

CHAPTER 10

TOLKIEN'S COSMIC-CHRISTIAN
ECOLOGY: THE MEDIEVAL UNDERPINNINGS*Alfred K. Siewers*

Tolkien's fascination with Celtic otherworldly narrative traditions helps to illumine the ecologically centered aspects of his fantasy. Views of nature that emerged in early-medieval literature from incarnational, cosmic emphases of Christianity (in tandem with earlier mythology) provided a narrative base for Tolkien's critique of modern objectifying views of nature.

At the start of the third millennium, readers still immersed in the end of the Third Age in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* included tree-house living eco-pagan activists blocking motorway construction in England and evangelical Christians at conservative Wheaton College (Illinois) dedicating a new library in honor of Tolkien and his literary friends the Inklings. "The beauty of the road-protests was that they enabled us as young adults to fully indulge those escapist fantasies," said activist eco-pagan Andy Letcher, "whilst engaging in a meaningful ecological struggle. . . . Tolkien grounded us, and made us relevant."¹ In the heartland of an American consumer culture that Tolkien abhorred,² Wheaton College faculty member Jerry Root noted that texts like *The Lord of the Rings* remain an oasis of sorts for conservative traditionalists as well. "People today are underdeveloped spiritually, they're famished," said Root, who teaches courses on the Inklings on a campus where students pledge not to drink as a form of religious practice, even as contemporaries in Letcher's Tolkien-inspired

“tribe” turn to hallucinogenic mushrooms in theirs. “These authors. . . say to us: How can anybody look with an imaginative eye and not see a world that is infused with the divine?”³

In an era of ever-sharpening cultural divides between self-described traditionalists and progressives, Tolkien’s major work stands out for its ability to engage people of all political and religious stripes with its anti-modernist and essentially “Green” environmental perspective. Indeed *The Lord of the Rings* has become more than fantasy in impacting a mass audience with an ecological message of valuing life above global consumerism.⁴ Yet this contemporary edge of Tolkien’s retro-medieval modern fantasy strangely mirrors its medieval inspiration, and in those roots lies the source of its real-life power to create broadly based communities of readers today. Tolkien’s fantasy replicates a pattern of ecologically centered narrative design from the early Middle Ages, explained below as “overlay landscape,” that helped originally inspire his project. His sources, which he at times termed “Celtic,” emerged in a patristic Christian milieu (the period of mainly Greek texts of the Christian “church fathers,” from the apostolic era to roughly the ninth century in the West), and served in their own day to bridge pagan, classical intellectual, and Christian traditions in connecting physical and spiritual realms through narrative.⁵ They, in some ways, serve a similar function in Tolkien’s reconstruction.

Early Celtic (really Welsh and Irish) Otherworld texts helped provide Tolkien with a pattern for an ecocentric Middle-earth—that is, for portraying the natural world as a central character beyond human control or even human concerns, integrated rather than separated from the divine, representing a kind of premodern version of Aldo Leopold’s twentieth-century “land ethic.”⁶ The elves and their realms, the Ents and Tom Bombadil’s domain, all have precedents in indigenous narratives of northern Europe shaped by an earlier, more cosmically oriented Christianity with which Tolkien was familiar through his scholarship. The relation of these narratives to early Christian cosmological traditions (explicit for example in the works of the Irish philosopher John Scottus Eriugena) helps to explain how Tolkien’s fantasy could stretch beyond his own Augustinian Catholicism to embrace the imaginations of a wide range of religious and secular beliefs. The mingling of his Catholic faith with an interest in Celtic languages was responsible.

Tolkien in constructing an ecocentric Middle-earth from early models was drawing upon views of nature that emerged before the formative “Twelfth Century Renaissance” of Western Europe. Andrew Louth explained the transition from early-medieval views of the physical body to later-medieval Catholic views as “moving from seeing the body as microcosm reflecting in itself a cosmic story, to seeing the body as interpreter of

human inwardness.”⁷ That same transition inevitably involved changes in the way Creation or physical nature (identified with the human body) was viewed, as medieval Western cosmology formed. In fact, the body can be extrapolated to nature in Louth’s statement, in describing a transition “from seeing nature as microcosm reflecting in itself a cosmic story, to seeing nature as interpreter of human inwardness,” from integrating the Other to objectifying it. In the earlier view, Kallistos Ware notes, “The body is directly involved in the vision of God,”⁸ and again in extending attitudes toward the physical to the cosmos as a whole, one could as truly say that in that era “nature was directly involved in experience of the divine,” as illustrated by active engagement of a worshipper with the divine through meditative asceticism in the desert tradition.

It was in this earlier Christian literary milieu of a nature integrated with the divine that the Celtic story pattern of the Otherworld was formed, in texts featuring an overlay landscape of the spiritual realm integrated with the physical, drawing on pagan mythology but reflecting a cosmic Christian theology. The Otherworld, in texts such as the so-called Ulster and Mythological Cycles of early Irish literature, was an ancestral realm of the old gods that also reflected Christian notions of Paradise, all interwoven with “real world” natural topography in a way analogous to the Australian aboriginal Dreamtime. Rather than an allegorical backdrop or structure of vertically separated physical and spiritual landscapes (such as in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*), this integrative cultural landscape was more a horizontal experiential engagement of the two, as are Tolkien’s fantasy landscapes: a polycentered reality, not merely an objectification of earthly reality as human desire. This overlay-landscape pattern of early otherworldly story forms the deep structure of Tolkien’s ecocentric view of nature.

The Lord of the Rings As Ecocentric Narrative

“Green”/antimodernist popular readings of Tolkien across disparate cultural communities are stronger than ever in the wake of recent film portrayals of Saruman’s Isengard as a forest-consuming industrial hellhole engaged in genetic engineering. The wasteland of Isengard, as portrayed by director Peter S. Jackson, and the even more desolate volcanic wasteland of militarism and black magic that is Mordor, stand out in bold relief for a new generation of Tolkien fans against the greenways of the Shire, elven realms, and tree-shepherd Ents.⁹ Indeed, an ecocentric theme is even more pronounced in the book’s accounts of Tom Bombadil and Goldberry, the Old Forest, Radagast the Brown, and a large miscellany of scenes and details down to the point of view of a fox in the Shire observing Hobbits traveling¹⁰—features left out of the movies. One of the most-noted connections between films

and text was Jackson's use of New Zealand's stunning landscape to match Tolkien's scenery. Framing both projects is the Western sea.

Ecocritic Lawrence Buell concluded that one of the goals of literary studies in an era of massive environmental degradation should be to seek to counter such trends from within the structure of culture, "to take stock of the resources within our traditions of thought" for developing more ecologically centered narratives of the world.¹¹ Tolkien's fantasy is in fact a textbook case of adapting ecocentric literary traditions from the past as a basis for cultural restoration in the present. The effort parallels another (primarily nonenvironmental) modern literary project of cultural recovery: William Butler Yeats's effort to draw on early Irish mythology for texts that he hoped would be the basis for fashioning a new national culture for Ireland, bridging social divisions. Though Tolkien's effort by his own account was not so intentional, his foreword to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings* suggests that the industrialization and development of the English countryside were on his mind while writing what could be read in part as a deliberately "retro" literary intervention in that process (as in "The Scouring of the Shire").¹²

Indeed, the fantasy realm of Middle-earth to Tolkien was the real earth of England. His term relates to the Old Icelandic or Old Norse term *miðgarðr*, part of a belief system involving a sense of multiple worlds with our Earth in the center, terminology from an Old Norse culture whose worldview Tolkien felt was analogous in important ways to that of the Anglo-Saxons. The name could be read in both pagan and Christian terms ("middle" Earth being also between chaos and the realm of the gods, or Hades and heaven in later medieval Christian cosmology), like Tolkien's favorite Old English poem, *Beowulf*. The view of Middle-earth as a place that through its very position is integrative of mythical or spiritual and physical realms (as in Christian belief is Christ's body) is implied in a passage from *The Lord of the Rings* that illumines the text's ecocentricity:

"Do we walk in legends or on the green earth in the daylight?"

"A man may do both," Aragorn said. "For not we but those who come after will make the legends of our time. The green earth, say you? That is a mighty matter of legend, though you tread it under the light of day!"¹³

Tolkien's sense of the integral interrelationship of our Middle-earth (in a pre-Ice Age European past) and spiritual or mythical realms is glimpsed in the reconstruction of a famous "real-world" conversation between C.S. Lewis and himself:

Myths are "lies and therefore worthless, even though breathed through silver." No, said Tolkien. *They are not lies*. . . You look at trees, he said, and call

them “trees,” and probably you do not think twice about the word. . . . To you, a tree is simply a vegetable organism, and a star simply a ball of inanimate matter moving along a mathematical course. But the first men to talk of “trees” and “stars” saw things very differently. To them, the world was alive with mythological beings. . . . Christianity (he said) is exactly the same thing—with the enormous difference that the poet who invented it was God Himself, and the images He used were real men and actual history.¹⁴

There is an implied relationship (and potential engagement) here between the realm of imagination/language and the physical world, and thus between the spiritual and the physical, in Tolkien's cosmic philology, exemplified in the Incarnation but present in various indigenous religions and mythologies. (In addition to Celtic material, for example, Tolkien drew on nature-related mythology from a nineteenth-century reimagining of Finnish folklore, *The Kalevala*, whose traditions emerged in a borderland Russian Orthodox milieu similar in syncretic cosmology to early Christian Ireland.)

Tolkien's Ecocentricity and Celtic Narrative Patterns

The overlay landscape of the Elven realms in Tolkien's fantasy is its most distinctive Celtic element, echoing the Otherworld common to both early Welsh and Irish literatures. In Tolkien's fantasy we see immortal realms interlaced with the everyday world of physical experience and natural topography, as in the early medieval Welsh *Mabinogi* and the Irish *Táin Bó Cuailnge*.¹⁵ The effect is a deeper dimensionality to landscape and ultimately nature that undergirds the ecocentricity of Tolkien's work. A similar overlay of spiritual and physical landscapes is seen in the layering of natural and spiritual forces, and history and in descriptions of other landscapes in Tolkien as well such as Weathertop, and the Old and Fangorn Forests. It is reflected in characters such as Tom Bombadil, Radagast the Brown (who communicates with animals) and Gandalf in his relation to elements of nature, all of whom are reminiscent of the shamanistic “wild man of the woods” motif in early Irish and British Celtic literature.¹⁶ The woods of Middle-earth themselves provide an example of a specific analogue with early Celtic traditions. The relationship between oaks and druids is well known, and a medieval Welsh poem suggests an importance and agency given to trees: “Cad Goddeu,” attributed to Taliesin (whose poetic voice and persona are echoed in the figures and chanting of both Tom Bombadil and Treebeard) seems to tell of a rallying of trees to war in Entish style.¹⁷ There are other analogues as well. Giving animals a “life of their own” so to speak, as with the giant eagles, echoes the untamable bulls at the center of the *Táin*

and the salmon in the Welsh tale *Culhwch ac Olwen*.¹⁸ The rising up of the waters at the boundary of Rivendell upon the approach of the Black Riders parallels the rivers defending Ulster in the *Táin*, and the music and otherworldly light of the Elves echo Celtic otherworldly tales, and are reminiscent of “uncreated light” associated with Byzantine saints.¹⁹

Tolkien’s readaptation of the early-medieval technique of overlay landscape enables an heteroglossic nature in a Bakhtinian sense, in which forests, rivers, mountains, and animals become characters, not really anthropomorphized, but representing powers larger than or beyond the human, a cosmic poly-centered focus for the narrative. To offer a more specific example of how this use of overlay landscape reflects Celtic otherworldly narrative patterns, consider the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi*, a probably early-twelfth-century Welsh text of anonymous authorship that reflects earlier traditions. In it the mound of Arberth in South Wales is a real topographical place that is also a focus of interaction between the Otherworld, a spiritual realm associated with ancestral tradition and forces of nature, and the everyday human world with which it is integrally interlaced. There Pwyll, the prince of Dyfed, an actual medieval Welsh kingdom (following an earlier encounter with an otherworldly hunter in the woods that results in Pwyll becoming prince of the Otherworld as well as of Dyfed), sees Rhiannon, a figure drawn from Celtic horse-goddess lore, riding through the natural landscape. She has chosen him to be her husband, as he learns at their encounter. Later, the mound becomes the center of resistance to an enchantment placed on the kingdom of their son.

This normalized presence of the Otherworld in the land lends to the landscape itself a dynamic, and as it were a voice of its own, which is larger than human control and concerns, a mystery that is experiential but beyond objectification. In this context, human characters such as Pwyll are actualized by their coming into relationship with this larger cosmic reality, as opposed to a more modern notion of identity as formed through a differentiation that occurs in the context of external social relations, and a distancing from the Other. This has implications for the perception of the relation of human beings to their physical environment, which in both Tolkien and many early Celtic texts tends to reflect the early-medieval view outlined by Louth and Ware above. The resulting living landscape of such a polyphonic text of nature can be seen in an early Irish passage in which St. Columba converses with an otherworldly youth, asking (among other questions about the origins of things) what the lake before them used to be:

The youth answered: “I know that. It was yellow, it was flowery, it was green, it was hilly; it was rich in liquor, and strewn rushes, and silver, and chariots. I have grazed it when I was a stag; I have swum it when I was a salmon, when

I was a seal; I have run upon it when I was a human. I have landed there under three sails: the yellow sail which bears, the green sail which drowns, the red sail under which flesh was conceived. Women have cried out because of me, although father and mother do not know what they bear."²⁰

John Carey identifies this text as a probable source for the early-eighth-century text *Immram Brain*, with its famous description of the sea-god Manannán Mac Lír leading Bran through an Otherworld inlaid in the sea.²¹ The seemingly pagan motif of moving through water as if on earth, combining both spiritual and physical dimensions, and experience of both the past and the present, relates to Tolkien's use of overlay landscape in *The Lord of the Rings*. The motif also echoes patristic exegeses of the description in Genesis 1 of waters above the firmament, envisioned as a kind of watery-greenhouse "cloud cover" for Paradise, imbibed with the *logoi* or divine energies of the original Creation.²² The image of the sea, associated in early Irish literature with the Otherworld as a teeming fertile oeuvre and oeuvre of life, including lost underwater realms, serves a similar role in Tolkien's mythology of Middle-Earth, and probably for similar reasons related to the engagement of Christian and pagan traditions just cited. In his analysis of the early Irish poem "Lament of the Old Woman of Beare," Carey notes that "the expectation of a future realm of blessed ever-living ones [is] contrasted with the lost antediluvian kingdoms and hidden Otherworld which seem to have played so important a part in the world-view of the pagan Irish. . . . Christian spirituality defines itself by contrast with beliefs of which it retains a sophisticated understanding—a fascinating dialectic which seems characteristic of the intellectual culture of early medieval Ireland."²³ More than a contrasting dialectic, however, the impression of moving through a cosmic sea while on earth is a trope of cosmological pagan-Christian engagement that Tolkien draws upon for textual atmospheric oxygen in his fantasy, as did the early Irish. As Kay Muhr has noted, "The positive water and sea imagery in Christian Irish literature may be partly derived from familiarity with the sea, and from the connection between water and revelation in pagan belief, but it also seems to have been closely associated with the two most important Christian sacraments, for, as St. Paul said, the Israelites were all baptized in the cloud and the sea, so they all drank the same spiritual drink, the water 'from the rock which was Christ.'"²⁴

The blessed lands beyond the sea, the Elven realms of Rivendell and Lothlórien, the Old Forest and Fangorn, and many descriptions of place throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, all reflect a similarly dynamic and relatively non-objectified sense of place. Tolkien's otherworldly places are often defined by water in various ways, and explicitly identified with longing for the sea in the Elven realms. In them, too, being on the Earth seems to

involve walking in an atmosphere of Paradise or original creation, which in the opening chapters of Genesis (so closely read in early-medieval Ireland) was associated with a juncture of the spiritual and material in waters that the Spirit moves or broods over, which are separated above and below the firmament, and which are expressed atmospherically as a mist rising from the earth. Layers of history and of spiritual presence intermingle with the physical scenery and subject in Tolkien's textual "spots of time." The Earth as a whole is by them imbued with the same numinosity by which manmade mounds in the "real" Irish and Welsh lands become portals for the Otherworld in early stories. Earth becomes, more powerfully alive than metaphor, a metonymy (as Eriugena defined place in his *Periphyseon*, using the analogy of a fish in water)²⁵ for the multidimensional life of an integrated spirit and body.

Northrop Frye developed a model for the integrative function of overlay landscape in two early-modern authors drawing on Celtic themes, Shakespeare and Spenser, especially their *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Faerie Queene* respectively. (A similar text familiar to Tolkien is the Celtic-influenced Middle English poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.) Frye describes the "rhythmic movement from normal world to green world and back again" that "makes each world seem unreal when seen by the light of the other."²⁶ In Middle-Earth, this back-and-forth lends a sense of permanent instability to human constructions and objectifications of nature.

Tolkien himself specifically fingered the Celtic influence on his work. His early fascination with Welsh inspired one of his Elven languages.²⁷ He said that *The Lord of the Rings* "contains, in the way of presentation that I find most natural, much of what I personally have received from the study of things Celtic." In "*The Lord of the Rings*. . . the names of persons and places in this story were mainly composed on patterns deliberately modeled on those of Welsh. . . This element in the tale has given perhaps more pleasure to more readers than anything else in it."²⁸ He would also fondly refer in his famous essay on *Beowulf* to "less severe Celtic learning," in contrast with his main field of study in early English literature.²⁹ And he mentioned that he meant the term *elf* to be understood "in its ancient meanings, which continued as late as Spenser," who drew on Irish fairy and Welsh Arthurian lore. Tolkien said too he wanted to create in his epic a mythology for England that would possess "(if I could achieve it) the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic (though it is rarely found in genuine ancient Celtic things)."³⁰ That last qualification recognizes the inevitable refashioning of early traditions in "retro" modes; in Tolkien's case his epic was also "a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision."³¹ He also wrote that he knew many "Celtic

things” in their original languages but had a “certain distaste” for them due to their “fundamental unreason,” seeing them as “a bright color” but “like a broken stained glass window reassembled without design” and “mad.”³² Tolkien’s confidence in recovering an underlying philological and religious order from the material enabled him to feel comfortable about reassembling in narrative the shiny pieces that had long fascinated him. Yet the cosmic order reflected in that early material was profoundly Christian, if exotically jarring even to a conservative modern Catholic such as himself.

Tolkien’s Christian Ecology: The Early Medieval Underpinnings

The story of the fall from grace in the biblical account of the Garden of Eden has in the West long served as an illustration of the separation of the human from the natural, and been regarded as a narrative forming the basis for ecological cultural disjunction, especially in the emphasis on that narrative of the Fall in the central Western theological works of Augustine.³³ Augustine’s four distinctive cosmological emphases—on the Fall; on Original Sin; on effective identification of the Son with the Father in explaining the Trinity (thus to an extent marginalizing Creation further in tandem with the Holy Spirit); and on the distance between reality, sign, and signifier in both theophany and semiotics—were all crucial in the formation of medieval Western views of nature. But in the early medieval period in which Celtic narratives were fashioned, Augustine’s complex of emphases represented only one strand in patristic exegeses shaping Insular monastic literary cosmologies. Harold Weatherby summed up the broader, non-Augustinian, patristic take on nature thus: “The Greek Fathers consistently interpret the Transfiguration as both manifesting and effecting the deification of nature.”³⁴ Nature was a book in the sense of a mystery with which to be engaged, like an Irish illuminated manuscript as icon, rather than a text needing to be decoded and possessed by a reader.

It is this Christian approach to cosmology that lies behind the story traditions partly revived in the Elven landscapes of Tolkien’s Middle-earth. The Incarnation for Athanasius and other “non-Augustinian” early patristic writers opened up the potential for deifying human beings, and with them nature, in a kind of restoration of Paradise, through a process of becoming one with uncreated divine energies experienced in Creation.³⁵ The exploration of this cosmic energy or activity in nature proved to be a prime interest of early Christian writers, including the Irish John Scottus Eriugena and his mentor, the earlier Greek writer Maximus the Confessor. That exploration was also a focus of early-medieval Irish hexaemeric biblical exegeses on the Creation.

In the early Irish otherworldly narrative involving St. Columba, cited above, we see exemplified the way in which early Christian literary culture in Wales and Ireland sought to integrate ancestral pagan and Christian, both physical and spiritual, perspectives on the land. Carey notes the pagan resonance of the text's description of cyclical living or rebirth, although it also echoes the early Irish Christian color scheme for describing types of martyrdom, and thus a return to God, paralleled in colors assigned to the winds.³⁶ More than that, the motif of moving through water as if on earth in the narrative (already discussed), combining both spiritual and physical dimensions and using water as medium for the overlay landscape, echoes Antony's famous comment in Athanasius's fourth-century *Vita* of the saint (a text that helped inspire John Cassian and early Celtic monasticism), that, for a monk, to be in the desert was to be a fish in the sea, whereas to be in the city was to be a fish out of water.³⁷ In the early-medieval British Isles there were plenty of watery monastic "deserts" in the form of islands and coastal hermitages, adding their own overlay of a spiritual sea of landscape, evocative again of Genesis.³⁸

The overlay landscape pattern was thus a way of incorporating Christianity in ancestral beliefs and legends about places in the natural landscape. In one early Irish text cited by Carey, the Tuatha Dé Danann of the fairy mounds are referred to as "exiles who came from heaven," reminiscent of the status of Galadriel and other elves in Tolkien's writings as exiles (but not evil fallen beings) come to Middle Earth from the Blessed Realm.³⁹ Two other early Irish texts are noted by Carey in which such otherworldly beings voice similar statements about their nature, one noting that: "The Fall has not touched us. . ."⁴⁰ These otherworldly beings or fairies (their human-or-greater stature borrowed by Tolkien for his Elves) could also be read in their early medieval context as figures of what human beings would be like as unfallen immortals in Paradise—as examples of deified human beings or "natural" saints, if not always saintly-seeming. Carey concludes that, "the radical idea that the old gods are unfallen humans survived in Ireland throughout the Middle Ages."⁴¹ Such figures were part of the deifying of nature referred to by Weatherby, related also to traditional localized cults of saints in Celtic lands. Tolkien echoes this personal sense of the divine in nature in *The Silmarillion* when the messengers of Manwe tell the Numenoreans, "it is not the land of Manwe that makes its people deathless, but the Deathless that dwell therein have hallowed the land."⁴² True nature is not a "what" but a "who" in early Christian cosmology, as on Middle-earth.

It was Maximus in the seventh century in Greek, and Eriugena in the ninth century in Latin, who fully articulated the cosmology of the overlay-landscape pattern's approach to nature, with its adapted echo in *The Lord of the Rings*. Maximus's writings undergirded what became the dogma of

Christ's two natures at the Sixth Ecumenical Council, on the significance of Creation. As he put it, "The one Logos is many logoi, and the many logoi are one."⁴³ Preexistent principles, these logoi (both "words" and "reasons" in Greek) are more than archetypes or linguistic signs, but callings to participate in God, similar to Eriugena's theophanies or unfoldments of the divine in nature. The logoi, as personal expressions of God related to the incarnate Logos, were not objects to be enslaved. In the early Middle Ages they were seen as dynamic divine energies, with the effect of instilling a plurality and sense of difference in a monotheistic Creation, and operating in a kind of middle ground between God and physical Creation—in effect, the realm of the Otherworld, in which the physical, imaginary and divine images can be integrated.⁴⁴ As Maximus put it, the one Logos is unspeakable but "this same Logos is manifested and multiplied in a way suitable to the good in all the beings who came from Him. . . .and He recapitulates all things in Himself. . . .For all things participate in God by analogy, insofar as they came from God."⁴⁵

Athanasius, writing of the relation of words (logoi) to reality in the Psalms, said: "The one who hears, in addition to learning these things [scriptural tradition], also comprehends and is taught in it the emotions of the soul, and, consequently, on the basis of that which affects him and by which he is constrained, he also is enabled by this book to possess the image deriving from the words."⁴⁶ In a similar way, the singing words of Tom Bombadil echo the original singing of creation described in *The Silmarillion*, as do the chants of the Ents. There is likewise a link between word and reality, including the physical environment, in Maximus's logoi, that re-sacralizes nature. This reflects what Carey sees in the early Irish cosmological treatise known as *The Ever-new Tongue*, a "perennially immanent" cosmic language, outside of time.⁴⁷ Julia Kristeva, describing psychological aspects of this cosmic language of early-medieval Christianity, writes that in it "the Spirit loses its immanence and identifies with the kingdom of God as defined through germinal, floral, nutritional, and erotic metamorphoses that imply, beyond the cosmic energy theory often viewed as specific to the East, the openly sexual fusion with the Thing at the limits of the nameable."⁴⁸ This also could describe the philologically motivated engagement with nature in Tolkien's overlay landscapes.

In Tolkien's worldview, as an Edwardian Roman Catholic, the Augustinian Fall was always present, as seen in the ending of the Third Age and the departing of the Elves and (implicitly) of beings such as Hobbits and Ents from the realms of human beings. But the most significant contribution of his writing to a modern ecocentric literature in the West is his imaginative recovery, for a mass global audience, of a non-Augustinian Western cosmological narrative, one based in Christian patristics that still resonate with

indigenous religious traditions. The overlay landscapes of *The Lord of the Rings* defy human objectification or control. Yet they invite human engagement and actualization in participation with a larger mystery of the cosmos. In the process they embody a textual re-sacralization of both his and our Middle-earth, bespeaking the power of recovering alternative Western narrative traditions in shaping new coalitions for ecological healing.

Notes

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1. Andy Letcher, “The Scouring of the Shire: Fairies, Trolls and Pixies in Eco-Protest Culture,” *Folklore* 112 (2001): 147–61. Comments are from an e-mail, January 26, 2004. On Tolkien’s Green connections, see Patrick Curry, *Defending Middle-Earth: Tolkien, Myth and Modernity* (New York, St. Martin’s, 1997), rebutted by Verlyn Flieger in “J.R.R. Tolkien and the Matter of Britain,” *Mythlore* 87, 23, no. 1 (2000): 47–59.
2. J.R.R. Tolkien to Christopher Tolkien, letters 53 and 100, in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien: A Selection*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter with assistance from Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 1995), 65, 115.
3. See “The Marion E. Wade Center,” <http://www.wheaton.edu/learnres/wade/>. Root’s comments are from David Crumm, *Detroit Free Press on-line* (May 14, 2001), http://www.freep.com/features/books/rings14_20010514.htm.
4. A newspaper recently opined, “People familiar with either the books or the movies can easily pick up on ecological issues and Tolkien’s love and concern for nature.” Jennifer Switala, “*Return of the King*: Professor Offers Insight on Tolkien and *Lord of the Rings*,” *Sunbury (PA) Daily Item* December 17, 2003: D8. And an eco-Tolkien park is proposed: http://www.tolkiensociety.org/t_park/proposal_tolkienpark_2000.html.
5. The term Celtic can be problematic because of romanticized and stereotyped overtones: see Patrick Sims-Williams, “The Visionary Celt: The Construction of an Ethnic Preconception,” *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 2 (1986): 71–96, but is still a useful term for early Welsh and Irish texts that share linguistic and cultural connections.
6. But see Sims-Williams’s cautions regarding stereotyping early Celtic views in “The Invention of Celtic Nature Poetry,” in *Celticism*, ed. Terence Brown (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 97–124. For a qualified view of ecocentric emphases of early Irish and Welsh texts, see Alfred K. Siewers, “Landscapes of Conversion: Guthlac’s Mound and Grendel’s Mere as Expressions of Anglo-Saxon Nation-Building,” in *Viator* 34 (2003): 1–39.

7. Andrew Louth, "The Body in Western Catholic Christianity," in *Religion and the Body*, ed. Sarah Coakley (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 129.
8. Kallistos Ware, "The Body in Greek Christianity," in *Religion and the Body*, ed. Sarah Coakley (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 108.
9. See, for example, Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 2nd edn., revised (one-volume edn.) (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 3.4, 462 (hereafter *LR*) when Treebeard says Saruman, "has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things." The Shire is featured especially in the opening chapters of the epic and then in nostalgic memories throughout, and finally as a kind of fallen eco-topia in need of restoration in the anticlimactic but essential chapter, 6.8, "The Scouring of the Shire," left out, however, by the films. On Elven realms, see *LR* 1.3, 78–83, about otherworldly Elves in a natural setting; 1.12, 209, regarding the powers of the waters of Rivendell, and on that valley's natural/magical fertility, 2.1, 219–20 and 2.2, 233; and 2.6, 328, to 2.8, 369, on Lothlórien's natural-magical realm.
10. See *LR* 1.3, 71, about this now-famous fox; regarding Bombadil, Goldberry, and the Old Forest, see especially 1.6–1.8, inclusive, but also 2.2, 258–59; on Radagast's natural powers 2.2, 250–51, and on Saruman's disdain for those powers and how they yet won the day against Saruman, 2.2, 252 and 254–55.
11. Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1995), 21.
12. Tolkien, *LR*, "Foreword to the Second Edition," xvii.
13. Tolkien, *LR* 3.2, 424.
14. Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and Their Friends* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), 43–44.
15. John Carey has defended the modern scholarly concept of the Celtic Otherworld in "The Irish 'Otherworld': Hiberno-Latin Perspectives," *Éigse* 25 (1991): 154–59.
16. Pádraig Ó Riain, "A Study of the Irish Legend of the Wild Man," *Éigse* 14 (1971–72): 179–206.
17. Patrick Ford, *The Mabinogi* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), 183–87; also see Marged Haycock, "The Significance of the 'Cad Goddeu' Tree-List in the Book of Taliesin," *Current Issues in Linguistic Theory* 68 (1990): 297–331.
18. The motif of an eagle carrying a shaman figure is found in the *Kalevala*, but birds as beings interacting with humans (or as shape-shifted humans) are a Celtic motif as well, as in the Fourth Branch of the Welsh *Mabinogi*, the Hiberno-Latin *Voyage of St. Brendan*, and stories of the birth and wasting-sickness of Cúchulainn in the Irish Ulster Cycle.
19. See John Carey, "The Encounter at the Ford: Warriors, Water and Women," *Éigse* 34 (2004): 10–24.
20. John Carey, *A Single Ray of the Sun: Religious Speculation in Early Ireland* (Andover, MA, and Aberystwyth, Wales: Celtic Studies Publications, 1999),

- 4–5, and his “The Lough Foyle Colloquy Texts: *Immacaldam Choluim Chille 7 ind Ólaig oc Carraic Eolaig* and *Immacaldam in Druad Brain 7 inna Banfátho Febuil ós Loch Febuil*,” *Ériu* 52 (2002): 53–87. See also Carey, “The Location of the Otherworld in Irish Tradition,” in *The Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature*, ed. Jonathan Wooding (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).
21. Carey, *Single Ray of the Sun*, 7.
 22. See, especially, the fourth-century St. Basil of Caesarea’s *Hexaemeron*, trans. Blomfield Jackson, *Basil: Letters and Select Works*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, second series, vol. 8 (1895; repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 52–107. For the relation of notions of divine energy, found in writings of Basil but developed across following centuries, to Maximus the Confessor’s seventh-century cosmology of *logoi*, expressed by John Scottus Eriugena. See also Joseph P. Farrell, *Free Choice in St. Maximus the Confessor* (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 1989), especially pp. 181 and 191.
 23. John Carey, “Lament of the Old Woman of Beare,” in *Celtica* 23 (1999): 30–37.
 24. Kay Muhr, “Water Imagery in Early Irish,” in *Celtica* 23 (1999): 193–210.
 25. John Scottus Eriugena, *The Periphyseon*, trans. Myra L. Uhlfelder (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), 42–54.
 26. Northrop Frye, “The Argument of Comedy,” in *Shakespeare, Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Leonard F. Dean (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 86, 88.
 27. See Deborah Webster Rogers and Ivor A. Rogers, J.R.R. Tolkien (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1980), 42; and John Garth, *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-Earth* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 14, 32, 35, 82, 213, 236.
 28. Tolkien, “English and Welsh,” in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 1997).
 29. Tolkien, *Letters*, letter 131, p. 143.
 30. Tolkien, *Letters*, letter 131, p. 144.
 31. Tolkien, *Letters*, letter 142, p. 172.
 32. Tolkien, *Letters*, letter 19, p. 26; see also his reference to Irish in *Letters*, letter 165, p. 219. A similar mosaic image is used by Irenaeus in his polemic against Gnostic exegeses; see Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 1 (1885), trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999) 1.8.1, p. 326.
 33. See the discussion in Siewers, “Landscapes of Conversion,” 8.
 34. Harold Weatherby, “Greek Fathers,” in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A.C. Hamilton et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 303.
 35. Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999), 22.
 36. Discussed in Alfred K. Siewers, “How Green was my Martyrdom? Ec(o)centricity in early Irish texts,” at the International Medieval Congress, Kalamazoo, MI, May 6, 2004, a later version of which was presented to the Early Irish Department seminar, University College Cork, Ireland, November 10, 2004.

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37. Athanasius, *The Life of Antony*, par. 85, in *The Life of St. Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus/Athanasius*, trans. Robert Gregg (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 93.
38. Máire Herbert, "The Legend of St. Cothúine: Perspectives from Early Christian Ireland," *Studia Hibernica* 31 (2000): 27–35.
39. Carey, *Single Ray of the Sun*, 19–20.
40. Carey, *Single Ray of the Sun*, 30.
41. Carey, *Single Ray of the Sun*, 36.
42. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* (London: HarperCollins, 1994), 317.
43. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 22, PG 91:1257AB, in *Free Choice in St. Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Joseph P. Farrell (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon's Press, 1989), 181.
44. See Farrell, *Free Choice*, 137, 179.
45. Quoted in Michael Oleksa, *Alaskan Missionary Spirituality*, 28, in *Christ in Eastern Thought*, trans. John Meyendorff (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1969), 102.
46. Athanasius, "A Letter to Marcellinus," in *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus/Athanasius*, trans. and ed. Robert Gregg (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 108.
47. John Carey, "Etymology and Time," *Temenos Academy Review* 5 (2002): 98.
48. Julia Kristeva, "Dostoevsky, the Writing of Suffering, and Forgiveness," in *Blacks Sun*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 209.