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*The Silmarillion and Genesis: The Contemporary Artist
and the Present Revelation*

Silmarillion i Księga Rodzaju: współczesny artysta i dzisiejsze objawienie

The erudite Tolkien critic Tom Shippey asks whether the *Silmarillion* is “a rival to Christian story”¹. In his otherwise astute response to this question, consisting to some extent of listing the doctrinal points of Christianity that the author does not transgress, Shippey at times shows a rather dated view of Christian doctrine that is not in every case valid even for the thinking orthodox believer of today. Although Shippey is more concerned about Tolkien than Christianity as such, he seems to feel that there is little room in it for creative theological intuition on the part of an artist.

By contrast, in his book *The Present Revelation*, Gabriel Moran goes as far as to expound a theology of the openness of revelation. According to the American Catholic theologian, revelation is open ended and cannot be petrified into the scriptures of one canonical text, no matter how sacred. Moreover, for Moran what he calls the “present revelation”, the revelation that takes place to this very day, although not restricted to anyone, is a special domain of the artist, who might even be said to be akin to the prophet².

¹ T. Shippey, *The Road to Middle Earth*, Grafton, London 1992, p. 209.

² See G. Moran, *The Present Revelation: The Search for Religious Foundations*, Herder & Herder, New York 1972, p. 228 and *passim*.

Even without the support of this theologian, one argument for such an understanding of revelation might be the currently recognized by most Biblical scholars partially open nature of revealed texts, especially on some vital problems. For instance, some questions are still enshrouded by a measure of mystery, which in some respects — at least in a religious interpretation — seems to be the intent of the divine author³. Thus whether or not revelation is still open, there is a measure of agreement that divine intent is not completely revealed in scripture. To reiterate, one might say that even in the Bible at some point we only “see indistinctly, as in a mirror.” (Cor 13, 12)

Moreover, looking at scripture from the contemporary believer’s perspective, a not unrelated factor is the dual nature of revelation, i.e. the fact that there is a human medium through which the divine inspiration is communicated, and which makes use of its own traditions and comprehension of the world⁴. This latter points will be particularly significant for our topic.

Whether or not we fully accept Moran’s thought-provoking proposal, it nonetheless provides an interesting context for a deeper look at the religious intuition behind J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Silmarillion*. The fact that Tolkien was a devout and rather conservative Catholic is well known: even the introduction of the liturgy in the national language troubled him, an English philologist if ever there was one⁵.

Yet behind Tolkien’s declared desire to create a mythology for England, his profound Catholicism seemed to have found an inspired outlet in ways he might not even have predicted. He did, after all, express the hope that his stories conveyed the truth at some level⁶. One might even hazard a claim that some of Tolkien’s ideas on the religious significance of art, such as in his essay of 1939 *On Fairy Stories*, approach Moran’s theological intuition. It is my intent to explore some ramifications of this “truth” which, in my view, places the author in the mainstream of twentieth century Catholic artists.

³ For instance, the question of whether God intends universal salvation for all people, or the eternal damnation of sinners; see W. Hryniewicz, *Nadzieja zbawienia wszystkich: od eschatologii lęku do eschatologii nadziei*, Verbinum, Warszawa 1990, *passim*.

⁴ For a discussion of the changing attitude of the Catholic Church to Biblical revelation, see Läßle, *Od Księgi Rodzaju do Ewangelii*, translated from the German by Juliusz Zychowicz, Znak, Kraków 1983, pp. 28–34; a turning point to this attitude was the encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* of 1943, hypothetically Tolkien may have been aware of it.

⁵ See H. Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography*, Grafton Books, London 1992 [pbk], p. 133.

⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 195.

To begin to deal with this problem adequately, at least two questions must be mentioned. The first is the role of myth in Tolkien; the second, no less important, is the role of myth in scripture. What must also be mentioned is that in Christian thought, especially in the post-Second Vatican Council period, but previous to that in a number of thinkers as well, of which Tolkien seems to have had more intuition than formal knowledge⁷, pagan myth is not considered altogether devoid of divine revelation and in its more profound manifestations can be considered part of a natural religiosity.

At one level the first two problems merge. Gunnar Urang is certainly correct in his description of Tolkien's approach to myth by observing that in it "there is no mythological pattern of eternal recurrence; at the most there are typological patterns,"⁸ but then the same can be said for much Biblical myth. And naturally enough, it is quite likely that the latter have actually influenced the contemporary author in his approach to creating myth. Whatever other sources he may have drawn upon in imagining his mythology for England, Tolkien could not disregard Biblical mythology, which for him has a basis of divine inspiration. The *Elder Edda* or the Finnish *Kalevala*, among others, may have had the more recognizable influence on the product of his imagination⁹, but the structure, and even function, of myth was in many respects Christian.

It has already been noted by Shippey how the *Silmarillion*, the work we shall pay particular attention to, was to some extent patterned after the *Book of Genesis*¹⁰. This is especially obvious at the level of cosmogony, which shall be the primary concern of our study. Moreover, much as *Genesis* introduces the problem of death, Tolkien treats final matters in his mythology as well. While discussing the function of Tolkien's elves, Shippey observes that the author's "imagination centred [...] on a kind of calque, a diagrammatic

⁷ Shippey explores some possible literary sources of this aspect of Tolkien's attitude toward pagan religion, see *op. cit.*, pp. 211–213, 216–220; if the author had any doubts, the Second Vatican Council confirmed his intuition on the genuine value of pre-Christian religiosity.

⁸ G. Urang, *Shadows of Heaven: Religion and Fantasy in the Writings of C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and J. R. R. Tolkien*, SCM Press LTD, London 1971, p. 116. While Urang is commenting on the structure of myth in *The Lord of the Rings*, the statement is likewise valid for the *Silmarillion*.

⁹ For an analysis of the sources that influenced Tolkien, see Shippey, *op. cit.*, pp. 215–16, 296–302 and *passim*.

¹⁰ See Shippey, *op. cit.*, pp. 209–20. Apart from the point discussed about elves below, Shippey has an interesting observation as to how the *Silmarillion*'s creation story dovetails with *Genesis* by avoiding open mention of the creation of man, the latter comes to Middle Earth from the East, speaking of 'something terrible of which they will not speak', i.e. the Biblical Fall is implied; see *op. cit.*, p. 209.

reversal. Since we die, he invented a race that does not". And in comparison with the best known literary treatment of *Genesis*, Shippey goes on to suggest that:

Paradise Lost, one might say, exists to tell us that death is a just punishment, and anyway (See *Paradise Regained*) not final. The *Silmarillion* by contrast seems to be trying to persuade us to see death as potentially a gift or reward (. . .). While the legends of the First age are a 'calque', then, their resemblance to a known pattern directs us primarily to the difference from that pattern; the elvishness of the elves is meant to reflect back on the humanity of man¹¹.

In the words of Iluvatar, the 'Creator' of elves and men, in contrast to men, with whom they cohabit the earth, the elves shall "bring forth more beauty" and "they shall have the greater bliss in this world" (*S*, 47)¹². The worldly immortality of the elves, however, is at times a burden for them as they tire of the world. For despite their greater powers, the elves are no more morally perfect than moral human beings, while their deathlessness, it is suggested, cuts them off from ultimate truth: significantly, in Tolkien's scheme it is not known, for instance, whether elves shall take part in the Second Music of the Ainur (See *S*, 48).

Beneath a pagan veneer, the monotheistic nature of Tolkien's mythology is fairly evident. Take for instance, the example of the Ainur, the partly angelic beings, partly pagan deities important to Tolkien's cosmology; they are in fact created by Eru Iluvatar, the godhead of the *Silmarillion*. The Ainur are in no way equal to their creator, who is known as "the One". And even though the narrator at times refers to the Valar, i.e. the most powerful of these created beings, as gods, and they develop personnas in some way in keeping with traditional pagan deities, at their inception they are more like angelic beings.

At this point Tolkien introduces what might be considered his imaginative interpretation of the doctrine of Logos, or the divine word. The cultural background of the Biblical Logos in the first chapter of *Genesis* has been claimed to be rooted in the ancient world's understanding of the word of the emperor; the emperor's word was a decree which was binding. In the *Silmarillion* there is an interesting dialogic element in which Iluvatar consults the Ainur.

The artistic raiment for this "consultation" is the enchanting "Music of the Ainur", whose inspiration can possibly be traced to the Pythagorean Music of the Spheres. This certainly has a high emotional appeal, but the

¹¹ Shippey, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-11.

¹² First published by George Allen & Unwin in 1977, the edition of the *Silmarillion* utilized in this article is the paperback Harper Collins Publishers (London) one of 1994.

crucial point is that although Eru Iluvatar listens to the Music of the Ainur, guiding it at times, he then goes on to give the necessary impetus for the creation of “Eä” (the World that Is), or the Middle Earth universe. In the narrative, divine Logos, pardon the pun, has the final word: “Let these things be!” commands Iluvatar, echoing the edicts in *Genesis* (perhaps a little too bluntly). Furthermore, there is still much that even the Valar are surprised at in creation once they enter it.

Before creating the world, Eru Iluvatar turns to the Ainur and says:

“Behold your music! This is your minstrelsey; and each of you shall find contained herein, amid the design I set before you, all those things which it may seem that he himself devised or added.” (*S*, 18)

But the ultimate creation, that of Man (or rather, Man and Elf) is reserved for the One. The Ainur, in the primordial vision granted them,

[...] saw with amazement the coming of the Children of Iluvatar, and the habitation that was prepared for them; and they perceived that they themselves in the labour of their music had been busy with the preparation of this dwelling, and yet knew not that it had any purpose beyond its own beauty. For the Children of Iluvatar were conceived by him alone. [*S*, 18–19]

The scriptural inspiration for such artistic licence might be the enigmatic line in *Genesis* where God, before creating Man, refers to Himself in the plural (*Let us make man in our own image*. Gn 1, 26). This line has been interpreted by traditional Christian exegesis as the earliest reference to the Trinity; at present Biblical scholars are inclined to agree that the voice of God is intended to refer to a chorus of angels witnessing creation.

Thus the Tolkien creation story seen as a possible imaginative amplification of scripture might be interpreted as raising the question of what role the angels might have had in creation¹³. As such it would suggest that each creation, the first creation being that of angelic beings, enriches the next. An interesting speculation which might be inferred in the narrative is that the Last Judgement — here the above mentioned Second Music of the Ainur — shall likewise be a final creation, where “the themes of Iluvatar shall be played aright, and take being in the moment of their utterance, for all shall understand fully his intent in their part, and each shall know the comprehension of each, and Iluvatar shall give to their thoughts the secret fire, being well pleased” (*S*, 16). One might add, it seems we have here a theological extension of Tolkien’s ideas on sub-creation.

¹³ Purtil has also discussed this question in his *J. R. R. Tolkien: Myth, Morality and Religion*, Harper & Row, San Francisco 1981, pp. 94–96.

Certainly such a line of theological conjecture, with the executive power still in the hands of the Godhead, would not be out of keeping with the idea of a personal God whose primary nature is love. This aspect of Tolkien's theological imagination might be considered as a more dialogic concept of love reinspiring a scriptural story.

Another important factor at work in his religious imagination, however, is the contemporary knowledge of the world. Although the author acknowledged traditional revelation, he pragmatically claimed that "our ideas about God will be largely derived from contemplating the world about us"¹⁴.

The ancient inspired author had a static vision of the universe, of which the earth was the dominant centre; at present we look at the universe in a dynamic way, be it at the micro (or rather world) level with evolution, or at the macro level of the expanding universe. The author of the Priestly (as opposed to the Yahwist¹⁵) creation story in Genesis sees creation as finished after six days. However symbolic the six days might be — the Priestly version is, after all, highly interested in justifying the liturgical week — the understanding is that creation is finished. In the *Silmarillion* Eru Iluvatar gives a fundamental shape to the universe, but the Ainur then enter "Eä" and continue to give it shape. "So began their great labours in wastes unmeasured and unexplored, and in ages uncounted and forgotten." (*S*, 22)

At this juncture they begin to behave more like forces of nature (indeed, Valar means "Powers of the world") or pagan deities — nonetheless the crucial point is that creation is ongoing and dynamic, not fully complete even by the end of the *Silmarillion* proper. Nor is the world, the habitat of the Children of Iluvatar, the dominant centre of this creation:

And this habitation [the world, C.G.] might seem a little thing to those who (...) consider only the immeasurable vastness of the World [the universe, C.G.], which still the Ainur are shaping. [*S*, 19]¹⁶

Another aspect of Biblical myth is its polemical nature, especially in regards to the pagan world view. One of the clearest examples

¹⁴ Quoted from Purtill, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

¹⁵ Biblical scholarship distinguishes two creation stories in the *Book of Genesis*, the first one in order of their appearance being the Priestly one, with the familiar six days of creation, after which follows the Yahwist one, with the story of Adam and Eve. The order in which they were composed, however, is the reverse of their placement; see Läpple, *op. cit.*, pp. 44–45.

¹⁶ Perhaps it is significant that the ongoing aspect of creation is not so obvious in the earlier version of the *Silmarillion*, published posthumously as *The Book of Lost Tales*, first published by George Allen & Unwin in 1983.

might be the differences between the definite ethical design of the God of Noah, and the chaotic nature of the gods of the Gilgamesh epic, on whose flood story the Biblical one obviously drew upon. The Priestly creation story is more interesting for our study. In contrast to the Yahwist version which possibly predated it by several centuries, in the former there seems to be a polemic with early dualism. In the Yahwist version we already have the presence of evil in paradise in the form of the serpent, whereas in the later version, which scholars claim was written during the Babylonian exile, we have the divine benediction: "God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good." (Gn 1, 31)

What may account for this different stress here is a possible polemic with the early Persian dualistic religion encountered in Babylon. A significant aspect of dualism, perhaps not fully developed yet in Persian mythology, but apparently intuited in a relatively more modern way by the Biblical author, is its emphasis on the basically evil nature of matter, which is opposed to the purity of spirit.

Whatever the inspiration for the optimistic benediction, the verse has become a bulwark against Manicheism, essentially unacceptable for Biblical Judaism, and consequently Christianity, which believe in a creation carried out by a good God, and as such one that could not be intrinsically evil.

As in all polemics, however, the voice of the opponent is present in the manner evidence for the other side is treated. A case in point seems to be the problem of the cruelty of nature, which is indirectly accorded a good deal of significance as can be witnessed in the story of the Priestly Golden Age¹⁷. In the blessing that God bestows upon the first couple — who are created simultaneously in the Priestly version — they are given a vegetarian diet, as are the animals of creation. Apparently we thus have a period when there is a two-fold harmony: between man and the animal world, and that between the animal world and the rest of nature symbolized by the lack of carnivores.

This ends after the Flood. Man is now allowed to eat the meat of animals, and the latter shall live in "dread fear" (Gn 9, 2) of their master. Although man is again blessed, there is no mention of him being the "image of God" at this point; the blessing is even preceded by the Yahwist source pointing out God's recognition of man's evil incli-

¹⁷ The term comes from the author and not from Biblical scholarship.

nations¹⁸, which indeed provoked the flood; and, obviously, harmonious coexistence with nature has ended. The implication of the whole sequence is that creation is obviously marked with evil, but man is responsible for it by his sinful behaviour. This would be in accordance with a theology stressing the significance of sin by implying that as an outward sign of the lost spiritual harmony, cosmic harmony was likewise disrupted.

While the contemporary naturalist may speak blithely about the “balance of nature”, for the religious artist the cruelty of nature is still a considerable problem. Perhaps for him even more than for the mystic: the poet Czesław Miłosz raises the problem in his correspondence with the Trappist monk Thomas Merton, and the latter does not even see this issue as a problem, stating in effect that nature is the way it is and that’s that¹⁹. Tolkien has stated how the wonder of the present world has inspired his Middle-earth²⁰, but its suffering has not left him unmoved.

Much as does the Biblical author, in the *Silmarillion*, Tolkien also depicts a brief golden age, known as the Spring of Arda. Golden Ages in themselves can be said to have a function similar to some aspects of art. Consider Brian Rosebury’s evaluation of the theological effect of Tolkien’s greatest work, the *Lord of the Rings*: in his analysis, as opposed to expounding a doctrine, the author develops his moral-ethical world so that the reader’s invited response is “‘if only it were so’. The recognition of this response within oneself is a recognition of an aspect of human desire, brought vividly to the surface of awareness”²¹. One might say at this point theology and art intersect in their use of desire. Golden Ages, for instance, contrasting as they do with known reality, might be intended to evoke a hunger for a deeper cosmic harmony, i.e. promote our dissatisfaction with the questionable “balance of nature”.

But long before the Children of Iluvatar come on the scene, the forces of evil spoil the Spring of Arda. Thus:

¹⁸ For a chart of the suggested order of Yahwist and Priestly sources in the first eleven chapters of *Genesis*, see Läßle, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹⁹ See T. Merton, Czesław Miłosz, *Listy*, translated by M. Tarnowska, Znak, Kraków 1991, pp. 60–1, 65–7.

²⁰ See K. Fonstad, *The Atlas of Middle-earth*, Revised Edition, Harper Collins, London 1992, p. ix.

²¹ B. Rosebury, *Tolkien: A Critical Assessment*, St. Martin’s Press, New York 1992, p. 140.

Green things fell sick and rotted, and rivers were choked with weeds and slime, and fens were made, rank and poisonous, the breeding place of flies; and beasts became monsters of horn and ivory and dyed the earth with blood [*S*, 41].

Herein lies the crux of the matter: the present religious author, unlike the ancient one, cannot relegate the cruelty of nature as non-existent until a stage of creation after some demoralization of man. His knowledge of evolution, which only the radical minority deny, informs him that nature was cruel long before the arrival of human beings. How then does he avoid a Manichean creation story, i.e. one in which creation itself is intrinsically evil?

Inevitably Tolkien's cosmology moves closer to the Yahwist version. His Satan is a Vala named Melkor. With the ease of his Biblical counterpart in the *Book of Job*, Melkor moves around the court, in this case the Timeless Halls, of Iluvatar. Significantly, he takes part in the Music of the Ainur, but his selfishness makes him covet true creative power, which only his divine master possesses. And during the Music, "it came into Melkor's heart to interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme of Iluvatar; for he sought therein to increase the glory of the part assigned to himself" (*S*, 16).

Thus, as with the Evangelical Satan, Melkor is corrupt even before the beginning of time. Yet significantly Iluvatar does not reject Melkor's contribution to the Music of the Ainur, deciding to work it into his creative scheme. At length he says to the rebel Vala: "And thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite" (*S*, 17).

This as a whole is basically consistent with the Christian doctrine of evil being subverted good²²; after all, Melkor was created good. However, what is significant here is that in permitting the Vala's evil — granted Iluvatar allows him to maintain his freedom — evil, or at least its potential, in this way enters creation²³. Albeit there is the promise that in the end this will be subverted to an ultimately good end, and that too is significant. At times this "good end" may indeed be seen in the balance of nature's violent

²² C. S. Lewis, in his preface to Chapter 10 of *Paradise Lost* wrote: "God created all things good without exception. [...] What we call bad things are good things perverted." Quoted from Shippey, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

²³ This could be seen as an expansion of St. Augustine's suggestion that the violence of nature and the resultant evil might be an expression of the freedom of Satan; see B. Sweetman, *Why Evil? Why Anything at All*, *The New Oxford Review*, July/August 1995, p. 26.

forces, as well as in the sense of wonder evoked by them. To Ulmo, the Vala responsible for water, Iluvatar says:

Seest thou not how here in this little realm in the Deeps of Time Melkor hath made bitter war upon thy province? He hath bethought him of bitter cold immoderate, and yet hath not destroyed the beauty of thy fountains, nor of thy clear pools. Behold snow, and the cunning work of the frost! [*S*, 20].

Melkor enters the creation as a powerful fire spirit, for all the Valar have their source in the Flame Imperishable. But by his evil doings he becomes Morgoth, an almost chthonic spirit, bound closer and closer to the earth, over which he has incomplete, but significant dominion.

Evil is thus present in the very fabric of creation, but it does not erase the sign of God's presence. This is manifested in one of the most effective prose passages of the book:

Yet it is told among the Eldar that the Valar endeavoured ever, in despite of Melkor, to rule the Earth and to prepare it for the coming of the Firstborn; [...] valleys they delved and Melkor raised them up; mountains they carved and Melkor threw them down; seas they hollowed and Melkor spilled them; and naught might have peace or come to lasting growth, for as surely as the Valar began a labour so would Melkor undo it or corrupt it. And yet their labour was not in vain; and though nowhere or in no work was their will or purpose wholly fulfilled, and all things were in hue and shape other than the Valar had first intended, slowly nonetheless the Earth was fashioned and made firm [*S*, 23–24].

Thus, although the passage is on the verge of being dualistic as the forces of good and evil struggle within creation, it cannot be said that any sphere is specifically the domain of either of them. Manicheanism can be claimed to be overcome, since matter itself, although marked by evil, is fundamentally good. This may be seen in the undeniable fact that creation is life-sustaining, awe inspiring, and a host of other qualities. Perhaps this is the ultimate meaning of the original revelation of creation as "good": not the negation of the evil intrinsic in it and plain to the naked eye, but the fact that the work of a good Creator is nevertheless still discernible within it. Indeed, such a revelation posits the existence of evil within creation, otherwise it would be redundant; revelation has little need of stating the obvious²⁴.

Yet another line in the *Silmarillion* sheds a complementary light on the divine benediction at the end of the first chapter of *Genesis*. In words that by their context liken them to those of God's blessing Iluvatar proclaims

²⁴ J. Habgood pointed out that for the ancient inspired author to write 'God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good' "required a high degree of faith in a world where much was mysterious, painful and threatening"; see "Creation", in *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. by A. Richardson and J. Bowden (SCM Press, London 1983), p. 129.

“Behold, I love the Earth” (*S*, 47). At that juncture Iluvatar naturally realizes that Melkor is actually working against his designs in creation. This might signify that when God says creation is “very good”, it means that it is loved and blessed by Him, and not simply that it is free from evil.

Another element worth mentioning concerning the *Silmarillion* is the fact of different and distinct religious voices in the book. We have already discussed the Priestly and Yahwist authors of *Genesis*; in the *Silmarillion*, a book which was never actually finished by the author himself, there are different Tolkiens as well. Two at least are readily distinguishable. The early parts of the book have been reworked a number of times, while the last part has been barely touched for decades. What discernible differences are there between the two relatively distinct authors?

According to Rosebury, a watershed in the writer’s development was his concept from the above mentioned essay *On Fairy Stories* of “eucatastrophe”, a happy ending, against the odds, which has emotional intensity and moral fittingness”²⁵. This is certainly not the tone of the greater part of the *Silmarillion*, the majority of which was written before 1939, or barely modified afterwards. Rosebury correctly points out that in this basically early work, the author places emphasis “upon the ubiquity of sin, the readiness with which created beings are deluded and corrupted, the tenacious power of pride, cupidity and resentment, and the depths of cruelty and blasphemy to which they lead”²⁶. The elves are almost determined by the race they belong to; the kin slaying Noldor, the most talented elves of all, are cursed almost like the line of Cain in *Genesis*. The ending witnesses the evil Morgoth cast into the Void, but the narrator sees no cause for celebration:

Yet the lies that Melkor, the mighty, and accursed (...), sowed in the hearts of Elves and Men are a seed that cannot die; and ever and anon it sprouts anew, and will bear dark fruits even unto the latest days [*S*, 307].

The earlier parts of the tale with the revisions of a later date, however, show an author who is struggling with his deep pessimism. Here the cautious religious optimism of *The Lord of the Rings* and its eucatastrophe is either foreshadowed in the creative sense, or interpolated at a later date. Contrast the words at the end of the *Silmarillion* with those of Iluvatar after the Valar have left His Timeless Halls. The Godhead realizes men would have many difficulties and temptations, and that they would often stray, but “These too in their time shall find that all that they do redounds at the end only in the glory of my work” (*S*, 47). Yet such hope in the *Silmarillion*, it must be

²⁵ Rosebury, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

stressed, is less enacted than in the realm of prophesy: one might even call it the ultimate prophesy.

The question remains as to how, then, can these two discussed voices be reconciled. The point, I believe, is that both messages are valid in their own way. The earlier, more pessimistic tone, some would say is indicative of Tolkien's experiences in the trenches of World War I. In the introduction to *Lord of the Rings* the author admits to the influence of those war time experiences, and they are all the more obvious in the *Silmarillion*. They were real to the author and constitute a fact of the twentieth century experience of the human condition.

There is also the cautious optimistic voice of the otherwise bitter young writer, later to be fortified by continual working on himself and no doubt influenced by a positive family life and development as an artist. This is likewise a truth of the human condition. In this sense the *Silmarillion* is like the Bible in its multiplicity of voices. And due to the very roughness stemming from the book's incompleteness both voices gain their authenticity. Perhaps herein lies the book's strength, at least from the religious perspective: what is most important is not that a work attains uniformity in its message, but that a number of truths can be genuinely presented.

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For the present study we have focused on cosmogony and the problem of whether creation is good or not; only with a positive answer to this query do other questions, e.g. of a Fall²⁷, exist, since a creation that is not ultimately good goes far toward absolving man of his responsibility for evil.

It is curious that in the *Silmarillion* men are contrasted to elves not only by their short life span, but also by a strange gift. Iluvatar willed:

...that the hearts of Men should seek beyond the world and should find no rest therein; but they should have a virtue to shape their life, amid the powers of the world, beyond the Music of the Ainur, which is as fate to all things else²⁸ [S, 47].

As should be clear by now, for Tolkien creation is not "the best of all possible worlds", but neither are the divine designs within it wholly unrecognizable. Yet it may even be that the lack of complete harmony in

²⁷ For an analysis of this problem in the *Silmarillion*, see Shippey, *op. cit.*, pp. 213-216.

²⁸ As Shippey indicates, the men in the *Silmarillion* hardly ever experience such freedom themselves (*op. cit.*, pp. 220-25); the quoted utterance of Ilúvatar, present in the *Lost Tales*, must be counted to the proto-eucatastrophic voice of Tolkien.

the world, as witnessed by the cruelty of nature among other things, has its own purpose as well. In part it is a factor that motivates the hearts of the human race to constantly seek beyond the world and stimulates the desire, it might even be said hunger, for the transcendent. In contrast, although the deathlessness of the elves ties them much closer to this world, by the same token they are less free. Hunger for the transcendent, Tolkien seems to imply, allows human beings a measure of control over their own destiny as it lifts them above the confines of fate.

It is doubtful that Miłosz, or any other thinking reader, would consider the problem of the cruelty of nature or the origin of evil fully answered in Tolkien's theology. Nonetheless, it must be said that at least these questions are taken very seriously. And perhaps that is all that can genuinely be asked of any revelation, or art, whether past or present.

The element of desire touched upon here is also vital. To the extent that the religious artist is indeed akin to a prophet, then Moran's dictum, that "A prophet does not tell people revelations; instead, he awakens the revelatory character of their own lives"²⁹ holds true for him as well. A bold claim! Nevertheless it is at least conceivable that to some in whom the desire or hunger for the transcendent was previously dormant, Tolkien's mythology, whether from the *Silmarillion* or the *Lord of the Rings*, may in its own right have acted as a kind of revelation; a sophisticated invitation for the readers to enter into their own personal dialogue with the absolute Thou can be discerned, and whether they have taken it up or not is another matter. The *Silmarillion*, as we have seen, maintains a kind of contemporary dialogue with the *Book of Genesis*. Were we to refer this to the Shippey question opening our article, then obviously real dialogue precludes 'rivalry': the present revelation, assuming we can call it that, does not supersede the earlier one, but, looking at it in Bakhtinian terms, merely grants it its own "excess of seeing", or, more simply, illuminates it from a different perspective.

²⁹ Moran, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

STRESZCZENIE

Autor ukazuje w jaki sposób Tolkien w swoim *Silmarillionie* prowadzi swego rodzaju dialog z księgą objawioną oraz zastanawia się, za amerykańskim teologiem Gabrielem Moranem, czy taki dialog prowadzony przez głęboko religijnego artystę sam nie stanowi czegoś na podobieństwo objawienia. Kluczowa sprawa to fakt, przynajmniej z religijnego punktu widzenia, że w *Piśmie Świętym* Duch Święty posługiwał się ludzkim autorem natchnionym, który z kolei korzystał ze znanych mu wyobrażeń świata, aby przekazać prawdy wiary. Współczesny pisarz religijny poruszając podobną problematykę, np. zło w przyrodzie (które to zagadnienie zajmuje ważne miejsce w naszej analizie), musi znaleźć inne rozwiązania, aby pisać w tym samym duchu oraz przemawiać do dzisiejszych czytelników, np. w *Silmarillionie* Tolkien z powodzeniem zмага się z faktem, że w świetle teorii ewolucji okrucieństwo w przyrodzie istniało już przed grzechem pierworodnym, starając się ukazać, że w swojej istocie nie zmienia to prawdy wiary dotyczącej dobrego Stwórcy.