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Song as Mythic Conduit in *The Fellowship of the Ring*

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Abstract

Explores the complex layering of history and legend that convey Tolkien's themes across a wide array of genres within the legendarium, reinforcing the sense of depth of time Tolkien hoped to achieve even within *The Hobbit*.

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SONG AS MYTHIC CONDUIT IN *The Fellowship of the Ring*

CACDI AÇAN

Elrond knew all about runes of every kind. That day he looked at the swords they had brought from the trolls' lair, and he said: "These are not troll-make. They are old swords, very old swords of the High Elves of the West, my kin. They were made for the Goblin-wars. They must have come from a dragon's hoard or goblin plunder, for dragons and goblins destroyed that city many ages ago. This, Thorin, the runes name Orcrist, the Goblin-cleaver in the ancient tongue of Gondolin; it was a famous blade. This, Gandalf, was Glamdring, Foe-Hammer that the king of Gondolin once wore. Keep them well!" (Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 3:62)

WHAT REMAINS FASCINATING about the above passage is not that Tolkien's initial readers—and the majority of his readers today—could have no idea what "Gondolin" was, but that within the narrative of *The Hobbit* itself, none of the Company asks Elrond, "What is Gondolin?" Rather, the Company—including the sheltered hobbit Bilbo Baggins—appears to be familiar at least in some way with Gondolin and its history. Indeed, Bilbo later takes courage in the connection of that fabled city to his own situation, when he informs Gollum that he holds "A sword, a blade which came out of Gondolin!" (5:83). Subsequent publication of Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*¹ has revealed that the tale of Gondolin was one of the earliest stories crafted concerning his "sub-created" world of Middle-Earth, and his reference to it in this later narrative about hobbits in the Third Age provides an example of Tolkien's concern with layering stories of the ancient mythology within his later narratives.² While such references as these

¹ The term *The Silmarillion* here refers to Tolkien's Middle-Earth legendarium: the published *Silmarillion* and the twelve-volume *History of Middle-Earth*. When italicized, *The Silmarillion* refers to the published 1977 text edited by Christopher Tolkien, 2nd ed. Although all references I note in this paper are also found in *The Silmarillion*, it is important to recall that there are competing "versions" of these tales throughout the body of Tolkien's works, and thus I am not claiming that characters within the texts of *LotR* knew any particular version.

² Clyde Kilby counts "over six hundred allusions to the First and Second Ages of Middle-earth in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*" (*Silmarillion* 45). In *Splintered Light*, Verlyn Flieger notes that "To read *The Lord of the Rings* [...] in the light of *The Silmarillion* is to be

clearly provide a sense of history, or layers of “reality,” to his created or “Secondary” world, some references appear to go beyond such a purpose to suggest a deeper connection between the stories of an ancient past and the “now” of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* [*LotR*]. Even in this reference from *The Hobbit*, the characters learn that Turgon High King of the Noldor’s sword has passed from the First Age to Gandalf, a central figure in the narrative of the Third Age. Tolkien’s text makes clear that the Company and Elrond realize the importance of this “inheritance” even if most readers could or do not.

On the whole, the relationship between J.R.R. Tolkien’s two major narrative strands—the Third Age account of *The Hobbit* and *LotR* and the First Age accounts of *The Silmarillion*—has led to explorations of the effects of the allusions and references to the First Age on readers or on the structure of the text. Tolkien himself notes, in his letter to publisher Milton Waldman, that “I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story,” and although he initially “independently conceived” of *The Hobbit*, “it proved to be the discovery of the completion of the whole” (*The Silmarillion* xii-xiii). Notably, critics such as T.A. Shippey, Verlyn Flieger, and Gergely Nagy have explored Tolkien’s general use of source material for clues to his secondary world and mythology, and have explored the sources particularly for examples of the sense of layering or depth that Tolkien saw as so vital.³ Even if readers never read the entire “symphony” of

newly aware of an immensely greater perspective, a suddenly increased depth of field” (xvi). Of course, this “greater perspective” is the vantage point of characters within the text itself, who are to a greater or lesser degree aware of these earlier legends. For example, Jonathan Evans notes that *The Hobbit*’s references to dragon-lore suggests “there was a body of folklore concerning dragons that everyone could be counted upon to know and, when necessary, to use” (30). J.S. Ryan agrees: “Tolkien in writing the trilogy has imaged an entire world and told the story of certain events which took place during its imagined history” (24). Paul Edmund Thomas cites Tolkien’s admission that “[the Hobbit] is not consciously based on any other book—save one, . . . the *Silmarillion* . . . to which frequent allusion is made” (qtd. in Thomas 59). Thomas also references T.A. Shippey’s treatment of Tolkien’s use of such references (60).

³ Virtually all critical discussions of Tolkien’s texts explore their relation to source material or literary influences. Entire volumes such as Jane Chance’s *Tolkien the Medievalist*, K.J. Battarbee’s *Scholarship and Fantasy: Proceedings of the Tolkien Phenomenon*, and George Clark and Daniel Timmons’ *J.R.R. Tolkien and His Literary Resonances* are strong examples of critical examinations of Tolkien’s links to a multitude of sources. Further, J.S. Ryan explores Tolkien’s conception of the purpose of fairy tale by surveying Tolkien’s indebtedness to *Beowulf*, Old Norse texts, Dante, George MacDonald, C.S. Lewis, and Coleridge, among others. John Gough takes issue with aligning the *Aimulindalë* with Northern sources and also makes connections between the creation tale and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Tom Shippey’s *The Road to Middle-earth* comprehensively explores Tolkien’s vision and revision processes

mythology behind *LotR*, the references themselves provide depth and layering to the “world making” that Tolkien undertakes. As with the above reference to Gondolin, as Paul Bibire explains, “[such an allusion] implies a wider world, the unbounded horizon of space and legend beyond Bilbo’s journey There and Back Again” (215).

Through Tolkien’s complex process of developing a legendarium with many “versions” of central stories, Flieger concludes that “the entire structure came to resemble real-world mythologies in the cumulative process and temporal span of its composition, as well as in the scope of its subject matter” (*Interrupted Music* xiv). In what Flieger refers to as “temporal layering,” Tolkien’s “mythos, like Arthur’s, has its own extended history,” which she parallels to French and Welsh versions and recastings of Arthurian legends (40).⁴ Similarly, in his exploration of the development of the tale(s) of Túrin, Nagy notes that “Tolkien ‘assumes’ acquaintance with other stories in the same way as *Beowulf* does” (240), and “Thus, a textual tradition is implied, in the same way as the legendary stories are implied in *Beowulf*” (244). Likewise, Shippey points out that “the immense complex of stories” (223) in *The Silmarillion*, which Tolkien alludes to in *The Hobbit* and *LotR*, reveals that “in *The Lord of the Rings* Middle-earth was already old, with a vast weight of history behind it” (230). As a result, Shippey continues, through allusions to earlier times and episodes, these later texts take on a “‘depth,’ the literary quality Tolkien valued most of all” (308).⁵

in light of his medieval and other influences. In large part, Flieger’s works such as *A Question of Time: J.R.R. Tolkien’s Road to Faerie*, *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien’s World*, and *Interrupted Music: The Making of Tolkien’s Mythology* establish Tolkien’s grounding in sources such as Celtic, Norse, Arthurian, and Victorian, as well as offer scintillating readings of Tolkien’s themes, his processes of revision and recasting, and the resulting complexity of Middle-earth which he dedicated “to England” (*Silm* xii). In many ways, this essay attempts to investigate further Flieger’s claims about Tolkien’s mythos by close attention to textual passages from *LotR*.

⁴ Nagy agrees: “the *Silmarillion* text is a precursor of and a context for *The Lord of the Rings*, which makes the allusions [in *LotR*] philologically genuine in an objective, primary world sense” (243). I will further explore Nagy’s discussion of myth “within the textual world” (243, author’s italics) below.

⁵ Shippey examines two texts which Tolkien knew well—*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the Old Norse *Volsunga*—which contain a sense of depth that Tolkien may have used as he constructed his legendarium. Shippey then delves into the versions of “Beren and Lúthien” within *The Silmarillion* (313ff) to reveal how Tolkien succeeds in creating this “quality (flavour, atmosphere, virtue) of depth” (310). Evans notes how the themes which Tolkien so admired in *Beowulf*—“the ‘echo of an echo’ possessing the same ‘intense emotion of regret’”—also appear in both *LotR* and *The Silmarillion* (218). Michael Brisbois continues the consideration of depth: “Tolkien’s novel creates a sense of an ‘enormous well’ at work beneath the text” and links the “effect” to “Tolkien’s use of medieval myth and

Thus, one of the purposes for such allusions to earlier days in *LotR* is to establish a sense of what Tolkien referred to as “the inner consistency of reality” (“On Fairy-Stories” [OFS] 139): the “successful ‘sub-creator’ [...] 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” (OFS 132). In addition, through these allusions, Tolkien establishes another kind of “reality”: a “temporal layering” of ancient stories, both oral and written, which add weight not merely to the world of Middle-earth but also to its aesthetic creations: its languages, its songs, and its literary transmission of history.

It is clear that despite his doubts about whether readers would ever have access to his foundational narratives about Middle-earth, Tolkien nonetheless constructed *LotR* to echo many of the central themes he had already explored, sometimes in varying versions, in *The Silmarillion*. The ways in which characters interact across racial divides, confront notions of good and evil, make choices, and earn redemption, for example, often seem to be grounded in specific events, objects, or people which hearken back to the narratives of *The Silmarillion*.⁶ These echoes and parallels are there, in a sense, not so much for us (at least initially) as for Tolkien himself and for the world of the text itself. As Nagy terms it, “within the textual world” (243), characters thus have the opportunity to consciously connect their lives with the tales of the past. Such internal depth provides a different sort of layering in that the characters at times may sense history and myth as affecting their own lives and choices and which they may or may not fully explain to us, the readers outside of the text. While *LotR* characters consider the transformative power of the tales on their present, the tales often take on a sacred quality, as do the spaces of their telling. As Nagy explains, “the lore of the Elder Days contextualizes the whole story and the

legend and the natural world of Middle-earth” (197). In their review of the *History of Middle-earth*, Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull underline that “Tolkien himself found the sense of historical or legendary depth conveyed by *The Lord of the Rings* to be one of its major qualities” (107).

⁶ A few examples of such cycles are the paralleling of age-ending battles across texts, the repeated appearance of the Eagles, the loss of Beren’s hand and Frodo’s finger, the Beren-Lúthien/Aragorn-Arwen narrative, and themes of “passing” associated with elves in all texts. Indeed, Richard C. West, noting Tolkien’s assertion of the tale’s centrality, indicates that “in a sense even *The Lord of the Rings* is a sequel to the story of Beren and Lúthien” and examines Aragorn’s singing of the Lay at Weathertop, as I will, below (260-1). Paul Bibire notes more subtle echoes and doublings within *The Hobbit*: the Nauglamir of Thingol both with the Arkenstone and with the Phial of Galadriel, Orcrist/Glamdring’s resurfacing to Gondolin, and Moria’s fall, like Gondolin, to a Balrog (205-6).

allusions *for the characters themselves*, for whom the *Silmarillion* tradition is accessible, quite regardless of the reader in the primary world" (243).

In the dual process of interweaving and creating depth for *LotR* inside the Secondary World itself, Tolkien succeeds in developing a fully realized mythology or sacred past for the "now" of his most popular texts. Terming Tolkien's body of work theological, philosophical or mythological, however, raises questions about the nature of myth in general and about Tolkien's myth as a kind of sacred undergirding in particular.⁷ For *The Silmarillion* to be "mythic," the inhabitants of the Secondary World of Middle-earth must at least allude to those tales as containing principles which guide understanding of major questions in their world. Noting Stephen J. Tonsor's claim that the tension in sacred tales of the past derive from "that which the myths of love affirm and that which the myths of power [...] proclaim," William Provost asserts that Tolkien's texts "develop in a deliberate, consistent way both of these categories of myth" (42-3). At the heart of Tolkien's work, Provost suggests, is a clear religious theme of struggle between power and love, one which points to theological notions of "good and evil." These myths need not be allegorical—that is, "theological" only for readers—given the "vast expanse" of past tales embedded in Middle-earth through *The Silmarillion*; rather they can serve as "religious-historical systems of belief" (Nagy 239) for the inhabitants of the textual world. Christine Chism reminds us that myths are, "sociologically," "sometimes textual, sometimes dramatic, always performative [and are] nurtured, cross-fertilized, and constantly reenacted to do social work" (65). Within *LotR*, we see just such a process of textual, dramatic, performative reinscribing of the sacred stories, and the "social work" they do often serves to parallel past and present, myth and history. If, as Clyde Kilby suggests, "In myth man [sic] discovers and affirms not his disparate nature but his mythic, his archetypal and cosmic nature" ("Mythic" 121), the sacred tales of the First Age told in *LotR* must also lead the characters to a sense of their "mythic, archetypal and cosmic nature." That is, these allusions

⁷ Elizabeth Whittingham surveys critical definitions of "myth" and seems to reject the sacred element of myth for Tolkien because "religion and ritual are not clearly manifest [in Tolkien] and the question of who wrote the myth is irrelevant" (213). Most critics, myself included, would take issue with both claims. She concludes by citing Roland Barthes: "the reader lives the myth as a story at once true and unreal" (qtd. in Whittingham 213). For my purposes, the "reader" Barthes refers to here are the characters within *LotR* itself, who themselves are encountering myths of their ancient past. "The chief function of any mythology, real or feigned," according to Flieger, "is to mirror a culture to itself, giving it a history and identity as well as a connection to the supernatural or transcendent" (*Interrupted Music* 139). In this sense, clearly, the ancient legends are mythic for Tolkien's Third Age characters. Flieger's yoking of mythic tales both to a listener's "now" and to a "transcendent" truth beyond the now grounds my notion of the sacred, below.

must stand for more than layers of depth and a sense of “reality” or even history; the allusions must also perform the function of the sacred: to alter the character, the reality, and the journey for the “present” of *LotR*.⁸

Despite the absence of a clear system of religious belief, a ritualization of that belief, or a detail of doctrines to delineate an actual religious system in Middle-earth,⁹ Tolkien’s *LotR* organizes itself, particularly in moments of great conflict, according to the mythological notions derived from the sacred tales of The Silmarillion.¹⁰ As Flieger claims, “The genesis and continuing history, the religio-philosophical basis on which it stands, the governing principles—all are explicit in the Silmarillion, implicit in *The Lord of the Rings*” (*Splintered Light* xvi). Interestingly, as with the reference to Gondolin from *The Hobbit*, characters within the narrative of *LotR* occasionally “cite” episodes from The Silmarillion, subtly suggesting that their actions exist and develop within or in like manner to the narrative and the lessons or Story of The Silmarillion.¹¹ At significant moments in the narrative, such tales/references take on the quality of the sacred, stories “set apart,” containing transformative power for the listener, and, significantly, retold in aesthetic forms. Indeed, numerous passages in *LotR* suggest several central relations of past Story and present narrative: all the races know at least part of the Story of the First Age, and they repeatedly react to allusions to this Story as “given” or understood as significant; they offer

⁸ Kilby’s reference to Mircea Eliade’s *Cosmos and History*, with its claim that myths seek to reinscribe a “Golden Time” into the lives of the mundane present (“Mythic” 125ff), is also helpful to explain the relationship between allusions to ancient tales and the “present” of *LotR*. Much of Kilby’s remaining chapter explores the Christian parallels of Tolkien’s texts.

⁹ One exception might be Faramir’s brief prayer facing West in *The Two Towers*, as observed by Sam and Frodo in Ithilien: “Faramir and all his men turned and faced west in a moment of silence. Faramir signed to Frodo and Sam that they should do likewise. [...] ‘we look towards Númenor that was, and beyond to Elvenhome that is, and to that which is beyond Elvenhome and will ever be’” (VI.5.661). This Gondorian ritual evokes the fates of both kindreds, both past and present, and seems to be a daily ritual not unlike prayer. The other overtly ritualized element—the “hymn” to Elbereth—will be of concern below. In attempting to locate Tolkien within his modernist era, Rosebury notes the simultaneous lack of dogma and the presence of theological weight: “Tolkien constructs a vision informed by what can only be called religious intuitions, yet does not begin from any foundation of assumed dogma” (152). J.S. Ryan claims more succinctly that “There is contained in the trilogy all the necessary material for religion” (30).

¹⁰ The same can be said, too, about transgression from those mythological notions. Clearly, Melkor’s rebellion, his fascination with his own creations, and the rebellion of the Noldor against the Valar serve as “negative exemplars” for the now of *LotR*, to which Elrond subtly alludes in “The Council of Elrond.”

¹¹ I capitalize “Story” here to suggest a mythic value to the ancient tales and their connection to the “now” of *LotR*. Thus, Story connotes *the* Story, the theological narrative of the ancient tales as told, understood, intuited, and integrated into *LotR*.

additional “versions” of ancient Stories for the new audience of the Third Age; and they often transform as characters through self-conscious evocation of ancient Story. As a result, it is fruitful to consider closely episodes within the confines of that present Middle-earth which establish The Silmarillion as a sacred Story evoking a set of truths which all the characters “know” to a greater or lesser degree.¹² Thus, references like those to the ancient city of Gondolin, or Frodo’s instinctive prayers to Elbereth, serve a clear function: they point to an underlying system of knowing, of believing, and of creating in the world of Middle-earth.

To explore the ways in which the Story of The Silmarillion undergirds the world of Middle-earth, I would like to consider several episodes involving the use of song in *The Fellowship of the Ring* [*FoTR*], when the song/poem directly alludes to characters and events known through The Silmarillion. In particular, *FoTR* highlights Bilbo, Frodo, and Aragorn in contact with the sacred Story, suggesting that they understand the creative power that song had/has in the world of Middle-earth, and that they are in the process of glimpsing a link between their own songs and the sacred song/Story.¹³ In these moments of song, the *LotR* seems to open a portal or passageway through which the characters may simultaneously glimpse both their current situation and the ancient past of the Elder Days; as such, song creates an in-between place where characters achieve a kind of visionary moment. Further, at times characters self-consciously integrate their newly-learned wisdom in later song/tales.¹⁴ Indeed, throughout *LotR*, a

¹² As such, my study here will not explore the ways in which The Silmarillion or *LotR* parallel or echo the sacred texts of Judeo-Christianity, not solely because of Tolkien’s much discussed aversion to allegory, but largely because my concern is with the ways in which The Silmarillion functions within the Secondary World of *LotR*—the ways in which the legends/Story of The Silmarillion are “truth” for that World, rather than with a comparison between Tolkien’s created world and our own. Clyde Kilby explores many Judeo-Christian parallels (“Mythic” and *Tolkien and The Silmarillion*), as do Flieger (“Naming”), Duriez (“Sub-Creation”) and Houghton (“Augustine”).

¹³ Indeed, Tolkien’s choice to employ song as vehicle for sacred story reaches back to the creation of Middle-earth itself through the Music of the Ainur. Bradford Lee Eden explains that “Tolkien knew and recognized the importance of music as an anthropomorphic reality and creational material in many mythologies” (183). As Rosebury succinctly explains, “[The Ainulindalë’s] fundamental mythical conception, the world as a Great Music made visible, its history a fulfillment of creative purposes which proceed both directly from God and mediately from him [...] is the key to much else in Tolkien’s religious, moral and aesthetic vision” (107). Provost, too, notes the centrality of song: “good language, music and song, is an essential element of this myth [Ainulindalë]” (49).

¹⁴ Of course, because Tolkien’s entire cosmology is founded on music-as-creation, the moments when characters invoke song particularly expose their grounding in a kind of theology or moral system of creation. Provost explains: “Song [...] is the very mode and

connection to the Elves and a subsequent interest in Story/song position characters such as Bilbo, Frodo and Aragorn in a kind of holy passageway through which they are able to see the interconnection between their own lives and the events within the songs of the First Age, and by which they may transform through a deeper consideration of creation-as-Art.

One of the earliest manifestations of the power of song comes with Tolkien's earliest reference to Varda as Elbereth in *LotR*. In *FotR*'s "Three is Company," Frodo nearly succumbs to using the Ring in response to a Black Rider who "began to crawl towards him," when "there came a sound like mingled song and laughter" (I.3.77). Gildor and "the High Elves" rescue the hobbits with, apparently, their very presence and their song (77). The Elves' singing to Elbereth here is not unlike the reference to Gondolin from *The Hobbit*: it references a more ancient time about which even the hobbits know something. Frodo, through his education from Bilbo, recognizes the name "Elbereth" and seems to realize that this reference and the Elves' arrival vanquish the Black Riders. As Flieger also explains, "*Elbereth* as a name evoked in time of extreme danger [has] by its very sound the power to drive away evil" (*Splintered Light* 89). Further, when Gildor identifies himself as "of the House of Finrod" (I.3.79), the hobbits do not inquire as to the meaning of such lineage, but seem to understand its significance.¹⁵ As Gildor continues his explanation, he hearkens back to the events of the First Age, even as he also suggests that the hobbits know a part of his story: "We are Exiles, and most of our kindred have long ago departed and we too are now only tarrying here a while, ere we return over the Great Sea. But some of our kinsfolk dwell still in peace in Rivendell" (I.3.79). The reference to "Exiles" rather than "the Noldor" or any further explanation assumes some knowledge about the Story of The Silmarillion on the part of the hobbits, a knowledge which Sam has already revealed in his conversation with Ted Sandyman: "They are sailing,

process of creation, being first a musical theme propounded by the Creator, then actual music fashioned into being" (50). As Eden succinctly reminds us, "it becomes increasingly apparent as the reader is drawn into *The Silmarillion* [and, I would argue, *LotR* as well] that music is the ultimate power in the cosmological history of Middle-earth" (188). Interestingly, Eden also notes the Platonic association with regressions of "song" through time in Middle-earth: "The gradations of music's power in Middle-earth from its appearance in the first page of *The Silmarillion* all the way down to the Fourth Age in *The Lord of the Rings* reflect a Neoplatonic hierarchy of being" (192). In Brisbois' exploration of Nature in Middle-earth, he claims that "the entire world of Middle-earth is infused with divine meaning" (208), and that meaning stems from the Music of the Ainur, the musical construction which later becomes Nature or the world itself. Flieger's *Interrupted Music* employs Tolkien's conception of creation as Music in order to explore the complex process of composition Tolkien developed to sustain, yet never complete, his Secondary World.

¹⁵ This reference from Gildor to a House of Finrod is an oversight in revision on Tolkien's part, of course, as Finrod Felagund had no descendents.

sailing, sailing over the Sea, they are going into the West and leaving us" (I.2.44).¹⁶ Sam's and particularly Frodo's understanding or tacit knowledge about references to this past suggest that even hobbits, sheltered and generally uninterested in other races, have held on to some part of the ancient Story. Through these oblique references to the Ainur (through Elbereth) and the tales of the Noldor (through references to Finrod and the term Exile), the hobbits are placed at the intersection of past and present. They are reminded of an earlier struggle between light and darkness—the Noldor against Morgoth, Varda's creation of the stars—which "fate or chance" has placed in the way of their imminent and similar struggle.¹⁷

Throughout this episode with the Elves, the narrative progresses intriguingly from hobbit song to Mordor darkness, to Elven song, to hobbit memory of that song. In the process, the chapter's structure emphasizes the significance of creation—song, stars, and Varda are powerful ancient forces which can strengthen good and dispel evil. Although ineffectual against the Black Riders, the hobbits themselves begin this section of the chapter with a song, authored by Bilbo, with a focus on the Hobbit-tension between home and adventure. The chapter progresses from there to the Black Riders' approach, thwarted by the numinous song to "Elbereth," creator of stars.¹⁸ Once entrenched in the safety of Woodhall, the narrator directly links the stars and song: "Away high in the East swung Remmirath, the Netted Stars, and slowly above the mists red Borgil rose, glowing like a jewel of fire. Then by some shift of airs all the mist was drawn away like a veil, and there leaned up, as he climbed over the rim of the world, the Swordsman of the Sky, Menelvagor with his shining belt. The Elves all burst into song" (I.3.80). Through the progression of the chapter, Song

¹⁶ Sam and Ted Sandyman's conversation at the Green Dragon reveals that at least part of Sam's education involved learning about the ancient Story found in *The Silmarillion*. Although the text references these stories as "tradition" or "fragments of tales and half remembered stories" (I.2.44), such a common base of story suggests that the events of *The Silmarillion* were in some way a mythological grounding for the Third Age, even in the Shire. Flieger also points out Sam's understanding of ancient Story: "Sam knows about Beren and Lúthien; he knows about the Silmarils; he has heard of Thangorodrim, and he can recite 'Gil-Galad was an Elven king' when occasion calls for it" (*Interrupted Music* 61). Significantly, even prior to his experience in Rivendell, where he presumably hears songs and stories aplenty, Sam has an understanding of the ancient stories and of their present significance, as in his reference to the Elves' passing into the West.

¹⁷ Interestingly, this "chance" meeting echoes Tolkien's description of our experiences with Faerie: "Even upon the borders of Faërie we encounter them only at some chance crossing of the ways" (OFS 113).

¹⁸ John William Houghton agrees that the song "'A Elbereth Gilthoniel' looks very much like a hymn to their star-kindling Queen" (178) and reminds us that "Tolkien himself calls it a hymn, and Elbereth, 'divine' or 'angelic'" (qtd. in Houghton, 182n8).

as encouragement (hobbits) quickly becomes Song as dispeller of evil (Elves), then transitions to Song as worship (in this case, of Elbereth, Star Kindler). Finally, the hobbits recall the experience as a kind of essence of numinous joy; Sam later describes the experience in terms of song: "it was the singing that went to my heart, if you know what I mean" (I.3.81). In tandem with the hobbits' apparent knowledge of ancient stories or events, the narrative progression of the chapter also links the use of song, particularly Elvish songs invoking the West or the past, to a creative power against evil and with a moment set apart.

In fact, the hobbits' encounter with Gildor and the Elves serves as a conduit through which they stand on a kind of portal between the ancient past of Story/song and their own imperiled present. As the hobbits are enclosed by the Elves on their journey to Woodhall, they seem to enter a kind of "dream time" or visionary moment that is book-ended by the stark reality of their quest: the sniffling, swaying Black Rider and the awakening alone at Woodhall the next morning. As Tolkien describes fairy-stories, here the experience of Elven song can "open a door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside of our own time, outside Time itself, maybe" (OFS 129). Such is the experience of the hobbits here. In this Other Time, they witness how a prayer or reference to an ancient past—the Creation of the Stars by Varda and the Elves' memory of that act—can impact the evil of their "now." The sacred song is not merely an account of ancient events, then; it is both a power to create a good space against encroaching evil and a passageway through which the hobbits see themselves as reflected through the ancient truths.

That their experience is a sacred moment seems clear; stylistically, it contrasts strongly with their own song and with the approaching evil of the Black Riders. The description, too, suggests that the hobbits have crossed over into "Faerie": they grow sleepy; Sam walks "with an expression on his face half of fear and half of astonished joy" (I.3.80); Pippin later recalls the food in a kind of Edenic rapture; Frodo falls into "a dreamless slumber" (I.3.83); and, the next morning, Frodo can still trace "an odd change that seemed to have come over [Sam]" (I.4.85). Although the Elves themselves are not "divine," their relationship to time—their immortality—gives them access to the sacred and the holy in ways the hobbits cannot experience alone. Through song and its Story, however, the hobbits have had a glimpse, a vision, of another space that will affect their Quest, as the encounter with Gildor prepares them literally and spiritually for the immediate peril ahead. Indeed, in the following chapter, Sam reveals his maturation and his intention to continue on the Quest no matter the road: "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 [...] but I know I can't turn back. [...] I have something to do before the end, and it lies ahead, not in the Shire" (I.4.85). George Clark notes the centrality of Sam's shift following his numinous

encounter: “one consequence of the meeting is the change in Sam’s vision and determination on which the success of the quest ultimately depends” (49). For him, the encounter with the Elves – particularly their music – has transformed him and prepared him for his future Quest.

The next incident of song opening a kind of passageway to the sacred functions in a slightly different way, as Aragorn keeps darkness and fear at bay through the singing of the Tale of Tinúviel. Here, interestingly, Aragorn seeks to divert the hobbits from their future Quest—silencing both Sam’s song and Frodo’s tale about Gil-galad’s fall in Mordor—by singing a love song about Beren and Lúthien: “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” (I.11.187). Unlike the almost unconscious “recognition” the Hobbits had about the Elves’ ancient references and song, here Aragorn both sings and explains the tale of Beren and Lúthien as if the hobbits know little of the story. However, his singing, not unlike the singing of the Elves, marks out a space in the narrative that temporarily moves the hobbits out of their time and place. Rather than focusing on the elements of the tale which parallel their current situation—such as Lúthien’s assault on Sauron’s fortress, Finrod’s fall, or Beren’s fight with Carcharoth—Aragorn instead sings of the first encounter of the lovers. In effect, he casts a kind of spell on the scene by evoking the moment of great love that was to change the course of Middle-earth. Following the brief episode of song, Aragorn also narrates the entire story of Beren and Lúthien, closing by connecting their story to his: “And of Eärendil came the Kings of Númenor, that is Westernesse” (I.11.190). At face value, the episode appears to contradict my claim that the songs recounting the Story of the Silmarillion serve as a sacred fabric for the inhabitants of Middle-earth, because the hobbits do not seem familiar with the narrative. However, I would argue that the episode evokes another central component of a Story’s function: in its telling, the song/Story teaches the less initiated about mythic events they do not yet know fully. Aragorn’s evocation of the central story of The Silmarillion¹⁹ thus offers the hobbits a song of love and quest triumphant in their darkest moment yet.

Further, through Aragorn’s “teachings” on Weathertop, the narrative begins the process of transforming Strider the wandering Ranger into Aragorn the heir of Elendil. Although Aragorn is not Elvish and is thus unable to draw the hobbits fully into a visionary space, his knowledge about past ages seems as central to the survival of the Quest as his prowess as a warrior. Through his

¹⁹ In *Interrupted Music*, Flieger reminds us that the story of Beren and Lúthien “and its successful outcome in Beren’s quest for a Silmaril is a formative component of the entire legendarium” (38). Shippey also uses the Lay of Leithian and its multiple sources to explore Tolkien’s concern with “depth” (313ff).

wisdom, Aragorn functions as a kind of bard, a wise singer who weaves tales of the past in order to impart wisdom and beauty to the current, in this case terror-filled, moment.²⁰ Structurally, the text heightens the power of Aragorn's words by ushering in the menacing Ringwraiths almost the moment he grows silent: "All seemed quiet and still, but Frodo felt a cold dread creeping over his heart, now that Strider was no longer speaking" (I.11.190). In a less powerful way than Gildor's song, Aragorn's song nonetheless surrounds the cave at Weathertop, albeit momentarily, with the power of sacred song that somehow holds back the evil that lurks just beyond. Unlike Gildor, Aragorn does not possess a direct connection to the events of the First Age, but he does possess the song itself, the words and the knowledge of the Story which he can teach the hobbits, and which can remind them of a narrative of light over darkness. Further, in his song and narrative, Aragorn places himself in the history which he tells, and thus signals the process of transformation that he, like Beren, must undergo for "victory."

As the Ringwraiths attack the hobbits and Strider only moments later, Frodo almost instinctively calls out "O Elbereth Gilthoniel!" and "[strikes] at the feet of his enemy" (I.11.191). Although he has not resisted the overwhelming temptation to put on the Ring and thus be drawn into the world of the Wraiths, he does possess knowledge enough to call out to Varda, even as the Lord of the Nazgûl "sees" him as Ringbearer. Wearing the Ring, Frodo enters not the visionary world of Faërie achieved at Woodhall but the "swirling mist" between Life and Undead, a realm into which he nearly crosses over from his wounding until the Ford at Bruinen.²¹ Frodo is armed with two weapons against this realm: his sword from the Barrow, which like Merry's is wound with spells against

²⁰ Indeed, this entire episode hearkens in interesting ways to the method of "digression" found in *Beowulf*. Seemingly unconnected to the larger narrative, the scop's song of Sigemund connects Beowulf's heroics to a past hero, even as it foreshadows Beowulf's later confrontation with his dragon. As for Aragorn, his story functions similarly; it digresses from the narrative of *LotR* while connecting an earlier quest to the current one. Of course, the fact that Aragorn's love of Arwen parallels the tale he chooses to tell adds further layers to the purpose of the song. West reads this passage in conjunction with his observation that "Tolkien [...] liked repeated patterns [and gives] similar scenes [of first meeting] to a number of his other characters who are lovers" (261); thus, West continues, "when Strider tells their story on Weathertop [...] his pensive mood on that occasion is due in part to his recognition that his case has similarities to that of his ancestors, and to his hope (only partially borne out) that it may have as relatively happy an issue among all the sad tales of Middle-earth" (261). The fact that Frodo and Sam make later repeated references to Lúthien and Beren suggests they have both listened and learned from Aragorn's song.

²¹ As Gandalf explains in "Many Meetings," "You were in gravest peril while you wore the Ring, for then you were half in the wraith-world yourself, and they might have seized you. You could see them, and they could see you" (II.1.216). Conceptions of seeing and being seen continue to layer throughout Frodo's Quest under "the Eye."

Angmar, and his knowledge of the sacred powers. Significantly, as Aragorn tells Frodo, "More deadly to him [than the sword] was the name of Elbereth" (I.2.193). Calling out a holy name against an unholy foe, Frodo seems to understand that sacred forces are work. Has he learned this through his encounter with Gildor, through his teaching from Bilbo, or through some preternatural link to the divine? It is not clear, but it is certain that from this point on in *LotR*, Frodo calls on Varda in moments of the greatest darkness. Interestingly, from his wounding at Weathertop through the conclusion of the Quest, Frodo possesses two portals through which he may and often does pass: the portal into Elven Faërie, facilitated through songs and references to the ancient past; and the portal into "mist," engineered by his use of the Ring and his subsequent wound(s). In the narrative sections which focus on Frodo, then, we consistently witness Frodo "on the verge" between one or the other or both of these spaces. At times a sacred vision—as with Gildor—and at other times a horrific vision of his possible future—as with the Nazgûl—Frodo's Quest goes beyond the journey to Mordor and implicates him in mythic spaces of good and evil.

Although Aragorn's song of Lúthien does not seem to impact the action directly once the Wraiths attack, it does provide a kind of "digression" before the confrontation with evil. Lúthien and Beren encountered and triumphed over the darkness of Morgoth, and so might they. Further, through his wisdom and song at Weathertop, Aragorn emerges as a figure that is not quite yet kingly but certainly no longer solely the dark Ranger Strider. He has moved toward his status as warrior-king in part through the connection he realizes between his Song and his "now." While he has not passed into Faërie, he has and must emerge as leader, to claim his identity as the inheritor of Beren's place and Story. Later, it seems, as a direct result of Aragorn's lesson both told and embodied, Frodo turns to face the Wraiths at the Ford, and on the brink between seen and unseen, he clearly makes use of the two lessons of the sacred explored in song thus far on his Quest: "By Elbereth and Lúthien the Fair [...] you shall have neither the Ring nor me!" (I.12.209). Here Frodo clearly stands on the verge of two passageways; nearly faded from his wound, the gaze of the Morgul lord has become more real than the real world around him. However, he rejects this portal to the unseen by integrating the Story of Lúthien for his own confrontation with evil. In effect, Frodo "cites" Lúthien at the Ford as a symbolic beacon of light against darkness, of the world of Faerie against the world of "mist."²²

²² Thus, just as Nagy notes with Elrond's reference to Túrin as Elf-friend in the Council, Frodo's reference to Lúthien appears as "an embryonic *typological interpretation*" of a past legend (243, author's emphasis). The Ringwraith was not "living" in the First Age when Lúthien and Beren gained the Silmaril, and thus the reference is not to remind the Wraith of something at which he himself failed. Rather, the reference serves to remind the forces of darkness which close upon Frodo of an example of their defeat. Frodo aligns himself with

Once at Rivendell, the hobbits have a two-fold experience of crossing over into the realm of Faërie (only briefly experienced with Gildor), and of hearing Elven songs recounting the ancient past. Indeed, in the House of Elrond, the Middle-earth of *LotR*'s "now" converges with ages past, creating a kind of permanent sacred space dedicated to art, song, lore and wisdom.²³ Interestingly, of the two songs Tolkien includes in the chapters at Rivendell, one comes from Bilbo and the other reprises Gildor's song or prayer to Elbereth, this time given in Elvish.²⁴ Through both songs, Frodo once again experiences a visionary moment allowing him to connect and somehow to "see" the sacred past. Further, we learn through Bilbo's song that in addition to being Frodo's primary "teacher," Bilbo has continued his study of the Story at Rivendell, writing and performing songs and poetry of Elven or ancient history. While Bilbo sings of Eärendil, Frodo hears the sacred narrative continued at the exact place where Aragorn ended his tale at Weathertop, with Eärendil seeking Aman for the sake of the Two Kindreds. Beyond the song's effect on Frodo, the episode also parallels Bilbo and Aragorn as special participants in the "now" of the Quest, and as special repositories or emblems of the sacred Story.

Bilbo's song of Eärendil functions as a multi-faceted conduit between sacred past and unknown future; in its imagery, context, and performance, the song's creation aligns Bilbo, Aragorn, and Frodo with the sacred, heroic, and creative past. Significantly, the song itself alludes to the musical references we have already explored. Bilbo's song describes "flying Elwing" who rescues Eärendil, and "The Silmaril she bound on him / and crowned him with the living light" (II.1.228), thereby alluding to the Tale of Lúthien that Aragorn told on Weathertop, for it is the same Silmaril in both songs. Once Eärendil reaches Valinor, the poem's reference to Varda echoes the scene at Woodhall and the Elvish prayer which follows: "the Silmaril as lantern light / and banner bright with living flame / to gleam thereon by Elbereth / herself was set, who thither came / and wings immortal made for him" (II.1.29). While at Rivendell, Bilbo has absorbed further the ancient tales, has seen connections between Elrond's lineage and Aragorn's, and has chosen to re-tell this narrative of salvation just before the doom-filled Council of Elrond. Although not an Elf, he like Aragorn positions

Lúthien and against the Nazgûl through the typological association of her Story: Quest triumphant over evil.

²³ As with medieval conceptions of the cathedral, whose threshold signaled a crossing over from the profane to the sacred, a space that represented the eternal realm, Rivendell serves a similar if not allegorically equal function in *LotR*. It is a representation of all that The Silmarillion holds sacred and worth preserving: song, love, lore, wisdom, joy, and nature.

²⁴ I say included because it is clear that the Elves sang many songs and told many tales of the ancient days in Hall of Fire celebration (II.1.224ff).

himself as a bard and a keeper of sacred Stories.²⁵ Indeed, the song establishes an important context for the discussion at the Council, particularly by its allusion to Númenor, as it focuses on both Eärendil himself and uses phrases such as “burning as an island star” (230). The Song of Eärendil, then, sings of a treasure lost in the First Age (the Silmaril), of an “impossible” quest that was achieved, and of beings (the Elder King and Elbereth) who stand against evil in Middle-earth.

Because Bilbo seeks out Aragorn—“the Dúnadan”—for help with the completion of the poem, slyly hinting to him that “the Lady Arwen was there” (II.1.226), the performance also serves to remind Aragorn of his own ancestry tracing back to Eärendil. Through Aragorn’s insistence on the inclusion of “an emerald” in the song (227), the “poets” Bilbo and Aragorn inscribe the “Dúnadan” publicly into ancient Story. Their “cross-genre retextualization” of Eärendil’s Story “implies a tradition of story that can be given a different form in different genres without essentially being changed in content” (Nagy 247). Thus, Bilbo’s “bardic weaving” links Aragorn and indeed the entire audience to past (Eärendil as ancestor), present (Aragorn as Dúnadan), and future (Aragorn as Elessar or Elfstone). In the space opened up by Bilbo’s song, the revelers in the Hall of Fire comprehend intricate layers of time and consciousness: “Time, as Tolkien envisioned it, was not a simple forward progression but a complex field of experience to which dream, memory, and language all gave access” (Flieger, *Question* 5). Like the Anglo-Saxon scop, Bilbo successfully weaves ancient stories with current events and people, even as he reveals his own growing abilities as “keeper of Story.” In the convergence of peoples, times, and events in the Hall of Fire, Bilbo constructs a song that integrates the “now” with the past Story, and through his very choice of subject projects a future of hope and victory.

While the Song of Eärendil clearly marks out a connection between Bilbo, Aragorn and the ancient Story, Frodo, positioned as the primary listener, once again stands on the portal to another place and time, on the verge of a transformation he only partially comprehends. Perhaps no other passage underlines Frodo’s state more clearly than his role as listener in the Hall of Fire:

At first the beauty of the melodies and of the interwoven words [...] held him in a spell. [...] [T]he firelit hall became like a golden mist above seas of foam that sighed upon the margins of the world. Then the enchantment

²⁵ In her exploration of Tolkien’s construction of a layering of myth, Flieger explains that “Tolkien had to invent a ‘prehistory’ of the existing texts, a genealogy of transmitters: bards, minstrels, storytellers of all kinds [...] who disseminated the stories both vertically in time and horizontally across the geography of Middle-earth” (*Interrupted Music* 61). In the Hall of Fire, Bilbo functions as yet another bard, another transmitter of the Story, created and recrafted for the moment.

became more and more dreamlike, until he felt that an endless river of gold and silver was flowing over him, too multitudinous for its pattern to be comprehended; it became part of the throbbing air about him, and it drenched and drowned him. Swiftly he sank under its shining weight into a deep realm of sleep. (II.1.227)²⁶

Frodo's experience echoes the hobbit's earlier passage into Faërie with Gildor, but here Frodo is our sole focus, and the passage is more significant, given that he has been on the verge of darkness at the Ford. Frodo seems to intuit the holiness of the space and sound within the Hall of Fire—he gives himself over to the power of song, which in Middle-earth is the power of creation itself. Like the original music/creation of the *Ainulindalë*, these songs create a “pattern,” complex yet beautiful, through which Frodo and the other listeners can experience, if fleetingly, the power of Story. As listener, Frodo crosses through the portal between consciousness and dream by means of Elven song, and as such the narrative again creates a unique relationship between the Ringbearer and the Elven Stories.²⁷

Frodo's visionary experience appears as a result of Elven song but is not completely separated from Bilbo's song, interestingly, for while in his vision, “he wandered long in a dream of music that turned unto running water, and then suddenly into a voice. It seemed to be the voice of Bilbo chanting verses” (II.1.227). Once Bilbo rejoins him after the singing, Frodo notices the connection between the earlier Elven songs and Bilbo's, even as he again reveals his prior knowledge of the sacred Story. As with earlier encounters with song, he asks for no clarification about “the Elder King” (Manwë), or the references to Valinor or Tirion, but seems to take these references, like those to Gondolin or Finrod, as

²⁶ Such a rich description clearly evokes the realm of Faërie. As David Sandner explores the relationship between Faërie and our world, he also perfectly explains Frodo's state in the Hall of Fire: “Fantasy [allows for] a contemplation of the world of the spirit, which, paradoxically, provides a deeper appreciation of the HERE and the NOW, as *Faërie* and the primary world become one: our world, enchanted” (139). Tolkien's discussion of “Faërian Drama” also explains Frodo's vision: “The experience may be very similar to Dreaming [...]. But in Faërian drama you are in a dream that some other mind is weaving” (OFS 142).

²⁷ This is not to say that other mortals do not experience “dream time” as well as Frodo; Aragorn, in his initial sighting of Arwen, Sam, and of course Beren all appear to cross over the passageway between times, often through song or the natural world. However, it seems that the narrative gives special attention to the moments when Frodo achieves this visionary state. In *A Question of Time*, Flieger argues that “Frodo is invested with associations that suggest that he may be unusually sensitive to the mood and ambience of Lórien” (97), and certainly the same seems true for his experience in the Hall of Fire. As Flieger notes later, “It is Frodo who most clearly moves through various levels and most explicitly and consciously through time” (174).

“understood.” While not of the same potency as Gildor’s song, like Aragorn’s song on Weathertop, Bilbo’s creation values the process the Elves began and continues it for a new time and audience. Further, although Bilbo’s song does not impart Elven “Faërie” visions, Frodo nonetheless claims that “It seemed to me to fit somehow, though I can’t explain. I was half asleep when you began, and it seemed to follow on from something that I was dreaming about” (II.1.231). In his semi-conscious state, Frodo senses Bilbo’s re-telling of the Story of Eärendil as part of the sacred process of song and creation. For Frodo, Bilbo’s song may be a road back from the dream time of Faerie, closer to the time and place wherein he must take on his vital task. Already hailed as Elf-Friend (by Gildor and Goldberry),²⁸ Frodo’s repeated visions and dreams suggest that he attains special knowledge and foresight through songs or references to the ancient Story and, perhaps, that he is able to be drawn further than other mortals into Faërie through these moments.

Through descriptions of Eärendil, Bilbo’s song itself subtly parallels Frodo’s role both as Savior and as tragic Exile: “A wanderer escaped from night”; “from east to west he passed away”; “they clothed him then in elven-white”; “From World’s End then he turned away, / and yearned again it to find afar / his home through shadows journeying”; “But on him mighty doom was laid” (II.1.228-30). The hobbit in him attends more consciously to Bilbo’s song than to the Elven enchantment, but in both kinds of song—high and low, as it were—Frodo “learns” or hears references to the Story, preparing him for the “doom” that he soon takes upon himself. For the remainder of his Quest, Frodo grows increasingly aligned with the space in between the world of the Quest and “other worlds” unseen. Suspended between spaces, already wounded and “[fading] out of the everyday world” (Flieger, *Splintered Light* 157), Frodo stands at the nexus between wraith-like mist, Faërie, and the present of Middle-earth, constantly shifting to and fro as he proceeds toward Mordor. On that journey, the Story appears consistently as a weapon against fading into the “mist” of the Ringwraiths, as here in the Hall of Fire the Song of Eärendil establishes a hope in the west which Frodo will ultimately gain. In addition to the song, then, the

²⁸ Much of Flieger’s excellent work on Tolkien’s legendarium has traced the significance of this term through its various permutations in Tolkien’s myth-making process. As she notes in *A Question of Time*, the epithet Elf-friend “became one of the most recurrent elements in the mythology” (64). Further, Flieger has attended closely to Frodo’s dream state and fully explored the connotations of his visions and dreams in the dizzying variations within Tolkien’s text (e.g. *Splintered Light*, *Interrupted Music*, *A Question of Time*, in particular). For instance, she notes that “Frodo travels in his dreams deeper and farther than any of the others was ever allowed to go” (167), and the narrative’s attention to his state in the Hall of Fire seems to underline the Ringbearer’s special intuitive abilities when exposed to Elven “magic.”

space of the Hall of Fire itself becomes a passageway for the Ringbearer, where he can move toward light, Story, and kind of healing only the Faërie space can provide.

Given the complex weaving of the references to the Elder Days we have already seen in *FotR*, it comes as no surprise that “Many Meetings” closes with a reprisal of Gildor’s prayer to Elbereth. As Frodo and Bilbo leave the Hall, “Even as they stepped over the threshold a single clear voice rose in song” (II.1.231). On that threshold, Frodo is drawn back into the enchantment of the Elven voices in prayer. Literally in the passageway between the divine rejoicing and the “homely” talk they seek together, the hobbits embody the position of the worshipper still involved in the world of the “now” yet continually drawn to the world of the sacred, the mortal who finds joy in the immortal. Frodo in particular yearns for the enchantment or “dream time” of the prayer to Elbereth, “while the sweet syllables of the elvish song fell like clear jewels of blended word and melody” (II.1.232). At the same time, he remains connected to Middle-earth, to his hobbit nature, and to Bilbo, who reminds him that “They will sing that, and other songs of the Blessed Realm, many times tonight. Come on!” (II.1.232).

Bilbo, older and more established in lore and at least partially healed in Rivendell, can more easily negotiate the passageway between enchanted song and current time. Nonetheless, once alone, both hobbits appear to have moved to a more conscious reverence for song and its embodiment in the natural world—in short, for the sacred things of Middle-earth. Looking over the valley, “They spoke no more of the small news of the Shire far away, nor of the dark shadows and perils that encompassed them, but of the fair things they had seen in the world together, of the Elves, of the stars, of trees, and the gentle fall of the bright year in the woods” (II.1.232). Following Frodo’s visionary experience and Bilbo’s creation of song, the hobbits move from Faërie space to Natural space to converse on aesthetics; they glorify in prose what the Elven songs have glorified in poetry: the stars, the trees, and the flowing passages of time. The hobbits’ reverence for Elves and their creations aligns them more closely if fleetingly to the sacred world that the Elves embody and that they repeatedly reference in tale or song.²⁹ Another image from the close of this chapter likewise links the aesthetic beauty of Elven song, mortals yearning for that beauty, and the hope such a connection can bring: Aragorn, clad as the heir of Elendil, stands with Arwen and Elrond. Man, Elf, and Half-Elven triangulate amidst the prayer to Elbereth, and Frodo witnesses this spectacle as a kind of aesthetic tableau, a

²⁹ In his exploration of Magic vs. Enchantment, Patrick Curry notes that “Tolkien [...] emphasized Enchantment as wonder at nature, including specifically its perception, celebration, and healing” (409). Like the visionary moment with Gildor at Woodhall, the Hall of Fire songs move Frodo and Bilbo to a deeper love for both created art (song and Story) and Creation itself.

visionary moment caught in time and song. As holy and aesthetic space, the Hall of Fire thus stages the multiple potentials of song for the characters therein; it celebrates the mythic Story of the past, reworks that ancient Story, evokes the creation and creators of Song/earth, and even establishes a kind of potential fulfillment of the Story in the “now” of *LotR*.

In each episode we have explored, the text connects conceptions of songs of the ancient Story of The Silmarillion to the central characters in the process of transforming in *LotR*. Consistently, the characters’ responses reveal that references to the ancient song or Story are either “understood” or necessary to learn, to integrate, and to apply. Of course, it is not only song which serves this allusive or instructive function in *LotR*. Consistent with Tolkien’s conception of the “sub-creation” of Art as an act of worship or praise of the divine Creation, many objects in *LotR*, too, are infused with a divine signification, either through past lineage or connection to the Story of the Elder Days. As we have already noted, Glamdring, Orcrist, and Sting fulfill the role of sacred objects in *The Hobbit*, linking the “now” of the Company’s Quest to a central narrative surrounding the city of Gondolin, which itself was an evocation of Elven Tirion. In *LotR*, too, objects provide a similar layering of mythic past and narrative present: the Barrow swords, Elendil’s broken sword Narsil, the Gates of Moria, the palantír, and of course the Ring itself. Each of the objects grounds the present narrative of *LotR* in the ancient Stories by requiring that characters understand the object’s history and to some extent its aesthetic nature, while also involving that object in the actions of the Quest of the Ring.

With the phial of Galadriel, significantly, Tolkien is able to layer sacred past and present Quest on a multitude of levels, resulting in an object which embodies the aesthetic transmission of past ideals and beauty to present peoples and circumstances. Flieger in fact calls the phial “The most mystical artifact [in *LotR*] [...], for the Phial transcends fantasy to become myth” (“Fantasy and Reality” 10). For Frodo, the object itself represents a reflection of the Song of Eärendil. Like the song, the object is an aesthetic reflection of the hero/star and serves the same purpose as the star: to signify the defeat of Darkness, to provide hope “in dark places” (II.8.367). In this way, the object links Frodo back to Bilbo’s song of the Eärendil the mariner from the Hall of Fire, as it provides the Ringbearer with a physical manifestation of the song’s subject and themes. In some way, Frodo now holds a literal connection to Eärendil, a small glimmer of the star-that-is-Silmaril that is also hope. As Flieger explains, “the Phial is both a link to past history [...] and a link to the future when the three jewels will be recovered” (11). Before that “end time,” too, the phial connects to the future in the symbolic and literal value it will hold for Sam and Frodo: a light in dark places, or hope.

While the song of Eärendil came to Frodo in Rivendell, the phial comes to him in Lothlórien, another Faërie space where Frodo has walked literally in Elven time, beyond or outside of Middle-earth.³⁰ Even more than in Rivendell, in Lothlórien Frodo has a nearly constant visionary experience and witnesses a reflection or sub-creation of Valinor itself. Coming as it does as a gift from Galadriel, the phial likewise serves to represent a character who herself has lived through sacred, ancient time into the present of *LotR*. The oldest Elf in *LotR*, save perhaps Círdan, someone who has seen Aman itself, has conversed with Elbereth, and has learned from Melian and Lúthien, Galadriel is herself a symbol of the conduit between times, places, and worlds, and her gift, as well as her song, reflects such a convergence. A kind of emissary of Varda to the Ringbearer, Galadriel offers Frodo not an actual star but a “star reflected,” a light that evokes the divine light and the sacred tale.³¹ In this way, the phial links Frodo and Sam to the songs and Stories, to the people and places from which they have learned: Elbereth, Lúthien, Rivendell, Lothlórien, Elrond, Aragorn, and Galadriel. As she reminds him, the phial now offers Frodo a passageway back to the images or power of her mirror just before he prepares to step back into narrative time and to the central portion of the Quest (II.8.367). The phial, like the songs in the Hall of Fire, will also open a passageway back from the “mist” of the Shadow space that surrounds him. On their quest, through their own tales and evocations, the hobbits continually use the jewel to call on the power of that Story in the darkest places of their quest.³²

³⁰ Flieger’s treatment of the Company’s experience in Lothlórien explores the ways in which Time flows differently there, as she explains that Frodo and Sam in particular notice this shift in Time and space: “[Lothlórien] is isolated from the ordinary world not just by its inaccessibility, but also by that indescribable quality that Sam calls Elven magic and that Tolkien called Faërie” (*Question of Time* 91). Once away from Lothlórien, the phial offers the hobbits a reminder of that “other time and space” which of course plays a central role in their success.

³¹ Rosebury notes Tolkien’s tendency to construct “adored, benevolent, intimately present or achingly distant feminine figures,” among them Galadriel and Varda (137). Leslie Donovan explores the influences of the “valkyrie figure” on Galadriel, notably her association with light: “medieval valkyries are sometimes recorded as bestowing on their heroes special gifts of power with properties of brightness” and that “the phial provides Frodo and Sam not only illumination but the strength of Galadriel’s spirit necessary for them to battle the darkness” (114-5). Michael Maher, on the other hand, explores the Marian connotations within Galadriel’s character and imagery (“A Land”).

³² Of course, the conversation Sam and Frodo have at Cirith Ungol concerning the tale of Beren and Lúthien, concerning their place in the greater Story and concerning their doom (*IT* 696-7), weaves together all of the elements which this essay has explored through a focus on *FoTR*. Likewise, their use of the phial and their evocation of Galadriel throughout the latter stages of the Quest underline the central importance of character, object, and

While the references, tales and songs, objects and characters which evoke the Story of the Silmarillion serve specific purposes of “depth” for the readers of Tolkien’s *LotR*, for the characters within the narrative itself, the Story already exists as an understood body of sacred tales. Some of the references and tales they “already know,” such as those references to Gondolin or Finrod, while other elements of the sacred past, such as the Tale of Lúthien, they must learn, often through a bardic figure who performs part of the sacred Story at a pivotal moment. In their exposure to Story, characters such as Bilbo, Frodo, Sam and Aragorn construct thematic, symbolic, and structural connections between the lessons learned from the Song and the life lived in the now. Each moment points to central ways in which the characters are transformed through their experience with song. Likewise, the episodes offer visionary moments wherein the actions of the “now” resonate fully with the actions of the ancient myth, and those who cross over and back from such spaces are forever changed. If, as Brian Rosebury suggests, “For Tolkien the fundamental derived human right is the right to create” (191), these moments reveal characters in the “now” of *LotR* inspired by ancient creations and prompted to create, re-create, and integrate those creations into their own journey, which will in turn, as Sam foresees, become part of the Story. In this way, references and evocations of The Silmarillion succeed not only in suggesting a “sustainable world” for the readers of Middle-earth, but also succeed in suggesting an aesthetic, communal and theological undergirding for the lives and experiences of the characters within *The Lord of the Rings* itself.

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Story. Flieger fully explores these references in relation to Tolkien’s layering process in *Interrupted Music*. Clark calls Galadriel Sam’s “teacher” in avoiding the Ring’s temptation (48).

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