

1995

# The Earthly Paradise in Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings

Gwenyth Hood

*Marshall University*, hood@marshall.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [http://mds.marshall.edu/english\\_faculty](http://mds.marshall.edu/english_faculty)



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Hood, Gwenyth. "The Earthly Paradise in Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings." *Mythlore* 80 (1995): 139-144. Print.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at Marshall Digital Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Faculty Research by an authorized administrator of Marshall Digital Scholar. For more information, please contact [zhangj@marshall.edu](mailto:zhangj@marshall.edu).

# The Earthly Paradise in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

Gwenyth Hood

**Abstract:** Valinor, modelled on the Earthly Paradise, is described more fully in Tolkien's posthumously published works than in *The Lord of the Rings*. Yet the fleeting Valinorean images within the trilogy have a powerful impact, heightening and simultaneously providing consolation for the horrors of Mordor.

**Keywords:** Ainulindalë, Earthly Paradise, Elves, innocence, Lórien, *The Lord of the Rings*, Valinor

Throughout all the grim and harrowing ordeals which dominate the action of *The Lord of the Rings*, a lovely but fleeting vision haunts the background. This is the vision of the Earthly Paradise, which enters some of the darkest moments of the trilogy. This vision gives the trilogy much of its power, both heightening the contrasting horrors and providing consolation for them.

The Earthly Paradise appears in many guises, most of them bound up with the image of Valinor. The relationship between Valinor and Middle-earth in Tolkien's mythology is best delineated in the Ainulindalë or Music of the Ainur, which was published with *The Silmarillion*.<sup>1</sup>

As the Ainulindalë tells the story, Ilúvatar creates the Ainur or holy ones (paralleling pagan gods as well as Biblical angels), teaches them music, and encourages them to sing before him. All the Ainur join in this great symphony, until Melkor decides that he can do better and makes his own discordant song. This creates confusion, but Ilúvatar, being an artist, cannot triumph simply by destroying Melkor, for that would ruin his pattern. Hence, he makes two attempts to reharmonize the symphony. First, he devises a "second theme," later associated with Manwë, chief of the Valar, which is "like and unlike" the first theme. But "the discord of Melkor rose in uproar and contended with it . . . until many of the Ainur were dismayed and sang no longer" (Tolkien, 1977, p. 16). Then Ilúvatar begins a "third theme," which is "unlike the others" (Tolkien, 1977, p. 16) and of haunting sweetness and subtlety. Somehow this new theme takes up the "most triumphant notes" of Melkor's discords, and in relation to the first and second themes, makes the whole symphony beautiful again (Tolkien, 1977, p. 17). This third theme is later identified with "the Children of Ilúvatar . . . Elves and Men" (Tolkien, 1977, p. 18).

Having made a victorious end to the music, Ilúvatar gives, first visual, then physical, reality to the symphony and it

becomes the known universe with all its history (Tolkien, 1977, p. 19). Part of this is Middle-earth in the Third Age, in which the action of the trilogy takes place.

From all this, we see that Ilúvatar's first theme, the primal harmony, embodies the pattern of nature as the One intended it to be, uncorrupted and without need of redemption. Of this harmony, the Valar, or Powers of the World, are instruments, and Valinor, the land which they have moulded to their liking and kept (mostly) free from the assaults of Morgoth and his allies, embodies it. Of course, during Tolkien's Third Age, when *The Lord of the Rings* takes place, Valinor must partly express the "second theme" rather than the first one. Manwë is its "Elder King," and to some extent it is affected by, and must resist, evil. Valinor's first bloom ended (along with the unmarred first theme) when the Two Trees were destroyed long ago. Now the Valar are, as the Appendices relate, "Guardians of the World," and their guardianship involves some military action since it was the "Host of Valinor" which "broke Thangorodrim and overthrew Morgoth," in the first age (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 319; Tolkien, 1965c, p. 452).

In the Third Age, however, Valinor has become more remote from the lives of the human characters. Like the Medieval idea of the Earthly Paradise, it is neither attainable by them (ordinarily), nor yet the height of their desires. It is not attainable, since as the Appendices of the trilogy tell us, Valinor was "removed forever from the circles of the world" (Tolkien, 1965c, p. 392) when the Númenórean Ar-Pharazôn strove to invade it and take by force the immortality which was not intended for man. In this it resembles the Biblical Eden, which is guarded from the fallen Adam and Eve to prevent them from eating the fruit of the Tree of Life and living forever (Genesis 3:22-24).

Valinor is not the proper fulfilment of human desire; Tolkien's humans dream of something greater, as Aragorn

<sup>1</sup> The Ainulindalë seems, indeed, to be the part of Tolkien's mythology which he worked out with the greatest care, for in *The Book of Lost Tales*, Part I, Christopher Tolkien states that with this short masterpiece there is an unbroken manuscript tradition from the earliest to the latest versions, which is not the case with many of Tolkien's other stories (Tolkien, 1983, p. 62).

suggests when he tells the grieving Arwen that he thinks it is better to die and leave “the circles of the world” beyond which “there is more than memory” (Tolkien, 1965c, p. 428) than to cross the sea to Valinor. In this, Valinor resembles the Earthly Paradise as Dante portrays it, perched on top of Mount Purgatory, where human souls experience it briefly after they are cleansed of sin, only to abandon it quickly for the Heavenly Paradise.

Still, despite this, Valinor, as the Earthly Paradise within Tolkien’s trilogy, remains the model of perfection most perceptible to the human imagination, since the fullness of Ilúvatar’s symphony, embodied in the third theme, has not yet been played out. The human (and hobbit) characters must have some conception of the original harmony in order to grasp, even fleetingly, the nature of the whole symphony which their third theme will have made beautiful when the Music is completed.

For Valinor in Tolkien’s work is, of course, not truly permanent or complete; it will be destroyed in the end, along with the world whose first pattern it embodied, to make way for the creation of a new world, free from the corruption of the old. Though expectations of this cataclysm, incorporating elements of the Apocalypse as well as the Northern mythology of Ragnarök, are much more explicit in *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales*, there are some cryptic references to it in the trilogy. Faramir, son of Denethor, Steward of Gondor, shows a consciousness of it when he says that his men give homage to “Númenor that was, and . . . to the Elvenhome that is, and to that which is beyond Elvenhome and will ever be” (Tolkien, 1965b, p. 361). The idea of the renewal of the world (correlating both to Tolkien’s mysterious Second Music of the Ainur, and to the Christian idea of the New Heaven and the New Earth) is suggested briefly a few times. Galadriel seems to be referring to it when she says to Fangorn that they will meet, “Not in Middle-earth, nor until the lands that lie under the wave are lifted up again. Then in the willow-meads of Tasarinan we may meet in the Spring” (Tolkien, 1965c, p. 321).<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, in the ages before this cataclysm, the vitality of Middle-earth fades slowly but surely, and the High Elves, being bound to the deteriorating structure, live virtually endless lives watching their world slowly die. From some perspectives the life of the mortal creatures would be preferable, as Tolkien has his creator Ilúvatar say in *The Silmarillion*:

It is one with this gift of freedom that the children of Men dwell only a short space in the world alive, and are not bound to it, and depart soon whither the Elves

know not . . . wherefore they are called the Guests or the Strangers. Death is their fate, the gift of Ilúvatar, which as Time wears even the Powers [Valar] shall envy.

(Tolkien, 1977, p. 42)

But in the Third Age, when this last battle is still far off, the humans and hobbits are more likely to envy the Elves for their access to Valinor. During the War of the Rings itself, Valinor appears blessedly unaffected by the struggle. The Valar will not receive the Ring of Power if it is brought to them, because it is bound up with difficulties that do not concern them. Meanwhile, no one can reach Valinor without permission, which is not readily granted; to fend off unwelcome visitors, Elbereth (Varda) appears in Galadriel’s second poem, “holy and queenly,” imposing separation:

For now the Kindler, Varda, the Queen of the Stars, from Mount Everwhite has uplifted her hands like clouds, and all paths are drowned deep in shadow . . . Now lost, lost to those from the East is Valimar!

(Tolkien, 1965a, p. 489)

Only those can reach Valinor who partake of its consecration and purity, and these, if they choose to seek Valinor, may not return to Middle-earth. Thus Eärendil found, upon attaining Valinor, that while he was accepted and allowed to assume the purity of the land (they clothe him in “elven white”) in doing so the inhabitants initiate him in wisdom beyond Middle-earth, preventing his return. As Bilbo’s poem describes it:

and words unheard were spoken then  
of folk of Men and Elven-kin,  
beyond the world were visions showed  
forbid to those that dwell therein.

(Tolkien, 1965a, p. 310)

Similarly the Elves, who are evidently permitted to return to Valinor when they choose, seem unable to come back to Middle-earth once they go. They must depart, “never to return,” or, as Samwise says, “They are sailing, sailing, sailing over the Sea, they are going into the West and leaving us” (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 74).

Yet although it is forbidden to all but a few, humans must know something of Valinor, since it embodies Ilúvatar’s original harmony. Hence, images of this distant and forbidden Paradise haunts the trilogy, evoked by many names, some referring to it as a whole and some to places within it: Valinor (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 309;), Valimar (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 489), Eldamar (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 309), Elvenhome (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 309), the Uttermost West (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 321), Ilmarin (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 309), Eressëa (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 321)<sup>3</sup> and the Blessed Realm

<sup>2</sup> Since Tasarinan is one of the lands of Middle-earth which Fangorn mentions in his poem (Tolkien, 1965b, p. 90), all of which now “lie under the wave,” and Galadriel speaks of meeting there again, but not “in Middle-earth,” it would seem that she hopes for a meeting when both Middle-earth and Valinor will be under a new dispensation after the Second Music.

<sup>3</sup> Eressëa’s claim to be part of Valinor may be disputed. Though there are Elves in Valinor (which justifies its title “Elvenhome”), Tolkien distinguishes the island Eressëa, to which the Elves of Middle-earth will ultimately repair, from Valinor proper, since it is not on the mainland (Tolkien, 1965c, p. 452). Tolkien’s motivation for making Eressëa separate in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* is now obscure, but Christopher Tolkien reports that in the earliest versions, Eressëa was eventually to be moved back to Middle-earth, where it would become England (Tolkien, 1983, pp. 22-27). However, both places are vaguely called “the West” throughout the work, and no separation is imposed between the inhabitants; hence, it seems proper to class them together as far as their relationship with Middle-earth is

(Tolkien, 1965a, pp. 294, 313). The names of the powers of Valinor are also invoked repeatedly: the Valar in general (upon whom Faramir's men call to turn back the Mûmak, Tolkien, 1965b, p. 341); Elbereth, who is most characteristically named by High Elves (Frodo recognizes Gildor and his company as High Elves because "they spoke the name of Elbereth," Tolkien, 1965a, p. 117); the Elder King (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 310); Oromë (to whom Théoden upon Snowmane is compared, (Tolkien, 1965c, p. 138)).

Physically speaking, Valinor is only glimpsed from afar in the trilogy, as we are permitted to follow Frodo's progress at the end almost to its shores and he perceives "a sweet fragrance" and "the sound of singing," and sees "a far green country under a swift sunrise," (Tolkien, 1965c, p. 384). Like the physical glimpse, images of the Blessed Realm in the poetry of the trilogy are also fleeting and remote, but they do attribute some distinctive qualities to Valinor. They suggest a Valinor distant from Middle-earth, free of evil, and marked by beauty, grandeur and (relative to Middle-earth) permanence. That Valinor is distant from the inhabitants of Middle-earth in both time and space is a recurring theme. Valinor is "where ends the world" (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 309), and Galadriel sings mournfully of the distance "across so wide a Sea" (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 483). The seas of Middle-earth once flowed "straight to the western shore" but have been "bent" (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 182; Tolkien, 1965c, p. 392). This physical separation correlates with a separation in consciousness. Valinor's life is at a higher level of mind and cannot be comprehended by minds accustomed to the lesser powers of Middle-earth. Gildor's company sings, "We still remember, we who dwell, / In this far land beneath the trees", apparently exercising the memory in preparation for a return. Galadriel indicates that were the Elves to remain in Middle-earth after the powers of the Elven Rings had passed away, they would "forget and be forgotten." They would "forget" perhaps not only Valinor itself but their own relationship with nature which it epitomizes (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 472).

Valinor's richness, grandeur, concord, beauty, communion, and permanence are suggested in a series of interwoven images in which separate elements are difficult to isolate. There is grandeur in the lofty mountain ("Everwhite" in Galadriel's second poem). Shores full of pearls and jewels suggest beauty and romantic distance all at once: "strands of pearl," (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 309); "jewels of Calacirya" (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 489). All these things are repeatedly suggested in Bilbo's poem on Eärendil's journey to Valinor:

He tarried there from errantry,  
and melodies they taught to him,  
and sages old him marvels told,  
and harps of gold they brought to him . . .

He came unto the timeless halls  
where shining fall the countless years,  
and endless reigns the Elder King  
in Ilmarin on Mountain sheer; . . .  
(Tolkien, 1965a, pp. 309-10)<sup>4</sup>

But Valinor remains in the distance and it is through the Elves that the human characters experience the Earthly Paradise most vividly in the context of the trilogy. Though both Elves and Men belong to Ilúvatar's third theme, Tolkien records "Ilúvatar made [the Elves] more like in nature to the Ainur, though less in might and stature" (Tolkien, 1977, p.41). That Elves (or Fairies, as he called them in *The Book of Lost Tales*) are more closely bound than man with the original harmony of nature is an idea that Tolkien presents not merely in *The Silmarillion* but in his famous essay "On Fairy-Stories," where he challenges the notion that fairies are "supernatural."

*Supernatural* is a dangerous and difficult word in any of its senses, looser or stricter. But to fairies it can hardly be applied, unless *super* is taken merely as a superlative prefix. For it is man who is, in contrast to fairies, supernatural . . . whereas they are natural, far more natural than he.  
(Tolkien, 1966, p. 39)

Tolkien's elves on Middle-earth thus represent superlative nature – that is, nature as Ilúvatar intended it to be – rather than the supernatural. Elves do not represent the state of human prelapsarian innocence, but they come very close. Though the Silvan Elves have never been to Valinor, and the High Elves (or Noldor) left that place in disobedience to the commands of the Valar, at this point in the trilogy they seem to have patched up whatever differences they had, since the way to Valinor is once more open to them. T. A. Shippey relates Tolkien's treatment of the Elves and the Earthly Paradise to the conception of the Middle English author of the legend of St. Michael in *The Early South English Legendary* that Elves were neutral angels. Even among the neutrals, however, some inclined to God without entering the fray, and these were confined to earth or the Earthly Paradise until Judgment Day, at which time they would be allowed to return to Heaven (Shippey, 1983, p. 178). This Medieval vision, oddly enough, corresponds to all the varieties of Elves mentioned in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* – the ones who remained obedient to the Valar, those who seemed to rebel (against the Valar, but perhaps not truly against Ilúvatar) and desired to return afterwards, and those who became evil and joined the side of Morgoth.

Elves, within the trilogy, are more "natural" than Men because they are intended to find fulfilment in nature, and they "die not until the world dies" (Tolkien, 1977, p.42).

concerned.

<sup>4</sup> Tolkien, in his mythology, makes the Christian distinction between time and eternity, and Valinor, he states plainly in one of his letters (Tolkien, 1981, p. 203), is not in eternity, but is part of the created world and also bound in time. "Timeless" in Bilbo's poem about Eärendil apparently means merely "unharmful by time," since time passes there in "shining years," instead of being marred by violence and blight as on Middle-earth. Time is clearly not absent, since Galadriel also refers to the accumulating years in Valinor, twice using the image of growing and falling leaves to emphasize the steady continuity as well as the enduring vigour: "There long the golden leaves have grown upon the branching years" (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 482); and "[L]ike gold fall the leaves in the wind, long years numberless as the wings of trees!" (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 489).

Men are supernatural because they hunger for eternity, and “have a virtue to shape their life . . . beyond the Music of the Ainur, which is as fate to all things else” (Tolkien, 1977, p. 41). The Elves more precisely embody the original harmony of nature; Men carry within them the potential for creating the Second Music.

In his essay, Tolkien states that one of the “operations” of fairy stories is “satisfaction of certain primordial human desires,” among them that desire, “ancient as the Fall,” to “converse with other living things” (Tolkien, 1966, pp. 44, 80). In the trilogy, it is the Elves who enjoy many of these Edenic pleasures. In complete harmony with their natural or physical being, they are immortal and they never age. They also never completely lose dominion over themselves, even in imagination or sleep. Legolas can “sleep” by “resting his mind in the strange paths of elvish dreams, even as he walked open-eyed in the light of this world” (Tolkien, 1965b, p. 37). Besides being at one with themselves, Elves are also at harmony with the natural world around them and yet in a position to lead and guide it. Elrond causes the flood which sweeps away the Black Riders at the Fords of Bruinen, but Gandalf describes the event thus: “The river of this valley is under [Elrond’s] power, and it will rise in anger when he has great need to bar the Ford” (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 296).<sup>5</sup> Elvish harmony with nature demands listening as well as speaking. “They always wished to talk to everything, the old Elves did” (Tolkien, 1965b, p. 90), Fangorn remarks, when he credits the Elves with having aroused in the Ents the desire to speak. The three Elven rings, which make Rivendell and Lórien what they are, also reveal Elvish benevolence, being made by elves who “did not desire strength or domination . . . but understanding, making, and healing, to preserve all things unstained” (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 352). Even without use of the three rings, nature responds to Elvish love and becomes especially beautiful and resistant to evil in places where they live or have lived. “Much evil must befall a country,” Gandalf says, “before it wholly forgets the Elves, if once they dwelt there” (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 371). Legolas notes that when he brings some of his people to Ithilien, the land will be “blessed” (Tolkien, 1965c, p. 289).

Besides their affinity for landscapes, rivers and plants, the Elves also have a bond with animals. They ride horses without rein or bridle for “such was the elvish way with all good beasts” (Tolkien, 1965b, p. 51). Around Elves, animals develop unusual wisdom. Glorfindel’s horse “will not let any rider fall that [Glorfindel] command[s] him to bear” (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 281). Gandalf says that Sam’s favourite pony, Bill, has learned so much at Rivendell that he is able to make his way back from Moria to Bree in safety (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 396; Tolkien, 1965c, p. 338). In their role as instructors and guides for sentient beings, the Elves tend to overflow with compassion for all living things which are not wholly evil, even for Gollum, who finds in their attempts to heal him an opportunity for escape (Tolkien, 1965a, pp. 334-5). They are dedicated healers, sensitive in spotting harms

and blights. Gildor perceives the moment he meets Frodo that there is “a shadow of fear” on him (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 118). Glorfindel perceives the serious nature of Frodo’s Morgul wound, and comforts him with his touch, though it is left to Elrond, the greatest healer (and of human descent), to find and remove the inward-working shard (Tolkien, 1965a, pp. 281, 292). But the Elves are not only able to perceive, understand and heal; they also “make.” What they make, however, harmonizes so well with the natural world that it is sometimes difficult to tell where one leaves off and the other begins. “[W]e put the thought of all that we love into all that we make” (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 479), says an Elf of Lórien, and therefore the garments which Galadriel gives the Fellowship carry with them the hues of Lórien and render their wearers practically indistinguishable from their environment.

It is in the Elven environments that we get our most vivid glimpse of what Valinor must be like. Most vivid of all is the experience of Lothlórien, which is ruled by Galadriel. Of all the lands in Middle-earth, Valinor is mirrored most closely in Lórien, whose realm is, as Aragorn says, “the heart of Elvendom on earth” (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 456).

Frodo experiences his entrance to the central part or “naith” of Lórien almost as if it were an Earthly Paradise in its newness and flawlessness:

It seemed to him that he had stepped through a high window that looked on a vanished world . . . All that he saw was shapely, but the shapes seemed at once clear cut, as if they had been first conceived and drawn at the uncovering of his eyes, and ancient as if they had endured for ever. He saw no colour but those he knew, gold and white and blue and green, but they were fresh and poignant, as if he had at that moment first perceived them and made for them names new and wonderful . . . No blemish or sickness or deformity could be seen in anything that grew upon the earth. On the land of Lórien there was no stain.”

(Tolkien, 1965a, pp. 454-5).

Indeed, Aragorn goes so far as to claim that Lórien is, like Valinor, pure of evil; rebuking Boromir’s suspicions of Galadriel, he declares: “There is . . . in this land no evil, unless a man bring it hither himself” (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 464). Repeatedly Tolkien emphasizes the differences between Lórien and the outside world; the characters there are hardly aware of time going by: “For the Elves the world moves, and it moves both very swift and very slow. Swift, because they themselves change little, and all else fleets by . . . Slow, because they do not count the running years, not for themselves” (Tolkien, 1977, p. 503). This, too, likens Lórien to Valinor, where “like gold fall the leaves in the wind, long years numberless as the wings of trees!” (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 489). Lórien seems, relative to the rest of Middle-earth, a timeless land.

Yet, vivid though their glimpse of the Earthly Paradise is in Lórien, the Fellowship do not have to wait

<sup>5</sup> The initiative for flooding comes from Elrond, but the anger is genuinely the river’s, and once aroused it is not completely under the Elves’ control. As Gandalf says, “For a moment I was afraid that we had let loose too fierce a wrath, and the flood would get out of hand and wash you all away” (Tolkien, 1965a, p.296).

until they reach Lórien to get a sense of it. They are prepared, in a fashion, to understand and appreciate Lórien before they get there, and they are reminded of Lórien throughout the rest of the quest. Indeed, images of Valinor, and Lórien suggesting Valinor, appear frequently throughout the trilogy, often in the midst, or immediately after, its darkest moments.

It is, after all, just when Frodo and his companions are leaving the Shire pursued by Black Riders that the Elvish music of Gildor and his companions floats over the air and they hear the song of "Elbereth" and the "starlight on the Western Seas" (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 117). Frodo immediately realizes that it is a "strange chance" (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 118) to meet Elves who once lived in Valinor and will soon return to it. In the Old Forest, after the encounter with the malicious willow, the hobbits are rescued by Tom Bombadil, oldest and fatherless, who "knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless – before the Dark Lord came from the Outside" (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 182). In Bombadil's house, Frodo has a vision of Valinor as he is to see it at the end of his quest, "a far green country . . . under a swift sunrise" (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 187).

On the road once more, when they are again threatened by Nazgûl, this time upon Weathertop, Aragorn seeks to comfort and strengthen the Fellowship with his story of Lúthien and Beren, who loved each other and fought with Morgoth on Middle-earth, and met beyond the Sundering Seas in Valinor. Undoubtedly, this is part of what inspires Frodo to call, "Elbereth!" in the crisis of the witch-king's attack (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 263), and once more, at the Ford of Bruinen, to cry in desperation, "By Elbereth and Lúthien the Fair, you shall have neither the Ring nor me!" (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 286). These cries were marks of the loyalty which helped preserve Frodo from domination by evil; Gandalf later tells him that the Morgul blade failed to transform him into a wraith because he "resisted to the last" (Tolkien, 1965a, p. 293).

The Fellowship visits Lórien, of course, immediately after the disastrous journey through Moria. After their departure, all members of the Fellowship have cause to remember their stay there, as their Elven apparel is mentioned by everyone who meets them and Gandalf returns to them by Galadriel's agency, bearing messages from her.

But it is Frodo and Sam, upon the darkest and loneliest journey of all, who remember Lórien most deeply and who draw from it the Valinorean imagery most vividly. They are the most dependant on the Elvish provisions – clothing, *lembas*, and rope which comes when called. But Galadriel's phial with the light of Eärendil's star in it turns out to be of crucial importance in lighting their way, both physically and spiritually, through the land of Mordor. When they uncover it in Shelob's lair it "kindled to a silver flame . . . as though Eärendil had himself come down from the high sunset paths with the last Silmaril upon his brow" (Tolkien, 1965b, p. 418). This reminds the hobbits, once more, of the Powers which are on their side, and Frodo is inspired to cry *Aiya Eärendil Elenion Ancalima!* ("Hail, Eärendil, brightest of stars!") not knowing what he says (Tolkien, 1965b, p. 418.)

The same phial's light breaks the spell of the watchers at the tower of Cirith Ungol, and, as Samwise puts it, rings "the front-door bell" (Tolkien, 1965c, p. 218), making possible Frodo's rescue. While passing through the watchers the second time, Frodo and Sam take to crying out upon Eärendil and Elbereth respectively (Tolkien, 1965c, pp. 231, 234-5). Perhaps it is significant that Samwise, who will be able to live a normal life in Middle-earth, blessed by Galadriel's gift, is the one who consistently thinks to call upon Elbereth, a power of the Earthly Paradise, whereas Frodo, who will completely sacrifice his earthly happiness for the good of others, has been led to call upon those names which are entangled with the suffering and sacrifice implied in the Third theme: Lúthien and Eärendil.

The events of the trilogy take place within the final phase of the Music when there seem to be two themes struggling, the sweet, subtle, profound but soft third theme, and Morgoth's "vain," harsh, blaring music, whose triumphant moments are, however, stolen and taken up into the third theme. It should have been a triumphant moment for Sauron's side when Frodo, having travelled so long and with so much suffering and patience, to destroy the Ring, finds that he cannot do so, and claims the ring for himself. But then the hidden power of the third theme – Bilbo's and Frodo's pity and patience, which left Gollum alive to track Frodo in his own obsessive lust for the Ring – overthrows the hopes of Sauron, and the Ringbearers survive to enjoy a Middle-earth cleansed from Sauron's woes for a while. Though Middle-earth will proceed on through all the bitterness of the third theme, for the moment, there is an interlude where the second theme is heard more loudly, and imagery of the Earthly Paradise appears everywhere. A shoot of Nimloth, the White Tree of Gondor, is found to herald the new age; after the King is crowned, Arwen Undómiel comes to Gondor and sings of Valinor with the two trees in bloom. The Shire is revived with Galadriel's gift of soil from her orchards, and for a time mirrors Lórien, which mirrors Valinor. Legolas comes with his friends to make Gondor "blessed" (Tolkien, 1965c, p. 289).

Of course, this is just a respite before the end; the Earthly Paradise is in the past and will continue to fade; Galadriel and Elrond are shortly to depart over the Sea to wait their time in Valinor, and Frodo will go with them, still suffering from his wounds. Yet, though faded, the Elves leave resonances of the primal harmony behind them, while the third theme becomes more prominent in the symphony.

In Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* Frodo and Sam are embarked upon a journey which is a descent into physical and spiritual hell. We know it is not a pointless journey, however, because it is done for the sake of others in a world whose highest hopes are expressed in the imagery of the Earthly Paradise of Valinor and Lórien. Samwise, finding himself "at journey's end . . . / in darkness buried deep" only needs to remind himself that "above all shadows rides the Sun/ and Stars for ever dwell." The imagery of Valinor throughout the story not only provides this hope, but also gives the characters reasons to pay attention to the horrors around them, because, after all, they must heed them in order

to overcome them. Without hope, it would be natural to close one's eyes to both the beauty and the horror; without hope, Frodo's sufferings would simply be another aspect of Mordor. Hence, the imagery of the Earthly Paradise throughout *The Lord of the Rings* makes the characters' gallant struggle both poignant and imaginatively believable.

#### References

- Shippey, T. A. 1983. *The Road to Middle-Earth*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. 1965a. *The Fellowship of the Ring*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. 1965b. *The Two Towers*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. 1965c. *The Return of the King*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. 1966. "On Fairy Stories." in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, ed. C. S. Lewis. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. pp. 38-89.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. 1977. *The Silmarillion*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. 1981. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. 1983. *The Book of Lost Tales, Part 1* ed. Christopher Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.