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Gandalf: An Angel to Tolkien's Middle-earth

Very late one evening, during the 1930's, Inklings' C. S. Lewis, Hugo Dyson, and J. R. R. Tolkien strolled casually among the trees of Oxford, discussing Lewis' problem with the sacrifice of Christ--he could discern no purpose in Christ beyond His example. Lewis accepted sacrifice in myth, and Tolkien asked why Lewis could not transfer his acceptance of sacrifice in myth to the true story. Lewis called myth "lies breathed through silver" (Carpenter 147). Tolkien shook his head and pointed to a tree along their path and noted that we call it a tree and think nothing of the word. However, it was not a tree until someone named it. By naming things we invent our own terms for those things: "As speech is invention about objects and ideas, so myth is invention about truth" (147).

> We have come from God, and inevitably the myths woven by us, though they contain error, will also reflect a splintered fragment of the true light, the eternal truth that is with God. Indeed only by myth-making, only by becoming a "sub-creator" and inventing stories, can Man ascribe to the state of perfection that he knew before the Fall. Our myths may be misguided, but they steer however shakily towards the true harbour, while materialistic "progress" leads only to a yawning abyss and the Iron Crown of the power of evil. (147).

In this conversation, Tolkien reveals his own philosophy of the

story through his declaration of the truth found in myth--"a splintered fragment of the true light." Thus, we should find fragments of truth, in this case, religious truth, in Tolkien's fiction. Further, since Tolkien was a devout Catholic--a faith replete with angels--we should locate angels, though he never uses the term within the texts of his stories.

The OED defines "angel" as "[a] ministering spirit or divine messenger; one of an order of spiritual beings superior to man in power and intelligence, who, according to the Jewish, Christian, Mohammedan, and other theologies, are the attendants and messengers of the Deity," and "angel" is derived from the Greek word "angelos" meaning "messenger" (458). For our search to find angels in Tolkien's Middle-earth, we must take "angel" in the broader sense of a being with more than human power and intelligence--superhuman--who is a messenger of the divine "Lords" of Middle-earth. My purpose is to show that Gandalf, the wizard of The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings[1], is an angel to Tolkien's fictive world of Middle-earth. To accomplish this task, I begin with an analysis of his theory of the "fairy-story," drawing upon his lecture entitled "On Fairy-Stories." Next, I will delineate the cosmology of Middle-earth as outlined in The Silmarillion, locating Gandalf within that cosmology and his relationship to the "Lords of Middle-earth." Finally, I will trace Gandalf through the story, emphasizing the events that I believe qualify him for the distinction of my title: An Angel to

Middle-earth.

Tolkien, in 1938, delivered an Andrew Lang Lecture at the University of St. Andrews entitled "On Fairy-stories," which sets forth his theory of the story. Most commonly, we associate fairy tales with "stories about Fairy, that is Faërie,[2] the realm or state in which fairies have their being" (38). Fairy-stories tend to be about men who enter the "perilous realm," or faërie. Tolkien uses faërie to begin fleshing out his definition of the fairy-story: "The definition of a fairy-story--what it is, or what it should be--does not . . . depend on any definition or historical account of elf or fairy, but upon the nature of Faërie: the Perilous Realm itself, and the air that blows in that country" (38). Faërie is indescribable, while not imperceptible and can be used for satire, adventure, morality, and fantasy. Tolkien argues we could translate faërie as "magic," "magic of a peculiar mood and power, at the furthest pole from the vulgar devices of the laborious, scientific, magician" (39). The magic of faërie, the virtue in its operations, satisfies primordial human desires to "survey the depths of space and time" and "hold communion with other living things" (41).

Tolkien argues against faërie as a dream: "the power of Faërie . . . even as it conceives the story, causes it to take a living form and colour before the eyes" (41). The writer who says the story is a dream cheats "the primal desire at the heart of Faërie: the realization, independent of the conceiving mind,

of imagined wonder" and knowledge that "behind the fantasy real wills and powers exist, independent of the minds and purposes of men" (42). A fairy-story[3] must be presented as true--any machinery that suggests an illusion disqualifies the tale as a fairy-story.

The fairy-story "open[s] a door on Other Time," and should we choose to pass through that door, "we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself, maybe" (56). Some argue that a good story creates a "willing suspension of disbelief" in the reader. Tolkien disagreed with this notion.

> 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 kindness or circumstance, to stay, then disbelief must be suspended (or stifled), otherwise listening and looking 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 (60-1).

This quotation, for me, entails the central core of Tolkien's theory of the fairy-story: that I, as reader, should not suspend disbelief, but if the story is good, if the story-maker achieves "sub-creation," then reading should produce in me secondary belief. To conclude this section of his lecture,

Tolkien speaks of the value and function of the fairy-story: "If written with art, the prime value of fairy-stories will simply be that value which, as literature, they share with other literary forms" (67).

Tolkien lists four properties of the fairy-story--fantasy, recovery, escape, and consolation--and gives a description of each in turn. Under "fantasy," Tolkien argues that to restrict Imagination to "the power of giving to ideal creations the inner consistency of reality" (68), is to deny it the ability to form mental images of things not present--something we do recalling anything from our past. The image we form and perceive, its implications, and our ability to express images past, vary according to the sharpness of the recalled image and our ability to control or manipulate it. This variance of the image is a difference in degree within the Imagination not in the kind of Imagination. If my "image-making" succeeds, then I create secondary belief. Thus, Art links Imagination to sub-creation. Tolkien continues:

> I require a word which shall embrace both the Sub-creative Art in itself and a quality of strangeness and wonder in the Expression, derived from the Image: a quality essential to the fairy-story. I propose, therefore, to arrogate myself to the powers of Humpty-Dumpty, and to use Fantasy for this purpose . . . which combines its older and higher use as an equivalent of Imagination the derived notions of "unreality" (that is, of unlikeness to the Primary World), of freedom from the domination of observed "fact," in short of the fantastic. . . . That the images are of things not in the primary world (if that indeed is possible) is a virtue, not a vice. Fantasy (in this sense) is, I

> think, not a lower but a higher form of Art, indeed the most nearly pure form, and so (when achieved) the most potent (68-9).

There is a drawback to the Fantasy described above--it is extremely difficult to achieve.

> To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft. Few attempt such difficult tasks. But when they are attempted and in any degree accomplished then we have a rare achievement of Art: indeed narrative art, story-making in its primary and most potent mode (70).

> Should the story say "he ate bread," the dramatic producer or painter can only show "a piece of bread" according to his taste or fancy, but the hearer of the story will think of bread in general and picture some form of his own. If the story says "he climbed a hill and saw a river in the valley below," the illustrator may catch, or nearly catch, his own vision of such a scene; but every hearer of the words will have his own picture, and it will be made out of all the hills and rivers and dales he has ever seen, but especially out of The Hill, The River, The Valley which were for him the first embodiment of the word (Note E 95-6).

Thus, Tolkien does what the reader-response critics will do some forty years later--bring the author back from the grave of New Criticism--contending that when the author does his work well, becoming a sub-creator, the reader has secondary belief, a belief that has life within the particular context of the reader's mind and experience. The text becomes an interaction between itself and the reader, itself and author, and so an interaction between author and reader.

At this point in the lecture, Tolkien notes that he was

perhaps hasty in using the term "magic" to describe the workings of Faërie, that "magic" should be reserved for the magician, "but the more potent and specially elvish craft I will . . . call Enchantment" (73). Enchantment creates a secondary world entered by both the designer of and the spectator to the secondary world. Tolkien refers to Lewis and the conversation on myth noted above, as the "man who described myth and fairy-story as lies," quoting a poem he wrote for Lewis that refers to his comment on story-making as "breathing a lie through Silver."

> "Dear Sir," I said--Although now long estranged,
> Man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed.
> Dis-graced he may be, yet is not de-throned,
> and keeps the rags of lordship once he owned:
> Man, Sub-creator, the refracted Light
> through whom is splintered from a single White
> to many hues, and endlessly combined
> in living shapes that move from mind to mind.
> Though all the crannies of the world we filled
> with Elves and Goblins, though we dared to build
> Gods and their houses out of dark and light,
> and sowed the seed of dragons--'twas our right
> (used or misused). That right has not decayed:
> we make still by the law in which we're made (74).

This poem ties Tolkien's theory of the fairy-story to the Primary World by asserting that myth and fairy-story form part of Reality as "refracted light . . . splintered from a single White." This idea recalls a metaphor Tolkien uses earlier in the lecture, calling history a "cauldron" into which pieces are continually thrown, forming the "soup of story." The story-maker ladles from the soup taking elements from many different moments in history to form into a new story, which refers to the "door opening on

Other Time," noted above. We may trace Arthurian Legend back to a historical individual, but the individual has stewed in the cauldron with many others for many centuries before The Pearl poet dips into the soup, or Mallory dips into the soup, to write of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. The point being that the "real" Arthur has been mixed with other histories to form the legend of valor which "refracts" the Truth. However, Fantasy does not destroy reason or science, but "[t]he keener and the clearer the reason, the better fantasy will it make" (75). Fantasy cannot exist without a recognition of the Truth.

Returning to his discussion of the properties of a fairy-story, Tolkien defines "Recovery" as "a regaining of a clear view." We clean our inner windows through fairy-story, and "things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity" (77). As the cauldron metaphor shows, Fantasy, or the fairy-story, is formed out of the Primary World and allows the world to appear in a new light. "By the forging of Gram cold iron was revealed; by the making of Pegasus horses were ennobled; in the Trees of the Sun and Moon root and stock, flower and fruit are manifested in glory" (78). For "Escape," Tolkien does not accept the scorn normally associated with the term, noting that there is a difference between the prisoner (meaning POW) who tries to escape and the deserter. He answers the "escape from reality" criticism of fantasy by arguing that the notion of an automobile being more "real" or "alive" than a centaur or a

dragon is curious, but the notion that an automobile is more alive or real than a horse is absurd: "How real, how startlingly alive is a factory chimney compared with an elm-tree: poor obsolete thing, insubstantial dream of an escapist! . . . Fairy-stories may invent monsters that fly the air or dwell in the deep, but at least they do not try to escape from heaven or the sea" (81). For Tolkien, Fantasy is not an escape from reality, but an escape to archaism: preferring horses, castles, ships, knights, priests, and kings or dragons, goblins, and elves to the modern world should not shame or embarrass the reader or writer of such tales. Tolkien notes that"[t]he maddest castle that ever came out of a giant's bag in a wild Gaelic story is not only much less ugly than a robot-factory, it is also (to use a modern phrase) 'in a very real sense' a great deal more real" (82). The desire to escape from the misery, violence, and pain of the modern world does not seem inherently wrong or evil. Finally, the oldest and deepest desire of all persons is the desire to escape from death, what Tolkien calls the "Great Escape."

To conclude the lecture, Tolkien defines "Consolation" as "the happy ending." As tragedy is the true form of Drama, so the happy ending, the opposite of tragedy, is the true form of the fairy-story, the highest function of Fantasy. Tolkien calls this ending the "Eucatastrophe," the sudden joyous turn, a miraculous grace, "never counted on to recur."

It does not deny the existence of <u>dyscatastrophe</u>, of

> sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is evangelium, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief (86).

This joy of the sudden turn can also be "a sudden glimpse of underlying truth" (88). Not only does the consolation answer the sorrow of the world, but also answers the question: "Is it true?"

> If you have built your little world well, yes: it is true for that world. . . . [I]t may be a far-off gleam or echo of evangelium in the real world . . . but if by grace what I say has in any respect validity, it is, of course, only one facet of a truth incalculably rich: finite only because the capacity of Man for whom this was done is finite. . . . But this story is supreme; and it is true. Art has been verified. God is the Lord, of angels, and of men--and of elves. Legend and History have met and fused (88-9).

Through the medium of the fairy-story, the writer reveals truth and that truth, for Tolkien, is "a far off gleam or echo of evangelium," or the Christian Gospel. His mother, shortly after his father's death and shortly before her own, embraced Catholicism, much to the chagrin of her family. Because of her family's opposition and her death shortly thereafter while he was still a child, Tolkien equated devotion to the Catholic Church with devotion to his mother. Though he tried to remove all traces of Christianity from his fictional world, we see underlying the stories he wrote, his theory of writing, that myth and the fairy-story contain fragments of truth from the primary world, and therefore, that his stories reflect his devotion to

Christianity and the angels we seek.

The first part of Tolkien's Silmarillion, entitled "Ainulindalë" or "The Music of the Ainur," recounts the creation of Middle-earth. "There was Eru, the One who in Arda is called Ilúvatar; and he made first the Ainur, the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thought, and they were with him before aught else was made" (SIL 15). Eru taught the Ainur different musical themes, each having an individual part in the "Great Music," which would cause creation. Eru Ilúvatar directed the Ainur to sing their themes together and the Ainur "began to fashion the theme of Ilúvatar to a great music; and a sound arose of endless interchanging melodies woven in harmony . . . and the music and the echo of the music went out into the Void, and it was not void" (15).[4] Eru led the Ainur to the Void and showed to them what their music had created--a vision of Arda, or the world that would be the home of the Children of Ilúvatar, the Elves and Men. Many of the Ainur were enamored of the vision and wished to be part of the earth, for each saw his or her contribution to the music of creation. Ilúvatar spoke the word "Eä! Let these things Be!" (20). Those Ainur who wanted to enter the world were among the greatest; they took leave of Ilúvatar with the condition that their power be confined to the world and that they remain within the world until the end of days. They become known as "the Valar, the Powers of the World" (20). Tolkien further explicates the Valar in one of his letters as "the first

creations, angelic beings, of which those most concerned in the Cosmogony reside (of love and choice) inside the World, as Valar or gods, or governors; and there are incarnate rational creatures" (Letters 205). In another letter, he calls the Valar "rational spirits or minds without incarnation, created before the physical world" (284). These letters give us our first evidence of primary truth (angels) in Tolkien's stories--that the Valar are "angelic beings."

The second part of the Silmarillion, called "Valaquenta," describes those spirits who entered the world: Valar, Maiar, and the enemies.[5] The Valar dwell in the far west of Middle-earth and name their land "Valinor." For our current purpose, only the Fëanturi, the masters of spirits, are relevant. Mandos, also named Námo the elder, is the keeper of the "Houses of the Dead," "summoner of the spirits of the slain," and "Doomsman of the Valar" (28). His brother, Lórien, also named Irmo the younger, is master of visions and dreams. Their sister, Nienna, "mourns for every wound . . . [b]ut she does not weep for herself," and "those who hearken to her learn pity, and endurance in hope" (28).

The Maiar are also Ainur who accompanied the Valar into Arda, of the same order but of a lesser degree. Tolkien names few of the Maiar in the Silmarillion, as they "seldom appeared in form visible to Elves and Men" (SIL 30). Eönwë was the banner-bearer and herald of Manwë and Ossë served Ulmo, Lord of the

Waters. Melian became the wife of an elf king, Elu Thingol, and their child Lúthien was a foremother of Elrond, Arwen, and Aragorn. Olórin was the wisest of the Maiar, who dwelt in Lórien but went often to the house of Nienna. Tolkien writes of Olórin in the "Valaquenta":

> But of Olórin that tale [The Silmarillion] does not speak; for 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. In later days he was the friend of all the Children of Ilúvatar, and took pity on their sorrows; and those who listened to him awoke from despair and put away the imaginations of darkness (31).

Olórin gave to Elves "fair visions" and "promptings of wisdom," consistent with his place in Valinor under the "master of dreams and visions." In a letter Tolkien wrote "Olórin=Gandalf" (Letters 411). The LOR supports this declaration. In volume II, Frodo questions Faramir on who he means by "the Grey Pilgrim." Faramir repeats a verse that gives other names of the Grey Pilgrim: "Many are my names in many countries, Mithrandir among the Elves, Tharkûn to the Dwarves; Olórin I was in my youth in the West that is forgotten, in the South Incánus, in the North Gandalf; to the East I go not" (LOR II 279). As I noted above, Valinor is in the west of Middle-earth, "the West that is forgotten" by the time Gandalf comes to Middle-Earth during the Third Age, at the end of which the Hobbit and LOR take place.

Gandalf first appears in the Hobbit to Bilbo Baggins, the

story's central character, as "an old man with a staff," wearing "a tall pointed blue hat, a long grey cloak, a silver scarf over which his long white beard hung down below his waist, and immense black boots" (12). When Bilbo recognizes who Gandalf is, he exclaims:

> Gandalf, Gandalf! Good gracious me! Not the wandering wizard that gave the Old Took a pair of magic diamond studs that fastened themselves and never came undone till ordered? Not the fellow who used to tell such wonderful tales at parties . . . that used to make such particularly excellent fireworks. . . . Not the Gandalf who was responsible for so many quiet lads and lasses going off into the Blue for mad adventures? (13-4).

What Bilbo does not know is that he will soon join the list of "quiet lads . . . going off into the Blue." Still, he calls Gandalf a "wizard" and associates magic, story telling, and fireworks with the wizard. Later in the first chapter, "Gandalf struck a blue light on the end of his magic staff" (25), showing again his magical nature. After Bilbo leaves with the dwarves, they have an encounter with three trolls that nearly ends their adventure as it begins. Gandalf returns and saves them from the trolls, keeping the trolls arguing among themselves over how to cook the dwarves until the sun rises and turns them to stone. Thorin asks Gandalf what caused him to return in time. Gandalf replies that he met some friends who told him of trolls that had settled near the road and, "I immediately had the feeling that I was wanted back. Looking behind I saw a fire in the distance and

made for it" (54). The group travels on and is captured by Goblins as they cross the Misty Mountains. Gandalf manages to elude capture and again rescue Bilbo and the dwarves. The narrative states that at the moment of rescue, "all the lights in the cavern went out, and the great fire went off poof! into a tower of blue glowing smoke, right up to the roof, that scattered piercing white sparks among all the goblins" (75). Gandalf leads the company from the caverns of the Goblins to the other side of the mountains, where they blunder into a meeting of Wargs (evil wolves) and Goblins. The company climbs tall pine trees to escape the Wargs, where Gandalf "gathered the huge pine cones . . . he set one alight with bright blue fire, and threw it whizzing down among the circle of wolves" (113). These incidents show Gandalf as a "being superior to man (or hobbit and dwarf) in power and intelligence," according to the Oxford definition of "angel," stated above. Thus, we must ask a more fundamental question of Gandalf: Who or what is he?

Both the Hobbit and the LOR are silent on Gandalf's origin. Only if we turn to the Appendices at the end of LOR, we find this entry from the chronology of Middle-earth for the Third Age:

> When maybe a thousand years had passed, and the first shadow [of Sauron's return] had fallen upon Greenwood the Great, the Istari or wizards appeared in Middle-earth. It was afterwards said that 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 or fear. They came therefore in the shape

> of Men, though they were never young and aged only slowly, and they had many powers of mind and hand. They revealed their true names to few, but used such names as were given to them. The two highest of this order (of whom it is said there are five) were called by the Eldar [Elves] Curunír, "the Man of Skill," and Mithrandir, "the Grey Pilgrim," but by Men in the North Saruman and Gandalf. . . . Mithrandir was closest in friendship with the Eldar, and wandered mostly in the West, and never made for himself any lasting abode (LOR III 365).

This account of the Istari or wizards is supported in Tolkien's Letters, where he calls them "Emissaries" from the "Far West" and "their proper function . . . was to encourage and bring out the native powers of the Enemies of Sauron" (180). In the Unfinished Tales, Tolkien notes that the Istari "were forbidden to reveal themselves in forms of majesty . . . but coming in shapes weak and humble were bidden to advise and persuade Men and Elves to good" (394). In another letter, Tolkien compared Gandalf to Sauron, "being an emissary of the Powers and a creature of the same order, an immortal spirit taking a visible physical form" (332). This notion of the immortality of wizards, being Maiar sent by the Valar to Middle-earth, leads us to another question: How could Saruman, Sauron, or Gandalf die? For, each "pass from Middle-earth," with only Gandalf returning from death. One reason their deaths were possible, Tolkien argues in the Unfinished Tales, centers on their place in Middle-earth. In leaving Valinor, the Istari were "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 labours of many long years" (394). Later, Tolkien states that "the Istari, being clad in bodies of Middle-earth, might even as Men and Elves fall away from their purposes. . . . For . . . being embodied [they] had need to learn much anew by slow experience, and though they knew whence they came, the memory of [Valinor] was to them a vison from afar" (395). Thus, Saruman could fall away from his purpose and seek power over Men and Elves, forgetting who he was and his place in the "West that is forgotten." Since we are focused upon Gandalf, we will look at his death and rebirth, and Tolkien's explanation for it.

In the LOR, the company of the Ring leaves Rivendell going south along the Misty Mountains. They plan to cross the mountains by the Redhorn Gate, but snowstorms prevent them. Gandalf proposes they pass under the mountains through the Mines of Moria. They encounter and battle Orcs led by a Balrog and in the duel between Gandalf and the Balrog, Gandalf breaks the bridge under the Balrog's feet, sending it plunging into the abyss.

> With a terrible cry the Balrog fell forward, and its shadow plunged down and vanished. But even as it fell it swung its whip, and the thongs lashed and curled about the wizard's knees, dragging him to the brink. He staggered and fell, grasped vainly at the stone, and slid into the abyss. "Fly, you fools!" he cried, and was gone (LOR I 345).

Tolkien admitted to being surprised by Gandalf's fall, for he believed the narrative was at this point nearly complete. Gandalf returns in Vol. II, when three of the former company search the edges of Fangorn Forest, where Orcs of Saruman carried two of the hobbits (Merry and Pippin). Many critics, including Tolkien himself, called Gandalf's return a defect, some going as far as calling the return "cheating." Tolkien replies,

> That is partly due to the ever-present compulsions of narrative technique. He must return at that point, and such explanations of his survival as are explicitly set out must be given there--but the narrative is urgent, and must not be held up for elaborate discussions involving the whole "mythological" setting. . . . Gandalf really "died," and was changed: for that seems to me the only real cheating, to represent anything that can be called "death" as making no difference. . . . I might say much more, but it would only be in (perhaps tedious) elucidation of the "mythological" ideas in my mind; it would not, I fear, get rid of the fact that the return of G[andalf] is as presented in this book a "defect," and one I was aware of, and probably did not work hard enough to mend (Letters 201-2).

Tolkien calls Gandalf's return a "defect" he was aware of and the scanty explanation within the text of that return, was due to the time constraints within the narrative--the story called the characters on. However, Tolkien does not leave us with this unsatisfying explanation, but goes on to explain why he believes Gandalf had to return.

> But G[andalf] is not, of course, a human being (Man or Hobbit). There are naturally no precise modern terms to say what he was. I w[oul]d venture to say that he was an incarnate "angel"--strictly an ἀνγελος [angelos]: that is, with the other Istari, wizards,

> "those who know," an emissary from the Lords of the West, sent to Middle-earth, as the great crisis of Sauron loomed on the horizon. By "incarnate" I mean they were embodied in physical bodies capable of pain, and weariness, and of afflicting the spirit with physical fear, and of being "killed," though supported by the angelic spirit they might endure long, and only show slowly the wearing of care and labour (202).

In another letter, Tolkien relates the above with Gandalf's function.

> His function as a "wizard" is an angelos or messenger from the Valar or Rulers: to assist the rational creatures of Middle-earth to resist Sauron, a power too great for them unaided. But since in the view of this tale & mythology Power--when it dominates or seeks to dominate the wills and minds (except by the assent of their reason)--is evil, these "wizards" were incarnated in the life-forms of Middle-earth, and so suffered the pains of both 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. The chief form this would take with them 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. But the situation became so much worse by the fall of Saruman, that the "good" were obliged to greater effort and sacrifice. Thus Gandalf faced and suffered death; and came back or was sent back, as he says, with enhanced power (237).

In other words, Gandalf's fall and return resulted from the defection or fall of Saruman, that to maintain the balance between good and evil, Gandalf had to die to be "enhanced" and able to face the powers of Sauron alone, before he could return. Tolkien, later in the first of the two letters quoted above, argues that the wizards had "failed, . . . the crisis had become

too grave and needed an enhancement of power. So Gandalf sacrificed himself, was accepted, and enhanced, and returned" (202). Finally, we see Tolkien call Gandalf "incarnate angel," "angelos," and "messenger from the Valar," a "nod" from the author himself that primary truth (angels) is "refracted" in Middle-earth in the Valar and Maiar. Gandalf does function as an angel in the text, an angel to Tolkien's Middle-earth.

We recall the Oxford definition of an angel noted in the beginning that an angel is a superhuman messenger of a deity. On this alone, Gandalf qualifies as an angel. I also noted Tolkien's devotion to Catholicism, how religion replaced his mother and permeated all of his thought--the "eucatastrophe" reflects the Eucharist of his faith. His theory of the story and its enthronement of Fantasy as the highest form of literature deserve more than the cursory attention that they have been given in the six decades since he delivered the lecture. His ideas of secondary-belief and myth as refracted truth are as compelling as any criticism written by Sidney, Coleridge, or Eliot. His debunking of the New Critical "death of the author" occurred forty years before Fish and the reader-response critics' authorial revival. For Tolkien, any story is a reflection of both the author's personal history and the cultural history into which he or she is born. The Fairy-story, Fantasy, gives the reader an escape from the misery of his or her miserable, modern life, giving him or her a new view of the world, consoled by the

possibility that a “eucatastrophe” could transform his or her drab existence in this dark evening on the twenty-first century. Tolkien’s fiction, as well known and loved as any of Shakespeare’s plays, and his criticism, as thought provoking and relevant as any in the canon, qualify him, in my mind, for a place among those writers and writings we call literature.

Notes

[1] Hereafter The Hobbit, J. R. R. Tolkien, The Hobbit: or There and Back Again (Boston: Houghton, 1966), will be abbreviated as Hobbit, The Lord of the Rings, J. R. R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring: Being the First Part of The Lord of the Rings (London: Houghton, 1954 New York: QPBC, 1995); J. R. R. Tolkien, The Two Towers: Being the Second Part of The Lord of the Rings (London: Houghton, 1954 New York: QPBC, 1995); J. R. R. Tolkien, The Return of the King: Being the Third Part of The Lord of the Rings (London: Houghton, 1955 New York: QPBC, 1995), as LOR with the volume number (I, II, and III respectively) included in citations. The Silmarillion, J. R. R. Tolkien, The Silmarillion Ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton, 1977), will be designated by Sil and Tolkien's lecture, "On Fairy-Stories," J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," The Tolkien Reader (New York: Ballantine, 1966) 33-99, as "OFS."

[2] Tolkien begins by looking at the terms "fairy," "fairy-tale," and "elf." The noun "fairy," in Tolkien's mind, is roughly equivalent with the term "elf." Both terms are relatively modern, appearing in the Oxford Dictionary (before 1450) as used by the poet Gower to describe a young man wishing to enchant the maidens of the church--he uses powers "as he were a faiërie" (qtd. in "OFS" 37).

[3] Tolkien asserts three possible sources for the fairy-story--diffusion, inheritance, and invention. Diffusion, or borrowing in space, refers the origin of a given story elsewhere. In other words, the inventor lived/lives somewhere. Inheritance, or borrowing in time, refers the origin somewhere in the past--some ancestor invented the story. For Tolkien, invention is the most fundamental origin of the fairy-story. He argues that

> The human mind, endowed with the powers of generalization and abstraction, sees not only green-grass, discriminating it from other things (and finding it fair to look upon), but sees that it is green as well as being grass. But how powerful, how stimulating to the very faculty that produced it, was the invention of the adjective: no spell or incantation in Faërie is more potent. . . . The mind that thought of light, heavy, grey, yellow, still, swift, also conceived of magic that would make heavy things light and able to fly, turn grey lead into yellow gold, and the still rock into a swift water. If it could do the one, it could do the other; it inevitably did both. When we can take green from grass, blue from heaven, and red from blood, we have already an enchanter's power--upon one plane; and the desire to wield that power in the world external to our minds awakes. It does not follow that we shall use that power well upon any plane. We may put deadly green upon a man's face and produce a horror; we may make the rare and terrible blue moon to shine; or we may cause the woods to spring with silver leaves and rams to wear fleeces of gold, and put hot fire into the belly of the cold worm. But in such "fantasy," as it is called, new form is made; Faërie begins; Man becomes a sub-creator (48-9).

[4] Ilúvatar listened to their flawless music, but Melkor, greatest of the Ainur, wanted to create his own music and introduced his own, discordant theme. The music faltered, Eru

raised his hand, introducing a theme that included the original music and Melkor's discord. Melkor introduced a second discord which Ilúvatar encompassed. After Melkor's third discord, Ilúvatar raised both hands and with a single resonating chord, stopped the music.

[5] The seven Lords of the Valar are, in hierarchical order, Manwë, Ulmo, Aulë, Oromë, Mandos, Lórien, and Tulkas. The seven Queens, the Valier, are, in order, Varda, Yavanna, Nienna, Estë, Vairë, Vána, and Nessa. Each Vala has a specific calling or work to perform, with Manwë as the "lord of the realm of Arda and the ruler of all that dwell therein" (SIL 26). Only Varda, spouse of Manwë, called the "Lady of the Stars," is named within the texts of Middle-earth (Hobbit and LOR) and the elves call her "Elbereth," the Queen of Stars. Melkor, greatest of the Ainur, brother to Manwë in the thought of Ilúvatar, entered Arda and became the Lord of Evil. He fought against the Valar, desiring dominion over all of Arda. Many of the Ainur who entered Arda followed Melkor or were seduced by promises of power. Among these were the "Valaraukar, the scourges of fire that in Middle-earth were called the Balrogs, demons of terror" (31). The greatest of Melkor's servants was Sauron or "Gorthaur the Cruel," of the Maiar, the lesser Ainur who entered Arda.

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