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“A Greater [Music]” and “A Song of Greater Power”: Lúthien's Song and Dance in the Light of the Ainulindalë

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Cover Page Footnote

I wish to thank Giuseppe Pezzini, Oronzo Cilli, Renée Vink, and Fr. Guglielmo Spirito for their invaluable support and encouragement in my daring to go beyond my usual approach of source criticism and exploring the new perspective embodied in the present writing. Finally, and most importantly, I dedicate the present writing to Camilla, my own personal Lúthien, whose song and dance indeed is the music of creation in my life.

“A Greater [Music]” and “A Song of Greater Power”: Lúthien's Song and Dance in the Light of the *Ainulindalë*¹

(Expanded from my presentation at Rimini Tolkien Conference “Tree of Tales” 2021:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXW-zi-rSUU>)

Available at <https://greengirdle.wordpress.com/2022/06/09/a-greater-music-and-a-song-of-greater-power-luthiens-song-and-dance-in-the-light-of-the-ainulindale/>

Abstract: It is often given for granted that the whole history of Arda somehow reflects the primordial symphony played by the angelic Ainur before the highest deity Ilúvatar before the beginning of days. Yet, the specific modalities of such mirroring did not, up to the present day, receive the attention it should. Therefore, the present writing endeavours to trace the correspondances between the divine music and the narrative dedicated to the amazing accomplishments of the betrothed Elven maiden Lúthien and human hero Beren. The choice of the latter story among all the tales of Arda is due to the fact that it represented the dearest to Tolkien even among his selection of the three Great Tales of the Elder Days, and thematically because it is a story wherein music plays a fundamental role, more than in any other tale Tolkien wrote.

Introduction

In late 1951, Tolkien was discussing with Milton Waldman of Collins publishing house the opportunity to publish *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* together. The same proposal had been previously declined by Allen & Unwin, which explains Tolkien's modesty in explaining the reasons of such an ambitious project to Waldman in the long letter he sent him:

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 (*Letters*, no. 131)

According to *Britannica*, a cosmogonic myth is the same thing as a creation myth, detailing the common origin of everything, whereas an etiological myth only explains the specific origin of a single given thing (how fire came to be, why a city bears its name, etc.).

Myths are narratives that express the basic valuations of a religious community. Myths of creation refer to the process through which the world is centred and given a definite form within the whole of reality. They also serve as a basis for the orientation of human beings within the world. This centring and orientation specify humanity's place in the universe and the regard that humans must have for other humans, nature, and the entire nonhuman world; they set the stylistic tone that tends to determine all other gestures, actions, and structures in the culture. The cosmogonic (origin of the world) myth is the myth par excellence. In this sense, the myth is akin to philosophy, but, unlike philosophy, it is constituted by a system of symbols; and because it is the basis for any subsequent cultural thought, it contains rational and nonrational forms. There is an order and structure to the myth, but this order and structure is not to be confused with rational, philosophical order and structure. The myth possesses its own distinctive kind of order.

Myths of creation have another distinctive character in that they provide both the model for nonmythic expression in the culture and the model for other cultural myths. In this sense, one must distinguish between cosmogonic myths and myths of the origin of cultural techniques and artifacts. Insofar as the cosmogonic myth tells the story of the creation of the world, other myths that narrate the story of a

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specific technique or the discovery of a particular area of cultural life take their models from the stylistic structure of the cosmogonic myth. These latter myths may be etiological (i.e., explaining origins); but the cosmogonic myth is never simply etiological, for it deals with the ultimate origin of all things. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/creation-myth>)

The cultural function of cosmogony in specifying the human place in the world both in their relations with other humans and with respect to life, other beings, and the environment means that the need for such myths is “founded in the lesser [etiological] in contact with the earth”, but equally and opposite it is also true that “the lesser draw[s] splendour from the vast backcloths” of cosmogony as “they set the stylistic tone that tends to determine all other gestures, actions, and structures in the culture” as well as producing a “system of symbols” that constitutes “the basis for any subsequent cultural thought”.

On one hand, this is certainly true for the fictional Elves of Tolkien's mythology to whom Tolkien's cosmogonic myth is supposed to belong; on the other, but at a further degree of remove, the English people to whom Tolkien would dedicate his efforts in mythmaking, as well as any sensitive reader, do accept, in their minds at least, what Tolkien terms the “Secondary Belief” (*OFS*) in the “Elf-centric” (*Letters*, no. 131) world in its own fictitious, narrative consistency.

This way, Tolkien's approach to the relations between “the larger” and “the lesser” legends may be considered not to be an exception but reflecting shared features among most mythologies as generally defined by *Britannica*. After all, if such correspondences are reputed to exist by modern scientists observing how the shape of DNA resembles spiralling galaxies, or even how atomic models remind one of the planetary systems, it can still be surprising how a poet such as William Blake began his 1803 poem *Auguries of Innocence* by writing inspiring lines expressing ideas not too far from the same basic concept: “To see a world in a grain of sand / And a heaven in a wild flower, / Hold infinity in the palm of your hand, / And eternity in an hour” (Blake 1988: 490).

About three centuries earlier, Italian artist Leonardo Da Vinci had already represented the human figure of his *Vitruvian Man* as the connection between the circle of heaven and the square of earth, based on the idea of the human person as “microcosm” reflecting therein the vast “macrocosm” or universe:

Leonardo envisaged the great picture chart of the human body he had produced through his anatomical drawings and *Vitruvian Man* as a *cosmografia del minor mondo* (“cosmography of the microcosm”). He believed the workings of the human body to be an analogy, in microcosm, for the workings of the universe. Leonardo wrote: “Man has been called by the ancients a lesser world, and indeed the name is well applied; because, as man is composed of earth, water, air, and fire...this body of the earth is similar.” (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Leonardo-da-Vinci/Anatomical-studies-and-drawings>)

The notion, sometimes translated in modern English as “as above, so below”, was often reformulated in alchemical texts during the Middle Ages, and Tolkien might perhaps have read the early 15th century Middle English version of the *Emerald Tablet* preserved in MS. Lambeth 501 as a part of *The Governance of Lordshipes*, one of three Middle English translations of the Latin *Secreta Secretorum* published by the Early English Text Society in 1898, wherein the following is attributed to Hermogenes:

Sothfastnesse hauys him so, þat it ys no doute þat þinges by-negh answeres to þinges abown, And þinges abown to þinges byneth. (Steele 1898: 88)

However, Tolkien certainly knew the concept as given in the passage from the *Gospel* describing the election of Saint Peter by Jesus:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and

whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (*Matthew* 16, 18-19 *KJV*)

Eventually, by looking among ancient texts from the pre-Christian age, one does not find the explicit notion of “as above, so below” either in Roman or in Greek culture, nor in Egyptian or Mesopotamic cosmologies, and yet, as we earlier saw, each cosmogonic myth had a foundational purpose as the cornerstone of its civilization, providing each culture not only with the legitimization of their rulers and priests, but also accompanying the whole of the activities and even domestic life of the entire community. As we shall soon see, this also applies to Tolkien's legends.

Tolkien's heroic-fairy-romance in a musical cosmogony

However to readers of *The Silmarillion* nowadays it is no mystery which is Tolkien's cosmogonic myth, in 1951 only a few people he knew were aware of the extent of his mythology, so he explicitly tells Milton Waldman the following:

The cycles begin with a cosmogonic myth: the *Music of the Ainur*. God and the Valar (or powers: Englished as gods) are revealed. These latter are as we should say angelic powers, whose function is to exercise delegated authority in their spheres (of rule and government, *not* creation, making or re-making). They are 'divine', that is, were originally 'outside' and existed 'before' the making of the world. Their power and wisdom is derived from their Knowledge of the cosmogonic drama, which they perceived first as a drama (that is as in a fashion we perceive a story composed by some-one else), and later as a 'reality' (*Letters*, no. 131)

It is noteworthy to underline that 'The Music of the Ainur' is the English title Tolkien gave to the earliest version of his cosmogony, composed between November 1918 and April 1920 (*BoLT* 1: 45) and posthumously published by his son Christopher in *The Book of Lost Tales: Part One*. All the subsequent versions instead are generally titled by Christopher by the Elvish name sharing the same meaning as the earlier English title: 'Ainulindalë', whereas his father used one or the other, or even both, interchangeably. Christopher undoubtedly made this choice for sake of simplicity, since the textual history of the cosmogonic myth by his father is already quite complex as it is, and establishing a consistent nomenclature certainly helps the reader.

Nonetheless, the tale itself always maintained its general outline untouched throughout such a complex history: the One God Ilúvatar creates the angelic (divine) Ainur, then proposes them to enrich a musical theme of his own devising through their musical talents. They produce a great music all in harmony, before one of them rebels against God and starts playing his own music regardless of the others and the main theme. Twice God rises from his throne to offer reconciliation to the rebel angel Melkor by introducing further musical themes, but twice more his kind offering is refused, so God rises a third time and abruptly ends all music. Thereafter, the Ainur, rebels included, are shown by God that through their music a world is made, grander and richer than their music alone could ever be, and even the dissonance introduced by would-be opposers serves a larger purpose into the divine design. Many of the Ainur then decide to enter the new-made world in order to help God's purpose therein, so becoming the Valar, or Powers, ruling and governing what to them appears as an infinite source of wonder. Most of all, though, they are fascinated by what God alone created when introducing his third theme: the two races of the Children of God, who are called Elves and Men.

However Tolkien may say that the whole *Silmarillion* is Elf-centric, though, the earliest version of his mythology was way more focused on Elves, when compared to the later reworkings. On one hand, for example, 'The Music of the Ainur' reveals that Men will take part into a Second Music of the Ainur after the world's end, whereas Elves, however unending may their lives be on Earth, then will meet a fate unknown to the Valar themselves. Arguably, this mystery, although fictional, is an inspiring concept in relativizing the reader's very human anxieties over the transience of human life. Although Tolkien never consistently made himself clear on this matter, I doubt that Tolkien's later

rephrasing of the sentence was unintentional in stating instead that both the races of the Children of God will join the angelic choirs after the end, as Christopher supposed. In the latter's words:

Early in the text just given (*BoLT 1* p.53) occurs the sentence: 'It is said that a mightier [music] far shall be woven before the seat of Ilúvatar by the choirs of both Ainur *and the sons of Men* after the Great End'; and in the concluding sentence of the text: 'Yet while *the sons of Men* will after the passing of things of a certainty join in the Second Music of the Ainur, what Ilúvatar has devised for the Eldar beyond the world's end he has not revealed even to the Valar, and Melko has not discovered it.' Now in the first revision of the *Ainulindalë* (which dates from the 1930s) the first of these sentences was changed to read: '. . . by the choirs of the Ainur *and the Children of Ilúvatar* after the end of days'; whereas the second remained, in this essential, unchanged. This remained the case right through to the final version. It is possible that the change in the first passage was unintentional, the substitution of another common phrase, and that this was never subsequently picked up. However, in the published work (pp. 15, 42) I left the two passages as they stand. (*BoLT 1*: 63)

On the other hand, a further example can be found in the earliest story of Beren and Lúthien, titled 'The Tale of Tinúviel': herein, instead of their union being the coronation of the common origin of the two races of the Children in a happy marriage whence the first Half-Elf is born, both characters belong to the Elven race, and the hardships they have to face before getting married are only due to Lúthien's father's ostility towards the different Elven kin of Beren's.

And it is precisely in the tale of these two lovers that Tolkien identifies the "romantic fairy-story" acting as a counterpart to his cosmogonic myth, an identification clearly expressed by Tolkien himself to Waldman:

The chief of the stories of the *Silmarillion*, and the one most fully treated is the *Story of Beren and Lúthien the Elfmaiden*. Here we meet, among other things, the first example of the motive (to become dominant in *Hobbits*) that the great policies of world history, 'the wheels of the world', are often turned not by the Lords and Governors, even gods, but by the seemingly unknown and weak – owing to the secret life in creation, and the part unknowable to all wisdom but One, that resides in the intrusions of the Children of God into the Drama. It is Beren the outlawed mortal who succeeds (with the help of Lúthien, a mere maiden even if an elf of royalty) where all the armies and warriors have failed: he penetrates the stronghold of the Enemy and wrests one of the *Silmarilli* from the Iron Crown. Thus he wins the hand of Lúthien and the first marriage of mortal and immortal is achieved. As such the story is (I think a beautiful and powerful) heroic-fairy-romance, receivable in itself with only a very general vague knowledge of the background. But it is also a fundamental link in the cycle, deprived of its full significance out of its place therein. For the capture of the *Silmaril*, a supreme victory, leads to disaster. The oath of the sons of Fëanor becomes operative, and lust for the *Silmaril* brings all the kingdoms of the Elves to ruin. (*Letters*, no. 131)

At this point it appears evident how, even if Tolkien in his 1951 letter to Waldman on a general level is certainly expressing intentions and ideas he always had in writing his legends from the very beginning, these same intentions and ideas underwent a long process of transformation in their development across years and decades. As a consequence, though, instead of stepping away from the initial aim, it often happens that in the process of rewriting and revising the original purpose is better suited and addressed.

In the case of the proposed correspondence between the Music of the Ainur and the tale of Beren and Lúthien I will then first survey the earliest version of both stories in *The Book of Lost Tales*, then I will compare *The Lay of Leithian* with what Christopher terms the B text of the 'Ainulindalë', eventually to deal with Christopher's 'Ainulindalë' and 'Of Beren and Lúthien' chapters in the published *Silmarillion*, always keeping an eye on the original sources used by Tolkien's son.

'The Music of the Ainur' and 'The Tale of Tinúviel' in *The Book of Lost Tales*

In the first version of Tolkien's cosmogony there is already the idea of the overflowing of the music

of the Ainur as water flooding out of the halls of Ilúvatar into the surrounding void:

Then the harpists, and the lutanists, the flautists and pipers, the organs and the countless choirs of the Ainur began to fashion the theme of Ilúvatar into great music; and a sound arose of mighty melodies changing and interchanging, mingling and dissolving amid the thunder of harmonies greater than the roar of the great seas, till the places of the dwelling of Ilúvatar and the regions of the Ainur were filled to overflowing with music, and the echo of music, and the echo of the echoes of music which flowed even into the dark and empty spaces far off. Never was there before, nor has there been since, such a music of immeasurable vastness of splendour; though it is said that a mightier far shall be woven before the seat of Ilúvatar by the choirs of both Ainur and the sons of Men after the Great End. Then shall Ilúvatar's mightiest themes be played aright; for then Ainur and Men will know his mind and heart as well as may be, and all his intent. (*BoLT 1: 53*)

The earliest version is particularly interesting since the connection between the Music and the water element is here especially stressed in writing “of harmonies greater than the roar of the great seas” (*BoLT 1: 53*). In fact, the roar of the ocean is later shown to the Ainur by God and they are utterly amazed:

Then the Ainur marvelled to see how the world was globed amid the void and yet separated from it; and they rejoiced to see light, and found it was both white and golden, and they laughed for the pleasure of colours, and for the great roaring of the ocean they were filled with longing. (*BoLT 1: 56*)

The reason for the special highlighting of water is found in the explanation immediately following:

Their hearts were glad because of air and the winds, and the matters whereof the Earth was made - iron and stone and silver and gold and many substances: but of all these water was held the fairest and most goodly and most greatly praised. Indeed there liveth still in water a deeper echo of the Music of the Ainur than in any substance else that is in the world, and at this latest day many of the Sons of Men will hearken unsatedly to the voice of the Sea and long for they know not what. Know then that water was for the most part the dream and invention of Ulmo, an Ainu whom Ilúvatar had instructed deeper than all others in the depths of music. (*BoLT 1: 56*)

When Tinúviel is held prisoner on the Hirilorn treehouse to prevent her departure to rescue Beren from the evil Prince of cats Tevildo, she performs three magical songs in a succession, each more powerful than the earlier, meanwhile mixing water and wine.

The next day she asked those who came to her to bring, if they would, some of the clearest water of the stream below, "but this," she said, "must be drawn at midnight in a silver bowl, and brought to my hand with no word spoken," and after that she desired wine to be brought, "but this," she said, "must be borne hither in a flagon of gold at noon, and he who brings it must sing as he comes," and they did as they were bid, but Tinwelint was not told. (*BoLT 2: 19*)

Her second song is especially relevant as it lists all the longest things, to conclude by the mention of Uinen's hair, identified as the length of all waters in Arda:

Now Tinúviel took the wine and water when she was alone, and singing a very magical song the while, she mingled them together, and as they lay in the bowl of gold she sang a song of growth, and as they lay in the bowl of silver she sang another song, and the names of all the tallest and longest things upon Earth were set in that song; the beards of the Indravangs, the tail of Karkaras, the body of Glorund, the bole of Hirilorn, and the sword of Nan she named, nor did she forget the chain Angainu that Aule and Tulkas made or the neck of Gilim the giant, and last and longest of all she spake of the hair of Uinen the lady of the sea that is spread through all the waters. Then did she lave her head with the mingled water and wine, and as she did so she sang a third song, a song of uttermost sleep, and the hair of Tinúviel which was dark and finer than the most delicate threads of twilight began suddenly to grow very fast indeed, and after twelve hours had passed it nigh filled the little room, and then

Tinúviel was very pleased and she lay down to rest; and when she awoke the room was full as with a black mist and she was deep hidden under it, and lo! her hair was trailing out of the windows and blowing about the tree boles in the morning. (*BoLT* 2: 19-20)

Tinúviel's enchantment appears to work as sympathetic magic, associating the Elven maiden's hair to Uinen's, thus to cause her hair to grow to the point of "overflowing", her song in turn being a domestic parallel to the Music of the Ainur outpouring from the halls of God in echoes and the echoes of echoes. This way, then, Tinúviel herself is compared to the stature of an Ainu, however she may actually be "only" the daughter of an Elven King and a lesser goddess, here called Gwendeling.

After all, already her dance in the hemlock clearing, winning her Beren's heart forever, was said to be only comparable to the dance of a Valië, the enchanting Nessa:

Tinúviel's joy was rather in the dance, and no names are set with hers for the beauty and subtlety of her twinkling feet.

Now it was the delight of Dairon and Tinúviel to fare away from the cavernous palace of Tinwelint their father and together spend long times amid the trees. There often would Dairon sit upon a tussock or a tree-root and make music while Tinúviel danced thereto, and when she danced to the playing of Dairon more lissom was she than Gwendeling, more magical than Tinfang Warble neath the moon, nor may any see such liting save be it only in the rose gardens of Valinor where Nessa dances on the lawns of never-fading green. (*BoLT* 2: 10)

However, the dance episode's first description here reported is way less striking than in subsequent versions, and Beren is rescued by his lover from Tevildo's dungeons only thanks to the help of the hound Huan, and even the retrieval of the Silmaril from Melko's crown relies almost entirely on Tinúviel's previously discussed enchantment, the sleep-inducing effects of which still persist under their performer's control. Even her plead to Mandos, apart from being confusing in a frame wherein Beren is a Gnome, is also presented as a sort of childish fable, being added to the tale's ending only by children in the Cottage of Lost Play.

This way, perhaps strikingly, the whole focus of the tale is set onto Tinúviel's incantation in the tree-house, motivated by her love for Beren and taking place in three subsequent songs, like the three themes of the Music of the Ainur. As we earlier saw, a cosmogonic myth sets "the stylistic tone that tends to determine all other gestures, actions, and structures in the culture" (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/creation-myth>). In this light, it is likely that Tolkien focused chiefly on Tinúviel's threefold incantation as a microcosm unfolding of the macrocosm angelic symphony, taking place in water as the substance holding the deepest memory of the Music, and being an incantation performed through song and dance as the primordial Music sets gestures, actions, and structures in Elven culture to a musical tone. Furthermore, the two lovers have to "win" three courts each (Tevildo's excepted since it is won by Huan): in a chronological order, both first win the inner court of each other's heart, then she breaks free from her father in Arthanor, while Beren wins the Silmaril against Melko in Angamandi, thus also gaining her father's court's approval, before Tinúviel obtains her beloved back from the dead in the halls of Mandos. This is another tripartite structure which parallels the Music of the Ainur, also in being twofold tripartite between the two members of the couple, just as three themes presented by God correspond to three musical executions by the Ainur.

The Lay of Leithian and 'Ainulindalë B'

With Beren reduced to a mortal man, the emphasis in *The Lay of Leithian* is much more placed on his beloved, from the very beginning of the poem, underlying how the King her father had

beryl, pearl, and opal pale, 15
and metal wrought like fishes mail,

buckler and corslet, axe and sword,
and gleaming spears were laid in hoard -
all these he had and loved them less
than a maiden once in Elfinesse; 20
for fairer than are born to Men
a daughter had he, Lúthien.
Such lissom limbs no more shall run
on the green earth beneath the sun;
so fair a maid no more shall be 25
from dawn to dusk, from sun to sea.
(Lays 156)

The tale in this version is much more serious, forfeiting the beast-fable overtones of the Tevildo episode, now substituted by the evil Thú, who will later become Sauron. Other major additions are the passage in Nargothrond and the role played by Celegorm and Curufin, two sons of Fëanor. Lúthien voice is now directly compared to waters, and the Canto narrating her imprisonment and escape from Doriath begins by associating her to the Esgalduin river and the roaring of its waves:

So days drew on from the mournful day;
the curse of silence no more lay
on Doriath, though Dairon's flute
and Lúthien's singing both were mute.
The murmurs soft awake once more 1210
about the woods, the waters roar
past the great gates of Thingol's halls;
but no dancing step of Lúthien falls
on turf or leaf. For she forlorn,
where stumbled once, where bruised and torn, 1215
with longing on him like a dream,
had Beren sat by the shrouded stream
Esgalduin the dark and strong,
she sat and mourned in a low song:
'Endless roll the waters past! 1220
To this my love hath come at last,
enchanted waters pitiless,
a heartache and a loneliness.'
(Lays 199-200)

The following narration details her talks with her mother, with Dairon, and with King Thingol, who commands her reclusion out of fear his daughter would try and reach Beren. As in the previous tale, she asks for water, wine, a spinning wheel, and a loom, and they are brought to her. However the lines describing her enchantment are even more captivating than the prose version of *Lost Tales*, the whole passage is too long to quote fully, so I can only recommend the reader to check lines 1476-1523 on Lays 205-206, meanwhile pointing out how the new poetical tale interestingly contrasts such narration with the opening of the Canto abovecited.

In 'Ainulindalë B', the overflowing of the Music is still there, but the “melodies (...) interchanging” of *The Book of Lost Tales* have now become “endless”, perhaps in conjunction with the “endless roll” of the “waters past” inspiring in Lúthien the idea how to escape:

Then the voices of the Ainur, like unto harps and lutes, and pipes and trumpets, and viols and organs, and like unto countless choirs singing with words, began to fashion the theme of Ilúvatar to a great music; and a sound arose of endless interchanging melodies, woven in harmonies, that passed beyond hearing both in the depths and in the heights, and the places of the dwelling of Ilúvatar were filled to overflowing, and the music and the echo of the music went out into the Void, and it was not void. Never was there before, nor has there since been, a music so immeasurable, though it has been said

that a greater still shall be made before Ilúvatar by the choirs of the Ainur and the Children of Ilúvatar after the end of days. Then shall the themes of Ilúvatar be played aright, and take being in the moment of their playing, for all shall then understand his intent in their part, and shall know the comprehension each of each, and Ilúvatar shall give to their thoughts the secret Fire, being well pleased. (*LR* 156-157)

The roar of the sea instead was erased, replaced by the Music passing “beyond hearing both in the depths and in the heights”. I suspect Tolkien in this second phase first connected the *Lay*, dated to 1926, to the earlier text of the 'Music' by the roaring of waters, then at some point between 'Ainulindalë A' and 'B', meaning the 1930s, introduced the changes somewhat to dissimulate the earlier, stronger water connection previously treated, which anyway is still implied by the “overflowing” of all versions. The reason he had in such a dissimulation lies most probably in the fact that he had something even more striking in mind than comparing Lúthien to the Valar (the comparison to Nessa is also dropped).

In the *Lay*, before the couple reaches Angband, the fortress of Melkor, Beren tries to leave Lúthien behind in order to protect her from the perils he chose to face alone in defiance toward Thingol. Nonetheless, soon his love catches up with him once more, and finds him singing his leavetaking from her:

Farewell sweet earth and northern sky,
for ever blest, since here did lie,
and here with lissom limbs did run,
beneath the moon, beneath the sun, 3325
Lúthien Tinúviel
more fair than mortal tongue can tell.
Though all to ruin fell the world,
and were dissolved and backward hurled
unmade into the old abyss, 3330
yet were its making good, for this -
the dawn, the dusk, the earth, the sea -
that Lúthien on a time should be!
(*Lays* 276-277)

Upon hearing this, she reveals to him, and replies:

'A, Beren, Beren!' came a sound,
'almost too late have I thee found!
O proud and fearless hand and heart,
not yet farewell, not yet we part! 3345
Not thus do those of elven race
forsake the love that they embrace.
A love is mine, as great a power
as thine, to shake the gate and tower
of death with challenge weak and frail 3350
that yet endures, and will not fail
nor yield, unvanquished were it hurled
beneath the foundations of the world.
Beloved fool! escape to seek
from such pursuit; in might so weak 3355
to trust not, thinking it well to save
from love thy loved, who welcomes grave
and torment sooner than in guard
of kind intent to languish, barred,
wingless and helpless him to aid 3360
for whose support her love was made!
(*Lays* 277)

In Beren's song, Lúthien's fairness has become ineffable, and she is even suggested to be the reason for which the whole world was even created. For her, though, it is not so much his love for her that is important, but her own love for him, which somehow seems to have just happened in a totally spontaneous, yet inexplicable, fashion, and “endures, and will not fail / nor yield, unvanquished were it hurled / beneath the foundations of the world”.

Beneath the foundations of the world there is only the abyss, and it is here that the new connection Tolkien operates with the 'Ainulindalë' is found, as in 'B' one reads: “In the midst of this strife [of sounds between the theme of Ilúvatar and Melkor's discordant music], whereat the halls of Iluvatar shook and a tremor ran through the dark places, Ilúvatar raised up both his hands, and in one chord, deeper than the abyss, higher than the firmament, more glorious than the sun, piercing as the light of the eye of Iluvatar, the music ceased” (LR 158). In the earlier text of 'The Music of the Ainur', the abyss was not mentioned here (see *BoLT 1*: 54). Nonetheless, the world is in all versions said to be “globed amid the Void, and it was sustained therein, but not of it” (LR 159), which means that the foundations of the world consist in the Secret Fire, that “burned in the heart of the World”.

In other words, however one might account for poetical diction and love-talk, what is here textually suggested is that Beren and Lúthien's love is a direct expression of the Creator's mind and will, a part of his providential design, and as such not only comparable or equal to the Ainur, but even their superior in being given to take part into the Secret Fire, the only true spark of Creation.

'Ainulindalë' and 'Of Beren and Lúthien' in *The Silmarillion*

As I earlier mentioned, the role of waters in both the cosmogonic myth and the romantic fairy-story remains, although diminished: in the former case the mention of the roaring seas when the Great Music is described, once suppressed in 'Ainulindalë B', never returns; in the latter, all versions of the tale from the 'Sketch of the Mythology' to the 'Later Quenta Silmarillion Series 2' either do not offer details at all concerning Lúthien's escape from Doriath, or they inform the readers they may find the details of her escape in *The Lay of Leithian*. Uinen's hair are no longer mentioned.

Nonetheless, the idea of overflowing waters becomes a motif throughout Tolkien's narratives thereafter: the most prominent example is obviously the fall of Númenor, but also the flood of Beleriand in the War of Wrath, and minor instances may also be identified in the flood of river Bruinen and the Ents's inundation of Orthanc. Furthermore, as I already pointed out, the importance of water was still recognized in both tales surveyed throughout all their reworkings, and preserved by Christopher in the published *Silmarillion*: the Music of the Ainur always fills the halls of Ilúvatar to “overflowing”, water is always the element wherein the Music most resonates, and Lúthien's song sounds like the voice of clear waters.

In fact, as I previously stated, Tolkien is simply shifting his depiction of the Elven maiden from a comparative to a superlative: it is not enough anymore to say she is like this and that, however godly they may be, but it is she to whom others are compared when praising them, like in Arwen's case, whereas she herself remains incomparable and over the top. However Huan may help, it is she (already in the *Lay*) rescuing Beren from Sauron's grip, winning a song duel against the latter, a contest even a mighty Elven Lord such as Finrod had lost. The use of the comparative is still present, as she is said to sing first “a song which no walls of stone could hinder” (TS 108) in order to let her presence be known by Beren, who joins her singing. Then she sings “a song of greater power” to defeat Sauron, and this choice of words recalls the “greater music” to be sung by the Ainur and the Children of God after the end of days.

Concerning Christopher's devising of the chapter 'Of Beren and Lúthien', more specifically in the Angband sequence, Douglas Kane comments:

More significantly, removed from the statement in the next sentence that Luthien was not daunted by Morgoth's eyes is the qualifier that she was the only one in Middle-earth about whom that was true. I find this change surprising and unfortunate, since Luthien's uniqueness (she is described as “the greatest of all the Eldar” in *The Shibboleth of Fëanor*; see *PoMe*, 357 n. 14) is such an important idea to Tolkien. (Kane 2011: 180)

Moreover, where previous versions offered different accounts of the ending of her story, eventually a single ending takes over which sees her singing a song so sad, so beautiful, so touching that even Mandos is moved to pity and brings Beren back to her from the dead so that they may after all live their romance in peace until their lives last. In *The Silmarillion* we read:

Lúthien came to the halls of Mandos, where are the appointed places of the Eldalië, beyond the mansions of the West upon the confines of the world. There those that wait sit in the shadow of their thought. But her beauty was more than their beauty, and her sorrow deeper than their sorrows; and she knelt before Mandos and sang to him.

The song of Lúthien before Mandos was the song most fair that ever in words was woven, and the song most sorrowful that ever the world shall ever hear. Unchanged, imperishable, it is sung still in Valinor beyond the hearing of the world, and the listening the Valar grieved. For Lúthien wove two themes of words, of the sorrow of the Eldar and the grief of Men, of the Two Kindreds that were made by Ilúvatar to dwell in Arda, the Kingdom of Earth amid the innumerable stars. And as she knelt before him her tears fell upon his feet like rain upon stones; and Mandos was moved to pity, who never before was so moved, nor has been since.

Therefore he summoned Beren, and even as Lúthien had spoken in the hour of his death they met again beyond the Western Sea. But Mandos had no power to withhold the spirits of Men that were dead within the confines of the world, after their time of waiting; nor could he change the fates of the Children of Ilúvatar. He went therefore to Manwë, Lord of the Valar, who governed the world under the hand of Ilúvatar; and Manwë sought counsel in his inmost thought, where the will of Ilúvatar was revealed. (TS 116)

Here Lúthien's song to Mandos is said to be "imperishable". The word appears only 14 times in the whole *History of Middle-earth* series, most of them qualifying the Flame Imperishable, a new name that Tolkien most likely first devised in the early 1950s for the Secret Fire bestowing the Creator's gifts of reality and life. Since Manwë finds that it is God's will to make an exception for Lúthien even to the strictest law of death, I think it only follows that the description of the Elf princess's song as "imperishable" does not only mean that it will always be sung, but also that it takes part in the Secret Fire that "is within it and yet in all parts of it, and is its life" (TS 38).

Conclusion

Elizabeth Whittingham cites Westermann's categorization of Creation myths into different types (Whittingham 2007: 40-42):

- Creation by birth (Hesiod, Sumerian myths)
- Creation by an action or activity (Ovid, Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, Norse myths, *Kalevala*)
- Creation as the result from a struggle (Ovid, Babylonian *Enuma Elish*)
- Creation by the Word (*Genesis*, *John 1*)

Although Tolkien's Arda is created by the Word of Ilúvatar: "Eä! Let these things be!", his Creation is also made by the musical activity of the Ainur, and also as the result of the musical contention between his Ainur and the rebel angels led by Melkor. Furthermore, as in both Judaism and Christianity, also in Tolkien's myth Creation is not done once and for all, but is a continuous development throughout the ages, as the primordial Music unfolds, sometimes even beyond the understanding of the Valar, but only founded in God's providence, as in the coming of the Children. In the light of such awareness, both the initial comparison of Tinúviel, her song and dance, to the Valar, and her eventual presentation as superlative and beyond compare, starting in *The Lay of Leithian* to continue and flourish throughout the late versions, point to the exceptional character of her standing. In her indeed Ilúvatar himself first saw fit to accomplish his design of joining the two races of his Children in the marriage whence their son Dior Eluchil is born. I think in this case one may come closer to Westermann's notion of Creation by birth in Tolkien's Arda than one may ever

get. Perhaps, one may guess, the song of Lúthien before Mandos, also described as weaving the themes of both kins together, might be the fourth theme that the choirs of the Ainur and the Children of Ilúvatar will sing after the end of days, when all that is good and beautiful will receive the Flame Imperishable and become real and true.

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