The primary experiences of active imagination for Jung were from 1913 to 1917, but his Red Book period is considered to have lasted until 1930, when he left off inscribing and illustrating his imaginal encounters onto the pages of the Liber Novus. Nearly simultaneously, from 1912 to 1928, Tolkien was illustrating The Book of Ishness, his sketchbook that contained a series of visionary drawings and paintings. The early years of this project were the most abundant, but he continued intermittently to add fantastical images until the end of the 1920s. Meanwhile during the heart of those years, from 1916 to 1925, Tolkien was primarily dedicated to the composition of his mythology, the great cosmogonic cycles that narrate the creation of Arda and the First Age of the world.

Why is the synchronic timing of Jung's and Tolkien's imaginal experiences important? Is it simply another coincidence? Or does it intimate some deeper, more profound implication concerning the nature of human existence in the cosmos? One hermeneutic method of unpacking the significance of this timing is archetypal astrology, which reveals the underlying archetypal patterns of the times through the correlated positions of the planets. When two or more planets come into geometrical alignment, the correlated archetypal energies can be seen unfolding multivalently in human and worldly events for the duration of the alignment. When the slower-moving outer planets of Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto align with each other, whole epochs of history, lasting years to decades depending on the configuration, reflect the relevant archetypal qualities in myriad ways.

Archetypal astrology provides a lens that can shed new light on our understanding of Jung's and Tolkien's experiences during this time period. By looking at the world transits during the years of their imaginal encounters we will be able to see the larger archetypal gestalt in which these experiences were emerging, while touching on Jung's and Tolkien's natal charts will illuminate the archetypal patterning of their individual psyches and how this may have further shaped the character of their experiences. Furthermore, we will look at the unfolding personal transits Tolkien and Jung underwent during their Red Book periods, honing in on several significant dates throughout this time, to see how the same world
transits interacted with their unique birth charts, indicating differing modes of creative expression for the same archetypal energies.

The planetary alignment that correlates most significantly with Jung’s and Tolkien’s awakening to the imaginal is the opposition of Uranus and Neptune that lasted from 1899 to 1918.[2] The most potent time of both men’s visionary periods took place in the sunset years of this alignment, from 1913 to 1917. In the modern astrological tradition, the archetype of Neptune, as Richard Tarnas writes, “is considered to govern the transcendent dimensions of life, imaginative and spiritual vision, and the realm of the ideal.”[3] Neptune “rules both the positive and negative meanings of enchantment—both poetic vision and wishful fantasy, mysticism and madness, higher realities and delusional unreality.”[4] Furthermore, “the Neptune principle has a special relation to the stream of consciousness and the oceanic depths of the unconscious, to all nonordinary states of consciousness, to the realm of dreams and visions, images and reflections.”[5] In contrast, the planet Uranus, as Tarnas articulates,

is empirically associated with the principle of change, rebellion, freedom, liberation, reform and revolution, and the unexpected breakup of structures; with sudden surprises, revelations and awakenings, lightning-like flashes of insight, the acceleration of thoughts and events; with births and new beginnings of all kinds; and with intellectual brilliance, cultural innovation, technological invention, experiment, creativity, and originality.[6]

When the archetypal natures of these two planets, Uranus and Neptune, come into relationship with each other, personal and world events with increasing frequency tend to reflect their combined energies. Repeatedly throughout the world’s cultural history Uranus-Neptune alignments correlate with widespread spiritual awakenings, the birth of new religious movements, cultural renaissances, the emergence of new philosophical perspectives, rebirths of idealism, sudden shifts in a culture’s cosmological and metaphysical vision, rapid collective changes in psychological understanding and interior sensibility . . . and epochal shifts in a culture’s artistic imagination.[7]

The first couple of decades of the twentieth century, when the Uranus-Neptune opposition was in effect, was a period of tremendous cultural and artistic innovation and creativity. As Sonu Shamdasani, the editor of The Red Book, writes, “On all sides, individuals were searching for new forms with which to depict the actualities of inner experience, in a quest for spiritual and cultural renewal.”[8] Jung’s and Tolkien’s unexpected awakenings to active imagination and fantasy, and their subsequent outpourings of creative genius, perfectly exemplify the characteristic manifestations of Uranus-Neptune alignments. In Jung’s words, “Our age is seeking a new spring of life. I found one and drank of it and the water tasted good.”[9] His use here of liquid metaphors and symbols—spring, drank, water—are particularly characteristic of the Neptune archetype.

Uranus-Neptune alignments also correlate with “cosmic epiphany” and the “birth of new forms of artistic expression,”[10] which can be seen in the unique artistic format of Jung’s Red Book, and the new languages and mythological composition of Tolkien’s cosmogonic cycles.

If it were possible to briefly summarize the essence of the material that emerged for Jung and Tolkien at this time—an impossible task—one might say that it is an expression of “the quintessential Uranus-Neptune theme of a radical transformation of the God-image and a revolutionary new understanding of the divine will acting in history.”[11] Jung’s Red Book can be seen as a participation in the death and rebirth of God, a renewal of the sacred through an encounter with soul. Similarly, the myths Tolkien began to compose during this same period are a new expression of the creation of the world, a reemergence of God’s creativity in an imaginal realm. As Shamdasani writes, “Jung held that the significance of these fantasies was due to the fact that they stemmed from the mythopoeic imagination which was missing in the present rational age.”[12] Tolkien also would have agreed with this statement as is evidenced in his poem Mythopoeia, of which the following is a fragment:

Though now long estranged,
man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed.
Disgraced he may be, yet is not dethroned,
and keeps the rags of lordship once he owned,
his world-dominion by creative act:
not his to worship the great Artefact,
man, sub-creator, the refracted light
through whom is splintered from a single White
to many hues, and endlessly combined
in living shapes that move from mind to mind.[13]

Although human beings have fallen, in Tolkien’s view, and become estranged from the divine imagination by the emergence of disenchanted rationality, we are still able to become alchemical vessels for that sacred creativity, to refract the light of the mythopoeic imagination into our own fantasies and imaginal encounters.

During the primary visionary years of Jung’s Red Book period, the previously discussed Uranus-Neptune world transit was crossing his natal Sun-Neptune square (see Figure 1). In an individual’s birth chart, the Sun is an expression of the personal identity, the autonomous self imbued with conscious awareness, the personality and ego identity, the will to be and to exist, as well as what the individual identifies him or herself to be. Jung’s Sun square Neptune can be seen multivalently expressed throughout his life, for example, in his personal exploration of the archetypal realm, his permeability of identity to the imaginal and spiritual, his later understanding of the Self as an archetype, and his lifelong effort to bring individual consciousness and the archetypal unconscious into fruitful relationship.

At the time Jung’s imaginal experiences began, the Uranus-Neptune opposition of the early twentieth century was crossing not only his natal Sun-Neptune, but the Ascendant-Descendent axis of his chart, the horizon of his birth moment, initiating both a dissolution and liberation of his identity (see Figure 2). The Uranus-Neptune transit was activating and awakening Jung to the eternal vastness of the archetypal realm, drawing forward encounters with imaginal figures who confronted his personal assumptions about the nature of spiritual reality and the psyche, leading to a descent and dissolution of his Solar egoic identity in an encounter with his soul.

The same Uranus-Neptune opposition was also shaping the archetypal atmosphere of Tolkien’s imaginal encounters, but the transit was crossing a different part of his chart, and thus manifesting in a realm other than his Solar identity. When Tolkien wrote the first words of his Middle-Earth mythology in September 1914 the Uranus-Neptune opposition was crossing his natal Venus, whose corresponding archetype relates to art, beauty, artistic creativity, and aesthetic expression (see Figure 3). Because at this time Uranus and Neptune were widening in their orb, now ten degrees apart, Uranus was tightly conjunct Tolkien’s Venus, while Neptune had yet to come into potently effective orb with his Venus. However, over the next several years, from 1916 to 1922, when Tolkien’s mythology was pouring forth from a seeming wellspring of imaginative creativity, Neptune was in tighter opposition to his natal
That the Uranus-Neptune opposition crossed Tolkien’s Venus, rather than the Sun as it did for Jung, is reflected in his chosen form of expression for the emerging material: Tolkien channeled the stream of imaginal energy into the artistic form of mythopoeic narrative, rather than using the experiences as tools to explore his own psyche and personal identity as Jung did. Interestingly, after 1915 all of Tolkien’s works of art were illustrations for his stories, unlike the earliest visionary drawings in The Book of Ishness which have no explanation for their origins other than their titles. Other powerful forces were coming through for Tolkien in those early years of creativity which we will explore later in this essay, but it seems that only once Uranus and Neptune activated his natal Venus did he find his preferred artistic outlet for the imaginal visions he was receiving.

While the long Uranus-Neptune transit crossing Jung’s Sun and Tolkien’s Venus reflect the larger gestalt of the experiences they were each undergoing, a deeper look at their individual transits will reveal the nuanced differences in their experiences and their individual expressions of those encounters. While the larger arc of this project is to show the uncanny convergence of Jung’s and Tolkien’s explorations of the imaginal realm, the current analysis of their divergence will help to unveil the cosmic underpinnings of their unique creative expressions.

A repeated vision shared in different manifestations by Jung and Tolkien was that of a Flood, or the Great Wave as Tolkien called it. While we know that Tolkien’s Great Wave visions came to him throughout his life beginning in childhood, primarily as dreams, we do not have specific dates for their occurrence. However, Jung’s first Flood vision took place on October 17, 1913 while on a train journey. He saw an immense flood that engulfed all the lands of Europe, destroying civilization and carrying floating rubble and corpses in its wake. The waters then turned to blood. Two weeks later he had the vision again; eventually he would come to recognize it as a premonition of the coming First World War.[14] Two weeks later he had the vision again; eventually he would come to recognize it as a premonition of the coming First World War.

Besides the Uranus-Neptune opposition on Jung’s Sun previously discussed, another major world transit was beginning to come into orb at this time: Saturn conjunct Pluto. As Tarnas writes, Saturn-Pluto alignments coincide with especially challenging historical periods marked by a pervasive quality of intense contraction: eras of international crisis and conflict, empowerment of reactionary forces and totalitarian impulses, organized violence and oppression, all sometimes marked by lasting traumatic effects.[15]

Less than a year after Jung’s Flood vision, World War I broke out in Europe when the Saturn-Pluto conjunction was in almost exact alignment. Yet during the previous autumn of 1913, Jung had been granted a painful premonition of that war as the wide Saturn-Pluto conjunction was in opposition to his natal Mars, the archetype of the warrior, of battle, anger, and violence (see Figure 4). Jung’s vision contained the combined Mars-Saturn-Pluto themes in the images of mass destruction and violent death, and the bloody wave of battle engulfing the continent. Yet the experience was also a precognitive visionary awakening reflective of the Uranus-Neptune alignment previously explored.

The same Saturn-Pluto conjunction that corresponded with Jung’s Flood vision and World War I was also transiting Tolkien’s chart, but in his case it was opposing his natal Mercury. The archetype of Mercury relates to language, speech, thought, writing, the intellect, education, and all forms of communication. Tolkien’s greatest love, it might be argued, was for languages, for their phonetic sound and resonant meaning, their evolutions and transformations, and their histories and lineages. Tolkien was born with his natal Mercury in an exact square to Saturn, which can be seen in his appreciation for ancient languages and literature (he disliked nearly all literature written after Chaucer, instead dedicating himself to medieval epics like Beowulf and the Norse and Icelandic sagas such as the Elder Edda), his meticulous attention to the details of language and expression, his painstaking and repeated revisions of
all his manuscripts striving for an unattainable level of perfection, and his habit of what he called “niggling” over the finesses of his invented languages (see Figure 5). As Tolkien’s biographer Humphrey Carpenter writes, “Tolkien had a passion for perfection in written work of any kind, whether it be philology or stories. This grew from his emotional commitment to his work, which did not permit him to treat it in any manner other than the deeply serious.” All this eloquently expresses the Saturn archetype of seriousness, the old and the ancient, precision, strict standards, revision and correction, meticulous attention to details, all in relation to Mercury’s realm of language and writing.

Pluto slowly transited Tolkien’s natal Mercury-Saturn from 1909 to 1919, the years which encompassed his education at Oxford in Philology, his deeply painful separation from the love of his life Edith Bratt (who later became his wife), the visionary drawings in The Book of Ishness, the composition of his first Middle-Earth poem The Voyage of Earendel, his fighting in World War I including in the Battle of the Somme, the deaths of two of his closest friends, and the earliest compositions of The Silmarillion stories including the cosmogonic myth called the Ainulindalë. As Saturn conjoined Pluto in the sky leading up to World War I, the powerful transformational energies associated with Pluto that had already been working on Tolkien’s mind found a Saturnian form and structure in his invention of languages and the creation of myths to accompany them. If anything truly sets Tolkien apart in the realm of fiction authors it is that he developed multiple, fully-fledged imaginal languages with their own syntax and etymology, languages that feel ancient and powerful in tone and character, with grammatical structures that trace their linguistic evolution through time—all Mercury-Saturn-Pluto themes. During these years it was as though his linguistic capabilities had been opened to the evolutionary stream of language itself, and he was able to participate in the generation and rebirth of new linguistic structures.

Interestingly, coming out of the ten-year transit of Pluto across Tolkien’s Mercury, Pluto then began to oppose Tolkien’s natal Sun, a transit that lasted until the end of the 1920s as he continued to compose the cycles of the First Age of Middle-Earth. Thus, the nearly twenty-year transit of Pluto across his wide Sun-Mercury conjunction entirely encompassed the years Tolkien was writing the myths of The Silmarillion. This was the time period when Tolkien was having the powerful visionary experiences that became the prima materia of his later, more refined works: The Red Book of Westmarch, known better as The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings.

To return to that pivotal moment in the late summer of 1914, when Saturn was conjunct Pluto and the destructive wave of the First World War had been unleashed across the continent of Europe, another potent transit was in the sky, also activating significant aspects of both Tolkien’s and Jung’s charts. At that time the planet Jupiter had come into the Uranus-Neptune alignment, making a conjunction with Uranus that lasted from December 1913 to January 1915. Archetypally, Jupiter is associated with “the principle of expansion and magnitude, providence and plenitude, liberality, elevation and ascendency, and with the tendency to experience growth and progress, success, honor, good fortune, abundance, aggrandizement, prodigality, excess and inflation.” In time periods when Jupiter was aligned with Uranus, as Tarnas writes, “An expansively and buoyantly energizing quality characterized such eras, one that often engendered a certain creative brilliance and the excitement of experiencing suddenly expanded horizons.” As we examined earlier, at this time Uranus was opposing Jung’s Sun, while it
was conjoining Tolkien's Venus. Thus, when Jupiter entered the configuration the expansive, elevating, liberating, breakthrough qualities associated with the Jupiter-Uranus combination could be seen in the profound shift that took place for each of these men during this fourteen-month period.

Under the Jupiter-Uranus conjunction transiting his Venus (see Figure 6), Tolkien encountered the names *Earendel* and *Middle-Earth* in the lines of an old Anglo-Saxon poem, both of which played profoundly prominent roles in his mythology. After this discovery, Tolkien composed on September 24, 1914 the poem *The Voyage of Earendel the Evening Star*, now recognized as the first written work in the Middle-Earth legendarium. Truly it was a breakthrough moment, as Tolkien was finding expression for the images and languages that had been coming to him for the last few years. After this point he began to write more stories about Middle-Earth and the peoples that inhabited this land, the Eldar, the many races of Elvenfolk living in the imaginal realm.

Coinciding with this same Jupiter-Uranus alignment, Jung's *Red Book* visions were taking a profound turn. A new figure had entered into his imaginal experiences, a wise guide and teacher, one who instructed Jung in a caring, loving, and spiritually illuminating way. This figure was Philemon, the ancient alchemical wisdom-keeper who became Jung's mentor in the realm of Soul. In Shamdasani's words, "To Jung, Philemon represented superior insight, and was like a guru to him."[19] On the day that Philemon was first recorded appearing, January 27, 1914, a remarkable configuration of planets was in the sky. Not only was Jupiter conjunct Uranus in opposition to Neptune as previously discussed, but the Sun, Moon, Mercury, and Venus were also conjoining the longer Jupiter-Uranus conjunction (see Figure 7). This rare and powerful configuration was all crossing Jung's natal Sun. Not only did this event occur at the new moon, when the Moon conjoins the Sun in a coniunctio of yin and yang energies, but the emergence of Philemon brought into Jung's psyche a Solar figure representative of his higher self, or Self, whose teachings brought tremendous new insight and awakening, communicated with love, compassion, and wisdom. The transits on this day could be seen as the birth chart of Philemon, which itself would be a fruitful topic to explore in depth.

Finally, to conclude this brief archetypal study, I would like to look at one major aspect that both Jung and Tolkien carried throughout their lives, that can be seen not only reflected in their Red Book periods, but in the entirety of their lifeworks. This is the conjunction of Neptune and Pluto, which occurs when the long cycles of the two outermost planetary bodies align, a meeting that takes place approximately every five hundred years and lasts for about 25-30 years each time. Neptune-Pluto alignments have occurred at the rise and fall of civilizational epochs, the most pivotal moments in history when the entire paradigm of a culture dies and is reborn from the ashes, whether it is the fall of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the Middle Ages, the dawn of the Renaissance, or the turn of the 20th century. As Tarnas writes,
The most recent Neptune-Pluto conjunction took place from 1880 to 1905, and Jung was born on the cusp of the transit in 1875. Jung lived the first thirty years of his life in Neptune-Pluto’s culturally transformative *gestalt*, while Tolkien was born in 1892 with the conjunction within 1° orb (see Figures 1 and 5). While a full study could be given to the ways just this single alignment is apparent in both Jung’s and Tolkien’s entire œuvre, I want to particularly attend to how two specific themes of this most recent Neptune-Pluto conjunction came through Jung and Tolkien: these manifestations are, as Tarnas describes them, “the dying of the gods that had ruled the Western spirit for two millennia and more” and the simultaneous “powerful upsurge of the unconscious” in many senses. [21] The profound and transformative encounters with the deep psyche and imaginal realm that both Jung and Tolkien experienced in their lifetimes are highly reflective of the Neptune-Pluto conjunction they each carry. They both had an encounter of overwhelming potency with the collective unconscious by passing through the underworld gateway of imagination. The powerful visions of the Flood that initiated Jung’s descent, and Great Wave dreams that haunted Tolkien, are also clear expressions of Neptune-Pluto: consciousness being violently “flooded” by the unconscious with overwhelming images of decimating waters that destroy and subsume all in their path. Furthermore, the death and rebirth of God in Jung’s *Red Book*, and the rebirth of Creation and the fall from grace in Tolkien’s cosmogony are but a taste of the ways Neptune-Pluto manifested in their life works. In a time of disenchanted rational modernity these two men seem to have been chosen as alchemical vessels for a deep, cosmic truth to be reborn. As Jung wrote in the pages of *The Red Book*, “To give birth to the ancient in a new time is creation. . . . The task is to give birth to the old in a new time.” [22] This is the karmic task both Jung and Tolkien carried in their own ways, to encounter the gods in the archetypal realm, and to express their living truths on the pages of imagination.

Bibliography


[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.


[18] Ibid.


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While I have previously analyzed the synchronicity of the two Red Books through the parallel images, symbols, and stories brought forward by each of their authors, I have not delved too far into the significance of their synchronic timing. Jung's and Tolkien's deep imaginal experiences both began around 1913 and continued until the end of that decade, although the particular vein of creativity set in motion during that time lasted for each of them until the close of the 1920s. Nearly simultaneously, from 1912 to 1928, Tolkien was illustrating The Book of Ishness, his sketchbook that contained a series of visionary drawings and paintings. The early years of this project were the most abundant, but he continued intermittently to add fantastical images until the end of the 1920s. Sonu Shamdasani is editor of The Red Book and Philemon Professor of Jung History at University College London. Read more. Product details. Synchronicity is a cluster of meaningful patterns that normal cause and effect has not caused. Synchronicity is acausal. Beyond cause as we know it. As I turned to Chapter Two of the book I was stunned by its title: "On the Shores of Gitche Gumee" - the Chippewa name for Lake Superior where the men of the Edmund Fitzgerald lost their