Splintered Light

Logos and Language in Tolkien's World

Revised Edition

Verlyn Flieger

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Preface to the Second Edition

Since *Splintered Light* was first published, Owen Barfield has died. At ninety-eight he was not only the last of the Inklings, he was the last link to a generation of thinkers whose ideas provided a countercurrent to the existentialist philosophy that seemed to characterize the twentieth century. The effect of Barfield's work on the fiction of J. R. R. Tolkien, and consequently on the present study of Tolkien's fantasy, would be hard to overestimate. I owe him a great deal, and it is my hope that the republication of *Splintered Light,* and thus of some of the central tenets of his thought, will in small measure repay my debt.

A great deal of work has been done in Tolkien studies since the present book was first written. Of primary importance is Christopher Tolkien's *The History of Middle-earth*, an edition with commentary on the entire body of work his father came to call the Silmarillion. This is more than helpful; it is indispensable. Christopher's contribution to his father's work and to Tolkien studies is of central importance not just to Tolkien scholars but to all readers of Tolkien's fiction. The first volume, *The Book of Lost Tales*, was published in 1984, a year after *Splintered Light*. Completed in 1996 in twelve volumes, this invaluable series makes available to scholar and general reader alike the length and breadth of Tolkien's mythology from its beginnings through all its changes and developments, modifications, variations, and competing versions. It shows the range and depth of Tolkien's imagination and his mythopoeic thought. It shows where *The Silmarillion* came from and how its rather compressed account of Tolkien's world relates to the whole. It gives an invaluable picture of how *The Lord of the Rings* turned inevitably and ineluctably toward the parent myth as the story took shape.

The Preface to the first edition of *Splintered Light* defended the importance of Tolkien's fantasy as a vehicle for philosophical and metaphysical speculation. It was correct in this, but too limited, I now believe, in suggesting that its subject matter was more relevant to such speculation than to the concerns of ordinary modern life. The intervening years have shown increasingly that Tolkien's work is highly relevant, that it speaks to and for the anxieties that marked his century (now past) and speaks even more profoundly to the new one he never lived to see. Moreover, it expresses those anxieties more tellingly precisely for being couched as fantasy fiction and has lasted longer than many more realistic works that have come and gone since *The Lord of the Rings* was first published. The first Preface asked "Why should anyone read Tolkien?" My answer at that time was, "For refreshment and entertainment." I know more about Tolkien and his work now than I did then, and I would amend my original answer to read: "For refreshment and entertainment and, even more important, for a deeper understanding of the ambiguities of good and evil and of ethical and moral dilemmas of a world constantly embroiled in wars with itself."

While the first edition dealt with some aspects of *The Lord of the Rings,* the argument was based largely on two books published after Tolkien's death and some twenty or so years after that work appeared. *The Silmarillion* is an admittedly synoptic version of Tolkien's cosmology, a one-volume overview edited and published by Christopher Tolkien in 1977. *Unfinished Tales*, containing supplementary (and often longer versions) of stories in *The Silmarillion*, was published three years after that. Using these works to throw new light on *The Lord of the Rings*, until then read in something of a mythological vacuum, *Splintered Light* argued for the toughness of Tolkien's imaginative vision. It examined the role of his invented languages in creating his fictive world and explored their function in reflecting its ethos.

As the twentieth century drew to a close, Tolkien came more and more to be seen as what the title of T. A. Shippey's recent book calls him, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*. Far from sinking out of sight as escapist fantasy or being shouldered aside by more "realistic" fiction, Tolkien's work is coming to be recognized as being in step with his time and as reflecting its wars, precarious peacetimes, and increasing anxiety about the stability of modern life. Tolkien's work is more relevant to the world today than it appeared to be when *The Lord of the Rings* was first published in the mid-1950s. Readers initially enchanted

by its fantasy world return again and again to the story for its soberer reflection of the real one.

Tolkien's great essay "On Fairy-stories" is the best and deepest consideration I have encountered of the nature, origin, and value of myth and fantasy, as well as the most cogent commentary on his own work. Here, among the many nuggets of pure gold, is the clearest statement of his working theory of fantasy. "For creative fantasy," he writes, "is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun; on a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it" (*The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays* [*MC*] 144).

Just so. Things in the world are as they are. It is the function of fantasy and its greatest strength to make that hard recognition and enable the audience to make it as well. That audience may come for escape to another world (or think that they do), but they must return to their own with the recognition, hard and uncompromising, that things are so in this world. This is the ultimate importance of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* to Tolkien's own, to this, or to any century.

Preface to the First Edition

In this uneasy century whose people are no more divided from one another than from themselves, when the likelihood of annihilation is the only constant in an age of change, what relevance is to be found in a reactionary English professor's anachronistic flight of fancy about elves and dragons and hobbits and magic jewels? That the books of this "hobbit don," as a skeptical colleague once termed J. R. R. Tolkien, topped the *New York Times* best-seller list for many weeks only shows the doubters the perennial appeal of escapism and the intellectual sloth of hoi polloi. Tolkien's fiction does not anatomize the empty lives of the middle class or the squalor and pathos of the poor; it offers no sex (though it has a surprising amount of violence), no social comment, no anger, no alienation. It has, in fact, little or no relationship to (as Oscar Wilde's Gwendolyn puts it) "the actual facts of real life as we know them."

Gwendolyn is talking about metaphysical speculation, and while Tolkien has a fairly low opinion of real life, and much prefers truth to facts, he would disagree with her that metaphysical speculation is irrelevant to either. The bones of his fiction are exactly such speculation, although they are fleshed with enchantment rather than reality and clothed in imagination rather than fact.

Why should anyone read Tolkien? For refreshment and entertainment. Why should anyone take his work seriously—as seriously (and that is very seriously indeed) as he took it? Because it is tough, uncompromising, honest. Because it confronts directly, albeit imaginatively, those two awkward, embarrassing, even forbidden subjects that our time shrinks from: death and the relationship between humanity and God. If we do read Tolkien, and if we do take him seriously, we may learn about ourselves—learn much that we did not know and even more that we once knew and have now forgotten.

Tolkien puts us in touch with the supernatural; he opens our eyes to wonder; he gives us, for however brief a period, a universe of beauty and meaning and purpose. Whether there really is such a universe is less important than the undeniable truth that we need one badly, that we are deeply uneasy at the lack of one and at the prospect that we may have to make, or remake, one ourselves. Tolkien shows us a way to do that.

Above all, he gives us back words, those tired old counters worn with use, and makes them new again in all their power, variety, and magic. He remembers for us what we have forgotten, that *spell* is both a noun and a verb, that it means incantation as well as the formation of a word by letters, and that to use it in either sense inevitably involves using it in both senses.

If, as Horace maintained, the aim of the poet is to inform and to delight, he will succeed at the former only insofar as he succeeds at the latter. The delight offered by Tolkien—enchantment, poetry (I do not mean verse), vision—engages the imagination, while his metaphysical speculation engages the intellect. The questions Tolkien raises are the same ones mankind has always asked: where do we fit in? what do we mean? why are we here? Mythology is as proper a forum for such questions as philosophy; and while philosophies come and go, mythologies tend to endure as stories long after they have ceased to command belief.

Tolkien's mythology enriches, reevaluates, and melds the great mythologies of Western man. It takes up the established patterns of mythic thought and turns them so that they catch new light. Tolkien's achievement in letters is distinguished, both in fiction and in scholarship. As for its relevance to the twentieth century, he may well turn out to be its greatest mythographer, its greatest exponent of myth, of the songs and stories of old times, of the tales of how we and the world came to be and how we need each other. In a world too long deprived of myth, that is no small achievement.

Introduction

The Silmarillion is without doubt the most difficult and problematic of Tolkien's major works.[1] Unlike *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, it is not a single story or even a continuous narrative. Rather, it is a compilation from diverse texts, some written years apart, selected and arranged so as to present a coherent picture of Tolkien's "mythology for England." As mythic fantasy, it strikes out into philosophical and theological territory seldom looked for by readers of the genre. As fiction, it lacks the hobbit earthiness that grounds *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Its style is more formal, and its narrative conveys little of the moment-to-moment sense of excitement and peril that characterizes those books. The stories of Bilbo and the dwarves, and of Frodo and the Fellowship in the world of Middle-earth, are tales of adventure with mythic overtones. *The Silmarillion* is the parent myth that resonates in those overtones.

The book is a difficult fit with the other two works due not just to its style and subject matter but also to the confusing chronology of its composition, which encompassed the more compressed composition of the other major works. There is as well the circumstance of its publication four years after Tolkien died and long after *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* had attained the status of classics. Its long-awaited appearance in the wake of its predecessors raised expectations that its elevated style and content inevitably failed to satisfy. Finally, its literary place in the canon as a whole is the subject of debate and disagreement still unresolved. How important is *The Silmarillion* when judged against the other works? Is it Tolkien's definitive statement, his philosophical manifesto? Is it a major contribution not just to modern fantasy but to English letters in the twentieth century, as its defenders maintain? Or

is it inflated, tedious, inferior to his other fiction, as his critics insist? Has the enormous popularity of *The Lord of the Rings* obscured its real value? Does it ride on the coattails of its predecessor? Should it be seen as the major work, or is it merely background material?

These and similar questions have been and will continue to be raised as the debate goes on. The history of the composition of Tolkien's mythology, its chronological relationship to his other fiction, and his difficulties in negotiating for its publication during his lifetime were presented succinctly in Humphrey Carpenter's biography of Tolkien and have been augmented by Christopher Tolkien's own editing and commentary in *The History of Middle-earth*. A recently issued second edition of *The Silmarillion* includes as a preface major portions of Tolkien's 1951 letter to Milton Waldman of Collins Publishers, in which he explained for a prospective publisher his ambition to dedicate a mythology "to England" and described in detail both his vision and his design.

> Do not laugh! But once upon a time (my crest has long since fallen) I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story—the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths—which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country. . . . I would draw some of the great tales in fullness, and leave many only placed in the scheme and sketched. The cycles would be linked to a majestic whole, and yet leave scope for other minds and hands, wielding paint and music and drama. Absurd. (*Silm*. xii)

The passage says as much about the man who wrote it as it does about the work itself. The tone of mixed hope and diffidence, the deprecating opening and closing phrases "Do not laugh!" and "Absurd" reveal a sensibility braced for ridicule. Tolkien was plainly both eager and afraid to expose his dream, fearful that what he once described to his publisher Stanley Unwin as "private and beloved nonsense" (*Letters* 26) would be misunderstood or made fun of. Yet his words belie his true feelings. All that is known about Tolkien—the evidence of his works, his letters, the picture that emerges from Carpenter's biography—makes it clear that he did not think his dream was nonsense or that his ambition was absurd, but that he took both very seriously indeed. That being the case, it would profit scholars and students of Tolkien's work to follow his

lead, to take his myth seriously and to enter into it with understanding and sympathy. For it was his lifework and his magnum opus, *The Lord of the Rings* notwithstanding. It was nearest to his heart, and as Christopher Tolkien points out in his Foreword, it became over the course of time "the vehicle and depository of his profoundest reflections" (vii).

Aside from what it revealed about Tolkien himself, the most striking aspect of his description is the sheer size and scope of the project, "the body of more or less connected legend," the range from the cosmogonic to fairy tale, the "vast backcloths." To be sure, this is a fair description of most primary mythologies—those real bodies of connected legend, Norse, Celtic, Hebrew, and above all Finnish—that were Tolkien's models. Stories of primary myth are retrieved from ancient documents or strung together out of oral material painstaking collected, in either case arranged and edited by scholars.

To conceive and execute such a scheme, to generate a secondary mythology out of a single creative imagination, calls for extraordinary vision and equally extraordinary ambition. Even Milton, arguably the premier mythographer in the English language, did no more than retell the existing Christian mythos. To find anything remotely paralleling Tolkien's achievement we must turn to Blake.[2] Even here, it is worth remembering that Blake's mythology was met with incomprehension and a certain critical reserve when it first appeared, and even today it is more studied as part of academic syllabi than read and enjoyed by the general public. However ambitious the conception, Tolkien came near to bringing it off. It occupied him over the space of some fifty years, for he began serious work on it in 1917 with a handwritten notebook titled "The Book of Lost Tales" (later to become the first title and text in *The History of Middle-earth*) and was still reworking the stories when he died on September 2, 1973.

When he wrote to Milton Waldman in 1951, Tolkien was negotiating with Collins for joint publication of *The Lord of the Rings* and the Silmarillion. The publishers of *The Hobbit*, George Allen and Unwin, seemed ready to go ahead with the one but were cautious, even negative, about the other. Tolkien felt and insisted that the two works were inextricably linked and that the history of the Ring not only rested on the earlier work but was its "continuation and completion, requiring the *Silmarillion* [sic] to be fully intelligible" (*Letters* 136–37). But beyond this, he was afraid that if the Silmarillion were not brought out with *The Lord of the Rings*, it would not be published at all.

For a long time it seemed that his fears were justified. The projected arrangement with Collins fell through; publishing costs increased, and no publisher would undertake so long a work as the joint Silmarillion and *The Lord of the Rings*. Finally, he agreed with Allen and Unwin to have *The Lord of the Rings* published alone. For over twenty years it was read and understood as an independent work. This has caused and still causes critical difficulties and has contributed not a little to the confusion over the relative importance of the two works. Critics lauding the richness of Tolkien's world and the detail and dense texture of its background did not altogether appreciate that what they had was only one enlarged corner of a vast canvas, a corner meaningful in itself but with much greater meaning as part of the whole and an extension of it.

Granted, the book's appendices gave glimpses of earlier history, but only glimpses. Based on these, rumors of a store of unpublished material circulated, but ordinary readers and scholars alike had to take *The Lord of the Rings* as it stood. This was not disastrous, but it was certainly unfortunate, for it deprived readers (and those who read the book wanted more) of the "vast backcloth" that was at the same time the heart of the matter. The ethos of Tolkien's created world was missing. The genesis and continuing history, the religio-philosophical basis on which it stands, the governing principles—all these are explicit in the Silmarillion, implicit in *The Lord of the Rings*. Without the one, the other could not exist.

The importance of this cannot be emphasized too strongly. To read *The Lord of the Rings*—or, even better, to reread it—in the light of *The Silmarillion* is to be newly aware of an immensely greater perspective, a suddenly increased depth of field. Obscure references take on their proper meaning, shadowy figures leap into prominence. *The Lord of the Rings* clearly now has what Tolkien planned for it to have all along, that same illusion of depth that he found and praised in *Beowulf*, the illusion of "surveying a past . . . noble and fraught with a deep significance—a past which itself had depth and reached backward into a dark antiquity of sorrow" (*MC* 27). Tolkien's tale is now placed within a larger history, and what had seemed digressions of little relevance are now seen to be essential elements enhancing both plot and theme.

The irony in all this is that without the separate and prior publication of *The Lord of the Rings* there would have been no audience for *The Silmarillion*. Without previous familiarity with Middle-earth and hobbits, without the drama of the Ring saga, readers would not have been

prepared for the more complex and rarefied *Silmarillion*. Enthusiasm and interest, appetites whetted by more than two decades of waiting for more, created a ready-made readership for *The Silmarillion* when it finally appeared in 1977.

Even so, the initial reception for Tolkien's mythology was mixed and, in a furtherance of the irony, mixed precisely because its precursor had set up expectations that it was never the intent or purpose of *The Silmarillion* to fulfill. Readers eager to re-inhabit the world of the Shire and the Old Forest and Fangorn were given instead an abstruse creation story, lists of gods and goddesses with explanations of their various natures and functions, and a confusing proliferation of names and genealogies with no readily apparent import. Many lovers of Tolkien's earlier works were put off; many were downright bored. Hopes for the romance of high adventure, for Tolkien's signature combination of epic and earthiness, were damped by language of biblical gravity and a narrative structured along the lines of the Old Testament.

Reviewers and critics seemed not to know quite what to make of what they had. *Time* magazine for October 24, 1977, while conceding that some of *The Silmarillion* was "majestic," called the rest "at least half fustian and more than a yard long," declaring that Tolkien's elevated prose sounded like "a parody of Edgar Rice Burroughs in the style of *The Book of Revelation*" (120). The *New York Review of Books* for November 14, 1977, predicted that there would be "far more purchasers of the new volume than ever read it through" and suggested that had it been published first, "it might well have laid a blight on the entire series" (22).

Not all comment was negative. There were those who understood what Tolkien was attempting, had sympathy for his aim, and admired his achievement. On September 3, 1977, the *Washington Post Book World* carried Joseph McLellan's review on its front page under the perceptive title "Frodo and the Cosmos." McLellan perceived correctly the relationship between *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* and saw also how completely the former was likely to overshadow the latter: "Tolkien found an enthusiastic audience for one small corner of his massive vision and no market at all for the greater part of his imaginings. And like a true professional . . . he adapted—shrank—his vision to suit the available market. One is reminded of Shakespeare, whose magnificent series of historical plays produced, offhand and almost by accident, a minor character named Falstaff" (3).

Another who understood Tolkien's vision, though he could not praise it without qualification, was John Gardner, whose lengthy comments in the *New York Times Book Review* for October 12, 1977, explored at length what he called "the eccentric heroism of Tolkien's attempt." As a medievalist, Gardner was well equipped to grasp the central concepts of Tolkien's myth and to recognize the forces that shape his cosmos. Gardner came very near the mark when he declared, "music is the central symbol and the total myth of 'The Silmarillion,' a symbol that becomes interchangeable with light (music's projection) " (40).

These are indeed the central ideas. Gardner is mistaken only in calling them symbols. It is the essence of Tolkien's conception and design that these are neither symbols nor metaphors (though they more and more take on these values as the story progresses) but actualities intended to be understood literally. Nevertheless, Gardner knew the medieval background and worldview from which Tolkien was working, and he reached the heart of Tolkien's myth when he said,

> What is medieval in Tolkien's vision is his set of organizing principles, his symbols and his pattern of legends and events. In the work of Boëthius and the scholastic philosophers, as in Dante and Chaucer, musical harmony is the first principle of cosmic balance, and the melody of individuals—the expression of individual free will—is the standard figure for the play of free will within the overall design of Providence. This concord of will and overall design was simultaneously expressed, in medieval thought, in terms of light: the foundation of music was the orderly tuning of the spheres. Other lights—lights borrowed from the cosmic originals—came to be important in exegetical writings and of course in medieval poetry: famous jewels or works in gold and silver were regularly symbolic of the order that tests individual will. . . . (40)

His scholarly background notwithstanding, Gardner as a reader has reservations about *The Silmarillion*, and as a reader he clearly preferred *The Lord of the Rings*, declaring that it "looms already as one of the truly great works of the human spirit, giving luster to its less awesome but still miraculous satellites, 'The Hobbit' and now 'The Silmarillion'" (1). Even now, more than twenty years after he wrote, Gardner would still seem to speak for the general reader. Moreover, while a modest

body of scholarship is beginning to accrue for *The Silmarillion,* critical opinion seems still to be weighted in favor of *The Lord of the Rings*.

One of the most acute and perceptive of Tolkien scholars, T. A. Shippey, himself a medievalist and philologist and thus admirably equipped to evaluate Tolkien on his own turf, as it were, asserted in *The Road to Middle-earth* that Tolkien "showed himself out of step with his time." Shippey's opinion, when his book was published in 1982, was that "*The Silmarillion* could never be anything but hard to read" (201, 202). Writing eighteen years later in *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, Shippey has not changed his mind. At the close of his chapter on *The Silmarillion,* he makes very nearly the same pronouncement: "For all that has been said, *The Silmarillion* can never be anything but hard to read," going on to declare that "like Joyce with *Finnegan's Wake* he [Tolkien] demanded too much for most audiences" (261).

Of the critical work on the book,[3] Shippey's above-mentioned chapter gives a fair and balanced reading. Randel Helms's *Tolkien and the Silmarils* gives a useful general overview. In the first edition of her *Tolkien's Art: A Mythology for England,* Jane Chance frankly admitted that she found *The Silmarillion* "difficult to read and even more difficult to enjoy" (129), but her second, revised edition devotes a final chapter to *The Silmarillion*, calling it Tolkien's "Book of Lost Tales." Even here, however, she calls it a "coda" to his other work.

If so, it is quite literally the tail (*coda:* Ital., from Lat. *cauda*, "tail") that wags the dog. One might as accurately say that the Old Testament is the coda to the New Testament. *The Silmarillion* precedes and prepares for *The Lord of the Rings*, but both are parts of the same continuous story, that "body of more or less connected legend" of which *The Silmarillion* is unmistakably the "cosmogonic," while in relation to it *the Lord of the Rings* is "the lesser in contact with the earth" and drawing much of its splendour from *The Silmarillion's* vast backcloth.

One important benefit that knowledge of *The Silmarillion* confers on Tolkien scholarship is a better perspective on the relationship of his work to that of those with whom he is all too often associated as a writer—C. S. Lewis and Charles Williams. The basis of this seems to have been their shared Christianity (though Tolkien was Roman Catholic, Lewis and Williams Anglican) and their informal membership in the Inklings—a loosely organized fellowship of like-minded men who met fairly regularly in Lewis's rooms in Magdalen College to talk and drink

and often share their writing. There are as well superficial similarities in their use of fantasy as a mode of expression. All this has resulted in a tendency to lump them together as writers with a common religious purpose and whose writing had a common religious bias.

That this was never the case is made clear by Humphrey Carpenter, who devotes a chapter of his book on the Inklings to investigating, carefully considering, and finally dismissing the idea.[4] Carpenter's conclusion is that the Inklings were a highly informal group with a somewhat shifting population who had common interests and ideas but no sense of mission or any common goal. Nevertheless, the notion of the similarity dies hard, and Middle-earth is still compared with Narnia and Logres. *The Silmarillion* provides needed evidence that as a writer (and also as a Christian) Tolkien was distinct from both Lewis and Williams, far more unlike than he was like them.

As developed in *The Silmarillion,* Tolkien's theology was manifestly tougher and darker than Lewis's, less occult than Williams's, and far less hopeful than either man's. Tolkien's belief is precarious, constantly renewed yet always in jeopardy. It is this precariousness that gives his work its knife-edge excitement. The outcome is always in doubt. Where Lewis based his Christianity in logic, defending it on rational rather than mystical grounds, Tolkien's Christianity is measured by and against experience and constantly put to the test.

Moreover, only in the most general sense can *The Silmarillion* be characterized as Christian, and in no sense at all can *The Lord of the Rings* be given so definitive a label. That both works are informed with the spirit of Christianity is clear. However, the seeker after explicit Christian reference, as distinct from Christian meaning, will find little in either book to get a grip on. This is no accident; it is Tolkien's declared intent, as several statements in his letters make clear. In a letter written in 1953 to Father Robert Murray, S.J., Tolkien commented of *The Lord of the Rings*, "I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like 'religion,' to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism" (*Letters* 172). And in his long descriptive letter to Waldman, he gave his reasons for discounting the Arthurian legend as England's myth. This was, he wrote, "because it is involved in, and explicitly contains the Christian religion. For reasons which I will not elaborate, that seems to me fatal. Myth and fairy-story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth

(or error), but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary 'real' world" (*Silm*. xii).

So, for example, there is in Tolkien's mythology no explicit Christ episode (though the reappearance of Gandalf comes close) such as the sacrificial death and resurrection of Aslan in Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. There is no Graal, as in Williams's *War in Heaven*, or overt Christian reference, as in Williams's Arthurian poems. *The Silmarillion* is Tolkien's gloss on Christianity, illustrating its universals, not repeating its specifics. The legendarium is concerned, he wrote to Waldman, "with Fall, Mortality, and the Machine" (xiii), subjects that, in their broadest sense, are the concern of all mythologies in all ages.

Independent though he is of Lewis and Williams, Tolkien manifests a surprising similarity of thought with the "other Inkling," the less known, less popular, but most influential of all—Owen Barfield, the unobtrusive fourth to the big three. Barfield is not a fantasist (though he is the author of a deftly humorous retelling of "The Frog Prince," *The Silver Trumpet*). Primarily, however, Barfield is a speculative thinker and philosopher whose interest lies chiefly in the relationship between language, myth, and cultural reality.

Evidence that Tolkien was aware of Barfield's influence can be found in his reference to Barfield in a letter written to C. A. Furth of Allen and Unwin, dated August 31, 1937. Here he said, "The only philological remark (I think) in *The Hobbit* is on p. 221 (lines 6–7 from end): an odd mythological way of referring to linguistic philosophy, and a point that will (happily) be missed by any who have not read Barfield (few have), and probably by those who have" (*Letters* 22). Tolkien was, of course, referring to the first edition. The lines in question, describing Bilbo's response to his first sight of Smaug and his treasure (paginated differently in later editions), read as follows: "There are no words left to express his staggerment, since Men changed the language that they learned of elves in the days when all the world was wonderful." (Clarification of the significance of this sentence, and discussion of the relationship between Tolkien's work and Barfield's, is discussed hererin in chapter 4.)

Saving the *Beowulf* poet, Barfield's theory of the interdependence of myth and language is the primary influence on Tolkien's mythos. It is very much present in Tolkien's fictive assumption, the very foundation and basis of his invented world, that language creates the reality it describes and that myth and language work reciprocally on each other.