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Abstract

Focuses on Tolkien's narrative treatment in *The Lord of the Rings* and the "Ring as an emergent symbol of language itself." Notes that through Tolkien's "characterization of protagonists and antagonists, his use of sub-texts and 'sub-authors,' Tolkien demonstrates the ways in which magic and language are bound up with one another."

Additional Keywords


Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*—Language; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*—Magic; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*—Narrative; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*—Symbolism

NEGATING AND AFFIRMING SPIRIT THROUGH LANGUAGE

THE INTEGRATION OF CHARACTER, MAGIC, AND STORY IN *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

ALAN MCCOMAS

Introduction

he *Lord of the Rings* is a story that moved me deeply the first time I read it, and has continued to move me through many re-readings. It has long since become one of the most important books of my personal reading experience. It is a story filled with magic, but the magic is very subtly distilled, difficult to find if one looks for it directly. As Sam Gamgee says, "If there's any magic about it, it's right down deep, where I can't lay my hands on it, in a manner of speaking." (I, 467). Sam is attempting to describe his experience of the enchanted realm of Lothlorien, but his words serve as a suitable appraisal of the experience that most readers come away with from Tolkien's epic story as a whole, despite the fact that the crux of the tale is a magical ring which, among other things, makes its wearer invisible. What precisely is magic in *The Lord of the Rings*, and how does it work? The answer to this question is bound up with the story itself, with Tolkien's idea of what stories are, what they do, and how they do it. At the root of story is language, and a question about magic in story must inevitably lead to an examination of the nature of language and its limits.

This paper therefore focuses primarily on the dynamics of Tolkien's narrative treatment. Particularly through his characterizations of protagonists and antagonists, his use of sub-texts and "sub-authors", Tolkien demonstrates the ways in which magic and language are bound up with one another. There is in this an underlying dialogue between author and reader, generated by the story itself, a dialogue that leads us into questions about the nature and meaning of stories. "To ask what is the origin of stories (however qualified)" wrote Tolkien, "is to ask what is the origin of language and of the mind" ("On Fairy Stories", p. 17).

Through his treatment of the people and things that animate his story, Tolkien builds a profound demonstrative commentary on the operation of stories — a commentary based on a penetrating and complex understanding of language itself, its nature, its development, its meaning, and the power for good or evil that it bestows.

Bound up in, and holding together, the larger tapestry of characters, places, and events, is the central image and theme of the story, the magical Ring of Power. As a reflexive linguistic metaphor, I find the image of the Ring as potent and irresistible as Gollum and Frodo find it, as an

actuality, seductive and all consuming. A discussion of the magical Ring as an emergent symbol of language itself must therefore become the central theme of this paper, which approaches the Ring by examining some of the major characters involved with it — Frodo, Sam, Gandalf, and Sauron.

In order to get at these characters I must first explain some of the fundamental linguistic ideas with which Tolkien was working. For the purposes of this paper, it will be enough if I can at least show that Tolkien approached his creative work from a philological standpoint (if not also — in however qualified a sense — from the aesthetic standpoint of a painter, emphasizing the visual aspects of experience).

Philology brings us down to the language at the root of stories, and in order to create a context for a discussion of the linguistic issues underlying Tolkien's prose, I have juxtaposed a number of linguistic arguments from several critical authors. The work of one of these — Rudolf Steiner — became the basis of Owen Barfield's book, *Poetic Diction*. Tolkien was personally acquainted with *Poetic Diction* and its author, and Tolkien's conception of philology was influenced by both. Two other authors who enter the discussion tangentially are Italo Calvino and Walter Benjamin. The works cited from these two are not philologically oriented, but provide access to important facets of the dynamic picture of language through which I hope to illuminate *The Lord of the Rings*.

Part One

Tolkien Himself: Motives and Foundations

Why would a man like Tolkien want to write? What is his writing about? What does it mean? How does it work?

J.R.R. Tolkien was a Professor of English Language at Leeds University, and later a Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford. Language became the subject of his life's work because he was a man in love with language — with letters, runes, script, signs, symbols. The sounds and shapes of words fascinated him.

Out of beautiful designs on a page, meaning and experience may emerge; knowledge and wisdom may be transmitted; intense emotion may be evoked. An essential wonder for the miracle of language — and especially written

language — was perhaps the seed from which Tolkien's scholarly career, and later, his fiction, grew.

Written language is a design for experience, indeed for all the processes and ramifications of living consciousness, and from the cunning shapes of words the mind may extract stories — a mysterious process indeed, and one that is linked to art. Humphrey Carpenter, in his biography of Tolkien, describes Tolkien's sense of language as follows:

"the love of words" ... was what motivated him. It was not an arid interest in the scientific principals of language; it was a deep love for the look and the sound of words, springing from the days when his mother had given him his first Latin lessons.

And as a result of this love of words, he had started to invent his own languages (Tolkien, p. 35).

Tolkien was enamored, not only of the overall effect of a literary text, but of the unique qualities of the individual words comprising it — sensual as well as semantic qualities. The words that struck him as most beautiful turned out to be archaic forms of English words, and of words from other "northern" languages. Small wonder that he specialized in Philology and Anglo-Saxon dialects.

Also being a philologist, getting a large part of any aesthetic pleasure that I am capable of from the form of words (and especially from the fresh association of word-form with word-sense), I have always best enjoyed things in a foreign language, or one so remote as to feel like it (such as Anglo-Saxon). (*Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 172).

A wealth of critical authors — Verlyn Flieger, Timothy R. O'Neill, and T.A. Shippey (to name a very few) have written philosophical, psychological, theosophical and (appropriately) philological studies of *The Lord of the Rings*, and found a wealth of ideas in it. In fact the body of critical literature that has grown around Tolkien has become so large in the years since his death, that, as Tolkien once said of an essay he wrote on *The Ancren Wisse*, it

...has already developed a "literature", (sic) and it is very possible that nothing I can say about it will be either new or illuminating to the industrious or leisured that have kept up with it. I have not. (*The Road to Middle Earth*, p. 5.)

This remark may at first seem discouraging to those who are interested in reading the "literature" that has developed around *The Lord of the Rings*, or it may be taken as guide. Despite his qualms (if not his apologies) regarding his study of critical literature, Tolkien completed and published his essay. Tolkien's point, above, is that his approach to *The Ancren Wisse* is not critical but philological. Philology provides a framework for all of Tolkien's literary endeavors, including his composition of poetry and prose fiction.

The ambition of the science of philology is to reconstruct — or at least to postulate the logical reconstruction

of — lost languages. The work of a philologist is to empirically hypothesize the meanings of languages created by cultures whose whole populations have been lost — dead languages, for which no dictionaries exist. The translation of a dead language is a complex task, accomplished in part through a deductive process of comparison. Surviving fragments of the lost language are compared with more recent texts in related languages. The evolution of word forms can thus be traced back through history. Once translated, the archaic fragments themselves can be employed by philologists as dictionaries and grammars from which to linguistically extrapolate the whole form and structure of the lost language in which the fragments are written.

As a philologist who was intimately acquainted with these arduous philological processes of comparison, translation, and extrapolation, Tolkien would certainly have appreciated the idea of a self-demonstrative text.

A great deal of Tolkien's inspiration lies in the creative use he made of his occupation as a philologist. Why not invent a "lost language", and, with a whole body of narrative text in modern English, define the "scraps" that remain? The modern narrative would give the "scraps" their context, evoke their meanings, provide a glimpse of the "ancient cultures" that created them. Reciprocally, the scraps would deepen and enrich the impact of the narrative in which they were presented.

Scraps, schmaps. Many readers of *The Lord of the Rings* — and other more difficult works such as *The Silmarillion* — are irritated, if not daunted, by the panoply of "Elvish" and "Dwarvish" words and names that fill its pages. These invented words are strangely spelled, their pronunciation is questionable, and there are so many of them that one's memory is strained at times with the effort of remembering what each one means. Those who close and shelve Tolkien's books for these reasons may be thankful that they don't have to make their livings as philologists.

The Lord of the Rings is not, and was not meant to be, a book that appeals to everyone. No one was more surprised at its popular success than its author, who invented the story (and the history) to provide a context for his invented languages. Tolkien's insistence on putting in the "scraps" of "lost" (invented) languages was to his mind a way of lending historic or cultural depth to his fiction, as well as a source of personal pleasure. The story, then, was of secondary importance, in Tolkien's view, to the fantastic languages with which he embellished it. Shippey points out that the writing of *The Lord of the Rings* came about as the result of Tolkien's attempt to provide a context for his invented languages, an attempt in which

...he had tried "to create a situation in which a common greeting would be *elen sila lumenn omentielmo*" [a star shines in the hour of our meeting]. Literary critics might not believe him, but philologists (if any are left) ought to know better. (*The Road to Middle Earth*, p. 13.)

The invented ("lost") languages that Tolkien surrounds

— and defines — with his demonstrative English prose, and the archaic style that characterizes the prose, give his work those elusive qualities that critics and scholars tend to classify as fantasy. Tolkien himself actually considered *The Lord of the Rings* a "fairy tale" in the most sophisticated and complex sense of the term. Yet, if written in a more contemporary style, bereft of the "mythopoeic" ambience that lends it its power, *The Lord of the Rings* could be read as a modern historical novel. The most ostensible elements of Tolkien's story — the drama, struggle, heroism, and romance — are as "normal" as any that might be found in a "realistic" novel.

The Ring in Tolkien's story may be supernaturally endowed, but the story of Frodo Baggins carrying it to Mordor is a story more of natural than of supernatural events, a tale of courage and heroism and treachery rather than of actual magic. (*The Inklings*, p. 157).

It is not insignificant that the whole enchanting story — the magical novel which turns out to be comprised, on closer inspection, of a "fiction of natural events" — was the outgrowth of a hobby. Another hobby cultivated by Tolkien was the production of art. Over the years, he became a reasonably accomplished artist, who produced a sizeable body of work. His ink and watercolor sketches, especially the landscapes he made of Middle-earth, evoke the quality of his prose in a peculiarly accurate and pleasing way. *Pictures by J.R.R. Tolkien*, published by Houghton Mifflin, provides a fairly comprehensive sampling of Tolkien's artwork, which, for the most part, evolved through his attempts to illustrate the world in which his stories are set. Other published examples of his artwork may be found in *The Father Christmas Letters*; a collection of Christmas stories Tolkien wrote and illustrated for his children.

As both an author and an artist, Tolkien must have been conscious of the link between the painterly and literary arts. Yet he was always careful to subordinate the former to the latter. "In human art," he wrote,

Fantasy is a thing best left to words, to true literature. In painting, for instance, the visible presentation of the fantastic image is technically too easy; the hand tends to outrun the mind, even to overthrow it. Silliness or morbidity are frequent results" ("On Fairy Stories", *Tree and Leaf*, p. 49).

Whether Tolkien's personal involvement with the visual arts was suppressed by his rather severe critical opinion of their proper role is not a question to be dealt with here. Rather, the significance of the fact that he was (in however limited a sense) an artist, as well as an author, leads us into a discussion of the relationship between image and language.

The following section of this paper therefore examines that relationship as the linguistic groundwork which lends so much potency to the central image of *The Lord of the Rings* — Sauron's Ring of Power.

Part Two Image, Language, and Evolution

Letters and words are "pictures" once removed. A text is a composition of angled and curved lines — therefore a kind of drawing. When an artist composes a drawing, the pattern of the lines, as it strikes the viewer's eye, mimics or reproduces the visual sensation generated by an actual object. In this direct impact upon the visual sense, art achieves its meaning. But the immediate image of a text — that which impinges upon the eye — is only significant as the first in a series of cognitive operations, undertaken by the reader, which lead to the meaning of the text. The immediate appearance of the written word denotes a secondary image in the mind. So the word "horse", which visually does not in any way resemble the animal it signifies, nevertheless produces, in the reader's imagination, a cognition (if not a sensation) probably very close to the sensation that would be produced by an artist's rendering of the same animal.

Drawing a picture, forming an image, is an endeavor that is equally shared by authors and artists — to the extent that each becomes an ample metaphor of the other. Both writing and drawing are expressive mediums that rely primarily on the faculty of sight — they are the arts of the eye, through which the artist/author evokes a "vision" in the mind of the viewer/reader. On the printed page as well as on the painted canvas, images of human experience are captured and preserved.

Surely the correlation between painting or drawing and writing occurred to Tolkien, whose only intentionally allegorical story, "Leaf by Niggle", may be read as a self-portrait. The protagonist, Niggle, is a painter who represents the author Tolkien. Niggle likes to paint single leaves — each one highly detailed. This correlates with Tolkien's invented words, each of which was evolved through a painstaking process of phonetic and semantic relation to every other — a process which occurs naturally in actual languages. Tolkien found himself, with his invented words, in a situation he allegorized via Niggle as follows:

There was one picture in particular which bothered him. It had begun with a leaf caught in the wind, and it became a tree; and the tree grew, sending out innumerable branches, and thrusting out the most fantastic roots. Strange birds came and settled on the twigs and had to be attended to. Then all round the Tree, and behind it, through the gaps in the leaves and boughs, a country began to open out; and there were glimpses of a forest marching over the land, and of mountains tipped with snow ("Leaf by Niggle", *Tree and Leaf*, p. 88).

In "Leaf", Tolkien expounds his own creative process and spiritual development through the tale of an amateur artist whose creative aspirations insistently outmatch his productive capabilities, but ultimately shape and define the world of his soul.

In his book *The Uses of Literature*, Italo Calvino examines

the intimate relationship of words and pictures, and to demonstrate the antiquity of our cognizance regarding this relationship, he quotes Michelangelo: "Sometimes I think and imagine that among men there exists a single art and science, and that this is drawing or painting, and that all the others derive from it". (*Uses of Literature*, p. 295).

We may infer then, that Michelangelo would exalt art even more severely than Tolkien would subjugate it, and that the two, had they ever met, might have entered into a heated argument on the topic! But this is beside Calvino's point, as well as mine. Tolkien and Michelangelo are looking at the same spectrum from opposite ends. At one end is language, at the other is art. In the middle is the cerebral image of the world, generated by both, which leads to the same crucial result — the understanding of the world that we gain through its re-creation. It is a conscious, knowledgeable understanding, which cannot be realized until it is articulated.

This new understanding of the world, attainable only through our re-imagining of it, is the idea that Calvino supports with Michelangelo's quote. Calvino himself puts it this way:

Everything man does is depiction, visual creation, spectacle. The world, marked by man's presence in its every part, is no longer nature: it is produced by our hands. A new anthropology is announced whereby every activity and production of man counts as visual communication in its linguistic and aesthetic aspects (*Uses of Literature*, p. 296).

"A new anthropology is announced". What was the old anthropology? It was unconscious, un-imagined, inarticulate. The world "is no longer nature: it is produced by our hands". In what sense? In what terms? In the sense of art. In the terms of language. We reproduce the infinite varieties of substance and being in the world — the "language" of nature — with a universally transformational visual medium. Michelangelo posits that this medium is paint. Paint, organized and articulated by the artist, can reproduce the visible phenomena of stone, sky, water, flesh — imaging and uniting all the distinctly incongruous aspects of the world. It is a very short step from this pictorial process to a linguistic one. Let the medium become ink, abstract the images into symbols, and the artist becomes a writer. The point remains that whether we are dealing with canvases or manuscripts, once the world has been "translated" in this way, our perception of it changes. We begin to see the world itself as a form of language.

Walter Benjamin has examined this link between what we see and what we say, demonstrating a circular recognition of the object as a language of itself, the transformation of this essential language into media that can be articulated by the human mind and hand, and the reflection in each of the other. Benjamin writes:

The translation of the language of things into that of man is not only a translation of the mute into the sonic; it is also the translation of the nameless into name. It

is therefore the translation of an imperfect language into a more perfect one, and cannot but add something to it, namely knowledge. (from *Reflections*, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," p. 325.)

Here Benjamin is emphasizing the "sonic" versus the visual aspect of language, but the form or media through which he communicates this distinction is of course the printed page. To Michelangelo's and Calvino's assertion that language is image, and that with this imagery we recognize the perceived world as language, Benjamin adds that the world, linguistically re-cognized, attains self-knowledge; consciousness. Through language — and in literature, specifically visual or imagistic language — we come to know the world and to know ourselves.

Benjamin posits an inescapable dichotomy in our perception, once we have attained consciousness through language. Reality is now comprised of two languages — "the language of things," and "the language of man." Having re-imagined the world in language, we are now faced with the difference between being and knowing. "The language of things," silent and inarticulate, simply is. We qualify it as ontology. "The language of man," which speaks and knows, is qualified as epistemology. The price we pay for our consciousness lies in this new division of the universe defined by our language.

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

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 faerie is more potent. ...When we 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. (*Tree and Leaf*, "On Fairy-Stories," p. 22).

In this passage Tolkien celebrates the imagistic power of language, and indicates a notion sympathetic with Benjamin's dichotomy of a "language of things" versus a "language of man." Only the latter is the inheritance of humans. Tolkien qualifies and acknowledges the limits of the new powers of consciousness we attain through language. These powers, he admits, are operative only "upon one plane," namely the non-material plane of thought itself.

It could be argued that human thought has already achieved, through the expanded articulation made possible by its continued fragmentation in language (perhaps most particularly in the quantified language of mathematics), a monstrous potency, capable of effectively reproducing omnipotent malignancy — if not omnipotent beneficence — in the material or external world. That we can achieve our desire, and "wield the power" of language "in the world external to our minds." But that fact doesn't make ours an ontological language. Being must precede knowing — the "language of man" would not exist without the "language of things." Proud and powerful as our knowledge has made us, it remains merely the afterthought of our existence.

Calvino's discussion of imagery as a foundation of language correlates with Tolkien's own demonstration of language as image: the Ring of Power. Benjamin, meanwhile, explores the linguistic basis of dichotomies that Tolkien demonstrates throughout his invented cosmogony — being/knowing, metaphysical/physical, creator/creature.

A fourth dichotomy demonstrated by Tolkien, and the one with which this paper is most closely concerned, I will refer to as spirit/magic. Benjamin's discourse resonates with the nuts and bolts of Tolkien's conception of spirit versus magic. The ultimate source of spirit in Middle-earth, and the answer to the question of who is empowered by magic there, hinges on the linguistic distinctions outlined above.

Thus far I have arranged this presentation of ideas on language itself in a linear manner. Calvino finds a genesis for language in image, and a consequent revolution in perception once language is activated. The conscious percipient now views reality itself as a form of language. Benjamin specifies the identity of the new, universal dichotomy that results from this re-cognition through language: ontology and epistemology become the poles of reality. Tolkien qualifies the epistemological as interior, and notes the human desire to exteriorize it — to make it isomorphic, somehow, with the phenomena it signifies.

I now bring in an explanation of the ideas of Rudolf Steiner, not as another link in the chain of ideas outlined above, but as a field on which these ideas may impinge and interact. According to Verlyn Flieger (*Splintered Light*, p. 36), Tolkien's philosophical views on language were deeply influenced by Owen Barfield's book, *Poetic Diction*. Barfield attributed the central thesis of his book to the linguistic ideas of Rudolph Steiner. Steiner was an anthropologist, and his ideas on the nature and development of language were only a part of a whole system of religious philosophy he developed called anthroposophy (*Poetic Diction*, p. 12). A very brief explanation of anthroposophy would go something like this:

Steiner's philosophy, which he felt was fundamentally Christian though not sectarian, holds that the process of evolution, which involves not only mankind but the

whole universe, is anthropocentric, and is a process of coming to consciousness in which man has become progressively more aware of himself and his surroundings, while at the same time becoming increasingly separate from the world around him and from the power which began the whole process. This coming to consciousness, now at a stage in which man is completely separated from the natural and supernatural world, is a necessary step in the progression to full consciousness, in which man will be at once fully aware of himself as an individual and fully aware of his union with God and the universe. (from Flieger, *Splintered Light*, p. 37. Barfield's linguistic theories — of which Steiner's anthroposophy forms the foundation — are summarized at greater length in chapter three of this book — and in Carpenter's *Inklings* — see also chapter three).

Tolkien's conception of Sauron and his Ring of Power evokes, as story, at least one aspect of Steiner's ideas on "evolution" — namely that the price of humanity's "coming to consciousness" is, as Flieger puts it above, a *complete separation* "from the natural and supernatural world", or as Carpenter says, a state (eventually to be transcended) "in which the human microcosm is now completely cut off from the macrocosm" (*The Inklings*, p. 36). Hence (back to Flieger) "we now perceive the cosmos as particularized, fragmented, and wholly separate from ourselves" (*Splintered Light*, p. 39).

Putting together Steiner's ideas with Benjamin's leads to the notion that it is epistemological language, the "language of man", by necessity unidentified with any of its objects, that has catalyzed the present human condition, i.e. our sense that we do not participate in nature, but control it — our loss, even, of connectedness with the nature of our selves (and all the global problems that both have caused).

The idea of such a linguistic denaturalization is further corroborated by Calvino's assertion that, having devised a system (any system) of language, we become capable not only of perceiving nature as language, but of perceiving nature as *our own invention* ("The world...is no longer nature: it is produced by our hands").

What is suggested is that consciousness, through the eons, begins to resemble the linguistic machinery that it operates (and by which it defines itself). "Language and the human mind act and react on each other", wrote Wordsworth (*Poetic Diction*, p. 58). The danger of using language lies in the tendency of our sense of nature — our ontological sense of the infinite continuum in which we participate — to become lost in the linguistic system we originally invented to communicate that sense. Lost in the labyrinth of "the language of man," we no longer perceive the unnamed object of the linguistic process — only the process itself.

In our arrogance, we forget that all our knowledge is based on a finite transformational system — hence all our

knowledge is finite. By contrast, our existence participates in an infinite continuum. It is absurd to assume that we can contain and possess the infinite within the limits of what we know.

That is the same mistake that Sauron makes.

We might say that language itself is what is biblically represented by "the forbidden fruit": the cause of our expulsion from paradise. But the hope held forth by the knowledge gained from the fruit (for anthroposophists, at least) is that by the consciousness we gain and cultivate through language, we will at last regain paradise — we will fully identify with nature and the universe, but no longer be ignorant of our individuality, our selfhood.

Such hope is not entirely false as long as we can assert that language, in its (and our) present state, has good as well as bad potentials.

This assertion is what Tolkien demonstrates in *The Lord of the Rings*, through his antithetical constructions of Good and Evil, the former evoked in the characterizations of Frodo, Sam, Gandalf, the Elves, and the other affirmative peoples of Middle-earth, the latter characterized by Sauron and his minions, studies in negation and dissembly.

The linguistic foundation of affirmation in Tolkien's invented mythos is "Spirit". The converse of Spirit is "Void". Spirit is evocative of all that is fundamentally substantive or true. The "good" language in the story is oriented toward Spirit. The affirmative characters in the story subordinate knowing to being. The "bad" language, evinced through the "evil" character constructions within the story, is oriented toward the Void. What is evil about Sauron is his assumption that, through his knowledge — knowledge and power arrived at, and literally contained by, language — he can possess everything that is.

Sauron's assumption is based on the lie that his knowledge is infinite — but lying will literally get you nowhere in Middle-earth, especially if you lie to yourself.

Here I would qualify the foregoing by pointing out that neither Benjamin nor Tolkien are positing the existence of some sort of "true language" — as if the "words" spoken by the "Creator" could be rediscovered by mortals, who would then achieve a divine creative power. C. S. Lewis describes such a "divine language," one comprised of words whose

meanings were not given to the syllables by chance, or skill, or long tradition, but truly inherent in the them as the shape of the great Sun is inherent in the little waterdrop (C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, chapter 10).

This is more or less analogous with Benjamin's "language of things", but makes the mistaken presumption that the "language of things" can be re-spoken! I have already shown the inherent contradiction of this notion in the explanation of terms given above. C.S. Lewis is not the only author ever to have posited a language which somehow unites signifier with signified, a language that might

therefore empower its speaker with the ability, through speech, to literally manipulate reality. The idea is an interesting one, especially when it is employed as a reflexive device — a language that can only be spoken within a story, as in Ursula K. Leguin's *A Wizard of Earthsea*. But for the purposes of this paper, I must argue against the plausibility of such a language.

The "language of things" is not self-contained. It is attached to, and cannot be estranged from, its object. The existence of the object simply, and inevitably, demonstrates a self evident "language". It is a demonstration — according to Calvino's remark on the "new anthropology" introduced by language — of which we are not cognizant until after we have invented transformational images/names for the perceived phenomena. Hence Benjamin's assertion that the "language of things" is an imperfect language, because it is locked into its object. The words "spoken by God" that bring the world into existence can only do so if there is a God to speak them. It is the speaker, not the speech, that lends potency to the "language of things."

I wish to suggest that the import of the message conveyed by *The Lord of the Rings* is not a lament for a kind of supremely realized, and subsequently lost, "divine language," but a celebration of the actual linguistic processes through which we come to know ourselves and our world, and with which, for better or for worse, we are enabled to reinvent them both.

Part Three

Entering, Exiting, Enchanting and Disenchanting; Story Mediated by Character

Having, in all of the above, given a brief sketch of Tolkien's linguistic ideas, and extrapolated a critical framework to support my approach, I now move on to an examination of *The Lord of the Rings* itself. The next step to be taken toward an appreciation of the One Ring as an emergent symbol of language involves a discussion of two major characters who are closely involved with the Ring, and with whom the reader is closely identified: the hobbits, Frodo Baggins and Sam Gamgee.

If Sauron is the most impersonally drawn character of *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo and Sam are the most intimately drawn. It is the hobbits with whom we identify — not only because of their ordinary human frailties, but because the third person narrator consistently treats hobbits from a more complete, more interiorized point of view than any other type of creature in the book — man or elf, ent or wizard. Yet the two antipodes of narrative treatment — Sauron/hobbits — are united by the Ring. The Ring is the one aspect of Sauron we are brought intimately close to, because it is possessed by a hobbit. It abides in Bilbo's pocket for years, and in *The Hobbit*, the third person narrator puts us right next to Bilbo on the occasions when he wears it. The same can be said for Frodo, and even Sam, in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Hobbits are the everymen of Tolkien's drama. Frodo Baggins is cast as a pointedly reluctant hero, one who has been thrust into his role by fate. After learning about the evil nature of the Ring and the need to destroy it, he exclaims,

"I do really wish to destroy it! ...Or, well, to have it destroyed. I am not made for perilous quests. I wish I had never seen the Ring! Why did it come to me? Why was I chosen?" (I, pp. 94-95)

Verlyn Flieger, in her essay "Frodo and Aragorn: The Concept of the Hero," describes Frodo in the following way:

He is a little man both literally and figuratively, and we recognize ourselves in him. He is utterly ordinary, and this is his great value. He has the characteristics also of Frye's low mimetic hero, the hero of realistic fiction. He has doubts, feels fear, falters, makes mistakes; he experiences, in short, the same emotions we experience. (Quoted from the collection, *Tolkien: New Critical Perspectives*, p. 41)

Flieger compares Frodo and Aragorn as two fundamentally different sorts of hero, the former a simple, reluctant everyman with whom we readily identify, the latter "a traditional epic/romance hero, larger than life, a leader, fighter, lover, healer." Aragorn is both "higher" and more archaic than Frodo, but is also a protagonist, and so is ultimately analogous to Frodo in many ways. That is beside Flieger's point, but the contrast between Frodo and Aragorn is one of many through which Tolkien evokes the idea that

without the high and noble the simple and vulgar is utterly mean; and without the simple and ordinary the noble and heroic is meaningless. (*Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 160).

My own point is that Tolkien sets up many contrasting relationships to demonstrate many ideas and theses through his characters and their interactions. Flieger's description of Frodo supports my suggestion that Frodo is the antithesis of Sauron, who is not only the story's major antagonist, but also its most inaccessible character. Sauron is the inmost of the Chinese boxes that comprise the story; Sauron is magical, immortal, ancient, mysterious, perilous, evil. Frodo is the outermost of these boxes. He is tiny, meek, vulnerable. He is ordinary, mortal, modern, obvious, and good. We celebrate his thirty-third birthday with him, we hide by the side of the road with him from the Black Rider, we bathe and eat and sing with Frodo and his friends.

Frodo, Sam, Pippin and Merry, more than any of the other characters in the *The Lord of the Rings*, mediate the fantasy of Middle-earth for the reader. The whole affair is as strange to them as it is to us. Everything must be explained to hobbits (and readers), by characters who are better informed (which means just about everybody else).

"Modern" is perhaps among the most important of the

antitheses that delineate Frodo and his fellows from Sauron, the ancient enemy. The Shire, Frodo's homeland, is a small pleasant country in the west of Middle-earth. The social and cultural aspects of the Shire are anomalously modern, when compared to the archaic, romantic landscape of the rest of Middle-earth. Only in the Shire can one visit a museum, where weapons and armor are displayed as obsolete relics, suitable for study and dusting (I, p. 25). Meanwhile, not far beyond the borders of the small country where hobbits pursue their plain, sensible, trivial notions of modern decency, kings and wizards, orcs and elves, armies and nations are engaged in cataclysmic warfare, using weapons of the sort that are displayed in the hobbits' museum.

The inhabitants of the Shire tend to operate very autonomously of — and even in ignorance of — the Middle-earth of which the Shire is a part. Charles Williams, a fellow author and a friend of Tolkien's, saw the Shire's detachment from the romantic world surrounding it as a centrally important aspect of Tolkien's whole conception:

"C. Williams who is reading it all [i.e. the manuscript of *LotR*]," Tolkien noted at the time, "says the great thing is that its *centre* is not in strife and war and heroism (though they are all understood and depicted) but in freedom, peace, ordinary life and good living. Yet he agrees that these very things require the existence of a great world outside the Shire — lest they should grow stale by custom and turn into the humdrum." (from *The Inklings*, by Humphrey Carpenter, p. 123).

The politics and economy of the Shire also exhibit a markedly modern (and pointedly English) quality. In the years before the Third Age of Middle-earth "The hobbits took the land [the Shire] for their own, and they chose from their own chiefs a Thain to hold the authority of the king that was gone" (I, p. 24). But the Thains who rule the Shire seem to exhibit a very "laissez-faire" attitude toward government, and the closing chapters of *The Return of the King*, where they are concerned with sanctioned authorities in the Shire, deal more with Mayors (namely Will Whitfoot and his successor, Sam Gamgee) than Thains. The Shire is described from the outset as "a district of well-ordered business" (I, p. 24). The Shire is in many ways already less magical and more realistic than the Kingdom of Gondor (of which it is a fief) as Gondor is restored by the book's end (Gondor is a kingdom of humans, versus elves, and the center of the disenchanting new age). But already at the start of the story, it is within the Shire that the seeds of modernity, destined to hold sway in the world, are sprouting.

The Shire is a doorstep that leads into the enchantments of Middle-earth — a doorstep Tolkien makes familiar, ordinary, realistic. It is not very unlike our own world — specifically, not very unlike Tolkien's sentimental notion of the English countryside, with its inns and farms and beer, its comfortable sitting rooms and well stocked pantries and pots of tea. It serves, not only as a point of

departure from our world into Middle-earth—smoothing the transition from reality to fantasy—but as an intimation of what Middle-earth is destined to become—namely, a world entirely like our own. Or rather, *our world* in its present “disenchanted” form:

I am historically minded. Middle-earth is not an imaginary world. The name is the modern form (appearing in the 13th century and still in use) of *midden-erd/middel-erd*, an ancient name for the oikoumene, the abiding place of Men, the objectively real world, in use specifically opposed to imaginary worlds (as Fairyland) or unseen worlds (as Heaven or Hell). The theatre of my tale is this earth, the one in which we now live, but the historical period is imaginary. The essentials of that abiding place are all there (at any rate for inhabitants of N.W. Europe), so naturally it feels familiar, even if a little glorified by the enchantment of distance and time. (*Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 239).

The enchanted world, then, must have both a doorstep—the Shire—and a doorman, Frodo Baggins, “as nice a young hobbit as you could wish to meet” (I, p. 45), to transpose it onto the disenchanted world, occupied by the reader, wherein its “history” may be studied:

Both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* can be seen as primarily works of mediation. In the former Bilbo acts as the link between modern times and the archaic world of dwarves and dragons. In the latter Frodo and his Shire companions play a similar part... (from *The Road to Middle Earth*, by Professor T.A. Shippey, p. 169)

We must go to the Shire to meet Frodo, but having gone that far, everything else is brought to us. The talisman of the most fantastic level of the story is put into Frodo’s hands in the opening chapters of the book:

Frodo took the envelope from the mantelpiece, and glanced at it, but did not open it.

“You’ll find his [Bilbo’s] will and all the other documents in there, I think,” said the wizard [Gandalf]. “You are master of Bag End now. And also, I fancy, You’ll find a golden ring.”

“The Ring!” exclaimed Frodo. “Has he left me that?” (I, 63).

From the very outset of the story, Sauron and Frodo are intimately associated, through the agency of the Ring. Indeed Frodo’s movements, as we follow him through the text, are inverse to Sauron’s movements. Frodo must go from his well-grounded, ordinary Shire, further and further into the dangers (as well as the wonders and marvels) of “the East”. Frodo carries us deeper and deeper into the realms of the Fantastic as he wanders toward Mordor. But by implication, Sauron’s movements are entirely in the opposite direction. The epitome of the Fantastic, Sauron emerges from the depths of the imagined, to appear at the doorstep of Bag End, Frodo’s home, and the reader’s point of departure into Middle-earth. The Ring itself is the most immediate representation of Sauron’s presence in Frodo’s proximity, and only a little later, the Black Riders, agents

of Sauron, pursue Frodo through the Shire—*having ridden out from Mordor on horseback*.

Sauron, who is for hobbits (and readers) a nearly forgotten matter of legend and lore—a story within the story—remains the goal, thematically and logically, of the narrative. The pathway of Tolkien’s narrative slowly draws us closer and closer to Sauron as Frodo pursues the quest to destroy the Ring, in such a way that the image of Sauron becomes at last immense—not only because the Ring-Bearer penetrates the heart of Sauron’s realm, and is surrounded, exteriorly, by the vast landscape of Mordor, but because the potency of the Ring penetrates and overwhelms Frodo’s inmost consciousness.

With the third person narrator, the reader enters Middle Earth on the shoulder of Frodo, and it is through the eyes and ears of Frodo, or one of his hobbit friends (Sam, Merry, or Pippin) that the reader takes in the events of Tolkien’s narrative. Because of his central role it is arguable that Frodo is the protagonist with whom the reader will identify most closely as the story unwinds, but Frodo’s portrait would be largely incomplete were it not for Sam Gamgee.

If Frodo is a modernized, reluctant knight, Sam is his faithful squire. Much of our sense of Frodo’s persona, his pain and his spiritual struggle, comes from Sam’s observations. Sam is certainly, at least, more of an everyman than Frodo. Frodo might be considered a member of the “landed gentry” in the Shire. He is Bilbo’s heir, the master of Bag End and of a comfortable fortune, well educated, well read, and, as the Elven Lord Glorfindel describes him, “a scholar in the Ancient Tongue,” the language of the Elves (I, 119). Sam by contrast is Frodo’s simple-minded gardener, the son of “Gaffer” Gamgee, who was in turn Bilbo’s gardener. Sam lacks Frodo’s eloquence, and has the habit of apologizing for his simplified way of saying things:

“Yes, sir. I don’t know how to say it, but after last night I feel different. I seem to see ahead, in a kind of way. I know we are going to take a very long road, into darkness; but I know I can’t turn back. It isn’t to see Elves now, nor dragons, nor mountains, that I want—I don’t rightly know what I want: but I have something to do before the end, and it lies ahead, not in the Shire. I must see it through, sir, if you understand me.” (I, p. 127).

We see in this typical statement of Sam’s that his “simple” way of putting things is in fact very penetrating and concise. With the few words he chooses, Sam articulates many of the story’s largest themes and metaphors. He is cognizant of his own importance and foresight, and he uses words that resonate with Tolkien’s most fundamental images of fantasy. Yet Sam admits already (at this early phase of the story) that fantasy isn’t what he wants.

Sam is voicing a state of mind that differs considerably from Frodo’s “reluctance”, and the difference becomes crucially important. Frodo is the hobbit who brings us into

the story, and Sam ultimately proves to be the hobbit who leads us safely out of it. What Sam wants (though he doesn't yet "know" it), is a good, plain, wholesome, modern reality — like that in which the reader is situated — and he knows this can't be had as long as the Ring exists to threaten his world with its corrupting (and archaic) influence. Sam's stubborn, stout heart and plain common sense ultimately become the qualities that enable him to carry the Quest to its completion (and indeed he literally must carry Frodo up the slopes of Mt. Doom before the end — see III, 268). Sam's character evolves conversely to Frodo's. He becomes more and more realistic as Frodo grows more and more ethereal.

Cert. (sic.) Sam is the most closely drawn character, the successor to Bilbo of the first book, the genuine hobbit. Frodo is not so interesting, because he has to be high-minded, and has (as it were) a vocation. The book will prob. end up with Sam. Frodo will naturally become too ennobled and rarefied by the achievement of the great Quest, and will pass West with all the great figures; but S. will settle down to the Shire and gardens and inns. (Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien, p. 105).

Because Sam and his friends ultimately triumph, we might say that *The Lord of the Rings* is a story of the normalization of an enchanted world. The Ruling Ring must be destroyed, and its destruction precipitates the end of the "Third Age" and the diminishment of all the enchantment engendered by the three "uncorrupted" rings of power:

"The Third Age of the world is ended, and the new age is begun; and it is your task to order its beginning and to preserve what may be preserved. For though much has been saved, much must now pass away; and the power of the Three Rings also is ended. And all the lands that you see, and those that lie round about them, shall be dwellings of Men. For the time comes of the Dominion of Men, and the Elder Kindred shall fade or depart" (III, 308).

Gandalf addresses this comment to Aragorn, the King returned, but the exchange might well be relegated to Frodo, and addressed to Sam — there are many correlations between both sets of figures. Sam and Aragorn will live on in a world from which much enchantment has fallen away, while Frodo and Gandalf will recede, not into a void, but into that unmanifested source of creation from which all stories (and all language) springs.

The effect on the reader of these characterized relationships to the Other and to Reality, (Frodo/Sam, Gandalf/Aragorn, Middle-earth/Modern world) is that when we come to the end of the story we do not feel that we leave behind us an imaginary reality, but that we have been left behind by it.

The world within the story has, in the process of its narration, become disenchanting, but we witness that disenchantment, imaged as drama, while it occurs. Meanwhile the underlying dynamic of magic, history, ontology, and genesis that Tolkien constructs beneath the story of

the rings of power, conveys to us a very powerful intuitive understanding of the metaphysical "place" into which the enchantment goes.

All this makes *The Lord of the Rings* a very satisfying story indeed, but our desire to actually attain that lost space of enchantment is left unsatisfied — and definitively unsatisfiable — afterwards. This is especially true, I believe, for those like myself who read the book at a comparatively young age, before having come across other similar (and many much older) conceptions of a higher realm from which pure ideas descend, only to be manifested imperfectly "in the world exterior to ourselves". I think I am not alone in perceiving myself as a person for whom *The Lord of the Rings* was the book that first carved out a genuine conception of that space within the compass of my understanding.

The contrasting dynamic in the perceptions of Sam and Frodo is at first only comic, but becomes more and more poignant as the two friends move deeper into danger and desolation. This dynamic, and the interiority it conveys, is perhaps most ostensibly demonstrated by descriptions of dreams. Hence, in Tom Bombadil's house, Frodo dreams, prophetically, of Gandalf's imprisonment on the Tower of Orthanc (I, p. 177), while "Sam slept through the night in deep content, if logs are contented (I, 178)". But the circumstances grow darker, and so do the dreams.

On the long road to Rivendell, Frodo is stabbed by a Black Rider, and slips into delirium in the days that follow, as his friends hurry to bring him to safety. Here he dreams, one night, that "he walked on the grass in his garden in the Shire, but it seemed faint and dim, less clear than the tall black shadows that stood looking over the hedge" (I, p. 271). On a succeeding night, "Frodo lay half in a dream, imagining that endless dark wings were sweeping by above him, and that on the wings rode pursuers that sought him in all the hollows of the hills" (I, p. 273).

As Frodo and Sam draw close to Orduin and the quest's completion, Sam attains a state in which

Dream and waking mingled easily. He saw lights like gloating eyes, and dark creeping shapes, and he heard noises as of wild beasts or the dreadful cries of tortured things; and he would start up to find the world all dark and only empty blackness all about him (III, 262).

As Sauron's will penetrates Frodo through the Ring and Sam shoulders more and more of the responsibility for their survival, the difference between the inner perceptions of the two hobbits becomes alarmingly marked. Frodo tells Sam that

"No taste of food, no feel of water, no sound of wind, no memory of tree or grass or flower, no image of moon or star are left to me. I am naked in the dark, Sam, and there is no veil between me and the wheel of fire. I begin to see it even with my waking eyes, and all else fades" (III, 264.)

Whereas for Sam,

though all his thoughts there came the memory of water; and every brook or stream or fount that he had ever seen, under green willow-shaped or twinkling in the sun, danced and rippled for his torment behind the blindness of his eyes. He felt the cool mud about his toes and he paddled in the Pool at Bywater with Jolly Cotton and Tom and Nibs, and their sister Rosie. "But that was years ago," he sighed, "and far away. The way back, if there is one, goes past the Mountain" (III, 265)

Here the diverging characterizations of Frodo and Sam reach their most extreme development. The Ring, at this point, has gnawed away at Frodo's nature to the point where he can no longer consciously sense himself. What he senses within himself instead is the interior experience of Sauron. Frodo has utterly lost his sense of place in reality.

To return for a moment to the linguistic ideas outlined earlier, we might say that Frodo is lost within the epistemological labyrinth of the language that is Sauron — literally, the language that encircles the Ring of Power. Trapped within the spell of the Ring, Frodo no longer senses his ontology at all. The juxtaposed images of Sam's interior experience (happening simultaneously) emphasize the Ring's insidious penetration and transformation of Frodo's psyche. We never enter the Tower of Barad-dûr, or stand face to face with Sauron, but images of Sauron's inferiority are revealed to us through Frodo.

Frodo's will is at last consumed by the Ring; he yields to the temptation to claim it for his own. (And the rhetoric he employs to announce his collapse significantly emphasizes Frodo's *absence*: "I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!" [III, 274]. The "I" delivering this last explication can in effect be identified as Sauron. Throughout, the narrative emphasizes that he alone is truly capable of "possessing" the Ring). It is Frodo's fate, and a will much greater than his own, which finally undoes his resolve. By contrast — and by necessity — it is Sam's characteristic stubbornness that delivers Frodo and the Ring to the end of the quest (if not its final resolution. That is a matter in the hands of much higher powers than the little hobbits, not the least of which — ironically — is the will of Sauron himself, as defined by the text of the Ring!).

Sam never wavers in his conviction. As Charles Williams would say, he values "freedom, peace, ordinary life and good living" above all else, and he yearns for these things more and more powerfully as he goes deeper into darkness and danger. In that sense, Sam always faithfully asserts his nature, his ontology, over his knowledge. Sam clings desperately to the memories of his past, and learns to follow his instincts. "Don't trust your head, Samwise," he tells himself, "it's not the best part of you" (II, 350).

Sam ultimately becomes a kind of inversion of Tolkien, the author whose "escapist" fiction takes us into fantasy. When Sam generates an "escapist" narrative of his own, for the purpose of consoling and encouraging Frodo (as well

as himself) in the wasteland of Mordor, the thrust of the passage carries us out of the fantastic, back toward our own reality — back toward the common, everyday comforts of the Shire:

"And then we can have some rest and some sleep," said Sam. He laughed grimly. "and I mean just that, Mr. Frodo. I mean plain ordinary rest, and sleep, and waking up to a morning's work in the garden. I'm afraid that's all I'm hoping for all the time. All the big important plans are not for my sort. Still, I wonder if we shall ever be put into songs or tales. We're in one, of course; but I mean: put into words, you know, told by the fireside, or read out of a great big book with red and black letters, years and years afterwards." (III, p. 408).

Sam says these words to Frodo as they are about to begin climbing the stairs of Cirith Ungol. They are in the Mountains of Mordor, a place full of danger, and on their way to things more dangerous yet. Impelled by his desire to escape the situation, Sam fictionalizes his actual circumstances in the context of the scenario he creates, and authors a secondary reality that is — unattainable as it seems in its whole context — merely ordinary. Having written Sam into a dire nightmare of the fantastic, Tolkien lets Sam sketch out a little fantasy of his own, and the direction of escape is reflected toward the reader.

Through Sam, Tolkien comments on the ways in which his novel is working by inverting the process. Sam wishes to escape the dark imagined realm into which the reader has eagerly followed Tolkien's narrative. Sam imagines that he and all his troubles can be relegated to something that might be "read out of a great big book with red and black letters" — the very book, in fact, that the reader is perusing, probably in the comfort of a warm living room with a cushioned sofa! The escapists trade places, as it were. Or to put it another way, Sam the hobbit (mediator) has held up a mirror to the reader, as if to remind us how lucky we are to have a sofa, a book, a light to read by, and some tea to refresh ourselves with. What is going on here is something that Tolkien calls "Recovery":

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

The mediating hobbits demonstratively remind us of our actual situation (we are reading a story), of the wonder that surrounds us in our primary reality — the story we live out — and of the importance of not taking things for granted. The value of fantasy (and in a broader sense of all fiction) lies partly in this ability to give us a vicarious experience of realities that are out of the ordinary. Only when we can compare the ordinary with something of a

different nature can we appreciate and value it.

Frodo corroborates Sam's function as a sub-author, not by inverting the direction of escape, but by authoring the story itself. In the concluding chapters of the narrative Tolkien presents us with a scene in which hobbits literally close the book, end the story, push the reader back out into reality. The book that Tolkien has written becomes an object that is contained by the secondary reality of Middle-earth, a book of "history" compiled by Frodo himself, who thus supersedes Tolkien. It is the very book Sam foresaw with his wishful thinking — "a big book with plain red leather covers; its tall pages were now almost filled. At the beginning there were many leaves covered with Bilbo's thin wandering hand; [i.e. *The Hobbit*, the authorship of which Tolkien relinquishes to Bilbo in much the same way] but most of it was written in Frodo's firm flowing script" (III, 379). On the title page, Frodo has written "THE DOWNFALL OF THE LORD OF THE RINGS AND THE RETURN OF THE KING".

"Why, you have nearly finished it, Mr. Frodo!" Sam exclaimed. "well, you have kept at it, I must say."

"I have quite finished, Sam," said Frodo. "The last pages are for you." (III, 380).

This role Frodo plays as the literal author of the story is not merely tacked on at the end, but implied from the very start. The "Red Book" is immediately objectified in a note following the Prologue to *The Fellowship* (I, 37). Frodo claims he is writing on history, geography, and hobbit lore at the inn at Bree, the Prancing Pony (I, 213). Bilbo remarks to Frodo in Rivendell that "I have written some more of my book" (I, 305), and later asks Frodo to help him with it, as well as help him make "a start on the next" (I, 358).

Thus, the object on which the whole conjecture is based, the book comprising the text which communicates the (fantastic) notion of a magically transcendent text (the Ring), subsumes itself and is re-integrated with the language it contains. The circle of language completes and contains itself; the imaginative vision is qualified as fiction, a purely cerebral circumscription of a set of disembodied ideas. Tolkien demonstratively asserts the interiority of "the language of man." The reader is at last forced to perceive Tolkien's fantasy in the disenchanted state of language as we know it: a system of symbols that can reflect the experience of reality vicariously, in the mind's eye, but cannot satisfy our desire to re-create reality itself, "in the world external to our minds."

As for Frodo, finally he disappears into those inaccessible regions of thought and imagination of which his story gives the reader both a dramatic (or mythic) explanation, and an intuitive experience. He sails beyond the Sea,

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

back, and he beheld white shores and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise." (III, 384).

The simile referring us back to dream in this description of Frodo's grand exit is significant because it interiorizes, in a final sense, the country of the Elves, the "space" into which Frodo retreats — that space within the human soul where only thoughts and ideas may go, but where they are infused with a life of their own.

To be continued.

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