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**Abstract**
Discusses the creation story in the *Silmarillion* with a special focus on the power of song in Arda.

**Additional Keywords**
Creation in J.R.R. Tolkien; Music in J.R.R. Tolkien; Tolkien, J.R.R. “The Ainulindalë”; Pegeen Davis; Sarah Beach
In his Foreword to The Silmarillion, Christopher Tolkien notes that "my father came to conceive The Silmarillion as a compendium, a compendious narrative, made long afterwards from sources of great diversity (poems, and annals, and oral tales) that had survived in age-long tradition..." Indeed, The Book of Lost Tales, as it was originally called, was to become the repository of the history, legends, and mythology of Middle-earth.

Our concern is with the creation story of The Silmarillion, The Ainulindale. Though it is derivative, having biblical origins and Edric roots, it is not mere mimesis. This story uniquely depicts creation occurring through the medium of song. (Of course other mythologies have their world songs, and singers, but most of the singing affects only part of the created world; whereas Tolkien's music of creation actually creates the entire cosmos.) Most significantly, Tolkien's mythological depiction of creation represents a metaphysical truth. I use the term, metaphysical truth, cautiously; Tolkien was too schooled to polemicize, and too devout to proselytize. Rather say, his story poignantly expresses his artistic and religious sensibilities.

For Tolkien, writing was a religious act. He was the sub-creative artist, imitatio deo, foliating the universal tree of tales with his stories. He wanted to tell "great tales in fullness" which would form "a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmiconic to the level of romantic fairy-story..." Although he initially rejected this noble aspiration, we should not so quickly disregard the importance of the mythic impulse as O. K. Hambur, Professor of English, said in his article, "Spirit-Pysche-Symbol-Song," "The value of a myth is in the spiritual truth it contains, and it is a grave error to take it as a literal fact or as a historical truth belonging to a definite place and time."

Tolkien's desire to become a mythmaker first found expression in his theoretical essay, "On Fairy-stories," first delivered at the University of St. Andrews in 1938. In the essay he articulates the four principal characteristics of a fairy-story. The first, Fantasy, requires that the artist create a credible world--complete unto itself--peopled, purposeful, and primal. And to have a world one needs must have a story of its origins, and it was to that end that The Ainulindale was born.

On July 16, 1964 Tolkien commented in a letter:

I wrote a cosmogonical myth, 'The Music of the Ainur,' defining the relation of the One, the transcendent Creator, to the Valar, the 'Powers', the angelical First-created, and their part in ordering and carrying out the Primeval Design. It was also told how it came about that Eru, the One, made an addition to the Design: introducing the themes of the Eruhin, the Children of God, The Firstborn (elves) and the Successors (Men), whom the Valar were forbidden to try and dominate by fear or force.

Cosmogony, (kosmos [order] + gnos [offspring]) meaning a theory of the origins of the world, is an apt word choice, by Tolkien above, as it expresses the nature of his story. And not only does this tale tell of the world creation, but also in it Tolkien posits a Creator, creatures, conflict, and telos. Significantly, this world has evil extant a priori—a fact which Tolkien underscores in his "Letters." However analysis of the dualistic nature of Middle-earth is beyond the scope of this discussion. Suffice it to say that evil is an inherent part of the created world.
The word, Ainulindalë, (Ainu \[holy\] + lip [to sing] means the 'Ainu-Song' or Holy Song. And to establish the holiness and sanctity of this story Tolkien adopts high sounding language—the traditional style of Eddic literature, but more familiar to us because of its biblical tone. As one critic notes, the story is rich with "archaic formulations" and "metaphoric imaging." Tolkien was obviously aware of the power of high-sounding phrases, as he notes in his introduction to the Clark Hall translation of Beowulf:

We are being at once wisely aware of our own frivility if we avoid hitting and whacking and prefer "striking" and "smiting"; talk and chat and prefer "speech" and "discourse"; wellbred, brilliant, or polite noblemen . . . and prefer the "worthy, brave and courteous men" of long ago.

The creation of Middle-earth occurs, in a unique fashion, through the medium of "a great Music." The One speaks to the Ainur "propounding to them themes of music; and they sang before him, and he was glad."7 As the Ainur sing, they seem to be sustained by this primal music, and then Ilúvatar's themes "shine" and "burn with beauty" (S 17). This swirling chorus is like an elemental force of creation which fills the "dwelling of Ilúvatar . . . to overflowing." But this music is only an adumbration of the actual physical creation of Arda. Here, as in the biblical narrative of creation, the world comes into being in successive stages.

Creation first occurs, that is, the themes of music first begin, as "a part of the mind of Ilúvatar," The Ainur, who are kindled with the "Flame Imperishable," and who are the "offspring of his thought" fashion Ilúvatar's theme through music.

Commenting on the Valar Tolkien wrote:

The Valar or 'powers, rulers' were the first 'creation': rational spirits or minds without incarnation, created before the physical world. (Strictly these spirits were called Ainur, the Valar being only those from among them who entered the world after its making. . . .) The Ainur took part in the making of the world as 'sub-creators'; in various degrees, after this fashion. (L 284)

The Valar are meant to be reminiscent of "beings of the same order of beauty, power, and majesty as the 'gods' of higher mythology, which can yet be accepted—well, shall we say boldly, by a mind that believes in the Blessed Trinity" (L 146).

Although their music is bountiful, the Ainur do not completely understand or comprehend the mind of Ilúvatar. According to Tolkien, the Valar have limited awareness:

The Knowledge of the Creation Drama was incomplete: incomplete in each individual 'god', and incomplete if all the knowledge of the pantheon were pooled. For (partly to redress the evil of the rebel Melkor, partly for the completion of all in an ultimate finesse of detail) the Creator had not revealed all. The making, and nature, of the Children of God, were the two chief secrets. All that the gods knew was that they would come, at appointed times. (L 147)

Therefore the music does not "take Being in the moment of their utterance" as it shall at the "end of days." That is, at the "end of days" when the Ainur are completely merged in the consciousness of the divine, in tune, then their music creates instantaneously.

But here in this particular singing, the creation of the world occurs successively, in stages. During the first stage, the Ainur begin the creation process. The singing continues unabated until Melkor, desiring Ilúvatar's power, weaves his own thoughts into the music creating discord. To counter this discord Ilúvatar creates a second theme: "a new theme began amid the storm, like and yet unlike to the former theme, and it gathered power and had new beauty." Following this, discord ensues between the two themes and then a "third theme grew amid the confusion, and it was unlike the others." Ilúvatar's theme is "deep and wide and beautiful" and that of Melkor "was loud, and vain, and endlessly repeated." Ilúvatar ends the conflict with one final chord which is "deeper than the Abyss, higher than the Firmament, piercing as the light of the eye of Ilúvatar . . ." (S 17).

The three themes of music parallel the three phases of creation which Tolkien describes in the remaining passages of the "Ainulindalë." Each of these three phases has metaphysical import; and interestingly, the descriptions of these stages correlate to the descriptions of heavenly realms as described in the classic text of Eastern thought, The Autobiography of a Yogi, by Paramahansa Yogananda, the illumined yogi of India.3

In the first stage of the creation singing, the world exists in the thought and mind of Ilúvatar. This is what Yogananda refers to as the "causal" realm, the world of thought and idea in which all things exist and manifest solely in thought. Referring to this first stage of creation singing Tolkien corroborates this notion: "They [the Ainur] interpreted according to their powers, and completed in detail, the Design propounded to them by the One. This was propounded first in musical or abstract form, and then in an 'historical vision'" (L 284).

In the second stage Ilúvatar shows them the results of their singing:

And he showed to them a vision, giving to them sight where before was only hearing; and they saw a new World made visible before them, and it was globed amid the Void, and it was sustained therein, but was not of it. . . . 'Behold your music! This is your minstrelsy; and each of you shall find contained, amid the design that
Tolkien notes:

This concept, of conscious and sub-conscious thoughts materializing in form, is similarly expressed in Tolkien's "allegory," "Leaf by Niggle." When Niggle arrives in heaven, he discovers that all his work, created and imagined, has actually come into being. His work is symbolized as a tree, and as he is walking in "heaven" he sees before him "the Tree, his Tree, finished. . . .All the leaves he had ever laboured at were there, as he had imagined them rather than as he had made them; and there were others that had only budded in his mind, and many that might have budding. . . ."9

In the second stage the creation exists in the form of a vision—visible but not physically tangible. This is similar to the Eastern mystical concept of the "astral" realm—a realm of light and vibration. In explaining the "vision" manifestation of creation Tolkien notes:

In the first interpretation, the vast Music of the Ainur, Melkor introduced alterations, not interpretations of the mind of the One, and great discord arose. The One then presented this 'Music', including the apparent discords, as a visible 'history'.
At this stage it had still only a validity, to which the validity of a 'story' among ourselves may be compared: it 'exists' in the mind of the teller, and derivatively in the minds of hearers, but not on the same plane as teller or hearers. (L 284)

Ilúvatar reveals the third stage of creation:

'I know the desire of your minds that what ye have seen should verily be, not only in your thought, but even as ye yourselves are, and yet other. Therefore I say: Eä! Let these things Be! And I will send forth into the Void the Flame Imperishable, and it shall be at the heart of the World, and the World shall be. . . . And suddenly the Ainur saw afar off a light, as it were a cloud with a living heart of flame; and they knew that this was no vision only, but that Ilúvatar had made a new thing: Eä, the World that Is. (S 20)

Tolkien explains the third phase of creation as follows:

When the One (the Teller) said Let it Be, (Hence the Elves called the World, the Universe, Eä—It is. [textual note] then the Tale became History, on the same plane as the hearers; and these could, if they desired, enter into it. (L 284)

The Valar enter Arda "at the beginning of Time" and they see that the world was "unshaped" and "dark"; they realise "that the World had been but fore-shadowed and foresung, and they must achieve it." This last stage is the "creation of the physical" world, and it is to this world that the Valar go to assume their demiurgic labors; and "slowly nonetheless the Earth was fashioned and made firm. And thus was the habitation of the Children of Ilúvatar established at the last in the Deeps of Time and amidst the innumerable stars" (S 22).

The Finnish Kalevala also relates stories of creation singing and gods who through their demiurgic labors fashion a world:

In discussing the "Flame Imperishable," which brought the world into being, Tolkien said that the "Secret Fire sent to burn at the heart of the World" in the beginning was the Holy Spirit. "This is a profound explanation of the creation of Middle-earth if we consider Tolkien's belief in the triune nature of God as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The relationship between the Trinity and the created universe is elucidated in Yogananda's discussion of the creation:

God the Father is the Absolute, Unmanifested, existing beyond vibratory creation; the Son is the Christ consciousness . . . existing within vibratory creation; this Christ consciousness is the "only begotten" or sole reflection of the Uncreated Infinite. The outward manifestation of the omnipresent Christ Consciousness, its "witness" (Revelations 3:14), is Aum, the Word or Holy Ghost; the vibratory divine power, the only doer, the sole causative and activating force that upholds all creation through vibration.12

These concepts suggest that there is an actual metaphysical principle behind this literary depiction of the creation of Middle-earth. The music in the Aënilindalë, if we apply this principle, is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit—it is a form of that divine vibration which gives and sustains being in the universe. As stated in John 1:1:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Word, like the Aënilindalë's "Great Music" creates the vibratory force in creation, and it is that force which has the power to create and sustain worlds.13 And speaking about the nature of vibratory creation, Yogananda notes:

The ancient rishis [sages] discovered these laws of sound alliance between nature and man. Because nature is an objectification of Aum, the Primal Sound or Vibratory Word, man can obtain control over all natural manifestations through the use of certain mantras or chants.14

The ancient Western scientists referred to
Music" (Word); the Valar then "entered in at the
beginning of Time" (Time) into "Eä, the World that
is vibration, which appears as a peculiar
sound: the Word, Amen. Amen. In its
different aspects Amen presents the idea of
change, which is Time (Kala), in the
Ever-Unchangeable; and the idea of division,
which is Space (Desa), in the Evanescent
Indivisible. The ensuing effect is the idea
of particles—the innumerable atoms (patra
or any). These four—Word, Time, Space, and
the Atom—are therefore one and the same,
and substantially nothing but mere ideas.16

Note the marked parallels of this process in the
Ainulindalë: The World is created through "Great
Music" (Word); the Valar then "entered in at the
beginning of Time" (Time) into "Eä, the World that
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Through this music or vibration the created
universe takes form in successive stages. This
process of the individuation of the universe
received a fascinating explanation in the book,
The Holy Science, written by Swami Sri Yukteswar,
the Indian seer and spiritual preceptor of Paramahansa
Yogananda. He said:

The manifestation of Omnipotent Force . . .
in vibration, which appears as a peculiar
sound: the Word, Amen. Amen. In its
different aspects Amen presents the idea of
change, which is Time (Kala), in the
Ever-Unchangeable; and the idea of division,
which is Space (Desa), in the Evanescent
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The manifestation of the world through sound has
microcosmic counterparts in three realms of Middle-

Tom Bombadil is a "mighty singer," one who was
"before the river and the trees." He is always
"busy singing" because he sustains his world, his
shire, through song, chant, and incantation. Tom
Bombadil is perhaps one of the original Valar who
descended into the world to create it, but now he
has "withdrawn into a little land" where he continues
the creation of his world through song. Because he
serves his creation and has no desire to dominate,
he has attained mastery over himself and his realm.

Goldberry, Bombadil's consort, is another
powerful singer whose enchanting music has an
elvish quality to it, but "less keen and lofty
was the delight, but deeper and nearer to mortal
heart; marvellous and yet not strange."17

Goldberry's enchanting music typifies the peace
and serenity of Bombadil's land. Indeed it is in that
land that the hobbits first experience peace and
renewal.

The same tranquility is felt by the hobbits in
the elvish realms. In fact, the elves are
characterized as creatures of "light and music,"
appropriately so—they are the Children of
Illuvatar—creations of the divine light and
music. Through singing they attune themselves to
the vibrations of the cosmos, and it is their
singing which sustains them and their realms.

When Frodo, upon arriving in Rivendell, first
hears the "beauty of the melodies," he is enchanted
as in a spell: "Almost it seemed that the words
took shape, and visions of far lands and bright
things that he had never yet imagined opened out
before him . . ." (FOR 173). There is a similar
story in the Kalevala which tells of Vainämöinen,
a great singer, who goes in search of Vipunen to
obtain songs of magic, and finds Vipunen, unconceivable:
"With his songs he lay extended, / Outstretched with
his spells of magic."18 In both stories, music
enchants the listener because all sound is derived
from the primal vibratory creation; here in Middle-
earth, in the elvish realms especially, the hobbits
are soothed with sweet music.

When the Fellowship journeys to Lothlórien, they
are struck by its beauty because Lothlórien, "Lórien of
the Blossoms," is a supernatural realm. Sam catches
the essential quality of the land:

"It's sunlight and bright day, right enough
enough . . . I thought that Elves were
all for moon and stars: but this is more
elvish than anything I ever heard tell of.
I feel as if I was inside a song, if you
take my meaning." (FOR 455)

They are inside a song, the song of creation which
continually sustains Lórien.

The lands of Rivendell and Lothlórien, especially,
sustained out of the light and music of creation
emanate vibrations of peace and healing. The
Fellowship finds that "all fear and anxiety was lifted
from their minds. The future, good or ill, was not
forgotten, but ceased to have any power over the
present. Health and hope grew strong in them. . . ."
(FOR 358).

In his Ainulindalë, Tolkien has fulfilled the
highest aspirations of the sub-creator by creating
a story which has given us "a sudden glimpse of the
underlying reality or truth."19

NOTES

Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977),
p. 8.

2 Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien (New York:

3 O. K. Nambiar, "Spirit-Psych-Symbol-Song," in
Analogic Qualities of Literature, Vol. IV of Yearbook
of Comparative Criticism, ed. Joseph F. Streika
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4 J. R. R. Tolkien, The Letters of J. R. R.
Tolkien, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (Boston: Houghton
Mifflin, 1981), p. 345. All subsequent references are
noted in the text with the letter designation "L" and
page number.
5 Robert Foster, The Complete Guide to Middle-
6 Carpenter, Tolkien, p. 217.
7 Tolkien, Silmarillion, p. 15. All subsequent references are noted in the text with the letter designation, "S" and page number.
12 Yogananda, pp. 151-152.
13 Yogananda, p. 496.
14 Yogananda, p. 164.
18 Lonnrot, p. 178.

DYAD FOR FINROD

I. Lament

O friend of every child of Eru,
Who would raise hand in hate against thee,
Or slay the shining son of Finarfin?

Not the Eldar, O Finwë's offspring,
Sun-crowned scion of Ingwë's sister,
Eärwen's child and Elwë's kinsman:

Nor yet the Naugrim, Nargothrond's shapers,
The delving Dwarves in deep halls dwelling,
With Felagund ever firm in friendship:

Or shall Mortal Men in malice hold thee,
O sweet-voiced weaver of songs of wisdom,
Who life and lordship for love hast given?

Only the Enemy, envious Evil,
Mightiest minion of iron-crowned Morgoth,
Would deal thee death by the jaws of darkness.

Green shall thy grave be in ground new-cleanséd;
Eldan and Edain and Aulë's children,
Long shall lament the loss of thy brightness.

II. A Dream

From shore to ship he leaps
As lithe as a boy,
To greet the new-arrived
With wonder and joy.

He clasps his sister fair
In a warm embrace,
Then goes down on one knee
To speak face to face
With the Little Folk, who stare,
And blush, and smile
At the golden stranger-friend
Of the Elven-isle.

I have seen the Straight Road's end
And the haven white;
I have seen the grey ship glide
Toward the rising light,
And a figure standing tall
On the end of the quay,
His hair blown sunlit-gold
In the wind from the sea.

One hand it unpraised high,
A clear voice hails,
As the swan-prowed vessel alights
In a flutter of sails;

Margaret R. Purdy
December 1, 1981