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Harkening to the Other: A Certeauvian Reading of the Ainulindale

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Abstract

Applying literary theory to authors whose works interest us is “a kind of play that attunes us to the interior movements, voices, and processes” of their work. Analyzes the *Ainulindalë* using the literary-historical theoretical framework of Michel de Certeau as a way of understanding how the inhabitants of Arda, not just the readers outside the world, comprehend how they are situated in their history, and what this says about Tolkien’s understanding of history.

Additional Keywords

J.R.R Tolkien; *Ainulindalë*



DARKENING TO THE OTHER:
A CERTEAUVIAN READING
OF THE *AINULINDĒ*

CACDI AĀAN

EXPLORATIONS OF THE DETAILED GEOGRAPHY OF ARDA have focused primarily on the impact that the detail, supporting documents, and layers of story have had on *readers* of Tolkien's fiction. That is, the rich descriptions regarding landscapes and geographical places with particular (and multiple) names offer the reader a sense of "'depth,' the literary quality Tolkien valued most of all" (Shippey 308), and result in readers' beliefs that Tolkien's Secondary world contains all elements of the Primary world: language, culture, history, artifacts, conflicts, and so on. Such readings offer vital insight into the relationship between the text, its created Secondary World of intricate "depth," and its readers, who experience this Secondary World as fully realized or otherwise believable.¹ With the posthumous and ongoing publication of *The Silmarillion* as part of *The History of Middle-earth*, readers and scholars can now see that Tolkien was vitally concerned with rendering his world as fully realized and as residing/partially surviving in vast, complex and at times conflicting artifacts accounting for Arda's cosmology and long history.

Just as readers, the more they read and are familiar with the numerous extant accounts of Arda,² feel a greater connection and sense of depth between the ancient past and the events, names, and peoples moving through Tolkien's Third Age narratives, so too *inhabitants* of the Secondary World develop a greater wisdom the more glimpses of past times-places they encounter through tales or ancient artifacts. I have noted elsewhere the textual

¹ As Tolkien claims in "On Fairy-stories," "[The author] makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside [the story], what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside" (132).

² My use of *extant* here accepts Tolkien's construction of the ancient Elven past via a system of texts and tales, some complete, others fragmentary, evoking the cultural history of the Eldar, as well as a system that produced these texts/artifacts for the beings in the Secondary World. For a consideration of the authors/audience of these texts—as surviving/originating through Elves or Men—see Nils Ivar Agoy's "Viewpoints, Audiences and Lost Texts in *The Silmarillion*."

care taken to insert First Age references into Third Age events so as to allow a character or an event to take on greater cosmic significance.³ I would like to argue here that it is also vital to consider the First Age materials themselves as complex, layered documents of cultural practices particularly concerned with space, geography, boundaries, and movement. Consistently, the accounts of Arda offer up intricate layers, detailing landscape and geography not merely to render a world “real” for readers, but firstly to reify the very processes of creation itself for those *within* Arda.⁴ Viewing the storehouse of Elven material as glimpses of Arda’s ancient past, the accounts reveal both an impulse to narrate and an impulse to map out; in other words, they often narrate or create story, even as they also locate and fix in time and space. In the movement between these modes—narrating and mapping—the textual concern with naming, positioning, and detailing past cultural episodes-in-places points to the unfolding of cultural systems as well as to the centrality of artifacts that seek to preserve those cultural systems. At the same time, the texts (Tolkien’s as well as those of the imagined series of compilers or narrators) work to suggest a residue orality and sense of “tales being told,” even as the texts inscribe these moments, events, and beings into a quasi-historicity.

Several of the foundational concerns in the theories of French philosopher and influential cultural critic Michel de Certeau offer fascinating portals into these negotiations and tensions underpinning the First Age accounts of *The Silmarillion* and in particular, the *Ainulindalë*.⁵ In *The Writing of History*, for example, Certeau interrogates historiography to expose the ways in which it codifies past events into a knowledge system (episteme) that can never fully capture the voices, people, and intricacies of the past: “effectively the problem facing historians,” Certeau observes, is “what can we apprehend from the discourse of an absent being?” (*Writing of History* [WH] 244). Largely unaware of its own position and techniques, historiography orders and privileges according to what Certeau calls a “scriptural economy” (*Practice of*

³ “Song as Mythic Conduit in *The Fellowship of the Ring*.”

⁴ It is these concerns with place, its naming, and its inhabitants that partially explain the consistent foregrounding of detailed descriptions of landscape, regions, dwellings, and their shifting names through history so characteristic of the body of works about Middle-earth. Each treatment, each description, evokes the making of Arda that begins all subsequent (sub) creation.

⁵ Jocelyn Dunphy Blomfield details Certeau’s wide-ranging interests: “A cross-disciplinary thinker—Jesuit priest, psychoanalyst, student of mysticism, analyst of culture, politics and strategic uses of language—Certeau as historian wrote within a specialized methodology” (164). My interest in exploring Tolkien’s First Age documents through the play of Certeau’s theories is part of a larger ongoing project.

Everyday Life [PE] 132), while claiming or assuming a kind of distanced objectivity from its subject, the past. To counter such distancing, Luce Giard notes that “[Certeau] showed how the historian always produces the writing of history from the standpoint of the present, from his or her relation with governing powers” (ix-x). Even as historians attempt to locate and codify ‘history,’ in Certeau’s view the voice and presence of the past haunts these pages but cannot be fully contained, ordered, or written. Historical practices, and their scriptural economy, then, can never be objective or totalizing.⁶ Beyond the exposure of historiography’s processes, Certeau remains fascinated by the ruptures or gaps in the ‘science’ of historiography and seeks to let those spaces speak. Certeau’s many projects thus consistently seek “to detect the voice of the other” (Terdiman “Response” 8), and this attention to or movement toward “the discipline of ‘the margin’” (Terdiman “Marginality” 407) is echoed in the *Aimulindalē*’s account of creation, as we shall see.⁷

Certeau’s most effective examples for observing the movements and practices of the other were late medieval mystics and early modern colonial encounters. These ‘outside’ or marginal practices become codified as ‘folklore,’ fable, or mysticism (i.e. other), made scientifically comprehensible only via the dominant discourse. In *The Mystic Fable*, Certeau attempts to reveal the ways in which historical and juridical processes confronted the ecstatic languages and bodies of European mystics in the 16th–17th century, positioning these voices and the texts that attempt to contain them on the cusp of modernity yet, in the case of the mystic, harkening back to a medieval system that assumed a divine Other.⁸ Certeau posits that “[Mystic spaces] are established, like

⁶ “History,” Certeau claims, “furnishes the empty frame of a linear succession which formally answers to questions on *beginnings* and to the need for *order*” (WH 12, emphasis in original). “Such formal organizations [...] do not provide for Certeau the underlying truth of history. They constitute rather a series of necessary and shifting frameworks through which to read dispersed textual clusters” (Ahearne 26). As Tom Conley notes in his translator’s introduction to *The Writing of History*, “Contrary to the simulation of living speech conveyed by discourse as it is performed, historical enunciation is possible only in writing” (xx).

⁷ “Writing in the manner of an early modern cartographer, plotting spaces, establishing the latitudes and curvatures of the surfaces he studied, and attending to omissions and lacunae, [Certeau] also left them intact and vital for the sake of both their realities and the fantasies they inspire” (Conley *L’Absent* 576). Conley’s location of Certeau’s analysis through metaphors of mapping, lacunae, and a sense of fantasy offer us fertile ground for exploring the processes of the First Age accounts.

⁸ Graham Ward explains Certeau’s vision of pre-enlightenment cosmology: “A doctrine of creation—God spoke the world into being and therefore the world was made by his Word and sustained by his Spirit—opened a sacramental space in which the world and all its activities could be understood and read. The world itself was discursive, words

utopias, in relation to a historical context that both requires them and denies them the credit of being anything but products of the imagination" (Ward 505). As with the voices and actions of the native 'other,' mystics require systems of knowledge to explain what they 'really' mean. On the other hand, Ian Buchanan describes Certeau's project regarding these 'other' voices: "He had to find the means of reclaiming mystical language from the impenetrable depths of the various no-wheres and no-whens of madness, heresy, and ineffability to which it had been consigned by religious historians, unwilling or unable to read the texts for themselves and in their own terms [...]" (326). Attending to the mystic utterance thus becomes the very task Certeau attempts to negotiate. However, his readings seek not to contain or impose logic upon the actions/voices of the mystic, but rather to observe and detail the practices, movements, and ruptures of mystic language and voice; Certeau's method of reading mystics "amounts to interpreting discourse in a musical sense" (Buchanan 327).⁹ Such a musical sense of reading suggests a window on to the *Ainulindalë*, itself an account of a musical-mystical practice. It is Certeau's work with mystic articulation/processes that he sets off against the written economy of the burgeoning modern age, and this mystic utterance, in his view, continues to exist and to exert influence over even the textualities that seek to contain it. According to Certeau, "Historiography deals only with regularities and modifications," whereas mystic "events [...] continually contradict the time produced by historiography" (*Mystic Fable* [MF] 11). Rather than imposing such an outside logic to mystic utterance, Certeau works to comprehend its operations, its tactics. Certeau thus emphasizes the mystical utterance—"the impossible expression of the ineffable" (Terdiman "Certeau" 477)—as a sound/tone that no outside system can fully decipher. In examining a language that admits it cannot ascertain its divine subject, Certeau's project thus positions itself: "to 'interpret', in the musical sense of the term, this mystical writing, [...] is to consider it a past from which we are cut off [...], to

and things were interrelated" (508). Once such a doctrine falls away, Certeau claims, the economy of writing subsumes the utterance of the Word, of mysticism, etc. To Certeau, "The 'mystical' operates on the margins of a society which is increasingly secularized, and is associated with that which is extraordinary or strange, rather than the activities of everyday life" (Marks 123). In some ways, the *Ainulindalë* attempts to construct a world-Arda—that is discursive, where "words and things [are] interrelated."

⁹ Indeed, Certeau opens *The Mystic Fable* with an extraordinary confession and positioning of his discourse: "This book does not lay claim to any special jurisdiction over its domain. It stands exiled from its subject. [...] I desire from the outset to strip this log of my textual peregrinations of the prestige [...] of being taken for a discourse accredited by a presence, authorized to speak in its name, or presumed privy to an insider's knowledge" (1).

retrace the steps of a labor but from afar [...]. To do this is to remain within a scriptural experience and to retain that sense of modesty that respects distances" (MF 17). Mystic speech and practice, for Certeau, represent both the troubling opacity of language resulting from modernity and the unstable position of the other as recorded in the moment of change.¹⁰

Just as Certeau's concern with attending to the voice of the other will inform our exploration of the *Aimulindalë*, so his influential treatment of life in cities, *The Practice of Everyday Life* [EL], will open up new considerations of the movements of the actors in Arda's creation. Throughout his study, Certeau examines (post)-modern urban inhabitants and their social practices to suggest the play between the overarching "grid" of the city and the inhabitants' transversal movement through that space.¹¹ In response to Michel Foucault's reading of modernity as a panoptic web of ordered power systems, Certeau qualifies the totalizing control of the matrices of power by noting how citizens move and act, transversally, employing tactics that while not overthrowing the overarching system of panoptic discipline, make use of that system in ways not anticipated by the strategies of power. As Certeau explains, "these multiform, resistan[t], tricky and stubborn procedures [...] elude discipline without being outside the field in which it is exercised [...]" (EL 96).¹² Those who walk the city, according to Certeau, develop space (a language) other than the rigid system of the map, as they move not along set patterns, but as they will, "in a way that also eludes urbanistic systematicity" (EL 105). In his attempt to

¹⁰ Certeau thus characterizes the mystical utterance as opaque: "It is never anything but the unstable metaphor for what is inaccessible" (MF 77). Charles Lock views the mystic as representative of Certeau's theoretical oeuvre: "That mystical discourse should be opaque not because the divine is obscure but because opacity is necessary to evade the searching light of reason: this is the paradox and provocation of Certeau's thinking in its very manifold. This is (the) heterologic" (193-4). See also Certeau's "Vocal Utopias: Glossolalias."

¹¹ Certeau's most captivating exploration in *The Practice of Everyday Life* positions the spectator at the top of the World Trade Center, able to view the city as a vast web or map over which she/he has total command: "His elevation transforms him into a voyeur. [...] It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more" (92). Such an urge to surveilling power evokes Melkor's desires through the First Age.

¹² Just as interestingly, Certeau equates these bodily movements with speech: "The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered [...]. It thus seems possible to give a preliminary definition of walking as a space of enunciation" (97-8). This emphasis on transverse movement and its resultant creativity will be reflected in the process of making in the *Aimulindalë*.

explore everyday practices, Certeau uses the term *tactics* to identify how “popular procedures (also ‘miniscule’ and quotidian) manipulate the mechanism of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them [...]” (EL xiv).¹³ Within the factory or workplace, in language, in the consumption of media, Certeau repeatedly reminds us that there are “practices which introduce *artistic* tricks and competitions of *accomplices* into a system that reproduces and partitions through work or leisure. Sly as a fox and twice as quick: there are countless ways of ‘making do’” (EL 29, author’s emphasis).¹⁴ Repeatedly, Certeau connects the acts of ordinary inhabitants to the creative, the story, the voice, the game, the trick, and the transversal, and always he emphasizes movement, a turn, whether linguistic or bodily, that can surprise or out-manuever dominant systems.¹⁵

In his wide-ranging investigations, Certeau may be concerned primarily with the cultural shifts toward modernity and the construction of the subject-other in modernity, but his debt to and critique of anthropology, human geography, philosophy, psychology, literature, and history suggest vast potential applications for his theories and readings, including Tolkien’s construction of Arda and the Elven materials that make up the *Silmarillion*. Scholars of Tolkien—acknowledging him as a modern man, philologist,

¹³ In fact, Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* positions itself in the gaps he perceives in Foucault’s construction of surveillance in *Discipline and Punish*; while acknowledging that “If it is true that the grid of ‘discipline’ is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it” (EL xiv). Wlad Godzich explains the distinction between the two thinkers: “Foucault’s descriptions present a vast machinery of power; de Certeau’s pit individual or small-group efforts against this machinery as a mode of interaction that constitutes the lived experience of these people” (xiv). Certeau explores Foucault’s work more extensively in part II of *The Practice of Everyday Life* (EL 45ff). *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, compiles three dazzling articles containing Certeau’s critique of and eulogy for Foucault’s work, style, and legacy (171-98).

¹⁴ Among his most effective examples of tactical practice are *la pèruque*, “the worker’s own work disguised as work for his employer” (EL 25); and *bricolage*, Levi-Strauss’s term for ‘making do,’ a construction or practice that does not follow systematized rules (EL xv). In all cases, Certeau emphasizes, “these ‘traverses’ remain heterogenous to the systems they infiltrate and in which they sketch out the guileful ruses of *different* interest and desires” (EL 34, emphasis in original). “We are concerned with battles or games between the strong and the weak, and with the ‘actions’ which remain possible for the latter” (34). Such claims echo Certeau’s examination of mystic utterance briefly outlined above.

¹⁵ Certeau offers resonant metaphors of tactical movement: “the night-side of societies, a night longer than their day, a dark sea [...], a maritime immensity” (EL 41). Noticing these movements, he suggests, will “transform what was represented as a matrix-force of history into a mobile infinity of tactics” (EL 41).

medievalist, world-maker, Roman Catholic, and craftsman of word systems—can employ Certeau’s methodology not merely as an overlay, but rather as a kind of play that attunes us to the interior movements, voices, and processes of Tolkien’s Secondary World. Certeau consistently locates his work in terms of geographical space and movement, and his emphasis on the dialectical relations between itinerary or walking vs. mapping;¹⁶ myths/fables vs. “history”; the utterance or orality vs. the function of written or codified texts, resonate with the Elven material and expand our understanding of the ways in which the First Age accounts carve out cultural and geographic space. In all of Certeau’s intellectual ‘peregrinations,’ he asserts that the voice, the practices, and the movements of the other, and our continual acknowledgment of the other must be ever attended to yet never contained. At the same time, his attention to space, movement, language, creativity, and the problematics of analyzing these actions (of not freezing and thereby trapping them) can reveal in the Elven creation account similar impulses to narrate a beginning in an absence, to accommodate transversal movements, to evoke a voice-utterance even inside written texts, and, in much of the First Age materials, to preserve a lost space-time.

EVERY STORY IS A TRAVEL STORY – A SPATIAL PRACTICE

– Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

Rather than underscoring a totality of control, order, and dominance, the *Aimulindalë* positions its power source (Eru) as an expander of boundaries, an encourager of themes (the precursors of fables or stories) to be developed dialectically through himself and the Ainur. One effect of such expansion is the account’s structural emphasis on pre-creation, a beginning in an absence that is before-time:¹⁷ “There was Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Ilúvatar; and he made first the Ainur, the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thought, and they were with him before aught else was made. And he spoke to them propounding to them themes of music; and they sang before him [...]” (15).

¹⁶ Certeau asks that we observe “the relation between the itinerary (a discursive series of operations) and the map (a plane projection totalizing observations) [...], between two symbolic and anthropological languages of space. Two poles of experience” (EL 119).

¹⁷ Pre-creation or (pre)creation is my term to suggest the time and space the *Aimulindalë* takes with events, performances, and movements before Arda is made material by Eru’s utterance of Eä (20). This space of (pre)creation makes up the majority of the account. Thus it is perhaps helpful to recall the translation for *Aimulindalë*: “music of the Ainur,” which suggests the importance of each stage or each performance. While Elizabeth Whittingham agrees, she notes that the text “develops through three separate stages: the Great Music, the Vision, and Eä” (212); I am adding the opening performance/song to these moments.

Eru, the all-powerful progenitor of Arda, begins all processes of making by creating 'others': the Ainur, who move from thought to exteriority, to some outside space, and then, apparently, possess an existence aligned with but separate from Eru himself. In Eru's utterance, he offers musical themes, systems ordered yet open to interpretation. As in Certeau's explorations, the account emphasizes movements among-between; from a totality (Eru) to a plethora (Ainur), the initial making of others multiplies possibilities and voices. Eru's themes, then, suggest Certeau's notion of the itinerary as "a discursive series of operations" (EL 119), a process of possible movements through space (or sound), rather than a grid that freezes or solidifies all actions, sounds, or creations. Certeau's attention to the margins—here the creation of other voices and additions to the musical themes—as well as his reminder that itineraries construct a more open space than do maps, helps to underscore even the first moments of the *Ainulindalë* as attending to possibilities and to others.

Subsequently, the Ainur act (sing) and move in concert through the no-place before creation, with Eru but apparently free to construct themes and utterances of their own:

But for a long while they sang only each alone, or but few together, while the rest hearkened; for each comprehended only that part of the mind of Ilúvatar from which he came, and in the understanding of their brethren they grew but slowly. Yet ever as they listened they came to deeper understanding, and increased in union and harmony. (15)

It appears that Eru—or the creative space he has carved out—encourages interplay, exchange, and potentiality. The more the Ainur attend to the voices of the 'other,' the greater the aesthetic effect/harmony, and thus Robert A. Collins notes that Tolkien constructs the vision of the cosmos in essentially aesthetic terms (257). Listening to and/or moving toward the other, the harmonic beauty of the chorus results from that very process of moving beyond one's position. Considering Certeau's concern with practices in space, we can understand the choric nature of Arda's pre-creation as a kind of cosmic spatial practice: actions grounded in movement between center and margins, between disparate spaces "of the mind of Ilúvatar," itineraries/tours developed or made beautiful through the sharing of power/voice. Before material space and time, in this beginning in an absence, the account already establishes itself as a travel story, as the figures of the creation must learn to sing and move toward one another in the process of that creation.

Once Eru has heard (and participated in) this improvisatory concert of the Ainur, he offers to the Ainur "a mighty theme" (15) and again takes the

prime position as Maker.¹⁸ The Ainur respond to this music with astonishment, as Eru begins “unfolding to them things greater and more wonderful than he had yet revealed; and the glory of its beginning and the splendor of its end amazed the Ainur, so that they bowed before Ilúvatar and were silent” (15). Initially, the account suggests that the new music is born of Eru alone, with the Ainur silenced and separated from the mighty theme. However, Eru offers this theme only *after* he has heard the Ainur construct music “in unison and harmony.” In process, Eru learns from, reacts to, and develops this “mighty theme” as a result of and in conversation with the previous creative performances. Once the Ainur, themselves now more skilled both in music and in the understanding of the other “brethren,” achieve the ability to move beyond their solo or small group performances, Eru offers the kernel that will grow into the “Great Music” (15). The Great Music thus signals the next stage of choric (pre)creation, a process which *requires* the voices, participation, and creativity of the Ainur. Eru thus assumes not a totalizing control of that theme, but rather immediately hearkens back to the other performers: “I will now that ye make in harmony together a Great Music. And [...] ye shall show forth your powers in adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devices, if he will. But I will sit and hearken, and be glad that through you great beauty has been wakened into song” (15). As the Ainur sat in silence while Eru developed the theme, Eru himself now offers that theme to the Ainur, while he remains silent and in full confidence of their creative impulses. Even the phrase, “if he will” suggests reciprocity and freedom, a sharing of the aesthetic processes of making, of ‘music.’ Eru’s process reflects what Reynolds and Fitzwilliam describe as Certeau’s “investigative-expansive mode, [which] seeks [...] fluid and plural relationships” (78). Only when the Ainur offer their voices in contribution to the theme Eru constructs does the Great Music take shape; in this performance, still positioned in the nowhere, the *Aimulindalë* evokes a utopian moment (or utopian *sound*) that gives voice to the ideal processes combining Eru’s theme and the Ainur’s harmony.

As with all utopian moments, the Great Music’s achievements are momentary, and the components of improvisation, harmonic unity, and movement from self to other cannot endure. For although the “endless

¹⁸ In his exploration of the *Aimulindalë*, Collins also notes that “In choosing a musical metaphor for the creative act, [Tolkien] characterizes both the making of the world and its subsequent history as the playing out of themes and variations [...]. As composer/director, Ilúvatar allows each musician room to improvise, reserving to himself the final touches which render the whole harmonious” (257). Collins’s characterization reminds us that the performative act is also movement and a hearkening to the other, as composer/conductor guides, listens, and as performers attend to each other.

interchanging melodies woven into harmony” succeed even in piercing absence—“the music and the echo of the music went out into the Void, and it was not void” (15)—the harmony cannot survive Melkor’s impulse for dominance and secretive isolation: “being alone he had begun to conceive thoughts of his own unlike those of his brethren” (16). With Melkor’s decision to isolate, to go “often alone into the void places” (16), the perfection of the musical performance in pre-creation, and what will eventually become the history of Arda, forever alters. Employing terms such as “discord” “despondent,” “disturbed,” “faltered,” and “turbulent sound” (16), the account suggests that Melkor’s decision to separate from the “endless interchanging melodies woven into harmony” affects both the relationship he has with others, and the quality of the aesthetic performance itself: Melkor becomes “synonymous with discord and evil,” and his attempts at song embody a “lack of harmony and creativity” (Whittingham 215-16). As a result, the account aligns communal activity in pre-creation with beauty and harmony, of sound filling void, while it associates isolation and secrecy with dissonance and blaring noise.

In the wake of Melkor’s rebellion, Eru responds and twice attempts to reintegrate Melkor’s sound-voice into the Great Music, suggesting again that the account seeks movement and can even welcome discord from the margins. Incorporating Melkor’s discord-as-challenge, Eru’s “new theme” is “like and yet unlike to the former theme”, as it “gathered power and had new beauty,” and “the Ainur perceived that he smiled” (16). Eru reminds Melkor gently of the value of process, integration, and moving towards the other; his smile and his left hand suggest a willingness to reconsider, to offer a new theme, a new potentiality for Melkor and the Ainur. Eru humbles himself, as it were, to accommodate Melkor’s will into the choric harmony, or he allows for the possibility that from this challenge (margin) might come further creation (harmony). Following Certeau, we can see Eru’s concern for and movement toward the other as a practice of the heterologic. The very itinerary of pre-creation, developed through theme and choric performance, leaves a space open for Melkor’s “blaring sound,” and Melkor has managed to traverse the theme in a way unforeseen, if discordant. As Eru develops the second theme, he positions it in between the previous harmony and Melkor’s challenge, “like and yet unlike,” evoking a kind of sonic movement from one to the other, from sound to sound, and from accord through discord to increased power and beauty.

When Melkor again refuses to attend to the value of many voices creating and contributing and asserts his own “discord,” “many of the Ainur were dismayed and sang no longer, and Melkor had the mastery” (16). Although in response Eru’s “countenance was stern; and he lifted up his right

hand" (16), he reacts once more with a theme that weaves, for "a third theme grew amid the confusion, and it was unlike the others" (16).¹⁹ Rather than silencing Melkor—an act it appears Eru is unwilling to perform unless necessary—Eru works even within dissonance, as the new theme develops "amid the confusion" and works its way through that dissonance to prominence, this time weaving "two musics progressing at one time" (16). The very process of "two musics progressing at one time" recalls Certeau's interest in a dialectical understanding of spatial practices/events; the third theme remains heterologic as it develops and moves, employing the voice even of the rebellious, destructive other to construct not a creation altogether "better," but one of both beauty and deep sadness. Of course, the new theme manifests Eru's ultimate power, but it evokes a power within or through, rather than a power over. If Eru's mode of creation is participatory and communal, incomplete until the Ainur join their voices and creativity to his original theme, his reaction to challenge and indeed to direct rebellion also appears open-ended, until Melkor's final refusal to join the third theme. Eru thus consistently appears in the participatory mode, seeking unity among voices but not mastery or domination, and the extant texts of the *Silmarillion* ultimately assert this communal mode, the movement toward the other, as foundational to the Great Music of Arda itself.²⁰

Considering Certeau's notion of the tactic whose transversal movements make use of the power systems' design for its own ('useless') purposes, a typical post-structuralist reading of the *Ainulindalë* might suggest that Melkor's rebellion and attempts to take control both of the Music and later of Arda most clearly represent such tactics. After all, Melkor seeks his own creation from within the model (or power structure) of the Music of the Ainur; he constructs his own system, or music/theme, as a rebellion against what he views as the totalizing system. Although powerful, Melkor is positioned in the account as "other," on the margins, seeking alone in the Void, as he attempts to thwart the communication-creation systems of Eru and the Ainur. However, as Certeau articulates them, such attempts at overthrow and domination do not align with the "sly games and tricks" he associates with tactical movements; rather, Melkor's movements seek to control and to be visible, as direct and strategic attempts at Power. While certainly one could argue that Eru attempts

¹⁹ Collins intriguingly argues that the three-themed structure evokes both "an Hegelian dialectic: thesis, antithesis, synthesis [...]" as well as "the pattern of the classical sonata" (259).

²⁰ Although she emphasizes different themes in the account, such as the struggle between good and evil, Whittingham agrees that "the concepts naturalized in the 'Ainulindalë' become evident in the lives of the people of Middle-earth, in the actions and words of the characters of *The Silmarillion*" (213).

to reinscribe Melkor into his system with the second and third themes, Eru nevertheless retains the many voices of the Ainur, their harmonies and their communal movements, as the root practice of creation, even as he never fully closes off the openings Melkor constructs. Melkor's movements thus position *him* as the (would be) totalizing force, the power that seeks domination, surveillance, and isolation. As the events of the First Age unfold, Melkor's actions repeatedly echo Certeau's association of surveillance with domination, as he seeks to establish his own strategic system of control over Arda and its inhabitants.

Might we, then, ascribe tactics of a sort—or at least a transversal movement—to the responses of Eru himself? That is, might Eru's development of the second and third themes open up the possibility, even *welcome* the potentiality, for myriad transversal actions and movements within the infinitesimal actions of Arda's unfolding?²¹ Faced with Melkor's blaring sonic attack, Eru responds with a smile: "heterology [...] depends on a metaphoric movement, showing the ways in which what is strictly given always moves beyond itself" (Colebrook 560). In the case of the *Ainulindalë*, Eru moves beyond himself and interweaves even Melkor's dissonance into the harmonics of creation. This unexpected movement opens up the ensuing world (Arda) to the 'other' and allows for a "tactical economy" (557) to develop unexpected actions/responses/ movements that will unfold in its history. As with Certeau's reading of mystics, Eru's response here reflects "a series of attempts to execute the movement of another's thought, for fresh purposes" (Buchanan 327). In fact, it is Eru's improvisational addition of the Children of Ilúvatar that inserts into the music further polyphony, a continual potentiality for transversal actions and unexpected voices. Although Eru chides Melkor's rebellion—"thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite" (17)—he also emphasizes communal processes and movements in the itinerary of pre-creation, and even knowingly multiplies the potentialities for more voices as vital sources for that music. Thus, "the Children of Ilúvatar were conceived by [Eru] alone [...], and none of the Ainur had part in their making" (18). These beings, also springing from the mind of Eru, are, like the Ainur, a conscious creation of the "other." In their reaction to the Children, the Ainur reveal their own desire to move toward and honor these other voices: "Therefore when they beheld them, the more did they love them, being things *other* than themselves, strange and free [...]" (18, emphasis mine). Theologically we

²¹ I suggest tactics *of a sort* here to acknowledge that Eru remains the ultimate source of power [music] in the text; however, Eru at the very least welcomes the potentiality that transversal movement, tactics, and surprises might offer his creation.

consider such a detail the insertion of free will/choice into the cosmology, and “the possibility that one might choose to introduce discord then becomes part of Ilúvatar’s plan” (Whittingham 217); reading via Certeau, we can also consider the Children as perhaps the clearest example of the heterologic, of embracing the other, in the making of Arda.

CERTEAU’S CONCERNS WITH THE WAY in which practices organize space [...] are concerns, therefore, of liturgy. Liturgy, like ritual, names activities performed within a sacred worldview; what is done is not an end in itself [...] but a creative act, expressing, being, a gift to what is other and divine. (Ward 503)

At the same time that the *Ainulindalë* emphasizes the song as the grounding of Arda’s future, the account also emphasizes Certeauvian processes across, among, and between: transverse movements through which ideas or aesthetics become organized, communal, and visionary. Up to the third theme, the *Ainulindalë* offers pre-creations, musical performances, themes that build upon themes in the no-place before time, but those acts do not yet construct Arda, although we might say that they pre-figure its creation. As the account moves toward the embodied or “real,” it begins to evoke a geography as it textually (and liturgically) maps the making of the world. In yet another (pre)creative movement toward the making of Arda, Eru offers a vision of the world:

“[T]hose things that ye have sung, I will show them forth, that ye may see what ye have done. [...]” 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. (17)

Added to or placed alongside the music of the Ainur—or as a visual evocation of it—Eru’s vision is the World that will (or may) be, a template for the world that is not quite map, not quite itinerary, but is suspended as potentiality, fluid and immaterial: “We have thus a tension, or a temporizing [...], between the claims of pattern (Providence) and improvisation (choice, individual freedom)” (Collins 261). Neither purely song nor material place, the vision vacillates between the two: the Ainur achieve sight; they realize the links between their voices, their harmonies, and a specific place/space, potentially embodied and with its own unfolding, its own being. Or, they reconsider the pre-creation as a series of liturgical practices: actions infused with sacred power and aesthetic weight that were not solely an end to themselves: “they themselves in the labour of their music had been busy with the preparation of this dwelling, and yet knew not that it had any purpose beyond its own

beauty" (18). Arda exists as a visionary geography or mystic event: a mental projection and artistic conception of a sacred place not yet material. Although a kind of fixed point, the vision also unfolds or "played before them" (18); it suggests the vast possibilities and potentialities of movement and action within/upon this place. Differing from a map temporally, the vision posits a future geography to be manifested in time, in culture, and in text, but it does not solidify or make certain those events or that unfolding.

As Eru gestures toward this final pre-creation, the vision grounds the cosmological in the geographical: "Behold your Music!" (17).²² The command evokes the space between, paradoxically yoking the immaterial (music) to the spectral (Arda), but for the moment only in the conditional or visionary sense. Hovering between the complexities of the music that contain harmonic beauty and the potentiality of discord, Eru creates both the vision and sight itself to then direct the Ainur's vision toward the movement, the unfolding of Arda in time and place. The Ainur must then see the place, or the vision of the place, as representing a realizable spatial expanse as well as the 'unfolding' of myriad process/lives/events. Its apparent materiality, a place "sustained therein, but [...] not of it," suggests the transitional process from the Void to a future geography to be materially constructed, geographically mapped, bodily inhabited. Because the Ainur gain sight for the specific purpose of witnessing the vision of Arda, their understanding of that unfolding vision-song now becomes yoked with geographical space, and ultimately, with time.²³ The account evokes a series of pulsations and echoes: themes become harmonies, dissonance folds into further themes, which then construct Eru's vision, a vision that places the Ainur themselves in the position of the mystic witness. These pulsations and movements are liturgical, as they imbue a sacred quality into the spatial practices of the Ainur. Their text or recounting of the vision will become Arda itself, as they move from the memory of the vision into the blank space, and as they infuse that space with the sound of their "musics."

²² Such a paradoxical command evokes Certeau's concern with mystics' use of "split words' [that] worked by pointing beyond the languages which they employed towards an Other which could not be manifested as such by these languages" (Ahearne 109). "Behold your Music" thus positions the event as mystic, paradoxical, ineffable.

²³ Interestingly, the account of the Music of the Ainur in *The Book of Lost Tales* does not include the intermediary stage of the Vision of the world; Ilúvatar constructs the world immediately after the strife with Melko (54-5) and gives "Life and Reality" "within the design that is mine" and "the adornments and embellishments" of the Ainur (55). This version also indicates that it is the more creative Ainur who enter into the Reality of Arda, while those who remain with Ilúvatar "were mostly those who had been engrossed in their playing with thoughts of Ilúvatar's plan and design" (57).

The vision and unfolding of Arda in this moment-before-time contain “its history,” the series of events and beings that (will) move through the geographical spaces of the world and who (will) participate in its processes. In offering a vision as the unfolding of possibility, the account works to fold the fixity of the map (what they see) into the fluidity of the tale (the events that unfold): “spatially organized but [...] continually traversed and gradually reconfigured [...] the world around us is both stable and plastic [...]” (Hay 368). Rendered as almost cinematic, the vision of Arda is expansive: “as they looked and wondered this World began to unfold its history, and it seemed to them that it lived and grew” (17). As the text continues, however, the vision-map only partially reveals what will be “reality” in Arda, in time and place:

[W]hile the Ainur were yet gazing upon this vision, it was taken away and hidden from their sight [...]. But they had become enamoured of the beauty of the vision and engrossed in the unfolding of the World which came there to being, and their minds were filled with it; for the history was incomplete and the circles of time not full-wrought when the vision was taken away. (19-20)²⁴

This partial vision, interrupted and incomplete, leaves the world and the actions within the world open, fluid, and not completely knowable even to the Ainur. It remains both a model and a series of potentialities or unfoldings, neither inevitable nor fully contained by any knowledge or text. To continue the cinematic metaphor, Eru offers this vision-unfolding to the Ainur as a “preview” of the world in space and in time, as both three-dimensional map and complex collection of stories on which the Ainur will continually reflect as the actual tales of the world itself unfold, often, to their surprise. Again the account attends to a sense of movement in the Valar, a kind of leaning forward, for they are “enamoured” of the vision, full of desire for its beauty, inspired by its separate life and growth.

Even as the text moves close to the moment of making Arda material, it positions the power of creation in the voice of the One, suggesting as Certeau notes of the Christian Word, a speech that can incarnate rather than merely signify. The moment of embodiment is thus an utterance:

“I know the desire of your minds that what ye have seen should verily be, not only in thought, but even as ye yourselves are [...]. 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 those of you that will may go down into it.” And

²⁴ It is in this passage that the text refer to select Ainu as the Valar (20).

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. (20)

Eru's creation clearly aligns with Certeau's understanding of pre-modern cosmology, where God "uses the world as his discourse" (MF 92) so that God and his creation are signifier and sign. While the moment of Creation—Eru speaking Eä—derives again from the power source, and might thus seem to reorient Arda's creation as an overarching vision of One, the speaking of creation has also been articulated as process and spatial practice: Eru has encouraged song from the others, developed themes, allowed for improvisation, and even rebellion. In an intermediary moment-space, Eru then offers vision: the gift of sight itself and the vision of the world. Rather than reading the account as a singularity of making, the cycle of offering, attending, making harmony, and increasing the beauty of song appears to suggest creation as aesthetic improvisation as well as liturgical process. While his speech-act alone embodies Arda, Eru again opens up his creation to the processes of the other, "those of you that will may go down into it," rather than giving an all-powerful command or providing codified detail. Thus, the moment echoes the pre-creative Great Music, when Eru invited each Ainu to "show forth your powers in adorning this theme [...] if he will" (15), to participate in and add to the beauty, sound, and harmony. As the Ainur have leaned forward or hearkened to that vision, Eru now responds by speaking the World into being, and by offering the possibility for movements that cross the borders of thought, of sound, of sight, into Being.

Following Eru's invitation to enter into the material Arda, the Ainur must then re-enact (or make real) the processes of creation a second time, or perhaps even a third time, if the Great Music is the sonic template for what the vision offers. For the Valar, the memory of their music-vision must be made material through the manipulation of the world created by Eru as an empty canvas:

[W]hen the Valar entered into Eä they were at first astounded and at a loss, for it was as if naught was yet made which they had seen in vision, and all was but on point to begin and yet unshaped, and it was dark. For the Great Music had been but the growth and flowering of thought in the Timeless Halls, and the Vision only a foreshowing; but now they had entered in at the beginning of Time, and the Valar perceived that the World had been but foreshadowed and foresung, and they must achieve it. (20)

A “growth and flowering of thought,” the Great Music and its ensuing vision exist in the conditional mode, in the before-time-and-place. With their memory of the idealized models, the Valar attempt to animate the vision-song upon the material space of the World that now is, dark and unformed. Using “fore” three times, the account underlines both the dialectical process of arriving at the material world (Ēa)—foreshowing, foreshadowed, foresung—and distinguishes the material Arda’s separation in time from those moments before. Ēa exists now as a material echo of that be-fore, a potentiality that the Valar must infuse with the resonances of foreshowing, foreshadowing, and foresinging. In fact, the meanings of Ēa, both “let these things Be” and “the World that Is” (20) underscore the processes of yoking of the word (the language-song of creation) to Being itself. As with the medieval systems Certeau references and in which Tolkien was expert, once the Valar enter that world and re-create the songs and harmonies from the be-fore, Arda becomes “discursive,” resonant with the words/songs of the sacred.

As the Ainur change the empty canvas into geographically measurable space, the account suggests they choose to take on a physical presence in Arda to work and shape its substances and even to become in some material way part of those substances. In describing the Valar’s first activities in Arda, the *Ainulindalë* uses words evoking movement, material processes, and embodiment: the Valar work, labor, order, walk on the Earth, garden, rule, prepare, endeavor, build, delve, carve, hollow, and fashion (21-2). The emphasis on physical processes, rather than mental or musical ones, draws a distinction between the Great Music/Vision and the ‘now’ of Arda’s material or geographical construction. With the exception of Melkor, who “meddled in all that was done” (20), the Valar work in concert, combining powers and developing a ‘harmonics’ of creation together. Although still spirits, “the Valar took to themselves shape and hue; and because they were drawn into the World by love of the Children of Ilúvatar [...] they took shape after that manner which they had beheld in the Vision [...]” (21). The Valar’s choice to become “clad in the raiment of the World” (21) aligns them, spirit beings, with Eru’s physical creations, the Firstborn. Following Certeau, we can see the Valar’s choice as honoring and acknowledging the other, the Firstborn, as creations outside of themselves that give the entire process of creation its purpose. In other words, the Valar’s embodiment might be viewed as a movement toward an ‘other’; just as Eru has offered them the chance to create harmonies and develop the creation, so the Valar hearken to these other creations, the Firstborn, as fellow actors in the processes of Arda, or as fellow travelers through the spaces of Ēa. Like Eru before them, the “Great Ones” (21) work to construct the world, to navigate their meanings, according to practices that include but do not yet consume those less powerful.

Interestingly, even in witnessing the vision of Eru, the soon-to-be Valar are connected together both as a communal force and to particular geographies of the Arda-to-be: Ulmo with water, Manwë with air/winds, for example (19). As Eru instructs Ulmo—"in these clouds thou art drawn nearer to Manwë, thy friend, whom thou lovest" (19)—Ulmo moves beyond his boundaries, beyond his initial understanding of water, to find a fuller comprehension through others. Ulmo's delight in the "surprises" of creation point to the potentialities, the tactics, that the Great Music and the vision have left open: "neither had my secret thought conceived the snowflake, nor in all my music was contained the falling of the rain" (19). Ulmo's attention to other possibilities and to movement suggests that the Valar must do more than *exactly* recall the music and the vision; they must also 'sing together,' join forces, and remain open to the potential creative surprises—the snowflake, the rain, and later, the Trees of Valinor—that Arda might inspire.²⁵ The passage evokes Certeau's own attempt at "plural writing," pointing to "the anonymous seas in which creativity murmurs a violent song" (Preface vii). Once again, Eru opens the possibility for tactics, for transversal actions within Arda that Melkor, with his desire "to be called Lord, and to be a master over other wills" (18), cannot completely contain or thwart. As he was from the Great Music on, Melkor is positioned as a singular force against "the other Valar" (21), seeking to move not toward his fellow Ainur, but outside, beyond, and for the purposes of monolithic power. Such a position echoes the strategic systems of Certeau's spectator atop the World Trade Center: "If the city, seen from above, is figured as a text, the one who reads is figured in terms of lust and domination, as complicit in an erotics of knowing" (Lock 185). Melkor's 'city,' Arda itself,²⁶ becomes the object of his lust and domination. Until his final expulsion into the Void at the close of the First Age, he repeatedly seeks to thwart rather than to create, so that "the light of the eyes of Melkor was like a flame that withers with heat and pierces with a deadly cold" (22). Aligned with the strategic forces of the panoptic eye, Melkor's power consistently invokes "the infernal glare of surveillance" (Ahearne 162) that pushes Certeau's critique of such a position beyond the mere description of Power and toward the theological position of Evil.

In exploring the *Ainulindalë* through Michel de Certeau's notions of movement and utterance, tactics in everyday practices, and his overarching

²⁵ The clear echo of Certeau's notion of *la péruque* registers in this conversation: "practices [...] constrained but not defined by an order imposed from 'above' [...] constantly mutating responses to constantly mutating distributions of power in successive socioeconomic and symbolic formations" (Ahearne 160-1).

²⁶ As Tolkien's essay on the nature of evil in *The History of Middle-earth* observes, "The whole of 'Middle-earth' was Morgoth's Ring" (400).

concern with giving voice to the other, we can view Arda's creation tale as a series of participatory acts, choric spatial practices in which those in power—Eru and the Ainur—improve with cooperation, always leaving spaces open for other voices. Indeed, the lens of Certeau's heterology underlines how the *Ainulindalë*'s practices of song, theme, and harmony give voice to notions of traversing boundaries, of hearkening to, of blending. The series of pre-creative events underscores these crossings: the music develops, changes, and sharpens through theme, harmony, discord, and vision. As the vision of Arda unfolds and as Arda comes to being through the voice-utterance, the account attempts to locate itself as both a process of movement and a position in time; in doing so, the text represents the creation of Arda as both mapping a place and recounting a story, folding together (or inhabiting the space between) Certeau's positions of strategy or fixed totality and tactic or transversal movements.

Of course, for Tolkien's Secondary World, history also appears as largely textual, a collection of documents that attempts to tell and to preserve a past that is already "other."²⁷ The Eldar construct the textual account of the creation of the world, the *Ainulindalë*, not as witnesses but by research and writing, by a scriptural economy; as such, the text is separated from the events and utterances by vast amounts of time and space. In their acknowledgement of this temporal position, the accounts take on the resonance of a repository of cultures. While a remnant of the Eldar remain as viable embodied beings able to provide evidence of the places and cultural relations of Valinor and Beleriand, they can only recount memory, the relations of the past—they tell the tales that remain artifacts of a lost cultural geography. As the *Ainulindalë* closes, it self-consciously refers to this temporal/spatial distance: "what has here been declared is come from the Valar themselves, with whom the Eldalië spoke in the land of Valinor, and by whom they were instructed" (22). Although the account claims access to 'eye witnesses' of the Great Music—the Valar—it also admits that the information remains fragmentary: "Thus began the first battle of the Valar with Melkor for the dominion of Arda; and of these

²⁷ Ahearne notes: "The historical interpreter is for Certeau simultaneously bound to and separated from the past in ways that he or she cannot fully control" (37), so that "the historical past will not necessarily stay in its place. It returns in differing modes to haunt and partially to organize the present" (42-3). Such a reading also accurately describes the Eldar's relationship with the past, both in exile in the First Age and beyond. The ways in which Tolkien's Secondary World reinserts ancient tales, texts, and artifacts into later times suggests an understanding of these 'haunted' relations between Arda's ancient past and any later time.

tumults the Elves know but little" (22). The historicity of these accounts, then, remains partial, but from a mythic standpoint, the tale stands as vital in that it provides the cultural truths of Arda's beginnings and purposes. Thus, the *Ainulindalë* and indeed the *Silmarillion* as a whole orient more toward Certeau's notions of the "tale and legend," which "are deployed [...] in a space outside of and isolated from daily competition, that of the past, the marvelous, the original" (EL 23). Although the *Silmarillion* exists on the one hand as a text, organized, codified, and structured, it also frequently and self-consciously points to oral accounts, multiple competing tales, earlier oral forms of accounts, and thus it seeks not for historical control over its subject (the past) but rather for a sense of mythos, of story. For Tolkien, as for Certeau, "Stories open paths. They introduce otherness into familiar space [...]. They constitute for Certeau perhaps the fundamental fable upon which we inscribe our truths" (Ahearne 183).

Consistently, Tolkien appears to position his Secondary World in several moments of transition, or on several thresholds. Like the mystic accounts of the 16th-17th century that so fascinated Certeau, the Elven material self-consciously hearkens to a lost linguistic, liturgical past that renders elegiac and mournful all subsequent tales. For example, the accounts repeatedly map out a human [or Elven] geography only to offer mournful tales of the disappearance of those places and inhabitants. Temporally, the accounts move from an ancient past when the angelic forms of the pre-creation, the Valar, interact and speak with the Eldar, to a more "modern" time-place whose inhabitants have access to those magical events only through wise figures, or from tales and textual accounts. From the perspective of the contemporary time in which Tolkien wrote, his legendarium, and particularly the First Age Elven material, positions itself as "other" than its time. Neither literally "ancient" nor part of more general modernist impulses, the Elven material is doubly other: separated and ancient within its Secondary world, and outside the general modernist forms of its author's time-place. Stepping out further, these tales mark Tolkien the sub-creator's peculiar liminal position as other: neither modern, nor medieval, but a traveler through vast interior spaces, hearkening to the polyphonic voices of his own mind/world.

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