

**Abstract for Re-Enchanting the Academy Conference
The Synchronicity of the Two ‘Red Books’:
Jung, Tolkien, and the Imaginal Realm**

Becca Tarnas

*“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.”*
– C.G. Jung, *The Red Book*

*“Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode,
because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a
Maker.”*
– J.R.R. Tolkien, “*On Fairy-Stories*”

In the year 1913, both C.G. Jung and J.R.R. Tolkien, independently of each other, began to undergo profound imaginal experiences. They had each stepped across a threshold and entered into another world, the realm of imagination, the world of fantasy. For Jung these initially spontaneous visionary experiences, which he later developed into a meditative technique called active imagination, were recorded in the *Liber Novus*, or *The Red Book*. The experiences narrated in *The Red Book* became the seeds from which nearly all his subsequent work flowered. For Tolkien this imaginal journey revealed to him the world of Middle Earth, whose stories and myths eventually led to the writing of *The Lord of the Rings*, a book he named within its own contextual history *The Red Book of Westmarch*. Although working in different fields—namely psychology and philology, respectively—there are many synchronistic parallels between Jung’s and Tolkien’s ‘Red Book periods’: the style of the many works of art they produced at this time, to the nature of their visions and dreams, and an underlying similarity in world view that emerged from their experiences. All these suggest the two men may have been treading, at times, the same paths through the archetypal realm. The revelations of this research bring to the surface questions about the nature of imagination and its relationship to the collective unconscious or collective psyche, which hold deep implications for recognizing a re-enchanting world view reborn out of the reductive materialism of modernity. With Tolkien and Jung as preliminary guides, we are offered a return to the depths of an ensouled cosmos in which imagination saturates the very foundations of reality.