement and

euformation. It is because of Gandalf that Frodo is prepared to know the mind of Gollum and feel a kinship and compassion toward him. It is because of Gandalf's influence that Frodo can create a euformative community of his own in which Sméagol can reemerge and regain substance. It is because of Gandalf that Frodo can feel pity for Saruman, even after the fallen *Istar* tries to murder him, saying: "He was great once, of a noble kind that we should not dare to raise our hands against. He is fallen, and his cure is beyond us; but I would still spare him, in the hope that he may find it" (*LOTR*, 1019). What a stark contrast. Because of the euformative communities he has been part of, Frodo has gone from one who felt no pity for Gollum's dysformation, to one who can show pity for both Gollum and Saruman because he can now understand them. Saruman, himself, recognizes this change in Frodo. He looks at Frodo with "mingled wonder and respect and hatred" saying, "You have grown, Halfling . . . Yes, you have grown very much" (*LOTR*, 1019).

Pity is the significant term here, one with "moral and imaginative worth" for Tolkien (*L*, 191), and it is, in part, a recognition of the limited strength of another. It does not see people as either heroes or failures; it does not see them simply in terms of moral failure or success. It is, at its root, a love of others that is aware of euformation, dysformation, and limitation. And so, it is marked by a desire for the other's good to be realized. It is forged by communities of those in process, where some are more euformed than others, but the ethos is one of love. As Finrod says in the Athrabeth, "Yet pity is of two kinds: one is of kinship recognized, and is near to love" (*MR*, 324). This is the pity Frodo shows for Saruman and for Gollum. This is the pity he has learned from Gandalf – it is the pity of kinship recognized and is a theologically grounded way of being in the world that counteracts and contradicts the cruelty, indifference, spite, and inhumanity of Sauron and Saruman; as well as the abnegation and annihilation of Gollum. Frodo's euformation allows him to experience Pity for

those around him and to desire their good. It empowers him to reach out, and reach down, in Pity to those brought low by their dysformative journeys.

In the end, it is the pity Bilbo extended to Gollum (the same pity that Frodo learns from Gandalf) "that ultimately allows the Quest to be achieved" (*L*, 191). Frodo's capacity to express Pity grows out of his euformative journey of willing surrender. In the end, the Shire is saved, but not for him. As Frodo says, "It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: someone has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them" (*LOTR*, 1029). Frodo gives them up so Sam and his family can keep them. He pays a real price, but his story does not end there. Instead, it continues beyond the walls of the world where

> at last on a night of rain Frodo smelled a sweet fragrance on the air and heard the sound of singing . . . over the water. And then it seemed to him that . . . the grey rain-curtain turned all to silver glass and was rolled back, and he beheld white shores and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise (*LOTR*, 1030).

While Frodo does not begin the story as a markedly euformed individual, his experience of euformative community has already laid important groundwork for his growth upon the journey. Yet, that is not to say that his ennoblement does not yet exist. When the hobbits encounter the party of Elves, it is Frodo who stays up late into the night speaking with them, giving and receiving news of the wider world while the other hobbits sleep. What he has already become through his relationship with Bilbo, and through the relationships he has because of Bilbo, opens him up to the possibility of this conversation. It is Frodo who sees through Strider's appearance and deems him trustworthy, where the other hobbits – particularly Sam – remain distrustful until his affiliation with Gandalf emerges. Frodo's comment on appearance versus reality is astute and demonstrates his spiritually keen vision: "I think one of his spies would – well, seem fairer and feel fouler, if you understand" (*LOTR*, 171). He is already wise enough to know that appearances can deceive and cannot always be trusted. Yet, lest we

be tempted to think he has already "arrived," shortly after the hobbits meet Aragorn Frodo comments on his shrinking waistline, saying, "I hope the thinning process will not go on indefinitely, or I shall become a wraith" (*LOTR*, 184). Aragorn knows that becoming a wraith is nothing to joke about because it is a real possibility for all creatures within Arda Marred, but especially for the Ring-bearer. So, he quickly and earnestly tells Frodo not to speak of such things.

The third relationship that forms Frodo is with his loyal friend Sam Gamgee. Sam is the ideal companion on Frodo's journey: unfailingly loyal, stubbornly hopeful, and doggedly persistent in supporting his master and friend. It is Sam who refuses to give up when Frodo's strength is failing him. It is Sam who literally carries Frodo up the mountain and refuses to let hope die. It is Sam who retains the ability to see the beauty of the stars peeking through the clouds and recognize in their light that "in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty forever beyond its reach" (*LOTR*, 922). Sometimes, Frodo cannot feel this hope, and the only hold he has on it is through Sam who can say with complete sincerity, "where there's life there's hope" (*LOTR*, 700). Sam's fellowship shapes Frodo into the kind of hobbit who can persevere even in the face of anguish, deprivation, and despair. Even when he cannot remember the good things he has left behind – even when "No taste of food, no feel of water, no sound of wind, no memory of tree or grass or flower, no image of moon or star are left" to him (*LOTR*, 937-8) – Sam can, and regularly reminds Frodo of them. During their conversation about what kind of story they have found themselves in, Frodo says, "to hear you somehow makes me as merry as if the story was already written. But you've left out one of the chief characters: Samwise the stouthearted . . . Frodo wouldn't have got far without Sam" (*LOTR*, 712). Frodo needs Sam, needs his fellowship, needs his cheer, and needs his hope. Without Sam, the quest would have failed.

Sam remains grounded and firmly rooted in the Shire, even when he is away from it. This connection to what he has left behind keeps Frodo from becoming completely untethered and set adrift, consumed with the burden of bearing the Ring. Further, where the Ring is constantly tempting Frodo toward self-aggrandizing illusions of significance, Sam's humility counteracts the Ring's influence. In the short time Sam bore the Ring, he saw a grand vision of himself as a hero who could command the land to bear fruit so that even the waste of Mordor could become a bounteous garden. But it does not take long for his practical Hobbit nature to reassert itself and deny the possibility, acknowledging that he is, after all, only a very insignificant person in the grand scheme of things and one small, well-tended garden is enough for any one person to manage and enjoy (*LOTR*, 901). On the one hand, Sam clearly refuses the Sarumanic temptation to treat other realities as instruments of his personal ambition and gratification. On the other hand, he also refuses to lose himself to the Ring's power as Gollum does. Instead, he recognizes his proper part and place in relation to others. Through his humility and service, Sam keeps Frodo grounded and helps him resist the temptations to become like Saruman or Gollum.

Agent of Euformative Community

Through Frodo's experience of euformative community, he is trained and equipped as an agent of that community for others. Because euformative community is not simply a matter of the quality of relationships between people – or, more broadly, of the relationships within an "in group" – it involves the way the members of that community open each other up to others. So, Frodo opens up community and invites others to share in it. Gollum is the most obvious example of this, but since I discussed his formative journey in Chapter 5, I will focus here on the way Frodo reshapes the Shire as a euformative community. As I discussed above, the Shire is not known for

broadening hobbits' horizons. It is an insular community, one that is tight-knit and supportive, but closed. It was separated from the rest of the world for long years thanks to the protection offered by Aragorn's kin (though the hobbits knew nothing of the protection they received). Though it was not removed or hidden like Lothlórien or Rivendell, it was still set apart. This is clear when Frodo describes the change in his perspective thanks to Aragorn:

> In fact, he reminds me often of you [Gandalf]. I didn't know that any of the Big People were like that. I thought, well, that they were just big, and rather stupid: kind and stupid like Butterbur; or stupid and wicked like Bill Ferny. But then we don't know much about Men in the Shire (*LOTR*, 220-221).

Frodo's perspective is already changing, and through him and his friends, it will change for the Shire as well. Though the Shire retains its protected status after Aragorn becomes king, it is included in the wider world, even if only in limited ways. Hobbit nature has not changed, and so they still want a land of their own free from the incursions of Men, but its complete isolation is overcome. It, as a land, experiences euformation in that it and its people become part of the world-community. Thanks to Frodo's euformation and his journeys into the wider world, the Shire has rejoined that wider world and become part of the community it offers.

Again, Sam is emblematic of this change. As the one who experiences Frodo's euformation most directly, both contributing to it and benefitting from it, and as a representative of the working-class hobbits of the Shire, his euformation and opening outward to the world represent a similar movement for the Shire. Sam's horizons are broadened. His perspective has changed. His life is a narration of what Merry observes in the Houses of Healing:

> It is best to love first what you are fitted to love, I suppose: you must start somewhere and have some roots, and the soil of the Shire is deep. Still there are things deeper and higher; and not a gaffer could tend his garden in what he calls peace but for them, whether he knows about them or not. I am glad that I know about them, a little (*LOTR*, 870).

Sam loves the Shire, and his roots go down deeply into it. He is the quintessential

hobbit, fitted for the Shire and for the life it makes possible. But he has seen the deeper and higher things, and loves them too. He has experienced his own euformation and grown in his capacity to love through his experience of a broader and wider world than he had previously known. The Shire becomes similarly euformed. It remains fitted for its hobbits and for its relative seclusion, but it too has encountered the deeper and higher things and cannot remain isolated from them any longer.

Frodo, Weak and Wounded

But ultimately, Frodo's euformation is incomplete. One of the ways Frodo suffers most is precisely in the damage that is done to his ability to be a continuing part of the euformative communities he has enjoyed. He, though he has helped to save the Shire, must leave it and his friends behind. Again, this is not a necessary part of euformation. It is, rather, a consequence of Frodo's long exposure to the Ring's evil and its dysformative power. The fact that Frodo must leave is a sign that something is broken and demands a healing that cannot be achieved in Middle-earth. In this regard, Frodo's euformation is not a higher or better one than Sam's because euformation does not necessarily require the kind of broken fellowship and loss of community that Frodo experiences. If anything, it is lower and less complete since Sam, along with Merry and Pippin, are euformed to be more fully themselves as hobbits of the Shire, more fully friends with one another, even while their relationships now stretch beyond what they were previously capable of. This demonstrates that euformative community is not a panacea. There are some problems it cannot solve and some hurts that it cannot heal.

Tolkien explains that Frodo suffers from two spiritual wounds to match the three physical wounds his body still suffers: 1) a "desire to have returned as a 'hero' not content with being a mere instrument of good" and 2) "another temptation, blacker and yet (in a sense) more merited, for . . . he had not in fact cast away the Ring by a

voluntary act: he was tempted to regret its destruction, and still to desire it" (*L*, 328). These two spiritual wounds offer illuminating parallels between Frodo and the dysformative journeys of Saruman and Gollum. Like Saruman, Frodo is tempted to desire praise and worship. Saruman wanted to claim the Ring and make himself the God of Middle-earth. He was not content with being "a mere instrument of good" (*L*, 328). He wanted pride of place and in order to accomplish that he was willing to become the very thing he was sent to fight against. There is a part of Frodo that also wants acclamation for the work he helped to accomplish, that rightly wants to be welcomed back to the Shire and admired as the other hobbits are. And there is "a last flicker of pride" in him that wants to take credit for the Ring's destruction (*L*, 328). But *that* praise and acclamation do not rightly belong to him. He is worthy of praise for the great burden he bore and the sacrifice he made, but he cannot take credit for the Ring's destruction.[16]

Because the Ring overwhelms his will at the end, Frodo is ultimately unable to complete the quest. He fails, though he has done all within his power and spent himself to the utmost. While Tolkien is clear that this is not a moral failure, it *is* still a failure:

> I do not think that Frodo's was a *moral* failure. At the last moment the pressure of the Ring would reach its maximum – impossible, I should have said, for anyone to resist, certainly after long possession, months of increasing torment, and when starved and exhausted. Frodo had done what he could and spent himself completely (as an instrument of Providence) and had produced a situation in which the object of his quest could be achieved. His humility (with which he began) and his sufferings were justly rewarded by the highest honor; and his exercise of patience and mercy towards Gollum gained him Mercy: his failure was redressed (*L*, 326).[17]

While Frodo's failure happens when his limited strength is finally overwhelmed, rather

[16] Frodo and Sam *are* praised for their role in destroying the Ring on the Field of Cormallen (*LOTR*, 953-955).

[17] In a footnote to the passage above, Tolkien elaborates: "No account is here taken of 'grace' or the enhancement of our powers as instruments of Providence . . . But grace is not infinite, and for the most part seems in the Divine economy limited to what is sufficient for the accomplishment of the task appointed to one instrument in a pattern of circumstances and other instruments" (*L*, 326).

than by anything like a free decision on his part (which is why it is not a *moral* failure for which he is culpable), it *is* still a disastrous fall – one that, without the strange working of providence, would have destroyed everything. As Tolkien continues, "We are finite creatures with absolute limitations upon the powers of our soul-body structure in either action or endurance. *Moral* failure can only be asserted, I think, when a man's effort or endurance falls *short* of his limits, and the blame decreases as that limit is closer approached" (*L*, 326). So, Frodo bears no blame in Tolkien's conception because he resisted to the utmost of his power. Had he given in earlier and surrendered to the temptation sooner, then moral failure could have been attributed to him. But Frodo stood firm as long as his limited power could manage. In one sense, the quest was hopeless from the beginning. The Wise knew that no one would be able to willingly destroy the Ring after bearing it for so long. But they still went forward with the quest, trusting in Ilúvatar's providential ordering of the world and his ability to work with creaturely free will to accomplish the quest in the end.

Providence, for Tolkien, acts through special grace at times, but is limited to providing just what is needed to accomplish the task. This is what sets Frodo's surrender apart from Gollum's. Frodo spending himself as an instrument of providence has a radically different shape than Gollum's role as an instrument of the Ring. In the "Divine economy" grace will not overpower or overmaster creatures or move them to accomplish the divinely appointed end against their will. If Ilúvatar acted in that way, he would be no better than Saruman, regardless of the good intent behind it or the incredible good that would result from it. No, Ilúvatar models what it is to work with others rather than to exercise dominion over them. He, unlike the Ring, does not ask for the dissolution of self in his service. In becoming an instrument of providence, Frodo remains himself, with all his euformation and dysformation intact. So, grace is operative even, perhaps especially, in Frodo's failure.

Ilúvatar's providential apportioning of grace can and does strengthen and support his children, in such a way that they are equipped to stand firm, but within limits. In the end, Frodo cannot stand firm. In Tolkien's divine economy, grace does not undergird a heroic depiction of the self, a sort of sanctified version of Saruman-like strength in which sufficient exertion of the will can overcome all obstacles – but of strengthening, supporting, and encouraging within limits, and of redeeming failure beyond those limits.

But the lingering desire to possess the Ring and regret its destruction is a darker temptation that Frodo still suffers.[18] Because Frodo did not, in the end, choose the Ring's destruction, desire for it grips him still.[19] Even though his will resisted its influence for so long, it had insinuated itself so thoroughly into his thoughts and desires that, just as Gollum did, he hated it and yet loved it. In some sense, he wanted the Ring, wanted to claim it for his own, and when it was a destroyed, a piece of his soul was destroyed with it.

While some might see this as pessimism on Tolkien's part, he would counter that it is just the reality of living within a fallen world and is consistent with the fundamental character of Arda Marred. When Gandalf tells Frodo near the story's end that "there are some wounds that cannot be wholly cured" (*LOTR*, 989) he is not saying that Frodo's wounds can never be healed, but that they cannot be healed in Middle-earth. Just as redemption is possible for Saruman and the orcs, but not by the agency of the characters within the story, so too Frodo's wounds require a kind of healing only possible where creation itself is as it should be.

Some see Frodo's departure into the West as his entry into heaven, but that is a

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[18] So, too, does Bilbo too even though he freely renounced the Ring (*L*, 328 in reference to *LOTR*, 987).

[19] Gandalf acknowledges the potential for this to happen when Frodo is recovering in Elrond's house. He tells Frodo what would have happened if the Nazgul had gotten hold of him, saying that Sauron "would have tormented you for trying to keep his Ring, *if any greater torment were possible than being robbed of it and seeing it on his hand*" (*LOTR*, 222 emphasis mine).

serious misunderstanding. Frodo does not go West to receive an eternal reward. Rather, he goes on a kind of "a purgatorial (but not penal) sojourn" (*L*, 386) and as an opportunity to find healing for his soul. Rather than a journey to heaven, Frodo's trip is more like King Arthur's departure to Avalon. It is not heaven, but a place of healing. However, unlike Arthur's sojourn in Avalon, Frodo's is permanent. Those who sail into the West can never return. Even so, Frodo will eventually die and so the Undying Lands are not a permanent home for him, a home free from the pains and suffering of life within Arda Marred; they are temporary, and they have a purpose that, once completed, will allow him to freely choose the time of his own death in the same manner Aragorn did and so to freely "give back the gift" (*LOTR*, 1062). As a mortal, Frodo "cannot abide forever, and though [he] cannot return to mortal earth, [he] can and will 'die' – of free will, and leave the world" (*L*, 198-9). In effect, the Undying Lands provide, in the words of Rowan Williams, "a context ample enough for the subject of profound injury to grow into a different kind of self-perception."[20] In the West, Frodo enters a place that offers the time and space to experience healing of the profound injuries his soul has sustained, and through healing to grow into a new kind of self-perception.

This new perception is prefigured in a kind of super-sensory visual perception that I discuss in more detail in Chapter 7, but will introduce below. I refer to this visual perception as deep sight since it allows one to see deeply into the true nature of things around them.

Deep Sight

Another way of describing Frodo's particular euformative trajectory is to say that he is becoming more like the Númenóreans. The Númenóreans are the most Elvish of the Men in Middle-earth. Ennobled and rewarded with extended life and more Elvish

[20] Williams, "Redeeming Sorrows," 263.

perceptions for their role in defeating Melkor, they can see through appearances to the reality beneath. Again, Faramir serves as a good example of this due to his strong Númenórean ancestry. As Gandalf describes Denethor, Faramir's father, to Pippin, he says

> He is not as other men of this time, Pippin, and whatever be his descent from father to son, by some chance the blood of Westernesse runs nearly true in him; as it does in his other son, Faramir, and yet did not in Boromir whom he loved best. He has long sight. He can perceive, if he bends his will thither, much of what is passing in the minds of men, even of those that dwell far off. It is difficult to deceive him, and dangerous to try (*LOTR*, 759).

So Faramir is more like the Númenóreans of old and his interaction with Gollum clearly demonstrates this. Faramir looks deeply into Gollum's eyes and when he does, their normal light – both the pale and the green – goes out. Faramir sees deeply into Gollum's heart and mind, but when the moment has passed Faramir says, "There are locked doors and closed windows in your mind, and dark rooms behind them . . . But in this I judge that you speak the truth" (*LOTR*, 689). Even so, Faramir recognizes that Gollum knows more than he has said, recognizes it clearly despite the locked doors, closed windows, and dark rooms behind Gollum's eyes. Faramir's ability to perceive is reminiscent of the way Sam describes his interaction with Galadriel: "She seemed to be looking inside me" (*LOTR*, 358).

On several occasions, Frodo shows that he too has this kind of deep sight. One of the first times we see it is in the fellowship's time in Lothlórien following Gandalf's death. He sees things in Galadriel's mirror, the Eye of Sauron included, that few others have seen. He also sees one of the three Elven rings of power on her finger, which is something no one else has seen. Galadriel comments,

> as Ring-bearer and as one that has borne it on finger and seen that which is hidden, your sight is grown keener. You have perceived my thought more clearly than many that are accounted wise. You saw the Eye of him that holds the Seven and the Nine. And did you not see and recognize the ring upon my finger? (*LOTR*, 366).

Frodo's eyes are coming to see beyond appearances to the underlying reality. He is

seeing what is really there, even in the mind of Galadriel, which Sauron himself has longed to look into but cannot. But this is not the only time Frodo displays his euformation in this particular fashion.

We see his deep sight again in the taming of Sméagol where he suggests that Sméagol might rise to the surface if Gollum would freely guide the way to Mordor (*LOTR*, 616), but we see it even more clearly when he warns Sméagol of the dangers inherent in the oath he swore upon the Ring:

> I warn you, Sméagol, you are in danger . . . I did not mean the danger that we all share . . . I mean a danger to yourself alone. You swore a promise by what you call the Precious. Remember that! It will hold you to it; but it will seek a way to twist it to your own undoing. Already you are being twisted. You revealed yourself to me just now, foolishly. *Give it back to Sméagol* you said. Do not say that again! Do not let that thought grow in you! You will never get it back. But the desire of it may betray you to a bitter end. You will never get it back (*LOTR*, 640).[21]

Frodo knows the dangers of the Ring; he experiences them constantly, and so he knows how it will seek to twist and distort even an oath made in good faith. It is not a thing to be trifled with. But that is something anyone with knowledge of the Ring could have seen and foretold. There is no mystery there. Frodo demonstrates deep sight in recognizing that the Ring is already pulling at Gollum's mind and soul. "You revealed yourself to me just now," Frodo says. Gollum's heart and mind are laid bare for a moment as Frodo sees the truth behind Gollum's words. Sam approves of this interaction, but is surprised by it because "It had always been a notion of his that the kindness of dear Mr. Frodo was of such a high degree that it must imply a fair measure of blindness. Of course, he also firmly held the incompatible belief that Mr. Frodo was the wisest person in the world" (*LOTR*, 640). Frodo is not blind, but neither is he unkind, even to one as dysformed as Gollum. Pity has been growing in Frodo's heart and its growth is an essential characteristic of euformation as I have already discussed.

Frodo glimpses the truth of things again in perceiving the alternation between the

[21] Of course, Gollum *does* get the Ring back, in a sense, even if only for a few moments.

Sméagol-self and Gollum-self at war within Gollum. After Gollum asserts that he is telling the truth, Frodo

> felt a strange certainty that in this matter Gollum was for once not so far from the truth as might be suspected . . . For one thing, he noted that Gollum used *I*, and that seemed usually to be a sign, on its rare appearances, that some remnants of old truth and sincerity were for the moment on top (*LOTR*, 643).

But, as with everything that relates to the Ring, this particular aspect of euformation is directly and actively opposed by its corrupting influence. Just as it twists its bearers into puppets of Sauron, it also seeks to destroy their euformation by distorting their sight as it pulls them into the shadow realm. After Sam rescues Frodo from the orcs of Cirith Ungol, the Ring temporarily distorts Frodo's vision so that he lashes out at Sam. But then

> a mist seemed to clear from his eyes . . . The hideous vision had seemed so real to him, half bemused as he was still with wound and fear. Sam had changed before his very eyes into an orc again, leering and pawing at his treasure, a foul little creature with greedy eyes and slobbering mouth. But now the vision had passed. There was Sam kneeling before him, his face wrung with pain, as if he had been stabbed in the heart; tears welled from his eyes (*LOTR*, 912).

The results of this distorted vision are reminiscent of the power of Saruman's voice. Broken sight leads to broken relationships as the Ring pushes Frodo toward isolation, just as Saruman's voice seeks to break down the bonds of euformative community made by Gandalf. Frodo sees the damage his words have done as soon as his vision returns to normal and quickly makes amends. And because the two form their own euformative community, Sam is just as quick to forgive as Frodo is to repent. Their relationship is only temporarily wounded and can quickly recover. This repentance and forgiveness are in direct contrast to Gollum's unforgiving response to the incident on the stairs to Cirith Ungol, where his heart finally hardens toward Frodo and Sam. Tolkien offers glimmers here of Sam's euformation, but he also narrates it through Sam's demonstrations of deep sight. A deeper discussion of Sam's deep-sight must wait until Chapter 7, but Frodo and Sam are not the only hobbits to demonstrate the ability to see in this way.

It is fitting, given Tolkien's interest in the ennoblement of the humble, that though Merry and Pippin are separated from their friends for much of *The Two Towers*, they also experience the euformative power of their communities, though not to the same degree as Frodo or Sam. It is easy to focus on their physical growth, especially since this is what primarily defines them as heroes in the Shire, but there is more to their growth than the physical. In the years after their adventures had ended, their fellow hobbits notice the change in them, acknowledging that "if they were now large and magnificent, they were unchanged otherwise, unless they were indeed more fairspoken and more jovial and full of merriment than ever before" (*LOTR*, 1025). They are physically larger thanks to the Ent-draught of Fangorn, but their growth in joviality, merriment, and fairspokenness is indicative of the euformative experience they have enjoyed. They have associated with the high and mighty, taking part in great deeds with those of already ennobled soul, and have spent extended time in Gandalf's transformative company. They have had greater opportunity to experience euformation in his presence, whereas Frodo and Sam have had an accelerated growth as they have had to grow into Gandalf's role for each other along their harrowing journey. So, it is fitting that both Merry and Pippin also demonstrate deep sight, though without a corresponding growth in Elvishness. Instead, they become more fully themselves, more fully hobbit-like.

It is, perhaps, most remarkable that Pippin demonstrates this kind of sight, given who he is and the role he has played in the Fellowship up to this point. His brush with Sauron through the palantír and his time alone with Gandalf as they rode to Minas Tirith sobered him and allowed him to see beyond himself. He begins to grow out of the childish role he has filled and to think and act as an adult. And so, when he looks at Denethor and Gandalf together he is struck by the great difference in their appearances, but he recognizes that there is more to them than outward appearances. There is a truth

that is only perceptible through deep sight:

> Denethor looked indeed much more like a great wizard than Gandalf did, more kingly, beautiful, and powerful; and older. Yet by a sense other than sight Pippin perceived that Gandalf had the greater power and the deeper wisdom, and a majesty that was veiled. And he was older, far older . . . What was Gandalf? In what far time and place did he come into the world, and when would he leave it? (*LOTR*, 757).

These are deep questions for anyone, but especially for Pippin. He catches a glimpse, with a sense other than sight, of Gandalf's nature. This stands in contrast to Saruman's inability to see what Gandalf has become. If Saruman is unable to recognize what Gandalf has become and this is symptomatic of his dysformation, then Pippin's ability to see what Saruman has missed is evidence of his euformation. And his euformation has grown a deep sight in him that is perhaps more akin to spiritual discernment than actual seeing.

Merry demonstrates similar sight. In the houses of healing, he replies to Pippin's comment that the two of them "can't live on the heights" by saying, "Not yet, at any rate. But at least, Pippin, we can now see them, and honor them" (*LOTR*, 870). While never presented as being as immature as Pippin, Merry has not yet demonstrated this kind of insight or recognition of the world around him. Here he recognizes the truth of that which is greater and higher than he, and sees that the Shire as he has always known it would not exist if not for the high and great with whom he has been associating. But he recognizes, too, that the Shire itself is a good land, a place where hobbits can flourish in keeping with their particular nature. There is also an implicit recognition in Merry's response that hobbits could, at some point, live on the heights. In fact, Gandalf later affirms this, saying,

> My time is over: it is no longer my task to set things to rights, nor to help folk to do so. And as for you, my dear friends, you will need no help. You are grown up now. Grown indeed very high; among the great you are, and I have no longer any fear at all for any of you (*LOTR*, 996).

The small and humble are now to be counted among the great. They have grown up,

though only two have physically grown, and can attend to their own affairs as those who have been euformed. They need not engage with the world as children in need of protection, but neither will they interact as those desiring to rule and dominate. They have navigated the temptations to which both Saruman and Gollum succumbed, and have arrived at a state of ennoblement with real similarities to that of the Elves, yet without over-riding their distinct hobbitly nature.

So, euformation respects creaturely freedom and individuality. It does not force them to be other than what they were made by Ilúvatar to be. In this, it mirrors Ilúvatar's providential working within the story of the Ring, wherein he was providentially extending grace even, and perhaps especially, in Frodo's failure. Similarly, euformation was at work even in the midst of Frodo's losing battle.

Conclusion

Frodo has experienced a particular kind of euformation in Tolkien's epic. On his path toward an Elvish hobbithood, he has suffered much, grown much, sacrificed much, and come out the other side damaged almost beyond repair. He has changed in deep ways that forever alter his ways of being in the world. While he remains himself, that self is both more than it was and less. He is more capable of living on the heights with the great and lofty that Merry recognized, but he is less capable of living in community with those who know and love him. But that loss is *not* a necessary part of his growth; it is a wound that requires healing beyond the walls of the world. Thankfully for Frodo, his opportunities for euformation are not at an end. He has as many years as are necessary in the Undying Lands to experience healing and transformation in the company of those who have been sub-creatively forming the world since the first notes of the Great Music were sung. If there are any in Eä who can effect Frodo's full healing, it is them. In the West, Frodo can, over time, come to reflect more fully what it is to be

a Hobbit: one who is mortal (rather than Elvish), human (rather than orkish), and embodied (rather than wraithly).

However, even in his healing, Frodo's journey will be marked by loss. Though he has Bilbo with him, and Sam will eventually join him,[22] he has been removed from the community of hobbits that Merry, Pippin, and Sam enjoy for many years. For Sam in particular, his journey of euformation has made him more fully hobbitlike – thoroughly and substantially hobbitlike, rather than Elvish – in a way that binds him back more fully into the community of other hobbits, as one who flourishes among them and helps them to flourish as well. Frodo's departure is a sign of something broken, of something less fully euformed than Sam.

So, Frodo's euformation is toward a distinctive creaturely end. His spiritual trajectory is, ultimately, toward full hobbithood, which is good and right, since Ilúvatar intended that all things would be themselves and not some other kind. To be fully a hobbit – or fully human – is to live as an embodied creature within the world in a way that is reminiscent and reflective of the Elves, but without becoming an Elf. It is to be fully and truly embodied, and to embrace that as good and right, but to do so without dismissing or devaluing the soul. The proper end for humanity within Tolkien's legendarium highlights the perversity of Saruman and Gollum's dysformative ends. It demonstrates how incomplete and deficient their pursuit of power or freedom is, since in both cases their misguided exercise of free will prevents them from living as the kind of unique creature they were meant to be. And so, though the dysformative ends have occupied a great deal of the character studies in this project, it is the euformative ends that are highlighted in doing so. By narrating the difference between dysformation and euformation, Tolkien allows us to see the two ends more clearly than a merely

[22] In Appendix B to *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien writes that 61 years to the day after Frodo left Bag End to begin his journey into the West, Sam, too, rode out of Bag End, "passed the Towers, and went to the Grey Havens, and passed over the Sea, last of the Ring-bearers" (*LOTR*, 1097).

theoretical account might. He allows us to see similar dysformative ends as real options in the primary world. But more importantly, he allows us to see that even the world's pervasive marring cannot squash the potential for embodied creatures to know and experience the power of euformative community.

Chapter 7. Tolkien and the Spiritual Senses

In this final chapter, I turn my attention to a facet of euformation that involves a transformation of the way people perceive the world. As I briefly discussed in Chapter 6, growing in Elvishness is one potential euformative path, and the kind of enlarged perception I discuss here aligns with that, though it is not limited to those who follow that particular route. This chapter explores the way deep sight relates to the Christian tradition regarding the spiritual senses.[1] I refer to this tradition through the terms "spiritual perception" and "the spiritual senses," and for the purposes of this chapter these terms will be equivalent. Further, I follow in Gavrilyuk and Coakley's footsteps in using these as "umbrella term[s] covering a variety of overlapping, yet distinct, expressions in which 'sense' in general or a particular sensory modality (vision, audition, olfaction, touch or taste) is typically qualified by reference to spirit."[2] With that said, however, the focus of this study will be limited to sight. While I could examine the role of audition, especially regarding the sound of the sea and its echoes of the Great Music, it is enough to note that such parallels can be drawn. Limiting my scope to one spiritual sense allows for a more thorough examination of the parallels it presents. Further, limiting the discussion to sight alone follows the model presented by segments of the tradition (in Augustine, Bonaventure, Bernard of Clairvaux, William of Saint-Thierry, and others) that saw spiritual sight as the highest power of the intellect[3] – and in that sense the highest perception of spiritual things available to most people during their earthly life.

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[1] This use of spiritual senses ought not be confused with discussions of the spiritual sense of Scripture as defined in classic Christian texts referring to non-literal interpretations.

[2] Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley, eds., *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2.

[3] Balthasar writes of the sense of sight as follows: "As the 'most spiritual of the senses' (Thomas), the eye is wholly present to things, outside of itself ecstatically, and, as such, it is the crown of the 'tree of the senses.'" Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 394.

In this chapter, I do not attempt a systematic overview of the spiritual senses tradition, but have simply identified elements of that tradition that are echoed in Tolkien's ways of imagining euformation with special attention to the places where the echoes invite fruitful conversation.[4] I explore the way Tolkien imagines something like the spiritual senses in his secondary world, which proves illuminating in both its resemblance to and difference from the possibilities of spiritual perception in the primary world. Tolkien invites us to see the primary world differently. While there are strands of the tradition that deal with the spiritual senses and spiritual perception in metaphorical terms, those in the tradition who engage with the senses as real corollaries of their physical counterparts are most illuminating as conversation partners for Tolkien. Those in this vein see the spiritual senses as "interior perceptions directed to realities that, while less physical, have no less direct an effect on the human person."[5]

One strand of the tradition, especially as represented in Balthasar's reading of Origen, emphasizes the nature of all perception as a joint spiritual-corporeal endeavor because humans, by their very nature, are spiritual-corporeal unities.[6] Tolkien's imagination assumes such a unity and presents a range of possibilities for its expression: from physical far-sightedness through to a "spiritual" perception that sees euformation and dysformation in light of Arda's providential nature. Corporeal and spiritual go together in his sub-created world.[7] In addition to exploring Tolkien's presentation of

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[4] While Balthasar is the key 20th century figure I interact with, he is drawing on and adapting an older tradition. His work has been the impetus for more recent work that re-examines both the older tradition and his contribution to it. I draw from these sources throughout.

[5] Bernard McGinn, "Late Medieval Mystics," in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 196.

[6] "What is at stake is always man as a spiritual-corporeal reality in the concrete process of living." Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 384. Bonaventure also drew on this element of Origen's thinking, though his terminology differed from Balthasar's. See Gregory F. LaNave, "Bonaventure," in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Note 12 on 161: "The spiritual senses are defined not only by analogy to, but also by a connection to, the corporeal senses."

[7] The primary difference, it seems to me, between Tolkien's narrative and the tradition rests in the object of perception. For the tradition, God Himself is the object, but in Tolkien's legendarium spiritual perception does not lead to a vision of Ilúvatar. Rather, it leads to a deeper perception of embodied others. This difference in object, while differing from the broader tradition, parallels Balthasar's thinking

perception as both spiritual and corporeal, this chapter also attends to the need for community if the spiritual senses are to be developed, the possibility of becoming proficient in their use by growing in virtue, and their availability all along the spiritual journey.[8] I conclude by exploring some ways in which Tolkien's narrative and the tradition can add to and expand on each other. Let me first turn to the tradition itself, however, so that I can lay a necessary foundation.

Historical Foundations of the Tradition

While the tradition dates back at least to Origen of Alexandria[9], it has its proponents sprinkled within theological discourse through the centuries down to two of the twentieth century's most important Roman Catholic theologians, Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Despite the variety of terms used by theologians through the centuries,[10] those who wrote and thought along these lines sought to make sense of the descriptions they found in Scripture expressing human encounters with the divine through sensory language. This endeavor faces complications from the outset for a variety of reasons,[11] not least of which is that God, as the divine creator of all things, is

as I will discuss below.

[8] This availability is by no means standard in the tradition. Mark McInroy observes that "the spiritual senses are often understood in the patristic setting as being given to those who, through much practice, have attained the final stage of the spiritual life and been granted so-called 'mystical' experience" Mark McInroy, *Balthasar on the Spiritual Senses: Perceiving Splendour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 20. While Tolkien's narrative aligns with the tradition in this way, Sam Gamgee forces us to reconsider their availability in line with Balthasar's reading of Origen.

[9] Karl Rahner, "The 'Spiritual Senses' According to Origen," in *Theological Investigations, Vol. 16 Experience of the Spirit: Source of Theology*, trans. David Morland O.S.B. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1979), 82; Gavrilyuk and Coakley, *The Spiritual Senses*, 2.

[10] Gavrilyuk and Coakley affirm that a great deal of diversity and imprecise terminology exists on the subject of the spiritual senses, so my presentation here is not intended to "impose an artificial uniformity on diverse materials." Gavrilyuk and Coakley, *The Spiritual Senses*, 2–4. McInroy notes that authors within the tradition respond to even the most basic questions in very different fashions. McInroy, *Perceiving Splendour*, 102.

[11] See, for example, Richard Cross, "Thomas Aquinas," in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 174–89. He writes, "What is in some sense philosophically surprising about the spiritual senses is not that they are absent in much high scholastic theology (though this certainly is the case); it is that anyone should have posited them in the first place. God, after all, is an immaterial being, and we might be forgiven for supposing that the senses have to do merely with corporeal or material things. We might think that there is some further faculty – the mind or the intellect – that has to do with immaterial things, be they

entirely other than everything that exists. God is not one thing among many, but is radically different from all that our physical senses can perceive. So, the groundwork for the tradition seeks to make sense of the encounter between God and humanity in terms of divine self-disclosure and self-revelation. Though theologians go about it in different ways,[12] those within the tradition posit that the God who is infinite and immaterial, transcendent and exalted, has also made himself known – primarily and most powerfully through the person of Jesus Christ – and invites humans into an encounter.

One of the primary divides within the tradition is between those who deal with expressions of spiritual perception as nothing more than a metaphor and those who understand it as providing analogies. Some within the tradition make use of both metaphorical and analogical uses of the language of perception without clearly distinguishing between them.[13] There is solid ground for both interpretational methods, though my discussion will focus on the analogical mode. Gavrilyuk and Coakley helpfully distinguish between the two as follows,

> Analogy obtains when the operation of the spiritual senses is described in terms akin to the operation of physical sensation. Metaphorical use can be assumed when no close similarity with the functioning of a physical sensorium is intended. Just what aspect of the self other than physical sensation such metaphors are

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universals or particulars (such as God). Indeed, the distinction between intellect and sense is commonplace in both Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy: the intellect has to do with the intelligible (immaterial) realm, and the senses to do with the material . . . Given these distinctions between intellect and sense, it is perhaps no surprise that some philosophically rigorous thinkers saw no need to posit spiritual senses. The intellect, on either view, is required to cognize any immaterial object, and no further mental faculty is necessary" (174). Karl Rahner makes a similar observation when he writes, "the spiritual senses . . . were commonly explained in a manner which set their content firmly within the framework of more reliable ideas and rendered them in fact superfluous." Karl Rahner, "The Doctrine of the 'Spiritual Senses' in the Middle Ages," in *Theological Investigations, Vol. 16 Experience of the Spirit: Source of Theology*, trans. David Morland O.S.B. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1979), 107. In concluding the aforementioned essay, Rahner explores this tension further: "If one assumes five different faculties which correspond analogically to the bodily powers of sensation, then one is going quite a long way beyond the empirical data" (133).

[12] Some explore these ideas by attending to just one sense, some divide the standard five senses into two groups: the affective and the intellectual, while still others see a correspondence between all five corporeal senses and their spiritual counterparts. See Gavrilyuk and Coakley, *The Spiritual Senses*, 5.

[13] See, for instance, Rahner, "Middle Ages," 104., where he limits his observations about Bonaventure's engagement with the spiritual senses to the texts that "deal explicitly with the five faculties. Wherever only one or other spiritual sense is mentioned, or there is a purely metaphorical reference to religious experience, the testimony is too uncertain to be relevant for our concern." In his footnote to this passage he states, "This means that certain passages are excluded which are quoted by other authors in their treatment of the 'spiritual senses.'"

> meant to portray often has to be further specified. Without such a clarification, what is meant by 'metaphorical use' remains rather ambiguous, depending upon, among other things, a given scholar's theoretical assumptions about metaphorical language in general. Still, in one important limiting case, the metaphorical use of spiritual perception implies that there is no special mode or faculty of perception required to account for experience being ascribed to the relevant senses.[14]

While there are obvious uses of the metaphorical adoption of the language of perception within the tradition, there are some cases where theologians clearly mean more than that.

Interestingly, Gavrilyuk and Coakley see Platonic inspiration for this. They present several examples where Plato's terminology and use of language shows that "he did not mean ordinary acts of imagining or reasoning. Rather Plato intended to describe a direct, perception-like apprehension of the intelligibles, including the good."[15] The proposed Platonic influence cuts against the grain of some features present within strands of the tradition that this chapter will be exploring, particularly where the ties between the physical body and spiritual perception are concerned,[16] but the existence of intelligibles that can be perceived by human persons despite their lack of physical form provides a foundation for much of what will follow. While the language I use does not refer to intelligibles as such, the tools for spiritual perception allow the human person to apprehend realities beyond the merely physical.

Parallels Between Tolkien and the Tradition

Now that some groundwork has been established, I will turn to parallels between

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[14] Gavrilyuk and Coakley, *The Spiritual Senses*, 6. They observe in a footnote to this passage that many who make this distinction "have Thomas Aquinas's treatment of the matter . . . at least in the back of their minds: analogical statements are literally (*proprie*) true, while metaphorical statements are not." They further qualify this observation by noting that many of those who wrote within this tradition predated Thomas Aquinas by several centuries and so this general treatment of the distinction between analogical and metaphorical thinking does not necessarily pertain to the thoughts of all the theologians examined within their book.

[15] Gavrilyuk and Coakley, *The Spiritual Senses*, 7.

[16] Gavrilyuk and Coakley gesture toward presentations of the body as an impediment in Origen's work and the gradual abandonment of all cognitive powers in the mystical contemplation of Pseudo-Dionysius in contrast with the importance of the body for Maximus, Ibid., 7–8.

the tradition of the spiritual senses and Tolkien's portrayal of enlarged perception. I will examine the way Balthasar's description of people as spiritual-corporeal unities is echoed in Tolkien's epic and build from there to discuss the role of community for Balthasar and Tolkien and the trainability of perception in Tolkien and the tradition, before concluding with Balthasar's placement of spiritual perception in the realm of experience for all believers.

Perception as Spiritual-Corporeal Endeavor

Bodies matter for Tolkien, and they are significant within his legendarium. We need only look at the difference in grandeur between Melkor of the Ainulindalë and Morgoth who is finally led away in chains. The two are so unlike as to be in some sense different people. So too, Sauron loses the ability to appear in a pleasing form before finally losing his ability to take a form at all except for that of the lidless eye. These examples point toward the inherent weakness of physical bodies because of the Melkor-ingredient resident within all matter,[17] and the warning given to the *Istari* before their travel to Middle-earth also affirms this, but physical bodies are not just a liability for Tolkien. For the creatures of Middle-earth, they are part of Ilúvatar's design, and so they are good. For the Ainur, they present opportunities to engage in fellowship with the created order in a different mode than when they are in their natural disembodied forms.

But as I have previously discussed, in Tolkien's work outer appearance mirrors inner reality and in that light body and soul are deeply and wonderfully connected. The body bears witness to the euformation or dysformation of the soul. This is because, in Tolkien's work as in Balthasar's, the human person is a "sensory-spiritual totality."[18]

[17] Remember, also, the discussion of the physical changes that accompany Saruman and Gollum's dysformative journeys in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

[18] Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 405. As I discussed in Chapter 2, in *Morgoth's Ring* Tolkien makes the

This concept mirrors aspects of Maximus the Confessor's thinking. As Frederick D. Aquino puts it, for Maximus "the natural state of the self, as intended by God, entails continuity, not division, between body and soul. The same unitive reality is expressed in the cosmos."[19] In other words, the human person is both an embodied soul and an ensouled body, and neither the body nor the soul takes precedence over the other.[20] To be, in Tolkien's terms, a Child of Ilúvatar, is to exist as this unity-in-duality, and this is by design. The Children are made to interact with all things as embodied creatures, whether those things be Elves or dwarves, Ainur or beasts. As McInroy later puts it, "the material body actually informs and enriches our life with God. It is precisely *through* the corporeal that we know the spiritual."[21]

There is an implicit affirmation of embodied human experience within this portrayal of spiritual perception. The body is not an unfortunate side-effect of creaturehood, but is essential and valuable, and it does more than inform and enrich the spiritual life. We experience the spiritual through the corporeal. This is clear in Balthasar's reading of Macarius, where he insists that "it is the same senses which first are earthly and then become heavenly through the infusion of grace."[22] The reason this

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connection between body and soul explicit when he observes that "their bodies had an effect upon their spirits" (*MR*, 400).

[19] Frederick D. Aquino, "Maximus the Confessor," in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 108.

[20] As Balthasar, interacting with Barth's theology, also observes: "the body is an inspirited frame" and the soul is always "the *soul* of the body." Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 385.

[21] McInroy, *Perceiving Splendour*, 40–41. McInroy further asserts that "Balthasar resists any interpretation of the spiritual senses that neglects the material world through which the spiritual realities are shown" (75) and "Since the human being is a unity of the spiritual and the physical, so too do the perceptual faculties of the human being apprehend physical and spiritual realities in a unified act of perception" (81). This disagrees with Origen's portrayal of the spiritual senses, at least as understood by Rahner, who writes, "man possesses, over and above his bodily faculties, 'a sense for the divine, *which is completely different from the senses as normally described*' or simply 'divine faculties of sense'" (Rahner, "According to Origen," 84., emphasis mine). See also example Boyd Taylor Coolman, "Alexander of Hales," in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): "The spiritual senses then are not transformed physical senses, but altogether different capacities for sensing non-physical realities," (130) and "the spiritual senses for Alexander are collectively a distinct capacity of the spiritual nature for sensing God, running parallel to, as it were, the capacity of body and soul for physical sensation" (131).

[22] Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 370. Commenting on this portion of Balthasar's work, McInroy writes, "Macarius thus represents a significant step forward in uniting corporeal and spiritual perception" McInroy, *Perceiving Splendour*, 41. It seems that Macarius's work can function in this way because, according

works in Balthasar's thinking is that perception is both sensory and "suprasensory"[23] because the world around us is comprised of both "a material component and a 'spiritual' dimension."[24] There is more to perceive than just the physical.[25] So, too, in Tolkien's legendarium there is a spiritual reality undergirding everything, and beyond the obvious manifestation of spiritual evil in Sauron, the more subtle spiritual realities can also be perceived by those who have eyes to see. As this chapter progresses, I will clarify the aspects of reality that can been seen in this way.

When Faramir peers into the depths of Gollum's soul, finding "locked doors and closed windows" with "dark rooms behind them" (*LOTR*, 689), his mode of perceiving reveals a parallel between Tolkien's deep-sight and Balthasar's spiritual perception. For both, it is through the physical senses that the spiritual senses work. As McInroy writes of Balthasar's thinking on the matter, "Balthasar interweaves spiritual and corporeal perception with each other such that spiritual perceiving simply cannot occur without its bodily counterpart."[26] Tolkien makes no attempt to describe or explain how this seeing happens, but it appears to be in and through Faramir's physical sight. In this way, Tolkien seems to mirror McInroy's description, when he writes:

> For Balthasar, then, it is actually the corporeal senses *themselves* that become spiritual. The spiritual senses grow out of the bodily senses. There is therefore no parallel set of spiritual sense faculties that must be brought together with the

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to Rahner's reading, "Pseudo-Macarius regards these five spiritual senses as natural faculties, since, according to him, their operations can remain on a purely natural plane, i.e. without grace" (Rahner, "According to Origen," 101. If the spiritual senses can operate on a purely natural plane or a grace-infused one, then understanding them as a corporeal-spiritual unity is fitting since they can operate on both planes of experience.

[23] Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 425.

[24] McInroy, *Perceiving Splendour*, 12.

[25] See Rahner, "According to Origen," 98., where he comments on Evagrius's development of Origen's ideas: "the bodily senses perceive sensual things; in comparison with the spiritual organs of perception, they grasp only a part and not the whole of the perceived object. This is surpassed by the 'perception of the spiritual organs', which penetrate more deeply the reality already grasped by the bodily senses and discover much more about it than do the latter. The spiritual faculties, in fact, either comprehend nothing or the whole reality, whose deepest meaning they communicate." Rahner expands on this comment in a footnote to the text above where he observes, "What is said here only refers to the perception of immaterial realities, i.e. spiritual phenomena in the strict sense. One does not rightly grasp how the physical sight of bodily realities differs from spiritual perception, unless spiritual perception consists in the knowledge of the foundation of things."

[26] McInroy, *Perceiving Splendour*, 122. Balthasar observes that "It is with both body and soul that the living human being experiences the world and, consequently, also God." Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 406.

> corporeal senses. Instead, the spiritual senses are transformed versions of the ordinary perceptual faculties of the body.[27]

Here, the parallel between Tolkien and Maximus becomes apparent again, for according to Maximus, "the worlds of the intelligible and the sensible are 'the same reality viewed in two different ways'. Perception is neither purely spiritual nor is it purely sensual."[28] So, Faramir sees more clearly and more deeply than many. He sees the dysformed soul through Gollum's physical presence before him.

Spiritual Perception and Community

In McInroy's presentation of Balthasar, the spiritual senses are developed and refined through relationship. He writes,

> Balthasar holds that the spiritual senses must be grafted onto a "personalist" anthropology that conceives of the human person as a "being in encounter," and not as an individual entity who is prior to relationship. According to Balthasar's revised version of the doctrine, the interpersonal encounter with one's neighbor is the definitive arena within which one receives one's spiritual senses.[29]

He sees this as a unique feature of Balthasar's treatment of the spiritual senses not drawn from earlier strands of the tradition.[30] This may be due, in part, to the ways Balthasar drew on and made extensive use of Barth's thinking and writing, particularly in Barth's assertion that since humans are "already in relation to others. There simply is no 'I' to speak of prior to the 'I' in encounter."[31] McInroy proceeds to note that "What

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[27] McInroy, *Perceiving Splendour*, 125. As I have already discussed, not all agree with this assessment, but the idea is not limited to Balthasar. See for example LaNave, "Bonaventure," 170: "The senses are to be not so much abandoned as transformed." See also McGinn, "Late Medieval Mystics," especially: "The Dutch beguine Hadewijch of Antwerp . . . has been seen as one of the foremost exponents of a view of contact with God that eschews a clear distinction between outer and inner perception" (196); and "Nevertheless, the indissoluble link of outer and inner sense-perception has a deeper root . . . an incarnational one founded on Mechthild's teaching that from all eternity . . . the Trinity decreed that the second person was to take on human nature in Jesus Christ and join body and soul to divinity so that the inner and the outer person and the physical senses can share in divine love" (203-204).

[28] Aquino, "Maximus," 109.

[29] McInroy, *Perceiving Splendour*, 94. McInroy is alluding to passages from Balthasar, *Seeing the Form* where Balthasar refers to perception "as a fully human act of encounter" (365) and to humanity's essential state as "being-with-others" (381) in which "Man always finds himself within the real, and the most real reality is the Thou – his fellow-man and the God who created him and who is calling him" (405).

[30] McInroy, *Perceiving Splendour*, 123.

[31] Ibid., 98.

Balthasar objects to in … patristic and scholastic anthropologies is the notion that the human being can first be considered a discrete, isolable entity who exists *prior to* encounter. Instead, the human person is always already 'in relation' to an other."[32] In Barth's thinking, this refers primarily to our dependent relationship upon the One who created us. Since God is not solitary but is a Trinity and humans are made in God's image, it follows that humanity is relational like the relational God who made them.[33]

This idea mirrors Tolkien's portrayal of the power of community to influence the kind of person characters become – as I have already shown in Gandalf's power to shape those around him into certain kinds of people, into euformed and ennobled souls,[34] and conversely of Saruman's power to twist and break relational bonds, isolating and dysforming those he brings under his sway. My presentation of euformative community in the legendarium offers a kind of narrated metaphor for the role of community in developing the spiritual senses. As Frodo and Sam spend time with Gandalf, and later with only each other, they experience the growth and ennoblement of their perceptual faculties. Though I have given only limited space to Sam's growth and euformation, his ennoblement offers a particularly striking example of this point. At the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings* Sam is drawn to stories of Elves and dragons, but he is shaped during his travels by the fellowship of Gandalf, Aragorn, and Frodo. As I discussed in Chapter 6, he exhibits spiritual sight after he and Frodo encounter Gollum, but the euformative work preparing him to see in such a way had already been happening since the journey began. I will discuss Sam's spiritual perception in the

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[32] Ibid., 123. McInroy restates this point later in more forceful language writing, "the single human being, as such, does not exist" (180).

[33] See the notes on Ibid., 100.

[34] See Gavrilyuk and Coakley, *The Spiritual Senses*, 14. In their summary on Gregory the Great, they draw our attention to the way he "ties the cultivation of the spiritual senses to spiritual direction, and more specifically to discernment." This idea of discernment will recur, but the way Gandalf operates within Middle-earth is akin to the role of a spiritual director who guides Christians into deeper truth, love, and fellowship with God and with others. This is a fitting title for the work Gandalf does, and of the work all the *Istari* were meant to do: leading Elves and Men into deeper truth so that they might freely choose to fight against Sauron's oppression and evil.

sections that follow.

While I do not want to press the point too far, in attending to the first depictions of Sam in *The Fellowship of the Ring* we see a humble hobbit who is so fascinated by the Elves that he pauses in his work to eavesdrop on Gandalf and Frodo's conversation (*LOTR*, 63-64). That Sam grows from one who eavesdrops to gain the knowledge he seeks into one who perceives spiritual truths as the Elves do is testament to the connection between euformation and spiritual perception. The ability to perceive in this way is latent within him at the beginning, but his experience in euformative community draws it out and breathes life into it.

Growing in Virtue

While this point derives from the preceding one, it does so in contradiction to Balthasar's portrayal of the spiritual senses. Where "in his reading of Origen . . . Balthasar downplays the role of practice in acquiring one's spiritual senses,"[35] Tolkien's portrayal of enlarged perception mirrors other sections of the tradition that insist upon the trainability of spiritual sensation, even if that training is accomplished without explicit instruction. Gandalf never sits his friends down to teach them the way to see and experience the world as he does, yet they learn it none the less. Their euformation enables enlarged perception. Put another way, their ennoblement equips them to perceive more than just physical realities. In Tolkien's epic, virtue and spiritual perception are closely connected, which means that growth in virtue brings about a corresponding growth in perceptual capacity.

As Sarah Coakley tantalizingly suggests, "our very acts of visual perceiving and sensual response might be affected by our moral fiber."[36] The parallel here is clear: while

[35] McInroy, *Perceiving Splendour*, 20.

[36] Sarah Coakley, "Gregory of Nyssa," in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 55.

it is true that in Tolkien's work, all are capable of spiritual perception as an inherent part of their nature as Children of Ilúvatar, those who have been most ennobled are most likely to see with spiritual sight. And as I have already established, when Tolkien writes of ennoblement he has sanctification and holiness in mind, both of which carry notions of growing virtue.[37] Frederick Aquino might just as easily have said of Tolkien's work what he said of Maximus the Confessor's: "A 'truly wise' person, 'through the abundance of virtue', possesses 'a mind illuminated by divine light' and can thus 'see what others do not see.'"[38] There exists in the spiritual senses tradition a correlation between sanctity and perception, and that correlation also exists in Tolkien's legendarium.

In her analysis of Gregory of Nyssa, Coakley observes "a capacity for the sense organs to develop from 'small-souled' to 'large-souled' apprehensions; yet what is also given is the simultaneous temptation 'completely to close' down the spiritual senses."[39] The inhabitants of Arda Marred have an analogous potential. As embodied creatures, their sense organs can be developed and grown from "small-souled" perception, where sight is limited to the material world around them, to "large-souled" perception, where sight's physical limitations are gradually removed. McInroy sees a similar dynamic at work in Origen's thinking where he notes that "just as one must undertake substantial efforts in order to strengthen one's physical faculties, so too must one practice in order to develop the spiritual senses."[40] Rahner, too, observes this dynamic in Origen's

[37] Many within the tradition follow Augustine in seeing diminished perceptual capacity due to sin. For a good summary of Augustine's view of the relation between spiritual perception and sin, see Matthew R. Lootens, "Augustine," in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 56–70. Lootens observes that the spiritual senses "can be activated and used to varying degrees – especially for discerning justice, beauty and truth – but it is only the grace and activity of God that can adequately heal these senses and overcome their dysfunction due to sin" (70). This activity of grace is the source of sanctification, growing virtue, and spiritual perception – all of which are intimately connected.

[38] Aquino, "Maximus," 109.

[39] Coakley, "Gregory of Nyssa," 48.

[40] McInroy, *Perceiving Splendour*, note on 34.

writings: "The physical faculties are strengthened by constant practice; it is just the same with the spiritual senses. The efforts of the bodily senses must be followed by the mastery of spiritual faculties, where indeed a great deal of training is required."[41] As Coakley further observes in Gregory, so too for Tolkien: "the view being proposed is that our perceptual capacities have labile and transformative possibilities, but ones that not all activate – whether through sin, laziness, blindness or philosophical obtuseness."[42] As I discuss below, while all can live out these "large-souled" capacities, not all do. And while it is not necessarily sin that prevents hobbits from seeing with spiritual sight, it might certainly be called laziness, or at least excessive comfort. As I mentioned in Chapter 6, their life in the Shire is good and pleasant, and has not pressed them to see beyond its borders. Neither has it inspired them to look for things deeper or higher than what they already know.[43]

But even those who exhibit "large-souled" perception are not immune from the temptations Coakley mentions. This is most evident in Denethor and Saruman. Both are largely noble, with Denethor displaying a nearly true Númenórean descent and Saruman being a Maia. But both, perhaps through what Coakley calls philosophical obtuseness but certainly through sin, have their perceptual capacities diminished and clouded. For both men, they think they are seeing more clearly than others, but, in reality, they are

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[41] Rahner, "According to Origen," 87. Earlier in his volume, Rahner observes that for Origen, those who have been made perfect are the only ones who "are endowed with these spiritual faculties, which they have brought to a higher level of operation *through constant practice*" (84, emphasis mine). He later explains that as Evagrius develops on Origen, a connection exists between virtue – or purity – and a growth beyond the spiritual-corporeal nature of perception. Initially, "the perception of the spiritual senses is closely linked to the activity of the bodily faculties, so that each is brought into operation by the other. This entirely material point of departure disappears on the higher level . . . In order to reach this point an ever increasing purity is needed" (99). So, in Evagrius's portrayal, the corporeal senses will eventually be transcended, even though they are initially necessary. This foreshadows his discussion of purity of heart and spiritual sight in the work of Bonaventure in Rahner, "Middle Ages," 115.

[42] Coakley, "Gregory of Nyssa," 48.

[43] This is clear from the early pages of *Lord of the Rings* in Sam's conversation with Ted Sandyman (*LOTR*, 44-45). These statements are not intended to say that there is anything inherently sinful or wrong with this hobbitish sense of the world. In fact, the hobbits' perception of the world offers significant expansions on the tradition of spiritual perception as I will discuss below. There is something good and right about the ordinariness of Hobbit vision.

seeing only falsehoods and partial truths. Though they should be seeing more clearly and more deeply, their sight has become diminished. What is striking about these two characters is that their downfall and the diminishment of their perceptual faculties comes about because of their inappropriate use of the *palantíri*, or seeing stones of Númenor. These ancient artifacts were made to enable communication across great distances. They were made to further extend the Númenóreans' already super-human visual capacities, but for Denethor and Saruman, they result in the opposite. This is because, as I have already discussed regarding Saruman in Chapter 4, they see with a calculative vision that only sees what is around them as a threat or a tool. For Saruman, in particular, his vision is a domineering and imperialist form of sight that lacks the ability to see and respect things as other than himself and with their own right to exist. Neither sees with hope, and neither sees the providential ordering of the world. The contrast between these two and Aragorn is stark. Their diminishing virtue leads to weakened spiritual perception and their inability to distinguish between truth and lies in the palantír. Aragorn, on the other hand, is the virtuous true king and he can wrest control of the palantír from Sauron and use it as it was intended. His sight is extended so far that he can face off with Sauron in Mordor and demonstrate his moral fiber. His euformation has prepared him for "large-souled" perception in his everyday life, and so he is equally prepared for the task of extending his perception through the palantír.[44]

Considering the connection between outer appearance and inner reality in Tolkien's work, perhaps it is not surprising that there is also a connection between virtue and perception. Since characters perceive – physically and spiritually – through their corporeal senses, it is fitting that their ability to perceive would be affected by the state of their souls. As spiritual-corporeal unities, outer appearance and perceptual

[44] Frodo's moral fiber also prepares him for his encounter with the mirror of Galadriel, which I will discuss in more detail later. That Sam is also invited to look in the Mirror offers yet another significant parallel with the idea that the spiritual senses are available to all, even the lowliest.

capacities are reflections of interior realities, and so as characters become more ennobled their capacity to exercise the spiritual senses increases, but so too will their capacities diminish with dysformation. So, it is the large-souled in *The Lord of the Rings* who are most adept at this: Elves and Wizards, ennobled men like Aragorn and Faramir, and even hobbits like Frodo. But this does not mean that *only* the most large-souled and ennobled can perceive in these kinds of ways, and this becomes clear in attending to Sam Gamgee.

Spiritual Perception for All

In Tolkien's legendarium, while the spiritual senses are most clearly and commonly exercised by the ennobled and the virtuous, they are not reserved for those who have reached the summit.[45] They are available to all, but especially to those who have experienced euformative community and been shaped by it. Those who have known that kind of fellowship have been trained in particular ways, to see and experience the world on corporeal and spiritual levels.

The simple fact that spiritual perception is possible even among the hobbits, who are arguably the lowest of the Children of Ilúvatar, emphasizes the parallel between Tolkien and Balthasar in this area.[46] So, while Frodo's ennoblement and growing perceptual ability offers sufficient evidence to prove the point, the parallel is even more clear in Sam's growth and development. His ability to see and understand grows throughout the narrative, and this is most clear in the two spiritual visions he sees of

[45] This runs counter to Rahner's reading of Bonaventure, particularly as presented in Rahner, "Middle Ages," 114. He writes that Bonaventure, "regards the spiritual senses as acts which are concerned with the stages of perfection and with the acquisition of the highest 'habitus' of the blessings of beatitude." He continues, "the act of the third and highest stage of divine knowledge is nothing other than the spiritual sense of sight, the act of purity of heart" (115). In other words, the spiritual senses are reserved for those approaching perfection.

[46] Though it is not just Balthasar who finds this theme in the tradition. Mark Mealey notices it in John Wesley's interaction with the spiritual senses as well. See Mark T. Mealey, "John Wesley," in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 242.

Frodo and Gollum. He sees the state of their souls, not just their shared bondage to the Ring. He sees with spiritual eyes and he sees truly. He sees as Gandalf does when he looks on Frodo's translucence at the house of Elrond (*LOTR*, 223). And Sam sees Frodo in a similar way every time he observes the light growing within his master. He is seeing the sanctified and ennobled soul shining forth from Frodo's weakening body.

Sam is experiencing euformation and ennoblement through his fellowship with Frodo, but he has not attained the kind of Elvishness that Frodo has. So, Sam's character arc offers a parallel with Balthasar's idea that the ability to perceive more than just the material and physical is available to all who are being ennobled and sanctified.[47] All who have encountered something of the divine design within Arda in the form of euformative community can experience the spiritual senses and perceive with them.

And so, while I will not claim that Tolkien had any familiarity with the tradition of the spiritual senses, his descriptions echo those within the tradition. His character arcs are tied just as closely to growing holiness as that of the ancient tradition. *The Lord of the Rings* offers a kind of narrated metaphor of the spiritual senses as its characters experience literal sensory improvement along with growing insight. Here again, Tolkien's voice fits within the corpus of spiritual formation to offer new insights and unique perspectives that can shape the way Christians experience, and expect to experience, euformation in their own lives. It is to these insights that I now proceed.

Expanding the Tradition

If Tolkien's work does fit within the growing body of literature surrounding and exploring spiritual formation, how might the parallels I have observed add to discussions of the spiritual senses? I see three primary ways Tolkien's sub-creation adds to the tradition, and each concerns proper objects of perception. As I have already

[47] McInroy, *Perceiving Splendour*, 122.

mentioned, the tradition posits God as the object of the spiritual senses, but since Ilúvatar is not named in the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* his presence is mediated. He can be perceived especially in his providential influence on events in Arda Marred. But it seems that in Tolkien's legendarium, Ilúvatar's providential interaction with Arda is not the only proper object of spiritual perception. The spiritual senses can also perceive deep insights into the world of Arda itself and into its inhabitants.

Perceiving Providence

I have already discussed the role of providence within Arda in Chapter 2, so I will not rehash that work here. Suffice to say that the ability to perceive providence at work is akin to having a taste for the ways Ilúvatar is at work, and this allows characters to perceive people and situations with hope. Similarly, we can say that some in our world have a taste for the ways God works within the created order. The perception of the ways Ilúvatar is at work in Arda Marred takes two different forms: one sees the plot of Arda Marred with hope because it perceives the potential for Ilúvatar to redeem a situation (for the Ring to be destroyed, for instance), and the other sees people with hope because it perceives the potential for Ilúvatar to redeem them. One of the most instructive ways Tolkien presents this second kind of perception of providence is in Gandalf's refusal to close off the potential for others to grow and change. In short, Gandalf's perception of the possibilities of providence allows and empowers him to be a euformative force in Middle-earth. I will begin by briefly revisiting chapters 4 and 5 to see this dynamic at work.

In chapter 4, I followed Saruman's downward spiral from Maia to no-thing, watching as his dysformation worsened with every appearance. But Saruman's degradation was not inevitable. Gandalf, and later Frodo, still have hope that he can be restored to his intended purpose and place in the world. There is a section in *Unfinished*

Tales that explores the scenes surrounding Gandalf's escape from Orthanc. In one of the drafts, Tolkien describes the internal battle in which Saruman considers repenting and returning to the light. In Christopher Tolkien's summary of this remarkable scene, he writes: "In this account, Saruman, in fear and despair, and perceiving the full horror of service to Mordor, resolved suddenly to yield to Gandalf, and to beg for his pardon and help," though Gandalf's escape foils this and causes Saruman's "pride [to reassert] itself in anger" (346). This would have marked a drastic change within the heart and mind of Saruman, and would have altered much of the way his character would eventually have developed. But the possibility existed in Tolkien's mind for this kind of change to occur. It is the kind of thing that could happen in Arda Marred, even to one far along in his dysformation. So, Gandalf's hope for Saruman's restoration is not unfounded. In Tolkien's imagining, Saruman could have been restored and redeemed, offering his help to Ilúvatar's children rather than continuing to oppose them for his own benefit. Gandalf knows that Ilúvatar's providential activity in the world means that hearts can change, repentance and restoration are possible, and so he can never close off the possibility for change in others. This deep belief and understanding of the way Arda works motivates Gandalf's generous open-handedness with Saruman, but it also motivates his hope for Gollum's healing.

As I discussed in chapter 5, Gandalf encourages pity for Gollum and an openness to what providence may have in store for him from the story's very beginning. When Frodo learns of the Ring's history and how it came into Gollum's hands, his immediate response is one of horror and loathing. But Gandalf replies, "I think it is a sad story . . . and it might have happened to others, even to some hobbits that I have known" (*LOTR*, 54). Gandalf sees in Bilbo's interaction with Gollum hints that Gollum "was not wholly ruined" and that "there was a little corner of his mind that was still his own" (*LOTR*, 55). This gives him hope for Gollum's restoration. If any piece of his mind and

will remained his own, then the possibility for euformation would necessarily exist.[48] As a Maia, Gandalf is a child of Ilúvatar's thought and so he alone of all the creatures of Middle-earth knows Ilúvatar intimately.[49] Sauron and Saruman did once, but their dysformation has obscured even the faintest remaining traces of that knowledge. Gandalf knows of Ilúvatar's ongoing providential interaction with the world he spoke into existence, and so Gandalf expects to see Ilúvatar continuing to work in that manner. He knows something of the Mind of the Maker, even if his knowledge and experience are limited. Even Melkor can be redeemed and forgiven. In fact, many of the Valar believe that Melkor's feigned repentance and restoration are genuine.[50] They, like Gandalf, have been sub-creatively involved in the shaping of Arda from the beginning and know that redemption and restoration are built into the fabric of the world. They know the mind of Ilúvatar and so they know that restoration and redemption are characteristic of the way he works. Knowing all this, they believe that Melkor had truly been reformed since his apparent restoration matches the pattern they recognize from the Great Music.

Since Gandalf knows that redemption is part of the way Ilúvatar works within the marred world, he also knows that Ilúvatar's redemptive activity is not limited to individuals, but extends to the events and story of Arda itself.[51] And so, when he tells Frodo that there was more than one power at work when Bilbo found the Ring (*LOTR*, 55-56) he recognizes the providential hand of Ilúvatar. He commends Bilbo for his Pity

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[48] There are hints that the Nazgul are, perhaps, the only creatures within Middle-earth who are beyond redemption. There is nothing left of them to redeem since they have lost all that was themselves to the power of the Ring. Recovery is not possible when there is nothing left to recover.

[49] Remember that "Middle-earth" refers only to the inhabited lands east of Valinor and does not include the Blessed Realm itself.

[50] Tolkien writes, "it seemed to Manwë that the evil of Melkor was cured. For Manwë was free from evil and could not comprehend it, and he knew that in the beginning, in the thought of Ilúvatar, Melkor had been even as he; and he saw not to the depths of Melkor's heart, and did not perceive that all love had departed from him forever" (S, 65-66). So, Manwë mistakenly believed that Melkor had been restored.

[51] Though Gandalf is not the only one who perceives providence in this way. See Galadriel's suggestion that "Maybe the paths that you each shall tread are already laid before your feet, though you do not see them yet" (*LOTR*, 368).

and Mercy, seeing in them the reason Bilbo suffered so little harm from his long possession of the Ring (*LOTR*, 59) and sees in them again the working of providence. From this foundation, Gandalf makes a kind of providential prophecy of Gollum's future role in the grand scheme of things. It is because he has not closed off the potential for Gollum's euformation and because he perceives providence at work in the world that he can say:

> I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it. And he is bound up with the fate of the Ring. My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many – yours not least (*LOTR*, 59).

Gandalf recognizes that Ilúvatar's providential restoration of individuals can play a part in his restoration of the situation characteristic of Arda Marred. But Ilúvatar does not force redemption on individuals, and so Gollum and Saruman resist the redemptive activity at work in the world. Even so, the Ring is destroyed. Despite Saruman's dysformative attempts at domination and destruction, the Ring eludes him. Despite Gollum's dysformed loss of self and resistance to the power of euformative community, he is ultimately responsible for the Ring's destruction. The world is saved precisely because Gollum so desired the Ring that he would stop at nothing to have that all-consuming desire sated. His dysformation, in the terms of Chapter 2, is *conveniens*, and it is providentially used to accomplish the task that was beyond Frodo's limited strength.

Perceiving the World

As I have already discussed, spiritual perception is not limited to the highest and most ennobled in Tolkien's legendarium. That Sam Gamgee experiences deep-sight suggests that all the Children of Ilúvatar might do the same. But Tolkien does not just offer the potential for ennoblement and sanctification to the humble; he also dignifies their interactions with the world and helps us to see that the way they perceive the world carries spiritual weight – not despite its humility, but precisely because of it. The

insight of hobbits, rather than being a kind of perception that they must grow out of, offers a way of viewing the world that attends to its fabric and aims to live in harmony with it. Rather than seeing through the things around them to the deeper spiritual realities they contain, hobbits see the ordinary in things. They can see through the lofty and great to the humble within them. It is no accident that it is Merry and Pippin who find food, drink, and tobacco in the flotsam of Isengard (*LOTR*, 560-575).

Much is made, particularly in the Prologue to *The Lord of the Rings*, of the peaceful existence hobbits enjoyed. Tolkien writes that hobbits "love peace and quiet and good tilled earth: a well-ordered and well-farmed countryside was their favorite haunt" (*LOTR*, 1); have "a close friendship with the earth" (*LOTR*, 1);[52] "were, as a rule, generous and not greedy, but contented and moderate" (*LOTR*, 9); and "usually kept the laws of free will, because they were The Rules (as they said), both ancient and just" (*LOTR*, 9). Similarly, "At no time had Hobbits of any kind been warlike, and they had never fought among themselves" (*LOTR*, 5), yet "ease and peace had left this people still curiously tough. They were, if it came to it, difficult to daunt or to kill . . . Though slow to quarrel, and for sport killing nothing that lived, they were doughty at bay" (*LOTR*, 6). It is precisely in this peaceful, bucolic existence that the hobbits' strength resides, which is why Bilbo gives the story of *The Hobbit* the alternate title of *There and Back Again* (*LOTR*, 1027) and why "The Scouring of the Shire" is such an important ending for *The Lord of the Rings* (*LOTR*, 998-1020).[53] Despite their appearances, they are tough and willing to endure hardship and loss when they must, and it is this ready willingness to go without that further spurs their love for and enjoyment of the good things in life. Their enjoyment of the good things and their willingness to go without

[52] The connection with the earth bears more than a passing similarity to LaNave's treatment of Bonaventure in LaNave, "Bonaventure." See especially his claim that "God is knowable to us through creation" (165). It seems that Bonaventure would have approved of the hobbits close association with the earth and the humble perspective it engendered.

[53] It is also why Frodo's inability to remain in the Shire is so tragic for him and his friends.

them grows out of the peace they inhabit and their contentment with the ordinary things in life. This close familiarity with the ordinary tinges their view of the world with the ordinary in all things.

The hobbits are not disposed to seeing the grand picture, the heights or the depths, in part because they recognize that is not truly their place, that is not where they belong – not because of any fault in hobbit nature or inability to shape world events, but because on the heights their simple, ordinary life can be lost from view and it is in the ordinary and peaceful that they truly thrive.[54] They value the prosaic and see in it a good that the tradition of the spiritual senses might be prone to miss. This is a particular perspective Tolkien can offer to the tradition. In mirroring Balthasar's take on the availability of spiritual perception throughout the Christian life, Tolkien sanctifies the everyday. The hobbits' narrative in *The Lord of the Rings* demonstrates the dual reality of spiritual sight: that a vision of the heights and depths is available to everyone, not just to exemplars of the faith; and that the vision of the ordinary between those heights and depths is also good. Both are ways of seeing the world in the light of God, even though they differ. Where one can see the grand narrative of redemption, the other sees the constant goodness of creation. This touches on Tolkien's assertions in *On Fairy Stories* that fantasy should aid in our recovery. He writes:

> We should look at green again, and be startled anew (but not blinded) by blue and yellow and red. We should meet the centaur and the dragon, and then perhaps suddenly behold, like the ancient shepherds, sheep, and dogs, and horses – and wolves (*OFS*, 83).
>
> It was in fairy-stories that I first divined the potency of the words, and the wonder of the things, such as stone, and wood, and iron; tree and grass; house and fire; bread and wine (*OFS*, 86).

Tolkien believed that fantasy could help us to see the world around us with new eyes, and that is just what the perspective of hobbits can do. It can remind us of the

[54] Merry and Pippin recognize this to be true, as evidenced by their conversation about the heights in the Houses of Healing (*LOTR*, 870).

good around us, the pleasure in simple things, the joy in good food and good company. The perspective of hobbits offers the remedy to greed and possessiveness in that hobbits see the world "as we are (or were) meant to see [it] – as [something] apart from ourselves" (*OFS*, 83). This kind of vision ennobles and re-enchants the world.

As with the perception of providence, this perception of the world has at least two facets. One, which I have been discussing, has to do with perceiving the ordinary as good in itself, valuing it and appreciating it. It is seeing things as ingredients in our ordinary good life. But by re-enchanting the world, by appreciating and loving the world as something other than themselves, the hobbits can also perceive the mystery of the world around them. Because it is something other than them that has a life of its own beyond them, they can live in peace with it as being more than they can know or grasp. These two visions of the ordinary must go together. To live well in a hobbit-like way means living in harmony with things that we do not control and respecting their otherness. The hobbits' vision balances a sacramental appreciation for the mystery of the world with a recognition of its ordinariness. They are at home with the mystery of the world as other than them and with the world as unextraordinary. Yet this does not negate the deeper perceptions that are still available to them through spiritual perception.

Since the hobbits' way of seeing the world is not focused on great ends or lofty ideals, but on the mundane things of life, it mirrors Balthasar's references to St. Ignatius of Loyola who encouraged exercitants in the First Principle and Foundation of the *Spiritual Exercises* to find God in all things, even, or perhaps especially, in the mundane. This insight finds further parallel in Brother Lawrence's *The Practice of the Presence of God*. I would like to suggest, at this point, a further connection with key insights offered by William of Saint-Thierry, namely that:

(1) there must be a similarity between knower and what is known; (2) in the act of

> perception knower and known become in some sense one; and (3) this process involves a transformation on the part of the knower.[55]

It seems that hobbits are specially equipped through their intimacy with the earth, their natural peace-loving nature, and their contentment with the ordinary to really see the mundane around them. They are able, as Sam is with the Southron, to become in some sense one with the object of their perception. They can perceive along with rather than in isolation from what they attend to, precisely because they can appreciate and respect the other as other. This kind of perception changes hobbits. It transforms them, and strengthens their ability to perceive in this way.

Perceiving the Other

But another facet of spiritually perceiving the world – perceiving it as both mysterious and mundane – is perceiving the others who inhabit that world with spiritual sight. While this is related to the first point about perceiving others with hope and recognizing the potential for euformation within the world and within others, this is less about perceiving possibilities than it is about perceiving realities. In this final section, I will discuss Tolkien's presentation of a kind of spiritual sight that sees the actuality of others' souls – that sees their euformation or dysformation.

The reality of Frodo's euformation is evident to those who look on him with this kind of sight. As I have already noted, Gandalf sees it (*LOTR*, 223), Galadriel sees it (*LOTR*, 366),[56] and Faramir sees it (*LOTR*, 668). They see it in his ability to perceive

[55] McGinn, "Late Medieval Mystics," 194. We find a parallel idea in the work of Maximus the Confessor who links the goals of deification with participatory knowledge of God. The way Gavrilyuk and Coakley describe his aim bears strong resemblance to Tolkien's aims of consolation and recovery. See for instance: Gavrilyuk and Coakley, *The Spiritual Senses*, 14: "For Maximus, the goal of deification is to reintegrate the rational, volitional, affective and sensate functions of the self and thereby attain participatory knowledge of God." Frederick D. Aquino puts it slightly differently, noting that Maximus "links spiritual perception with the integration of the self." See Aquino, "Maximus," 104.. The participatory knowledge they point toward finds its echo in McGinn's second point about becoming one with the perceived object and addresses the ultimate end of consolation for Tolkien.

[56] In this scene, Galadriel acknowledges that the Ring also lends deep sight, but in a way that is corrupted. Evil in Arda always works by corrupting the good, and the capacity for deep sight is not immune.

that which is hidden, in an Elvish air about him, and in the light growing stronger and brighter within him. When Gandalf sees this light in Frodo, he recognizes that it is in direct contrast to the dysformative influence of the Ring, and sees that if the thinning of Frodo's body had continued, it would have done nothing to dim the brightness of his soul. In fact, Gandalf perceives that his thinning might only make his euformation more evident since his body would become translucent and thereby unable to obscure the brightness of the soul housed within:

> 'He is not half through yet, and to what he will come in the end not even Elrond can foretell. Not to evil, I think. He may become like a glass filled with a clear light for eyes to see that can' (*LOTR*, 223).

But this kind of perception is narrated most often through Sam, who also sees the actual euformed state of Frodo's soul, especially in contrast to Gollum's dysformation.[57] Sam accompanies Frodo on the entire journey, and comes to see Frodo with this kind of sight on several occasions. In doing so, he sees the actuality of Frodo's euformation and his struggle against the Ring's dysformative influence. He sees Frodo's suffering, sees how heavy the burden becomes, and sees that these cannot diminish the brightness. Not only can they not diminish their brightness, they might even be causing it to grow stronger. Before the hobbits encounter Faramir and his men in Ithilien, Sam watches Frodo sleep, and "He was reminded suddenly of Frodo as he had lain, asleep in the house of Elrond, after his deadly wound. Then as he had kept watch Sam had noticed that at times a light seemed to be shining faintly within; but now the light was even clearer and stronger" (*LOTR*, 652). Frodo's resistance to the temptation to put on the

[57] Sam also demonstrates a third kind of deep sight more in keeping with his simple hobbit nature: a plain wisdom of putting himself in another's shoes and seeing life from his perspective. In Ithilien, he witnesses his first "battle of Men against Men, and he did not like it much" (*LOTR*, 661). When one of the Southrons falls dead at his feet, "He was glad that he could not see the dead face. He wondered what the man's name was and where he came from; and if he was really evil of heart, or what lies or threats had led him on the long march from his home; and if he would not really rather have stayed there in peace" (*LOTR*, 661). Sam here recognizes that the Southrons need not be evil simply because they are warring against Sam's allies. He sees that the situation for humanity is more complex than simply good against evil, us against them. In his plain hobbit sense, Sam imagines that this dead man, under different circumstances, might have been just like him.

Ring seems to have increased the brightness Sam already saw within him so many months before. But this increasing brightness that demonstrates Frodo's euformation is even more clear when Sam sees Frodo and Gollum together. Then it is as though a veil is lifted and rather than seeing just the physical bodies in front of him, he sees the souls within. In the end, this even allows him to see Gollum with pity.[58]

Sam sees Frodo and Gollum in this way on two occasions. In both, the contrast between Frodo's euformation and Gollum's dysformation is clear. Sam sees more deeply into the reality of the two souls before him than he typically does. He sees the lowliness of Gollum's withered and dysformed soul in contrast to the brightly shining euformation of Frodo's, which is being constantly tested and pressed by the temptations of bearing the Ring. Sam first demonstrates deep sight during the taming of Sméagol, when,

> For a moment it appeared to Sam that his master had grown and Gollum had shrunk: a tall stern shadow, a mighty lord who hid his brightness in grey cloud, and at his feet a little whining dog. Yet the two were in some way akin and not alien: they could reach one another's minds (*LOTR*, 618).

Here, Sam's deep sight is revealed in two parts: first in recognizing the state of their souls, but also in recognizing their kinship. He sees that Frodo and Gollum can understand each other in a way that he cannot. They both know what it is to bear the Ring and to suffer under its oppressive weight. The first recognition is of the euformation of Frodo's soul and the dysformation of Gollum's. These are truths Sam would surely have known and acknowledged, but to see them so clearly is not typical. He *sees* deeply and does not just mentally acknowledge what he already knows to be true. This is an actual sight into what is normally only demonstrated in words and deeds. The second recognition is perhaps the deeper of the two since it sees the commonality

[58] "He himself, though only for a little while, had borne the Ring, and now dimly he guessed the agony of Gollum's shriveled mind and body, enslaved to that Ring, unable to find peace or relief ever again" (*LOTR*, 944).

between two such disparate souls. It is a recognition of the potential for euformative community between the two. It is telling that Sam does not share in this kinship, and so he never fully trusts Gollum because he cannot understand him as Frodo does. While it demonstrates the potential for Gollum to be euformed and to become like Frodo, it also emphasizes Frodo's potential to become like Gollum.[59]

The second instance intentionally echoes the first, and Sam himself acknowledges the resonance. After Gollum's attack on Frodo and Sam on the path up Mount Doom Tolkien writes,

> Then suddenly, as before under the eaves of the Emyn Muil, Sam saw these two rivals with other vision. A crouching shape, scarcely more than the shadow of a living thing, a creature now wholly ruined and defeated, yet filled with a hideous lust and rage; and before it stood stern, untouchable now by pity, a figure robed in white, but at its breast it held a wheel of fire. Out of the fire there spoke a commanding voice (*LOTR*, 944).

Ralph Wood sees this as the voice of the Ring speaking through Frodo's mouth, a kind of demonic ventriloquism at work.[60] I think, in line with Hammond and Scull, this is taking things too far. While the Ring is an embodiment of Sauron himself – it is in fact the greater part of his power and self, distilled into one small object – it is not presented as having the power of speech: a power reserved for living things. Giving the Ring the power of speech is "to argue for a sentience within the Ring beyond its ability, established early in the story, to 'look after itself' with the aim of eventual return to Sauron."[61] The Ring is clearly presented as having a will, but its power to effect that will

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[59] It is worth noting, however, that this would not be the kind of dysformative community Saruman and Wormtongue knew. Rather, Frodo's potential dysformation is a result of the Ring's malicious influence, not of any power Gollum might exert. Since the Ring pulls people to isolation and domination, it cannot generate community, dysformative or otherwise.

I hesitate to draw the parallels between Frodo and Gollum too firmly, however. Their responses to the trauma of ring-bearing are very different. Where Frodo exerts his will to the utmost in resistance to the Ring's influence, Gollum succumbs. Where Frodo continues to pursue euformative community (both receiving it and facilitating it), Gollum retreats into dysformative isolation. For a fruitful discussion on responding to trauma that has some bearing on this discussion though it does not reference *The Lord of the Rings*, see Collicutt, *The Psychology of Christian Character Formation*, 230–39.

[60] Ralph C. Wood, "Tolkien and Postmodernism," in *Tolkien among the Moderns*, ed. Ralph C. Wood (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 265.

[61] Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, *The Lord of the Rings: A Reader's Companion* (London: HarperCollins, 2014), 616.

is limited. It can work on the one who bears it and on the evil thoughts and bents of those around it, but there is no indication that it can act in the way Wood suggests.

With that said, Frodo *does* draw on the power of the Ring at this point just as he warned Gollum he would (*LOTR*, 640), but that only explains the voice and its origin, not the white robes.[62] The wheel of fire stands in contrast to the pure white robes that Saruman once wore and Gandalf now wears. This should not be read, in the way Wood advocates, as the Ring making Frodo into an anti-Gandalf, but rather as demonstrating Frodo's euformation into the "image" of Gandalf, or at least into a more Elvish hobbitness in line with the ennoblement of the humble that is Tolkien's key interest.[63] Wood is right to see a kind of transfiguration in this scene; he is right to assert that Sam is "given a sudden mystical vision of his friend;" but the glimpse is not of "a new Saruman who has returned to replace Gandalf."[64] Rather it is a glimpse of Frodo's ennobled spirit. The inner brightness Sam has seen growing in him now suffuses Frodo's whole being. His outer appearance, at least to Sam's eyes, matches the inner reality of his soul.

The three objects of perception discussed here do not receive much focus from the tradition of the spiritual senses, even though there are some within the tradition who gesture toward similar possibilities. The kind of perception Tolkien's characters

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[62] This scene hints at the fascinating possibility of euformation and dysformation being at work concurrently within one soul, pulling it in opposing directions.

[63] Wood, "Tolkien and Postmodernism," 265. Wood's analysis stems, in my opinion, from a misreading of the text that begins with his assertion that Frodo "flicks [Gollum] away as if he were an insect" and this is evidence that "Frodo is seeking to draw strength of will from the Ring in order to keep Sauron from seizing it" (265). The text itself suggests no such thing. In fact, the text explicitly states that even with Frodo's surprising ferocity "things might have gone far otherwise, if Gollum himself had remained unchanged; but whatever dreadful paths, lonely and hungry and waterless, he had trodden, driven by a devouring desire and a terrible fear, they had left grievous marks on him. He was a lean, starved, haggard thing, all bones and tight-drawn sallow skin. A wild light flamed in his eyes, but his malice was no longer matched by his old griping strength. Frodo flung him off and rose up quivering" (*LOTR*, 943). Frodo is not victorious because of the Ring's power; he is victorious because Gollum is so weakened that he cannot defeat even the half-starved Frodo, and because he cannot stand the idea of another taking the Ring. As Tolkien writes, "This was probably the only thing that could have roused the dying embers of Frodo's heart and will: an attack, an attempt to wrest his treasure from him by force" (*LOTR*, 943).

[64] Ibid.

experience is entirely directed toward what is around them. The ways this allows them to better know and understand their friends and the world is a powerful endorsement for following Balthasar's model and allowing spiritual perception to be directed toward objects other than the divine.

Conclusion

This chapter began by offering a focused overview of the Christian tradition describing the spiritual senses as a means of directly experiencing God, culminating in more focused attention to Hans Urs von Balthasar's treatment of the theme. From that point, it proceeded to point toward illuminating parallels between the tradition and Tolkien's presentation of deep sight, beginning with a discussion of the way Tolkien and Balthasar emphasized human nature as a spiritual-corporeal unity. The conversation then moved on to explore the importance of euformative community as a context in which to develop the ability to see with spiritual sight in connection with a growth in virtue. These three parallels led to a final parallel between Tolkien and facets of the tradition that emphasize the availability of the spiritual senses along the continuum of spiritual growth.

I concluded this chapter by exploring three ways Tolkien's portrayal of something like the spiritual senses can expand upon the Christian tradition by advocating for different objects of perception than God alone. I discussed perceiving people and situations with hope in light of Ilúvatar's providential activity in the world; the importance of perceiving that world as both mysterious and mundane, as other and deserving a life of its own apart from us; and the potential to see the euformation and dysformation of people's souls. The ability to see the dysformation of Saruman and Gollum, complete with its descent to nothingness, focuses attention on Frodo's euformation and the brightness that steadily grows within him.

With the breadth of the tradition offering so many angles on spiritual perception, there is great potential for literary engagement with the theme and fruitful ground to explore what spiritual perception could look like in practice. I think it likely that just as Tolkien's fiction offers helpful insights to the tradition, so too might other pieces of fiction. Since we are spiritual-corporeal entities and our fiction will be populated with people like us in many respects, it is fitting that these fictional others would be able to disclose spiritual truths through their lives and actions. As they perceive their worlds, their spiritual eyes may see truths that can enlighten and enliven contemporary engagement with the spiritual senses for those who read their stories.

Though I will not say that Tolkien set out to mirror this tradition, his epic illuminates it and can aid our perception of spiritual realities in the primary world. Perhaps in reading *The Lord of the Rings* we will be empowered and equipped to see the world as hobbits do, humbly perceiving the mundane in all things and through that humility gaining a new knowledge of ourselves. Or perhaps we will find hope in seeing providence at work. But, if nothing else, our close association with these uniquely embodied individuals on their euformative or dysformative journeys allows us to perceive those around us with clearer sight, and in seeing them more clearly come to feel the pity and compassion for them that Gandalf and Frodo exemplified.

Conclusion

By presenting a marred world that has the potential for euformation, Tolkien has offered a consistent and powerful imagining of spiritual formation that has kept pity and compassion at the fore. What Gandalf told Frodo at the story's beginning, "the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many – yours not least" (*LOTR*, 59), proves to be true. And so, the formational shape of the entire legendarium – from the Music of the Ainur, through the events of *The Lord of the Rings*, and on to the eschatological end – is deeply marked by both euformation and dysformation. Tolkien invites his readers to see these deep dynamics and to experience pity for his characters as they learn to experience it for those around them – to see them with spiritual sight, to know the dysformation that mars them and the euformation that ennobles them, and to reimagine the formational possibilities of the primary world.

He invites us to feel pity for Frodo, who is willing to suffer the loss of his health, his home, and "his Ring" for the sake of others; who is so shaped by euformative community that he becomes its agent in the world, drawing others into the same kind of fellowship despite his weakness, brokenness, and woundedness. He narrates Frodo's influence in changing Sam's capacity to view Gollum with pity as he recognizes that Gollum has lost himself and all his distinctiveness to the power of the Ring. Sam can pity Gollum because he can relate to him as one capable of his own euformation and dysformation. Frodo encourages his fellow hobbits to pity even Saruman, who became orkish through his dysformative use of power as always over others, treating them as tools for domination. Even though Saruman strip-mined the natural world in his drive to dominate, even though he bred his own orcs and crafted his own rings of power, he can still be welcomed into a euformative community if he is willing. Tolkien invites us

to know this kind of pity in the context of a world that is marred, yet redeemable (just like its inhabitants); a world in which even sin and death will be taken up into the ongoing theme that Ilúvatar is propounding; a world that will one day, no matter how bad things may seem at the time, experience its own euformation.

Though the story of Arda Marred can only be one of a long, slow defeat, it is a story that will not give in to despair. Tolkien assures his readers that, in the end, Arda Healed will be better than Arda Unmarred could ever have been, and the potential for euformation inherent within all created things is proof of this. Even if the marring appears to be beyond repair, as in the case of Mordor and the orcs, Arda *will* be healed and what was broken *will* be mended. Even if there is no release from anguish and torture within the bounds of Arda, there is still hope for it. Even if angels become no better than orcs or free-willed creatures exchange their freedom and uniqueness for bondage and loss of self, Ilúvatar's Great Music encompasses all and is somehow weaving even the most discordant notes into a harmony beyond the understanding of even the greatest of the Ainur. But this "taking up" is not reactionary. The theme is Eru's and always has been. Though he has given creatures the freedom to act and sub-create as they see fit, whether toward euformative or dysformative ends, after the end of days "the themes of Ilúvatar shall be played aright . . . for all shall then understand fully his intent in their part, and each shall know the comprehension of each" (S, 15-16).

The Marred world represents only part of the Great Music. The end of Arda has not yet been sung, but one day it will be. And when it is, what is broken will be fixed and what is dysformed will be set to right. In narrating the formational journeys of Arda and its inhabitants, Tolkien's imagination proves itself capable of elucidating truth and providing a compelling vision of Christian spiritual formation.

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