**Abstract**

This thesis explores how J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (*LOTR*) compels

literary belief that bridges into a reader’s experience in a way that can lead to life

transformation. By coming to an understanding of Tolkien’s sub-creativity and how it

relates to creativity in the reader, this thesis interprets how Tolkien instilled *LOTR* with

meaning to awaken religious sensibility, creating conditions for belief that may be

interpreted as an ontological encounter with God ‘outside’ the story.

*Mythos*, ‘the regenerative power of story’, affectively mediates experience, whether

stories be told, read, or heard. Sub-creation is both the activity of producing *mythos* and

the final result of a storyteller’s efforts. *LOTR* stems from what Tolkien called his own

personal ‘linguistic predilections’, portraying a particular otherworld derived through his

own unique creativity. It has remained popular since it was published in the mid-1950s,

and from its first page, readers are introduced to a cosmos according to its own literary

plane. As a long narrative within a unique mythical historical setting, it demonstrates how

characters participate in that world. The thesis considers how and why readers may find

this relatable in their own particular ways.

While arguing that the backdrop of *LOTR*’s mythological history was integral to

the meaning of the story, Tolkien said he was ‘fundamentally concerned with the problem

of the relation of Art (and Sub-creation) and Primary Reality’. That he distinguished art

and sub-creation from reality and emphasised a like relationship between them implies that

his ‘fundamental concern’ was analogical in nature. However, he also made clear this

relation is damaged and needs restoration. Throughout the argument, the distinctness of

this relation is developed and illustrated as instrumental to Tolkien’s creativity.

Tolkien was clearly trying to communicate certain meaning through *LOTR* from a

personalised aesthetic in a particular way. When he asserted that ‘art is the operative link

between imagination and the final result, sub-creation’, he indicated that poetic meaning

(art) is that which bridges the reader’s imagination into the pages of *LOTR*. If participation

in the story causes readers to come away with an affective resonance from the story, it is

reasonable to question why. One answer stems from Tolkien’s particular method and

outlook on the world and how he sub-created a literary world analogous to this. There is

no telling how stories will resonate, but their lastingness affirms their significance to the

human imagination. Readers experience *LOTR* at a ‘different stage of the imagination’

whereby religious sensibility may be awakened by virtue of its *mythos*. This thesis

explores how and why *LOTR* can awaken a reader’s ‘religious sense’ and lead to personal

life formation.