Lioi, Anthony. "The Great Music: Restoration as Counter-Apocalypse in the Tolkien Legendarium." *Nerd Ecology: Defending the Earth with Unpopular Culture*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. 123–144. Environmental Cultures. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474219730.ch-005>>.

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The Great Music: Restoration as Counter-Apocalypse in the Tolkien Legendarium

*In which I assert that J. R. R. Tolkien's legendarium begins with an enchanted sky, which provides the narrative framework for a restoration ecology based on human **alliance** with other creatures. This alliance protects local and planetary environments from being treated like **garbage**. Tolkien's restorative framework begins in the Silmarillion with "The Music of the Ainur," a cosmogony that details the creation of the universe by Powers of the One figured as singers and players in a great music that becomes the cosmos. This is neither an organic model of the world as body nor a technical model of the world as machine, but the world as performance and enchantment, coming-into-being as an aesthetic phenomenon. What the hobbits call "magic" in the Lord of the Rings is enchantment, understood as participation in the music of continuous creation. In his essay "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien theorized literary enchantment as the creation of a "Secondary World" of art that others could inhabit. Such **inhabitation** allows readers to attain a **refuge** from violence in the Primary World in **uncanny** works of art that promote the restoration of the world. Tolkien calls this restoration the "Second Music of the Ainur," the eschaton in which humans join with the Powers to heal the damage done to the First Music. The Second Music is audible at the end of the **Lord of the Rings** in events such as the healing of Ithilien after the War of the Ring. Using this theory of restorative enchantment, one can participate in eucatastrophe, the unexpected disruption of doom that stabilizes the relationship between "real" and "virtual" worlds as a continuous creation. Middle-earth as Secondary World contains a rationale for harmony among Primary World cultures understood as different themes in the Second Music. The Tolkien*

*legendarium thereby lays the groundwork for a counter-apocalypse, a project of **world-defense** based on creative communities in **alliance**.*

Frodo Baggins gazed out of the screen as I checked my Facebook account early in 2013. The foreground of the image was his open hand, which held Sauron's Ring of Power, the thing one must not possess, lest it destroy the world. This temptation appeared in a post from 350.org, the activist group founded with journalist Bill McKibben to promote global action on climate change. Typically, 350.org posts images of activists protesting the fossil fuel economy, so the appearance of a hobbit signaled a journey into nerd ecology. The Ring shone with a malignant light, and Elijah Wood's eyes conveyed the horror and compulsion that define Frodo's burden. Written into the photograph was a quotation from Yuliya Makliuk, the "Russian Speaking World Coordinator" of 350.org:

The more I think about the climate movement and the war of the ring [*sic*], the more parallels I see. Aren't our beautiful lands threatened by a powerful shadow? Haven't we heard about our sisters and brothers from afar already facing its menacing effects? Didn't many of us submit to the enemy or deny its existence? Yes, our leaders are tempted, our forests are dying, and our lives are at risk. And yes, we fight—some of us reveal the wormtongues who corrupt our governors; others risk their freedom to block iron towers and their smoking pits; and some of us work to end discords between different folks and to form alliances. We are at the state of war. We have inherited this ring from the fossil-fired past, the ring of greed, of imprudence, of dominance, born [*sic*] by the dark flames. It shouldn't be used any longer, or the world as we know it will collapse. We are living at the verge of the epochs. (Makliuk n.p.)

Makliuk offers an extended metaphor for planetary crisis based on J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Like the people of Rohan and Gondor, Rivendell and the Shire, the nations of the world face a common threat: the disruption of Earth's climate system. She figures this threat as the demonic Sauron, the despoiler of Middle-earth. Like Tolkien's characters, we understand that our civilizations face one doom. Many citizens are compromised by our complicity in the fossil-fuel economy, and some of us, the "wormtongues," are

outright traitors in thrall to Sauron and his allies, who stand for Exxon-Mobil, Alpha Natural Resources, and other lords of oil and coal. The ring in Frodo's hand is an artifact of evil forged in a land of death, Mordor. We are faced with an epic struggle between the One Ring, an instrument of domination and destruction, and the citizens of the free lands. This struggle defines the boundary between two epochs, the Third and Fourth Ages of Middle-earth, which stand for the Age of Oil and the Age of Clean Energy. This story is now the story of cosmopolis, according to a Ukrainian activist retelling a British fantasy transmitted by social media across the world. Makliuk can assume that her global audience understands the ramifications of Tolkien's work because Middle-earth and the climate crisis went global at the same time.

The Ring as a conventional sign of corruption marks a shift in the cultural status of *The Lord of the Rings*, the jewel in the nerd culture crown. The status of *Lord of the Rings* as a universal nerd language brings us closer to Germaine Greer's famous nightmare that "Tolkien would turn out to be the most influential writer of the twentieth century" (qtd. in Pearce 6). The environmentalist attraction to Tolkien is not new: the pastoral life of the Shire, Frodo's home, has appealed to generations of organic gardeners, tree-sitters, and environmental justice advocates because of its "radical nostalgia" (Curry 42). This appeal justifies Ralph C. Wood's claim that Tolkien's work is peculiarly postmodern in its critique of modern industrialism, statism, fascism, and environmental destruction (Wood 247). The status of *Rings* as a metanarrative is not new, either: reading the novel provides sure passage into Nerdland. It is the attempt to sublimate the urtext of nerd narrative into a planetary metanarrative that marks a change. This attempt makes sense because Tolkien's cosmos countermands the urge to abandon the material world and to despair of victory against the forces of destruction. It grounds the virtual refuge of art in the processes of material creation through a robust theory of human agency in cooperation with cosmic order. In the essay "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien elaborates this theory of art as "Sub-creation," affirming the work of the human "co-creator" as an extension of the Maker's work. This countermove has important consequences explored in this chapter. It subverts the paranoia of Baudrillard and Jameson, embracing the simulacra of fiction as another order of reality. It makes possible a rigorous defense of "escapism,"

a derogatory term used against the immersion in fantasy worlds so typical of nerd cultures. Precious as the stars are in Middle-earth, they do not stand for a metaphysically superior world, as in Plato's *Timaeus*. Creation is the beautiful and good work of a Creator who is not the insane archon whose ethos justifies empire. In Tolkien's cosmogony, the world is made when the powers of the One, personified as gods, sing a music that materializes as the cosmos itself. Music becomes matter; ideas do not deliquesce in error. Suffering is explained as the disruption of alliance by one god, Melkor, whose egotism injects cacophony into cosmos. Transgression does not pervert the music, as in the Calvinist theories of the Fall that underlie so much modern thought, from Max Weber to Westboro Baptist Church. It causes the One to improvise, to blend discord into harmony at the moment of performance. Life arises in Middle-earth surrounded by elements already engaged in a project of cosmic restoration. Therefore, humans (and hobbits and elves and Ents and dwarves) may ally themselves with the Powers that sing the world into being as a means of resisting any destroyer. This is the significance of the Tolkien legendarium for nerd ecology. Liberated from a soured humanism in which nerds struggle against the liquidation of Arda, we can create a cosmopolitics that includes not just "sentient life," but the *stoicheia*, the elements themselves, as allies. In this chapter, I will show how this cosmogony arises in "The Music of the Ainur," becomes literary theory in "On Fairy-Stories," and accounts for moments in *The Lord of the Rings*, which are otherwise inexplicable. This theory makes possible an eschatology of ecological restoration strong enough to resist contemporary metanarratives of world destruction.

The first music

The jewel of the Tolkien legendarium is *The Silmarillion*, a collection of myths, legends, and histories that provide the narrative foundation of *The Lord of the Rings*. Against the positivist critique of myth as a disease of language, Tolkien crafted languages that generated worlds, and the legendarium enshrines that process in creation myths. The first text, "The Music of the Ainur" (*Ainulindalë*), revises the biblical idea that God creates with a speech act, *Let there be light*. Like *Paradise Lost*, the text opens in the heaven beyond

the heavens, “before aught else was made,” the place occupied by Eru Ilúvatar, the One, with the Ainur and the Maiar, the greater and lesser spirits who are “the offspring of his thought” (*Silmarillion* 15). By calling them “offspring” and not “creatures,” Tolkien evokes the language of the Nicene Creed that specifies the Word as “begotten, not made.” Though it is not necessary to read “The Music” as a Christian document—Tolkien intended a free-standing English mythology—we can recognize the biblical and patristic valence of this myth. “Ainur” and “Maiar” are plural, so the One already stands before the Many who are children but also subjects. The precedent for this plurality lies in the Genesis narrative and one of its names for God, “Elohim,” which is structurally plural (“gods”) but understood in later theology as collective singular. Comparative studies of Near Eastern religious systems point to the idea of a divine court, a king and courtiers, that might have been subsumed in *Elohim*. Jewish and Christian theologians have pointed to this multiplicity as a plurality inside the Godhead, foreshadowing the doctrine of the Trinity and the Kabbalistic “faces” of God. Given Tolkien’s reliance on the theology of Augustine of Hippo, we might also understand the Ainur as the creative *logoi* or words of God that sustain continuous creation after the beginning. However one understands them, the Ainur are collaborators in the Music to come: Ilúvatar “spoke to them, propounding themes of music; and they sang before him, and he was glad” (15). There is discussion, experimentation, and rehearsal before the performance itself, a celestial jam session, and these activities are a source of divine pleasure. The text extends the metaphor of Creation-as-music to the Ainur as musicians. Ilúvatar tells the choir: “I will now that ye make in harmony together a Great Music. And since I have kindled you with the Flame Imperishable, ye shall show forth your powers in adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devices” (15). Like the God of Genesis, this One exerts will in order to create; unlike Elohim, Ilúvatar “kindles” other powers that possess agency and aesthetic interest. The action of the Ainur is subsidiary; they realize but do not materialize the music. They add their own ideas to it, and it becomes beautiful because of them. The collaborative nature of the music will become important for Tolkien’s theory of art as Sub-creation.

A moment of cyborg aesthetics characterizes creation: the Ainur become their instruments. “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 the music and the echo of the music went out into the Void and it was not void" (15). The ostentatious echo of the King James Bible, the repeated "like unto," draws attention to the metaphorical nature of the language. As a creation myth, "The Music of the Ainur" takes place in the time before time and the place before place, so nothing it names can be understood literally. It is already figuration to say that the Ainur sing with voices, but many of those voices sound like instruments. The description begins with the ineffable, moves to metaphor, and then to meta-metaphor. This layering does not appear in the rough draft of the text published in *The Lost Tales*: it is a later, conscious revision. In the draft, some Ainur sing and others play; in *The Silmarillion*, all the Ainur sing, and some sing like instruments. Imagine Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" performed by beings who *are* the instruments they play, a symphony orchestra made only of vocalists. Tolkien insisted on the continuity of music and musician: music must arise in a "body" and travel outward as a voice from a singer. This distinction anticipates Tolkien's critique of unethical creation in *The Lord of the Rings*. The ruling Ring of Sauron is a material object imbued with its creator's power, a fact that leads to Sauron's undoing when the Ring is destroyed in the fires of Mount Doom. This self-objectification is inherent to the Ring as a tool of domination. Before one can destroy others, one must alienate part of oneself from oneself, denying the connection among all beings by first dividing one's being from itself. The narrative of the Ring is foreshadowed by the titular jewels, the Silmarils, which the Elves make later in the legendarium. There are three jewels of unparalleled beauty and craftsmanship: like the Ring, they inspire violence that persists through the ages of Middle-earth. Because of the Silmarils, the Ring, and the portrait of Isengard as a Satanic mill, Tolkien has been accused of being a Luddite, a person who opposes advancements in technology. "The Music of the Ainur" argues another case—that making is sacred until it leads to objectification, alienation, and destruction. The question is not the goodness of technology, but the continuity between Sub-creator and creation that prevents tools from becoming objects of lust in its original sense: the desire to dominate through control.

The cosmogonic function of this principle appears when Ilúvatar intervenes and makes the music of the Ainur into material reality. First, Ilúvatar must

tame the music of Melkor, the Satanic figure who desires that his song destroy the others. Then, Ilúvatar ends the symphony, directing the attention of the Ainur to the world forming in the deep.

“Behold your Music!” 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. And as they looked and wondered this World began to unfold its history, and it seemed to them that it lived and grew. (17)

The ethical test of making depends on the capacity of the creation to take on a life of its own in community. Art becomes wonderful when it embraces the work of others. Melkor’s error is not that he has his own ideas, but that he desires the end of the divine commons. Though Sauron is the primary figure of fascism in *The Lord of the Rings*, he is only a Maia, one of Melkor’s lieutenants. Melkor, like Satan, is the greatest power after the One, but he is no antihero. One could not say, as Blake did of Milton, that Tolkien was secretly of the devil’s party. Melkor is an archon of the fascism that engulfed Europe during World War II. There is nothing charming about him. Even so, Ilúvatar gives him a chance to restore himself. At the moment that Eä, the Creation, is revealed, Ilúvatar tells the Ainur that all of them, even Melkor, will find their music reflected in the material world. There is nothing intrinsically evil about the music of Melkor when it maintains a relationship with the other themes. Tolkien takes seriously the Augustinian principle that evil is not a substance. Though Melkor continues his attempts to destroy the world, he could have done otherwise. This is the first inkling of the idea of restoration as reconciliation in *The Silmarillion*. Because *The Lord of the Rings* takes place at a moment in Middle-earth when the elves depart, critics have understood it as a declensionist narrative in which disenchantment is inevitable. However, Ilúvatar tells the Ainur that there will one day be a Second Music, even greater than the first, when the mortal children of the One sing with the Ainur and recreate the world. Tolkien takes sorrow seriously: one of the greatest Ainur, Nienna, eternally mourns the destruction her brother Melkor caused. Sorrow sings in the foundations of Arda, but the Second Music will heal the wounds of history, and write that recovery into the structure of the cosmos. Because of this ending, “Music” is not an apocalypse as that term is

commonly understood. It does not foretell the death of the world in violence. It constitutes a “counter-apocalypse,” a metanarrative of world-renewal against the glamorized catastrophe of Armageddon (Keller 276).

If “The Music of the Ainur” illustrates what Tolkien calls “enchantment,” the creation of a world that can be inhabited, the next book of *The Silmarillion*, the *Valaquenta*, details that inhabitation. The *Valaquenta* continues Tolkien’s cosmogony from the inside, explaining what the Ainur become when they enter the world as “Valar,” or Powers. The *Valaquenta* serves as the *Theogony* of Middle-earth, detailing the names and natures of the gods. As in a classical pantheon, each of the Valar is associated with certain aspects of the universe and certain activities related to it. Manwë, the king of the Valar, is a god of the air who controls the winds. His presence is hinted at in *The Lord of the Rings* whenever the protagonists are saved by creatures that fly, such as a butterflies or giant eagles. Varda, who created the stars, is beloved of the Elves and appears in prayers as “Elbereth.” There is a goddess of forests, Yavanna, a god of the sea, Ulmo, and so on. The *Valaquenta* details their activities at the beginning of the world, which sees the creation of Valinor, the home of the gods, the sun, and the moon, and the first struggles with evil inside the cosmos. These narratives form the foundation of the counter-apocalypse fulfilled in the Second Music and foreshadowed by *The Lord of the Rings*. Despite the parallels to classical pantheons—one can see Zeus in Manwë and Demeter in Yavanna, for instance—the Valar come to inhabit the world from the outside, though they belong in it because they made it. The music of each aspect of Eä is a Vala-song given independent, material being through the Flame of Ilúvatar. The Powers come from outside, but dwell inside a realm that they love and make beautiful. Divine power is represented as dwelling in the world, transcendent in the sense that singer cannot be reduced to song. Though many aspects of matter were made more extreme by the music of Melkor, the fire of volcanoes and the churning of the sea take part in the original harmony that endures with Creation. The gods are neither capricious nor malevolent, except for Melkor and his lieutenants. Tolkien’s emphasis on balance and benevolence applies to the gender of the powers as well. *The Lord of the Rings* has been criticized for having too few female protagonists; the *Silmarillion* does not suffer from this fault. There are as many female as male powers, and the greatest female powers such as Varda, Yavanna, and

Nienna are more influential in the legendarium and *The Lord of the Rings*. This suggests that the lack of human gender parity in the novel represents a fall from an earlier balance, a logic that informs all of Tolkien's stories of the Third Age of Middle-earth. Gender imbalance in society joins war, greed, and the will to power as flaws that must be redressed in the Second Music. They represent the challenges of inhabiting a world of free creatures able to choose between good and evil acts. The Valar share these challenges, and suffer when the world is injured. This passionate involvement in history suggests that the music of the world is not apathetic, but vulnerable because it incarnates in matter and history. Unlike Rilke, Tolkien writes as if the angelic orders hear our cries because they live with us; we are environed by their music.

Tolkien's cosmogony repudiates the anti-cosmic traditions in nerd culture. The narratives of nerd alienation, separation from society, liquidation, and objectification cannot occupy the same space as Middle-earth. When properly inhabited, the Tolkien legendarium disrupts apocalyptic narratives of mad gods that make evil worlds destined for destruction. This disruption occurs through the act of inhabitation itself: the community of readers—later, “fans”—constructs a “public sphere of the imagination” according to historian Michael Saler (17). The sphere arises from an “intense imaginative identification with the textual imaginary world, coupled with the synergistic effects arising from group involvement, [which] effectively reconfigured the world” for earthly citizens of Middle-earth (26). How, then, to best inhabit it? There are at least three possibilities: the mythic, the philosophical, and the theological. The most obvious method of inhabitation is mythic, because the *Ainulindalë* and *Valaquenta* are virtual sacred texts whose style and content echo biblical, Homeric, and Norse cosmogonies. The advantage of a virtual sacred text is its continuity with traditional mythologies without the institutional structures that compel assent. Many different readers can meet on the ground of the *Silmarillion*: atheists, agnostics, monotheists, and polytheists can inhabit Middle-earth and affirm that the Great Music is beautiful and good. Because they are virtual gods, the Ainur have no history of conflict with any belief system readers might bring to the story. The Valar are not idols that Judaism fought in Canaan; not the gods of Hellenism that Christianity and Islam suppressed; not the saints and angels the Enlightenment dispelled as superstition. They are not competitors for the attention of contemporary

Neopagans, and may provide paradigms for post-monotheistic religions. By creating an artificial mythology, Tolkien made an imaginary world with real values in it, a familiar ground for nerd ethics. The success of the cinematic versions of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* testify to the global appeal of these stories of a world worthy of defense. The weakness of the mythic approach as a route to environmental ethics lies in the conflicted relationship of myth to modernity. Bruce Lincoln, a historian of religion, offers three basic meanings of *myth* in the contemporary world: “a primordial truth” to be respected; a “lie” or “outmoded worldview” to be scorned; and a “pleasant diversion” or “story for children” (Lincoln ix). In order to produce a public ethos, one must inhabit the Tolkien cosmogony as a primordial truth mediated by popular literature. Fan cultures certainly achieve this, but largely in the delimited, semiprivate space of conventions and the Internet. As players of *Dungeons & Dragons* and *World of Warcraft* discovered, the movement of virtual fantasy worlds into visible cultural practices produces a backlash from traditional religious authorities and guardians of culture. One meets the second and third definitions of myth in pathologized form: adherents are condemned as dupes in arrested development. The mythic appropriation of the *Silmarillion* risks a repetition of the cultural forces that created the nerd stereotype in the first place. Go outside, Tolkienite, and play with the normal kids.

The philosophical appropriation of the *Ainulindalë* deflects this problem by connecting the text to its intellectual history. “The Music of the Ainur” synthesizes two Hellenistic traditions: the Pythagorean and the Platonic. The Pythagorean tradition understands the universe as a material instantiation of mathematical relationships: the intervals, chords, modes, and tones of the Western musical tradition map the structures of the classical cosmos. The tropes of the *music of the spheres* and the *harmony of worlds* descend from this tradition. As John Hollander explains, many natural philosophers believed that the study of music “would lead to the understanding of some of the most fundamental principles of the structure of the whole universe” because the planets and stars operated on the same ratios as vibrating strings (Hollander 15). These ideas are not simply objects of Orphic piety: they informed the arts and sciences for millennia. The late antique philosopher argued that the *musica mundana*, “the harmony of the universe, including the cosmological order of elements, astral bodies, and seasons,” resonated with the *musica humana* and the *musica*

instrumentalis, the rhythms of incarnate life and the work of the musician as philosopher (Hollander 25). When Shakespeare places Lear on the heath in the midst of the storm, he evokes the idea of musical correspondence between heaven and earth. The chaos of Lear's kingdom causes the sky to vibrate just as a plucked string vibrates its neighbors in an overtone series. The astronomer Johannes Kepler named his major work *The Harmony of the World* because he theorized the orbits of the planets as musical intervals. The tonal structure of Western music contains its own eschatology: the return of a melody to the tonic note tells a story of circumnavigation that informs the Second Music of the Ainur. Tonality provides a map for a transformation of the world through the emanation of melody from an origin to an end that contains the beginning in a form remade by its travels. This narrative structure is also the basis of the metaphysical lineage of the *Ainulindalë*. Beginning with Plato's *Timaeus*, the Idealist tradition explained the origin of the Many in the One in terms of departure and return. In the *Timaeus*, the Demiurge forms the cosmos from a realm of pure thought; human souls return to the One through contemplation and metempsychosis. In Plotinus, Plato's late antique disciple, the story changes: the transcendent One generates a Mind that forms a World Soul ordering matter from the inside. The World Soul inhabits nature, causing the world to turn back to the One through self-reflection on origins. This Plotinian plot informs Hellenistic Christian theologies of the Trinity and the foundations of Christian mysticism. Unlike the Calvinist split between nature and history that foments contemporary apocalypticism, this narrative emphasizes the continuity between the One and the Many. It affirms the goodness of matter against radical Gnostic dualism that Plotinus saw as a corruption of Platonism. In the legendarium, Tolkien synthesizes the music of the spheres with the cosmogony of Plotinus to produce an account of nature as a structure beautiful to the intellect and the senses at the same time, an aesthetic repudiation of anti-cosmic dualism. The advantage of this philosophical approach to the *Silmarillion* lies in the sheer weight of tradition. It is difficult to dismiss without renouncing the canons of Western philosophy and religion. The disadvantage lies in its formidable abstraction. There is a reason that so many people read *The Lord of the Rings* and falter at the *Silmarillion*: profundity can be dull. Languages produce worlds, but only worlds produce epics. The most persuasive version of an ethos is not the most mathematical.

The sacramental tradition provides a material antidote for philosophical abstraction. As a Catholic and a medievalist, Tolkien understood the Augustinian definition of a sacrament as a “visible form of invisible grace” mediated to the believer through the rituals of the institutional Church. However, sacramental theology understands Creation itself as the primary sacrament, and Christian ecological theology defends the goodness of the world on that basis. John Hart defines sacraments as “signs of the creating Spirit that draw people into grace-filled moments,” an extra-ecclesial frame that sponsors the concept of *natural sacrament*, “a place, event, or creature in nature” that, as a sign of “Spirit’s immanence and presence, draws people toward the Spirit” and all creatures (Hart xiv). Two features of these definitions stand out for our purposes: the idea of the sign and the inclusive scope of the phenomenon. In Catholic theology, a sign is not merely a conceptual pointer toward a referent. A sign contains some of what it signifies. There is a continuity of being between sign and referent: the name of a creature contains some its power. In this way, Arda embodies the Great Music. Here, Tolkien owes a debt to the Romantic idea of “absolute music” and its claim that the highest form of music owes nothing to other arts, such as poetry, to establish its meaning. Absolute music generates and justifies itself as the work of a genius, such as Beethoven, mediating the laws of nature through himself. The paradigmatic genre of absolute music is the symphony, in which words, if they are included, are more important as sounds than signs. In “The Music of the Ainur,” Tolkien portrays the universe as the primary instance of absolute music: transcendence passing into immanence, self-justifying in its beauty and goodness, voices sounding as instruments. According to Daniel Chua, absolute music transmutes its relationship to words in the other direction as well. Paradoxically, words established absolute music as autonomous. “After all, the Romantics did not compose, they merely talked. They fabricated from the symphony the *discourse* of absolute music. So far from standing speechless before its ineffable utterances, the Romantics spoke absolute music into existence. It was music emancipated from language *by language*” (Chua 6). Wordless music made by words made the world. This is the framework for a musical Logos.

A sacramental cosmos embodies what it mediates: the creatures of Middle-earth manifest the Great Music, and the music can be evoked in them through

the power of performance. This is a natural, not a supernatural effect: it does not depend upon belief and does not require membership in an institution. The Ainur sang the music whether or not an individual character knows that they did, and certain characters, such as Sam Gamgee, evoke the music without knowing what they are doing. This position shapes Tolkien's account of the power of human art. In a sacramental framework, art affirms the availability of goodness, truth, and beauty to everyone. Sacramentality intervenes in the narrative of cosmopolis by affirming the role of matter in the life of the spirit. Matter is not incidental to the growth of cosmopolis, so the city of all creatures must matter to them as embodied beings. The trajectory of the Organians of *Star Trek* from materiality to pure thought corresponds to a certain version of Platonism, but not to sacramentalism. Sacramentality resists metaphysical dualisms, especially dualisms that denigrate matter as inferior or unworthy. Within the Christian spiritual traditions, sacramentalism stands in tension with asceticism as an ethos of world-denial. Eschatologically, the sacraments point to the defense of all creatures and their central importance to the end of the world. In its traditional form, from the Patristic era to the present, sacramental theology affirms the goodness of creatures as innate and not instrumental, not an effect of their usefulness to humans. It constitutes a powerful anti-anthropocentrism within the tradition, even in the hierarchical forms of Christian humanism. There, human beings are the crown of Creation, the creature closest to God, but not the only creature or the only necessary one. In a sacramental universe, "All creation, from the grandeur of the stars to the life of creatures of the air, land, and waters, all the energies, elements, events, and entities" of the world "stimulate" awareness of spirit and care for cosmos (Hart 13). Sacramentalism is not ecology itself, but it informs the tradition of natural theology that sees the sensible universe as a manifestation of the Wisdom of God. Much of Anglophone nature writing descends from natural theology, Emerson to Annie Dillard, though its resonance with the Tolkien legendarium remains to be explored. At its most powerful, sacramental theology insists that the story of the world cannot end with destruction and disembodiment. Its advantage and its disadvantage are the same: it is culturally specific, a Catholic understanding of art as incarnation, moving from stories and ideas to creatures living in time and space. It is the theological tradition that informs Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories," his account of the value of art as the creator of Secondary Worlds.

Fairy stories and the art of enchantment

Tolkien delivered the lecture that would become “On Fairy-Stories” in 1938, as he was composing *The Lord of the Rings*, and in the essay one detects the architectonics of Middle-earth (*Tolkien Reader* 31). The first part of the essay examines the concepts of “fairy” and “fairy-story,” wherein Tolkien defends the genre as serious craft. His defense begins with the claim that imagination combined with art produces “Sub-creation” (*Tolkien Reader* 68). This constitutes a sacramental theory of art. Tolkien explains that “imagination,” for medieval philosophy, meant the faculty of the mind that allows us to produce images of objects not present to the senses. He does not deny the Romantic understanding of the term as a source of internal revelation, but his account focuses on basic mental processes first. Artists externalize images through the shaping of textual matter, moving these images from the Primary World (“real life”) to the Secondary World (virtual space) of the story. At the apex of success, the Secondary World possesses an internal consistency that evokes “Secondary belief” from the audience. This is the acme of artistic achievement, the creation of a “Sub-creation” that audiences inhabit (38). This account of Sub-creation represents a theoretical version of the *Ainulindalë* cosmogony. The imagination, like Ilúvatar, propounds themes to the artist’s creative powers, which make another world that can be enjoyed. The theological basis for this account lies in the Genesis narrative, which names the human as the image of God. In Trinitarian terms, the artist corresponds to Christ the Word, through which the world is created. Like Plotinus, Tolkien resists the metaphysical dualism of the Gnostics through a theory of Secondary Worlds as true, good, and beautiful. In such a system, there is no need to evolve beyond materiality, because inhabitation of a created world is the ultimate end of art. The radical distrust of the senses that makes possible the paranoia of *The Matrix* never forms. The contemporary discourse of the virtual as threat is disqualified: it is possible to make badly, to fail to make a real Secondary World, but all Secondary Worlds are legitimate. Tolkien’s incarnational ethos, which understands art as a powerful means to transform the Primary World, sponsors an optimism that is matched only by Jane McGonigal and her theories of gamification. “On Fairy-Stories” posits much more than a pragmatic use for art, however. Successful art creates an uncanny aesthetic of enchantment.

Tolkien's theory of Fantasy as enchantment returns to the distinction between the objectified tool and the enspirited creature. Fantasy as a genre partakes in imagination's freedom to depart from verisimilitude with the Primary World: "unreality" frees us from the "domination of observed 'fact'" (69). Tolkien uses the example of a world with a green sun to illustrate how Fantasy succeeds only when the ramifications of its unreal premises are carried to logical conclusions: not just the green sun but all that the green sun implies. When the unreal premises are achieved consistently, the Secondary World comes alive, and creates "Enchantment." Tolkien calls this an "elvish art" that "produces a Secondary World into which both designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside" (73). Magic is mechanical, the production of cheap effects that do not convince, while Enchantment produces living worlds through "sub-creative art." Tolkien's aesthetics generate principles that are cyborgian and uncanny. It is cyborg-like in its belief that union between creator and creation is a good thing; it is uncanny in that nonmakers, who refuse to enter the Sub-creation willingly, may perceive that creation as something that appears to be alive and should not. Tolkien recognizes this possibility when he describes Enchantment as "elvish," recalling the deceptions of fairies who entice mortals into their realm and never let them leave. Human approximations of the elvish art are both unsettling and quasi-divine: the artist as genius of an imaginary place, the maker as benevolent Demiurge. This robust theory of enchantment flies in the face of pessimistic appraisals of modernity as disenchanted. Max Weber, the German sociologist, considered enchantment an effect possible only for "primitive" and classical cultures: the process of Enlightenment breaks the enchanted world in a manner that cannot be reversed. Likewise, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno understand disenchantment as the "extirpation of animism," the impossibility of relating to nonhuman beings as person to person (3). Where these theorists posit a radical break between modernity and enchantment, Tolkien proposes a continuity: the role of the artist consists in the creation of Secondary Worlds that can be entered, inhabited, and exited through conscious choice. Tolkien's enchantment is not a retreat into pre-critical consciousness, but a restoration of the full powers of creation.

Tolkien believes that this restoration produces three important effects: recovery, escape, and consolation. For him, "recovery" is an epistemic and

existential category, a cleaning of the windows of perception that make it possible to see other creatures as they are (77). This principle relates to Brechtian alienation as its ally in goal and opposite in means. It is not that the artist *makes* the familiar strange, it is that fantasy cleanses us of trite assumptions. It allows us to see with fresh eyes. This complicates the aesthetic category of the uncanny: things that ought to be seen as alive are seen as alive again, but because we perceived them as dead, we are unnerved by their recovery. Fantasy's capacity to reveal the familiar as unfamiliar means that it does not mislead the enchanted; it allows them to escape a Primary World wounded by delusion. This forms the basis of Tolkien's defense of escape. Critics of fantasy, he believes, have confused the "Escape of the Prisoner" with the "Flight of the Deserter" (79). Both tropes originate in wartime experience. As it is the duty of the imprisoned soldier to escape the enemy, so it is the duty of the enchanted to escape disenchantment. The political implications of this duty include the escape from the unjust regime—Tolkien makes the analogy to German citizens escaping the Nazi Reich (79). There is an aesthetic dimension to escape as flight from bad making. Tolkien comments that he finds the Bifrost bridge of the Norse Gods more beautiful an artifact than the roof of Bletchley train station (79). Disenchanted aesthetics would dismiss Bifrost as unreal, but Tolkien wants to hold public art to the high standards of Secondary Worlds. The Secondary Worlds of art allow us to critique the Primary World as insufficient and unjust. Enchantment provides an Archimedian fulcrum for the lever of criticism, and as such it is eminently practical. This sense that Creation can be moved by Sub-creation informs the final category of consolation. Consolation occurs in fairy stories when a *eucatastrophe*, an unexpectedly good turn of events, overcomes the audience. Such a turn alerts the audience that there is an eschaton that denies a "universal final defeat" (86). The eucatastrophe "passes outside the frame" of the story into our vision of a good world to come: the lovers unite, the city is saved, and joy appears in the ruins. The eucatastrophe is more than a happy ending: it is an ending that could not have been imagined the moment before it happened. It is imagination transcending itself in the brief experience of a better world: Spock defeats Khan, and Katniss breaks the false sky. The enchantment of Secondary Worlds reveals not just our capacity to sing with the Valar in the making of the world, but to sing in the Second Music, glimpsed in moments of recovery, escape, and

consolation. This logic informs many moments of counter-apocalypse in *The Lord of the Rings*, which provide examples of eucatastrophe as incursion of the Second Music into historical time.

The defeat of the Captain of the Nazgûl by Éowyn and Merry at the Battle of the Pelennor Fields provides one such example. This battle takes place in Book V of *The Return of the King*, and determines the fate of the city of Gondor after an attack by the forces of Sauron. Éowyn is a royal shield maiden of Rohan, the nation of horse riders allied to Gondor. She had asked her king, Theoden, to allow her to accompany him in battle, but he refused. Éowyn then disguised herself as a warrior named “Dernhelm” and rode into battle with Meriadoc the hobbit. When Theoden falls to the Lord of the Nazgûl—the undead human kings that bear rings of power—Dernhelm draws a sword to protect him. The Black Captain laughs and declares, “No living man may hinder me!” Dernhelm responds with lines among the most famous in the book: “But no living man am I! You look upon a woman. Éowyn am I, Éomund’s daughter. You stand between me and my lord and kin. Begone, if you be not deathless! For living or dark undead, I will smite you, if you touch him” (*LoTR* 823). Merry turns to help her, but the monstrous mount of the Nazgûl pounces on Éowyn first. “A steel blade, fair yet terrible,” she cuts off its head with her sword. The Black Rider dismounts and crushes her shield with its mace. Just as he prepares to kill her, Merry stabs the Rider in the knee from behind, giving Éowyn the chance to drive her sword into its face. The Rider’s clothing falls to the ground, empty, and Sauron’s chief servant is no more. This event constitutes a eucatastrophe because two characters considered unfit for battle, a hobbit and a woman, dispatched a monster feared throughout Middle-earth, an enemy that almost killed Frodo in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. The eucatastrophe is structured like a riddle: *I can be hindered by no man. How can I be stopped?* The Rider thinks the answer is *I cannot be stopped*, but Éowyn and Merry answer correctly. Inside the narrative, this event bolsters the spirit of the Rohirrim, inspiring the sudden joy that defines the good turn. Outside the narrative, generations of nerds take heart that the rejected heroes triumph over a “shadow of despair” that thinks of them as prey (823).

To understand the connection of this event to the Second Music, it is necessary to read *The Silmarillion* typologically, as an anticipation of *The Lord*

of the Rings, as Christian readers have sometimes read the Hebrew Scripture as anticipation of the New. The defeat of the Nazgûl by Éowyn echoes the defeat of Melkor by Luthien, the title character in “The Tale of Beren and Luthien,” which Tolkien considered the heart of the legendarium. Luthien is the daughter of an Elvish king, Thingol, and a Maia, Melian. Her lineage combines the blood of the gods with the line of the Elves in the First Age, at the height of their power. Melian possesses the finest voice among Valar and Maiar, and all of the gods stop to listen when she sings. As Melian’s daughter, Luthien mediates a power of enchantment that runs through Gondorian royalty to Aragorn himself. Luthien founded this line by falling in love with Beren, a human king, but the match is prevented by her father until they prove themselves worthy through a quest. They must obtain a Silmaril from the crown of Melkor in his court at Angband. Disguised in animal form, Luthien and Beren enter the court. Luthien sings for Melkor, putting him and his court to sleep. Though they do not succeed in stealing the jewel, this adventure marks the only time any being, including the other Valar, bests Melkor. Luthien defeats the most powerful Vala at his own game of disruptive music, just as Éowyn destroys what no man could. Her achievement constitutes a restoration, in Tolkien’s terms, of the status of women in the Third Age of Middle-earth: sidelined by the narrative of war that occupies *The Lord of the Rings*, she asserts a new vision of what women can do, a renascence that recalls the greatest character of the legendarium. Like Luthien’s song, Éowyn’s war cry changes the terms of possibility in the world, and the defeat of the Rider presages the fall of Sauron. Éowyn’s victory points back to Luthien and forward to Frodo and Sam as unlikely heroes who destroy the Ring.

Éowyn breaks the frame of the story, allowing readers a glimpse of the world beyond the Third Age. Like Luthien, Éowyn marries a nobleman, Faramir, the second son of Denethor, the Steward of Gondor. Faramir is the brother of Boromir, who died in *Fellowship* after trying to steal the Ring from Frodo. Faramir first appears in *The Two Towers* when he discovers an opportunity to steal the Ring while Frodo and Sam are in his custody. He shows no interest in the Ring, and adds himself to the short list of characters not tempted to possess it. This is a minor eucatastrophe itself: a man uninterested in the power of domination. The narrative first identifies him with Henneth Annûn and its refuge, a cave behind the great falls of Ithilien where he shelters Sam and Frodo.

During their conversation, he defines his vision of the future as environmental justice and restoration: “For myself,” said Faramir, “I would see the White Tree in flower again in the courts of the kings, and the Silver Crown return, and Minas Tirith in peace. Minas Anor again as of old, full of light, high and fair, beautiful as a queen among other queens, not a mistress of many slaves, nay, not even a kind mistress of willing slaves” (*LoTR* 656). The White Tree of Gondor descends from a primal tree that flowered in the court of the Valar, and it returns when Aragorn finds a sapling in the rocks and replants it in his court. Like Éowyn, Faramir connects the creation of Arda with its future, the First Age with the Fourth. Though critics identify this pattern with Tolkien’s personal nostalgia, eschatology, the study of the last things, always looks back at the first things. That does not mean that history will be shaped by decline alone. Faramir and Éowyn become rulers of Ithilien, the stewards of a broken land that must be restored after the war with Sauron. As allies of the hobbits—the people who do not appear in the legendarium—Éowyn and Faramir stand for a future uncontained by prophecy. In his proposal of marriage, Faramir asks Éowyn to “dwell in fair Ithilien and there make a garden. All things will grow with joy there, if the White Lady comes” (944). The union of eucatastrophes signals the beginning of consolation through ecological recovery.

This turn to hope contains in microcosm the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, a story driven by breaks in the frame of history achieved by characters that did not appear in the metanarrative of the Wise in Middle-earth. Éowyn and Faramir, Frodo and Sam, hobbits, Ents, and even Aragorn arise from the margins of a world that seemed too exhausted to resist conquest. This plot reflects the presence of the Second Music, new voices lifted into history as *creatio continua*, acts of cosmic making that operate in the present. These voices were predicted in the legendarium when the *Ainulindalë* declared that some things in Eä are hidden from the Ainur themselves. The legendarium and *The Lord of the Rings* offer a recipe for counter-apocalypse, the resistance of free peoples to the lure of domination. Though this pattern does not correspond to the millenarian Protestant appropriation of the book of Revelation, it harmonizes with the late antique eschatology of the Alexandrian theologians Clement and Origen, and the Cappadocians, Nyssa and Nazianzus. Clement believed that divine punishment could only be pedagogical because of God’s loving nature: the soul is meant to be “transformed, healed and divinized”

by temporary suffering, whose proper end is *apokatastasis*, the “Restoration” to friendship with God (Sachs 617). The cosmos is a schoolyard, and life a series of lessons that continue even after death. Origen reasoned that the finite will of rational souls cannot resist the infinite love of the Creator for an infinite amount of time, raising the possibility that even the fallen angels can be reconciled to the One (617). Wait long enough, and the Enemy himself repents. Gregory of Nazianzus identifies the fires of punishment with Christ the healer (631), and Gregory of Nyssa stresses that all creatures will share in the Restoration, that this renewal occurs as the “eternal destiny of the material world” (633). The principle of *apokatastasis* is the same as the goal of the Second Music: a return to harmony after discord. God does not compel assent, but plays a long game of persuasion that ends in forgiveness at the end of time. The Restoration became the minority report of Latin Christianity because it conflicts with the notion of an eternal hell where the unjust are punished forever. In the West, *apokatastasis* leads to the idea of Purgatory in Catholic theology and the notion of Universalism—the salvation of all peoples and creatures—in the radical Reformation. Interpreted in this framework, the book of Revelation arrives at its original end, the descent of the New Jerusalem, which unites heaven and earth. There is no Rapture of the chosen into a disembodied heaven. The end of history leads to Ithilien and the planting of a new garden. This cosmic pastoral resonates with the ethos of ecological restoration, understood as the attempt “to make nature whole,” to “heal the scars” left by destructive practices of settlement, agriculture, and industry (Jordan 11). William Jordan III, a theorist of ecological restoration, admits that “preservation in the strict sense is impossible”: ecosystems change, and human intervention cannot be undone (Jordan 14). Jordan is interested in the philosophy of restoration as a revision of environmental decline: “For generations, environmentalists have assumed that the loss and degradation of areas generally described as ‘natural’ is an irreversible process—that we can only subtract from or degrade the natural landscape, never add to it or improve it. Yet the best work of restorationists shows that this is not always true” (13). Jordan contrasts the pragmatic rhetoric sometimes used to justify a restoration project—the improvement of water supply or the beautification of a brownfield—with the true goal of restoration, to undo damage to ecosystems that “we consider uninteresting, useless, ugly, repulsive, or even dangerous”

(22). Restorationism differs from land management as an attempt to honor the creatures that seem valueless to us: insofar as possible, ecosystems should be “self-organizing,” “self-sustaining,” and “self-maintaining” (Clewell and Aronson 8). This is apokatastasis as applied biology. The defense of the whole means exactly that: the water lilies with the mosquitoes, the trash dump with the meadow, the demons with the angels.

In the project of a restorationist counter-apocalypse, it may be helpful to consider the reading of metanarratives synchronically and diachronically. Synchronic reading is the strategy of understanding the story “from above,” knowing the beginning, middle, and ending of the story simultaneously. Synchronic reading understands myth as narrative structure made of parts that relate to one another as causes and effects. The function of the part is considered from the perspective of the whole. Diachronic reading is the strategy of understanding the narrative as it unfolds in time at a particular point in the plot, “from within.” It emphasizes continuous interpretation in which the reader revises past interpretations as the story unfolds. Parts may be related to other parts, but the entire shape of those relationships is never visible all at once. Music as score lends itself to synchrony, while music as performance lends itself to diachrony. Apokatastasis reads history synchronically: it views the beginning and middle of Eä’s score in light of the end. Restoration as an ecological practice also reads ecosystems from above, as improvisations that can be shaped to particular ends. Tolkien’s corpus admits only one synchronic reader: the One itself, Eru Ilúvatar. As the transcendent audience for the Great Music, Ilúvatar knows what happens at every moment in the plot. Everyone else can be surprised, including the Ainur. Even immortal beings must listen to the music as it blossoms as matter. Inside the world, no one understands entirely what is happening, and everyone must listen in the present, in a sequence of events. The shape of the music changes because of the limited knowledge of the singers: old voices depart and new ones arise in a manner that cannot be predicted. The unexpected is inevitable when one lives in time, even if, like the Valar, one sang the music in the beginning. Eschatology cannot be reduced to protology. This leaves room for the stochastic elements of the story—hobbits, shield maidens, and second sons—to confound the wise. The knowledge that there is an end, but that the end is hidden, even from the gods, encourages a synchronic reading that is not entirely possible. Just as ecological restoration

cannot return systems to a state before human intervention, Arda cannot return to what it was before Melkor and Sauron. Therefore, one need not despair when an impossible goal does not appear; paradoxically, impossible goals, like the destruction of the Ring, become thinkable because of the impossibility of complete synchronic knowledge. Synchrony means that the Second Music has already begun, that the edginess of the eschaton appears in the present as prolepsis. Synchrony reminds us to attend to the fate of all the characters, all the species and elements, at play in the song. Apokatastasis as counter-apocalypse tells the story of a Second Music in which no one (not the Orcs, not Gollum, not even Melkor) is abandoned eternally. Like all Platonic fables, this story depends on the One. But what happens to history when the One falls silent, the Valar recede, and humanity is left at the mercy of our demons? What happens when nerds get trapped in the cosmic schoolyard, and school is run by the Big Bad? How can the alliance of friends endure the evils of diachrony without a clear vision of synchrony? These are the questions posed by *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.