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## The Fall and Repentance of Galadriel

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### The Fall and Repentance of Galadriel

#### Abstract

Fills in some of the gaps of Galadriel's depiction in *The Lord of the Rings* with a close examination of her history throughout the development of Tolkien's legendarium, and particularly Tolkien's evolving conception of her rebellion and redemption.

#### Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Galadriel

# THE FALL AND REPENTANCE OF GALADRIEL<sup>1</sup>

ROMUALD IAN LAKOWSKI

**A**LTHOUGH Galadriel is one of the best known and best loved characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, surprisingly little has been written about her. It is true that she only really plays an important role in the Lothlórien episode in Book II: 6-8, and at the very end of Book VI. Part of the problem is that the story of her past life in Middle-earth was never really told in *The Lord of the Rings*, but only hinted at in the "Lament of Galadriel" (*LotR* II.8). Tolkien himself obviously felt dissatisfied by his treatment of Galadriel after *LotR* was published, and elaborated on her history in several late writings, including post-*LotR* versions of *The Silmarillion* (*Sil.*), some of his late letters (*Letters*), the section on *The History of Galadriel and Celeborn* in the *Unfinished Tales* (*UT*), and some notes that Tolkien himself supplied to Donald Swann's Song Cycle *The Road Goes Ever On*, first published in 1967. In addition Volumes 6-9 and 12 of *The History of Middle-earth* (*HME*) also contain early drafts of *LotR*, which allow us to see more clearly the emergence of Galadriel into the narrative. In several of these late writings Tolkien elaborated a story of Galadriel's Fall and Repentance, only to repudiate it in the final year of his life.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most succinct statement of the later story of Galadriel's Fall and Repentance can be found in a letter to Mrs. Ruth Austin in 25th Jan. 1971, written only two years before Tolkien's death:

I was particularly interested in your comments about Galadriel . . . . I think it is true that I owe much of this character to Christian and Catholic teaching and imagination about Mary, but actually Galadriel was a

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was given on 27th July, 2004 at Mythcon XXXIV in Nashville, Tennessee. Since there are many editions of *The Lord of the Rings* available and readers may not have access to the (one-volume) edition used in this paper, reference is made to both the book and chapter number, and the volume and page numbers (e.g. Book II.8; p.364). References to Tolkien's *Letters* include both letter number and page number, e.g. *Letters* #320, p.407. The various volumes of the *History of Middle-earth* are referred to by volume number and pages, e.g. *HME* 12: 336-39.

<sup>2</sup> For two earlier studies of Galadriel in the First Age, see Janice Johnson, 11-14 (who anticipates some of my own conclusions) and Dennis Bridoux, 19-23.

penitent: in her youth a leader in the rebellion against the Valar (the angelic guardians). At the end of the First Age she proudly refused forgiveness or permission to return. She was pardoned because of her resistance to the final and overwhelming temptation to take the Ring for herself. (*Letters* #320, p.407)

In the draft of an earlier letter to Mr. Rang dated Aug. 1967, Tolkien states that "The Exiles [*who fled from Valimar*] were allowed to return—save for a few chief actors in the rebellion of whom at the time of the *L.R.* only *Galadriel* remained" (*Letters* #297, p.386). In a note attached to this passage, Tolkien further explains that

At the time of her lament in Lórien she believed this to be perennial, as long as Earth endured. Hence she concludes her lament with a wish or prayer that Frodo may as a special grace be granted a purgatorial (but not penal) sojourn in *Eressea*, the Solitary Isle in sight of *Aman*, though for her the way is closed. [...] Her prayer was granted—but also her personal ban was lifted, in reward for her services against Sauron, and above all for her rejection of the temptation to take the Ring when offered to her. So at the end we see her taking ship. (*Ibid.*)

About the same time as this letter was written Tolkien added some notes to *Ai! laurië lantar lassí súrinen* "Galadriel's Lament in Lórien," no.5 in Donald Swann's 1967 Song Cycle *The Road Goes Ever On*, which was originally published in the "Farewell to Lórien" Chapter in *LotR* (II.8). In commenting on the line *Sí man i yulma nin enquantuva?* ("Who now shall refill the cup for me?" *LotR* II.8, p.368), and on the question *What ship would bear me ever back across so wide a Sea?* at the end of her earlier song ("I sang of leaves, of leaves of gold, and leaves of gold there grew," II.8, p.363), Tolkien explains that

[Galadriel] was the last survivor of the princes and queens who had led the revolting *Noldor* to exile in Middle-earth. After the overthrow of *Morgoth* at the end of the First Age a ban was set upon her return, and she had replied proudly that she had no wish to do so. She passed over the Mountains of *Eredluin* with her husband *Celeborn* (one of the *Sindar*) and went to *Eregion*. But it was impossible for one of the High-Elves to overcome the yearning for the Sea, and the longing to pass over it again to the land of their former bliss. She was now burdened with this desire. In the event, after the fall of *Sauron*, in reward for all that she had done to oppose him, but above all for her rejection of the Ring when it came within her power, the ban was lifted, and she returned over the Sea, as is told at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*. (*The Road Goes Ever on*, p.68)

In another late work “Of Dwarves and Men,” dating from after June 1969 (HME 12: 293) and also referring to the notes to the “Lament of Galadriel” in *A Road Goes Ever On*, Tolkien comments that

the Farewell was addressed direct to Frodo, and was an extempore outpouring in free rhythmic style, reflecting the overwhelming increase in her regret and longing, and her personal despair after she had survived the terrible temptation. [...] In the event it proved that it was Galadriel’s abnegation of pride and trust in her own powers, and her absolute refusal of any unlawful enhancement of them, that provided the ship to bear her back to her home. (HME 12:320-21, n.15 to p.299)

Tolkien also refers again to the “Lament of Galadriel” in yet another late work, “The Shibboleth of Fëanor,” dating from after Feb. 1968: “Her Lament—spoken before she knew of the pardon (and indeed honour) that the Valar gave her—harks back to the days of her youth in Valinor and to the darkness of the years of Exile while the Blessed Realm was closed to all the Ñoldor in Middle-earth” (HME 12:338-39).

The agreement of these five late witnesses, all dating from the period between 1967 and 1971, is impressive, but unfortunately nothing about Tolkien’s late writings is simple. There are other late accounts that contradict this clear narrative of Fall and Redemption. Nor is the exact nature of Galadriel’s Fall ever clearly spelled out.

### **Galadriel in *The Silmarillion***

*The Silmarillion*, published in 1977 after Tolkien’s death, has remarkably little to say about Galadriel’s part in the rebellion of the Noldor. All we are told is that “Galadriel, the only woman of the Noldor to stand that day tall and valiant among the contending princes, was eager to be gone. No oaths she swore, but the words of Fëanor [*her uncle*] concerning Middle-earth had kindled in her heart, for she yearned to see the wide unguarded lands and to rule there a realm at her own will” (*Sil.* 83-84).

There is no mention of a specific ban on the return of Galadriel, only of the general Doom or Curse of Mandos on the rebels, especially the House of Fëanor, for the kinslaying of the Teleri at Alqualondë (*Sil.* 85-90). In *The Silmarillion*, Galadriel herself was not involved in the kinslaying. However, she was tainted by association, because she was the niece of Fëanor and especially because she had Telerian blood in her through her mother Eärwen, the daughter of Olwë Lord of the Teleri. Thus, in *The Silmarillion*, Galadriel’s “sin” is primarily one of omission. On arriving in Middle-earth after the tortuous crossing of the Helcaraxë (the Grinding Ice) necessitated by Fëanor’s burning of the ships at Losgar (*Sil.* 97), Galadriel dwelt for a time in Doriath, where she met her future

husband Celeborn, kinsman of Thingol, King of Doriath and brother of Olwë. (Thus, Thingol was also Galadriel's maternal uncle.)<sup>3</sup> There, Galadriel also befriended Melian the Maia, wife of Thingol and mother of Lúthien Tinúviel. From Melian, Galadriel "learned great lore and wisdom concerning Middle-earth" (*Sil.* 115),<sup>4</sup> and she stayed with her when her brother Finrod Felagund went off to found Nargothrond.

When Melian asked Galadriel about the flight of the Noldor, she replied: "'we were not driven forth, but came of our own will, and against that of the Valar. And through great peril and in despite of the Valar for this purpose we came: to take vengeance upon Morgoth, and regain what he stole'. [...] but still she said no word of the Oath [*of Fëanor*], nor of the Kinslaying, nor of the burning of the ships at Losgar" (*Sil.* 127). Melian, nonetheless, guessed that Galadriel was hiding some dark secret and warned Thingol, and he eventually learned the truth from Círdan the Shipwright, who had heard dark rumors about the kinslaying. When Galadriel's brothers, the "sons of Finarfin," came to visit her in Doriath, Thingol angrily confronted them with these rumors. One of them, Angrod, confessed the truth, but tried to exonerate the house of Finarfin from blame: "Then Angrod spoke bitterly against the sons of Fëanor, telling of the blood at Alqualondë, and the Doom of Mandos, and the burning of the ships at Losgar. And he cried: 'Wherefore should we that endured the Grinding Ice [*Helcaraxë*] bear the name of kinslayers and traitors?'" (*Sil.* 129).<sup>5</sup> However, Melian replied with prophetic foresight: "Yet the shadow of Mandos lies on you also" (*Ibid.*), and like Fëanor and his sons, the sons of Finarfin also all perished in Middle-earth.

By implication, the shadow of Mandos also falls on Galadriel as well. However, at the end of the published *Quenta Silmarillion* Galadriel is clearly included in the general pardon of the Valar at the end of the First Age. We are told that the Elves of Beleriand were admitted again to the love of Manwë and

<sup>3</sup> See entry for the Year 1280 of "The Annals of Aman" in *HME* 10:Sec. 4, §85, pp.93 and 104.

<sup>4</sup> In the draft text for this passage we are told that there Galadriel "received the love of Melian" (*HME* 11:178); cf. *HME* 11:35, "there was much love between them" (in the published text this phrase is applied instead to Galadriel's relationship with Celeborn, *Sil.* 115). See also the rumor reported in the drafts of *Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age*: "For it is said by some that she was a handmaid of Melian the Immortal in the realm of Doriath" (*HME* 12:185); cf. *HME* 7:265-66, n.31 (quoted in n.6).

<sup>5</sup> In a draft text for this passage in "The Grey Annals," note to Year 66, §95, Galadriel herself denies any complicity on the part of her family: "and being perplexed and recalling suddenly with anger the words of Caranthir [one of the Sons of Fëanor] she said ere she could set a guard on her tongue: 'For already the children of Finrod [later Finarfin] are charged with talebearing and treason to their kindred. Yet we at least were guiltless, and suffered evil ourselves.' And Melian spoke no more of these things with Galadriel" (*HME* 11:119).

the pardon of the Valar; and the Teleri forgave their ancient grief, and the curse was laid to rest. Yet not all the Eldalië were willing to forsake the Hither Lands where they had long suffered and long dwelt; and some lingered many an age in Middle-earth. Among these were Círdan the Shipwright, and Celeborn of Doriath, with Galadriel his wife, who alone remained of those who led the Noldor to exile in Beleriand (*Sil.* 254).

In *The Lord of the Rings* itself, though there is sadness in the speech of Galadriel in the chapter "The Mirror of Galadriel," there is nothing to indicate that her stay in Middle-earth is unwilling: "For the Lord of the Galadhrim [*Celeborn*] is accounted the wisest of the Elves of Middle-earth, and a giver of gifts beyond the power of kings. He has dwelt in the West since the days of dawn, and I have dwelt with him years uncounted; for ere the fall of Nargothrond or Gondolin I passed over the mountains, and together through the ages of the world we have fought the long defeat" (*LotR* II.7, pp.347-48).

The early drafts of this passage, written in 1942, are more explicit, and strongly suggest that Tolkien already (before Galadriel had entered the *Silmarillion* tradition in 1951) conceived of Galadriel as a (voluntary) exile from Valinor: "The lord and lady of Lothlórien are accounted wise beyond the measure of the Elves of Middle-earth, and of all who have not passed beyond the Seas. For we have dwelt here since the Mountains were reared and the Sun was young" (*HME* 7:248).<sup>6</sup> In *Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age* in the *Silmarillion*, we find the similar statement (but with more emphasis on the power of Galadriel): "A queen she was of the woodland Elves, the wife of Celeborn of Doriath, yet she herself was of the Noldor and remembered the Day before days in Valinor, and she was the mightiest and fairest of all the Elves that remained in Middle-earth" (*Sil.* 298).<sup>7</sup>

Although the *Silmarillion* was published after Tolkien's death in 1973, an examination of Volumes 10 and 11 of the *History of Middle-earth* indicates that the

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<sup>6</sup> See *HME* 7:263, n.12. A further addition to the manuscript of one of the drafts makes the connection more explicit: "And I have dwelt here with him since the days of dawn, when I passed over the seas with Melian of Valinor; and ever together we have fought the long defeat" (*HME* 7:265, n.31). For Galadriel's relationship with Melian, see also n.4 above.

<sup>7</sup> For other references to Galadriel's fairness and valor in the *Silmarillion* tradition, see *Sil.* 90 (quoted above) and *HME* 10:112: "Galadriel, the only woman of the Noldor to stand that day *tall and valiant* among the contending princes"; and the drafts of *Sil.* 97 and 61 (quoted below): "Therefore led by Fingolfin and his sons, and by Inglor [later >Finrod] and Galadriel *the valiant and fair*" (*HME* 10:120; cf. p.196) and "A sister they had, Galadriel, the fairest lady of the house of Finwë, and *the most valiant*" (*ibid.* 177) [my italics]. Compare this with *LotR*, Appendix F, "Of the Elves": "Noblest of all was the Lady Galadriel of the royal house of Finarfin and sister of Finrod Felagund, King of Nargothrond" (*LotR*, App.F, p.1102 and *HME* 10:181).

latest material incorporated by Christopher Tolkien into the text of the 1977 *Silmarillion* dates from about 1958. At this point the emphasis is still on the Kinslaying at Alqualondë, Cain's sin of fratricide in *Genesis 4*, but in the later writings on Galadriel there is a radical shift in emphasis: Galadriel's besetting sin becomes that of pride, the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden in *Genesis 2-3*. It is certainly an easier sin to pin on a woman than the sin of fratricide, in which Galadriel was only indirectly implicated at most as an accomplice.

### **The History of Galadriel and Celeborn**

Before turning to consider the most striking illustration of this transformation of Galadriel's "sin" in the late work "The Shibboleth of Fëanor" which dates from after Feb. 1968 (*HME* 12:331), it is necessary at least briefly to consider the accounts of "The History of Galadriel and Celeborn," which Christopher Tolkien included in *The Unfinished Tales*, published in 1982. Since these accounts deal with the history of Galadriel, Celeborn and Amroth in the *Second Age* of Middle-earth, they are only indirectly relevant to the topic of this paper. Christopher Tolkien comments: "There is no part of the history of Middle-earth more full of problems than the story of Galadriel and Celeborn, and it must be admitted that there are severe inconsistencies 'embedded in the traditions'; or, to look at the matter from another point of view, that the role and importance of Galadriel only emerged slowly, and that her story underwent continual refashionings" (*UT* 294). These comments are equally applicable to the "First Age" accounts of Galadriel, some of which were included by Christopher Tolkien in the introduction to "The History of Galadriel and Celeborn" (*UT* 294-301). Although Christopher Tolkien does not date this material, there is a reference in a letter by his father to Dick Plotz of the Tolkien Society of America dated 12 Sept. 1965 to the existence of "a large amount of matter that is not strictly part of *The Silmarillion*" including "the history of Celeborn and Galadriel" (*Letters* #276, p.360). In his introduction to "The History of Galadriel and Celeborn," Christopher Tolkien expressed doubts that "the conception of a ban on Galadriel's return into the West was present when the chapter 'Farewell to Lórien' was composed, many years before" (*UT* 295). Part of his reason for believing so was that: "It is very notable that not only is there no mention in this text of a ban on Galadriel's return into the West, but it even seems from a passage at the beginning of the account that no such idea was present" (*ibid.* 302).

Undoubtedly, Christopher Tolkien is right. The earliest of the references to a specific Ban on Galadriel's return dates from 1967, a full 25 years after the drafts of Book II of *LotR* were first written in 1942 (*HME* 7:1). This late interpretation of the "Lament of Galadriel" in "Farewell to Lorien" is clearly contradicted by a statement that Galadriel herself makes in the earlier chapter "The Mirror of Galadriel" in *LotR*, after Frodo has just offered the Ring to her.



She refuses it, saying: "I pass the test [...] I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel" (*LotR* II.7, p.357). And she makes an even stronger statement slightly earlier in the same chapter in talking to Frodo about the general fate of the Elves (in which she obviously includes herself): "Yet if you succeed, then our power is diminished, and Lothlórien will fade, and the tides of Time will sweep it away. We must depart into the West, or dwindle to a rustic folk of dell and cave, slowly to forget and to be forgotten" (*ibid.* II.7, p.356). The only reasonable or natural interpretation of these passages is that Galadriel thought at this point she was free to return to Valinor. The view that Galadriel had prophetic foreknowledge of the Pardon of the Valar is at best very strained, and seems contradicted even by the late statement in "The Shibboleth of Fëanor" (after the ban had entered the story) quoted above that her Lament was spoken before she knew of the pardon of the Valar. Tolkien obviously "overlooked" or forgot about these inconsistencies when he developed his late story of the Ban of the Valar.

### **The Shibboleth of Fëanor**

In the late account of Galadriel in "The Shibboleth of Fëanor" (*HME* 12: 336-39, 347), part of which was also included by Christopher Tolkien in the introductory matter to "The History of Galadriel and Celeborn" (*UT* 295-98), great emphasis is placed on Galadriel's pride:

Galadriel was born in the bliss of Valinor, but it was not long, in the reckoning of the Blessed Realm, before that was dimmed; and thereafter she had no peace within. For in that testing time amid the strife of the Ñoldor she was drawn this way and that. She was proud, strong, and self-willed [...] she had dreams of far lands and dominions that might be her own to order as she would without tutelage. [...]

So it came to pass that when the light of Valinor failed, for ever as the Ñoldor thought, she joined the rebellion against the Valar who commanded them to stay; and once she had set foot upon that road of exile, she would not relent, but rejected the last message of the Valar, and came under the Doom of Mandos. Even after the merciless assault on the Teleri and the rape of their ships, though she fought fiercely against Fëanor in defence of her mother's kin, she did not turn back. Her pride was unwilling to return, a defeated suppliant for pardon; but now she burned with desire to follow Fëanor with her anger to whatever lands he might come, and to thwart him in all ways that she could. Pride still moved her when, at the end of the Elder Days after the final overthrow of Morgoth, she refused the pardon of the Valar for all who had fought against him, and remained in Middle-earth. It was not until two long ages more had passed, when at last all that she had desired in her youth came

to her hand, the Ring of Power and the dominion of Middle-earth of which she had dreamed, that her wisdom was full grown and she rejected it, and passing the last test departed from Middle-earth for ever. (*HME* 12:337-38)

There are several remarkable features of this text, especially the emphasis on Galadriel's pride and self-will. In this version of the story Galadriel freely refuses the general pardon of the Valar at the end of the First Age. Unlike the account in *The Silmarillion*, she is now shown as fighting on the opposing side during the kinslaying at Alqualondë against Fëanor. There are several other features of the account in "The Shibboleth of Fëanor" that are quite remarkable. She is portrayed as being something of an Amazon: "Her mother-name was Nerwen 'man-maiden', and she grew to be tall beyond the measure even of the women of the Ñoldor; she was strong of body, mind, and will, a match for both the loremasters and the athletes of the Eldar in the days of their youth" (*HME* 12:337).

Considerable attention is also focused on her golden hair. In "The Mirror of Galadriel," it is only briefly mentioned: "the hair of the Lady was of deep gold, and the hair of Lord Celeborn was of silver long and bright" (*LotR* II.7, p.345).<sup>8</sup> Already in *The Silmarillion* we are told: "A sister they [*the sons of Finarfin*] had, Galadriel, most beautiful of all the house of Finwë; her hair was lit with gold as though it had caught in a mesh the radiance of Laurelin" (*Sil.* 61).<sup>9</sup> In the account of "The Shibboleth of Fëanor" this description is greatly elaborated on:

Even among the Eldar she was accounted beautiful, and her hair was held a marvel unmatched. It was golden like the hair of her father and her foremother Indis, but richer and more radiant, for its gold was touched by some memory of the starlike silver of her mother; and the Eldar said that the light of the Two Trees, Laurelin and Telperion, had been snared in her tresses. Many thought that this saying first gave to Fëanor the thought of imprisoning and blending the light of the Trees that later took shape in his hands as the Silmarils. For Fëanor beheld the hair of Galadriel with wonder and delight. He begged three times for a tress, but Galadriel

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<sup>8</sup> In the early drafts of this passage both Galadriel and Celeborn have white hair, see *HME* 7: 233, 242, 246, 256, 262. The golden hair of Galadriel has been overlooked in both Ralph Bakshi's and Peter Jackson's films.

<sup>9</sup> The conception of the "golden house of Finrod [*Finarfin*]," later extended to the whole kindred of the Vanyar (cf. *HME* 11:382-83), also mentioned in draft texts of Appendix F of *LotR*, was already present in the "*Silmarillion*" tradition, before Galadriel was inserted back into the history of the First Age, see *HME* 1:43-44 and 12:77.

would not give him even one hair. These two kinsfolk, the greatest of the Eldar of Valinor, were unfriends for ever. (HME 12:337)<sup>10</sup>

This conception is also found in a late letter dating from 6 March 1973, the last year of Tolkien's life: "Galadriel [...] means 'Maiden crowned with gleaming hair'. It is a secondary name given to her in her youth in the far past because she had long hair which glistened like gold but was also shot with silver. She was then of Amazon disposition and bound up her hair as a crown when taking part in athletic feats" (*Letters* #348, p.428). This explanation of Galadriel's *epessë* or secondary name is also found in "The Shibboleth of Fëanor":

*Galadriel* was chosen by Artanis ("noble woman") to be her Sindarin name; for it was the most beautiful of her names, and, though as an *epessë*, had been given to her by her lover, Teleporno [*Celeborn*] of the Teleri, whom she wedded later in Beleriand. As he gave it in Telerin form it was *Alatâriel(lë)*. The Quenyarized form appears as *Altariel*, though its true form would have been *Ñaltariel*. It was euphoniously and correctly rendered in Sindarin *Galadriel* [...] The whole [name], = 'maiden crowned with a garland of bright radiance', was given in reference to Galadriel's hair. (HME 12:347)<sup>11</sup>

### The Repentance of Galadriel

All this emphasis on Galadriel's various names and on her golden hair in Tolkien's late writings (with their perilous associations with female pride and vanity) is very far removed from the spirit if not letter of *LotR*, where the emphasis on Galadriel's spiritual beauty and wisdom is coupled paradoxically to a deep sense of her humility and her own deep awareness of the limitations of her power emphasized in the double use of the verb "diminish" in the passages quoted above (*LotR*, II.7, pp.356-57).

We can see this clearly in examining the accounts of Galadriel's "temptation" by Frodo in *LotR* to take the Ring. In the initial draft outline for this passage, Galadriel dismisses Frodo's offer with a laugh: "Frodo offers Galadriel the Ring. She *laughs*. Says he is revenged for her temptation. Confesses that the thought had occurred to her. But she will only retain the unsullied Ring. Too much evil lay in the Ruling Ring. It is not permitted to use anything that Sauron

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<sup>10</sup> Galadriel's behavior here is in very sharp contrast with her gracious gift to Gimli in *LotR* of "three golden hairs" (*LotR*, II.8, p.367)—though clearly Fëanor is very different kind of character from Gimli.

<sup>11</sup> For further references to Galadriel's other names (Nerwen, Artanis, and Al(a)tariel), see also HME 12: 337, 346; UT 298, 346 (which is based on "The Shibboleth of Fëanor"), HME 10: 182, and the Appendix to *The Silmarillion*, p.360, entry kal-.

has made" (*HME* 7: 254). The laughter is important (in later drafts it is stated even more strongly that she laughs "with a sudden clear laugh of [pure] merriment" (*ibid.* 260, 261) as a clear sign of Galadriel's awareness of her own creaturely limitations and is retained in the printed text:

Galadriel laughed with a sudden clear laugh. "Wise the Lady Galadriel may be," she said, "yet here she has met her match in courtesy. Gently are you revenged for my testing of your heart at our first meeting. You begin to see with a keen eye. I do not deny that my heart has greatly desired to ask what you offer. For many long years I had pondered what I might do, should the Great Ring come into my hands, and behold! it was brought within my grasp. The evil that was devised long ago works on in many ways, whether Sauron himself stands or falls. Would not that have been a noble deed to set to the credit of his Ring, if I had taken it by force or fear from my guest?

"And now at last it comes. You will give me the Ring freely! In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!"

She lifted up her hand and from the ring that she wore there issued a great light that illumined her alone and left all else dark. She stood before Frodo seeming now tall beyond measurement, and beautiful beyond enduring, terrible and worshipful. Then she let her hand fall, and the light faded, and suddenly she laughed again, and lo! she was shrunken: a slender elf-woman, clad in simple white, whose gentle voice was soft and sad.

"I pass the test," she said. "I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel." (*LotR* II.7, pp.356-57)

All this is in very sharp contrast to the image of Galadriel that emerges in Tolkien's late writings. In this crucial scene, first comes the manifestation of her power. But then she knows very well she is being "tested." Her laughter both before and after is a clear sign to Frodo that he has nothing to fear — she is in on the "joke." She has enough self-knowledge and humility to admit that she feels the attraction of the Ring. But she knows that she can never possess the Ring, that it would end up possessing her. She willingly and freely renounces all claim to the Ring and accepts her "diminishment." After the manifestation of her power fades, she appears "shrunken: a slender elf-woman, clad in simple white," and then follows her beautiful and moving and poignant words of renunciation. The crucial words (already quoted) "I will diminish" clearly echo John the Baptist's "I

must diminish" in John 3:30.<sup>12</sup> But equally clearly the whole scene also has echoes of the Virgin Mary's *Magnificat*. Galadriel is paradoxically exulted because she is willing to be humbled. If there is any truth to Tolkien's own later claim that figure of Galadriel was modeled on the Virgin Mary (though she is clearly, as Tolkien does not say, also modeled on the traditional figure of the 'Fairy Queen'), the parallel is to be precisely found in this paradoxical mixture of power with humility and renunciation.<sup>13</sup>

The same image of "diminishment" can also be found in the description of Galadriel in the "Farewell to Lórien" chapter, when she meets Frodo and the other members of the Fellowship for the last time: "She seemed no longer perilous or terrible, nor full of hidden power; *but elven-fair she seemed beyond desire of heart*. Already she appeared to him (*since her refusal in the garden*) as by men of later days elves at times are seen: present, and yet remote, a living vision of that which has already passed far down the streams of time" [*phrases in italics not in LotR*] (HME 7:281; cf. LotR II.8, p.364). The same idea is also expressed more subtly in the final description of Galadriel as the Fellowship departs from Lothlórien:

On the green bank near to the very point of the Tongue the Lady Galadriel stood alone and silent. As they passed her they turned and their eyes watched her slowly floating away from them. [...] Soon the white form of the Lady was small and distant. She shone like a window of glass upon a far hill in the westering sun, or as a remote lake seen from a mountain: a crystal fallen in the lap of the land. Then it seemed to Frodo that she lifted her arms in a final farewell, and far but piercing-clear on the following

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<sup>12</sup> Tolkien was no doubt familiar with the Vulgate text for John 3:30: "*illum oportet crescere me autem minui* [He must grow greater, but I must diminish]. *Minui* (as well as the original Greek NT verb ελαττωσθαι) is most frequently translated as 'decrease,' or in some modern versions as 'become less important,' but can be translated more literally as 'diminish.'

<sup>13</sup> See the response, written in 1953, to a letter from his friend Fr. Robert Murray, S.J., who had read parts of the *Lord of the Rings* in manuscript, and who compared the image of Galadriel to that of the Virgin Mary. In it Tolkien wrote: "I think I know exactly what you mean by the order of Grace; and of course by your references to Our Lady, *upon which all my own small perception of beauty both in majesty and simplicity is founded*" [my italics] *Letters* #142, p.172; cf. also *Letters* #43 (p.49): "The woman is another fallen human-being with a soul in peril. But combined and harmonized with religion (as long ago it [the romantic chivalric tradition] was, producing much of that beautiful devotion to Our Lady that has been God's way of refining so much of our gross manly natures and emotions, and also of warming and colouring our hard, bitter, religion) it can be very noble." See also *Letters* #212, p.288 and #320, p.407, quoted above; and Purtil, pp.84-86.

wind came the sound of her voice singing [*her "Lament"*]. (*LotR* II.8, pp.367-68)

This is very far removed in spirit from the late story of Galadriel's Fall and Redemption that emerged in about 1967. While Frodo's offer of the Ring to Galadriel in *LotR* is a real "test," it is not the "final and overwhelming temptation" of Letter #320 quoted at the beginning of this paper. Even as late as September 1963, Tolkien was insisting that Galadriel's rejection of the Ring was reasoned and premeditated: "In the 'Mirror of Galadriel', I 381 [356], it appears that Galadriel conceived of herself as capable of wielding the Ring and supplanting the Dark Lord. [...] It was part of the essential deceit of the Ring to fill minds with imaginations of supreme power. But this the Great had well considered and had rejected [...]. Galadriel's rejection of the temptation was founded upon previous thought and resolve" (*Letters* #246, p.332).

### **The Final Story**

A careful examination of the textual evidence suggests many and striking differences between the pictures of Galadriel that emerge in *LotR* and in Tolkien's late writings, especially "The Shibboleth of Fëanor." Tolkien himself seems to have realized the problems with these late accounts of Galadriel, and at the very end of his life, he made one final and extraordinary change in the story that completely exonerated Galadriel from any part in the Rebellion of the Noldor. In a letter written on 4th August 1973, almost exactly a month before he died, Tolkien wrote: "Galadriel was 'unstained': she had committed no evil deeds. She was an enemy of Fëanor. She did not reach Middle-earth with the other Noldor, but independently. Her reasons for desiring to go to Middle-earth were legitimate, and she would have been permitted to depart, but for the misfortune that before she set out the revolt of Fëanor broke out, and she became involved in the desperate measures of Manwë, and the ban on all emigration" (*Letters* #353, p.431). This account was also found in "a very late and partly illegible note" set down in the last month of Tolkien's life (*UT* 299), which Christopher Tolkien reported (in summarized or retold form) in the section on "The History of Galadriel and Celeborn" in *The Unfinished Tales* (299-300). According to this very late account:

In Fëanor's revolt that followed the Darkening of Valinor Galadriel had no part: indeed she with Celeborn [*now not a Sindarwin Elf but one of the Teleri*] fought heroically in defence of Alqualondë against the assault of the Noldor, and Celeborn's ship was saved from them. Galadriel, despairing now of Valinor and horrified by the violence and cruelty of Fëanor, set sail into the darkness without waiting for Manwë's leave, which would undoubtedly have been withheld in that hour, however legitimate her

desire in itself. It was thus that she came under the ban set upon all departure, and Valinor was shut against her return. (*UT* 299)

Galadriel's opposition to Fëanor at Alqualondë and Celeborn's Telerian origins are already present in "The Shibboleth of Fëanor," but in other respects this story is a radical departure from that earlier account. Gone is Galadriel's rebellious pride: she is exonerated from all blame and only falls under the Ban of the Valar on a technicality, because she had unwittingly violated their emigration policies.

Given the serious inconsistencies and even contradictions between all these late accounts, it is hardly surprising that they were never incorporated into *The Silmarillion*. In *The Unfinished Tales*, Christopher Tolkien offered a defense of his decision:

This story [...] is profoundly at variance with all that is said elsewhere. It arose from 'philosophical' (rather than 'historical') considerations, concerning the precise nature of Galadriel's disobedience in Valinor on the one hand, and her status and power in Middle-earth on the other. That it would have entailed a good deal of alteration in the narrative of *The Silmarillion* is evident; but that my father doubtless intended to do. [...] The book as published was however formed from completed narratives, and I could not take into account merely projected revisions. (*UT* 300)

Such a defense is hardly necessary. Second thoughts aren't always better. Tom Shippey, for one, criticizes Tolkien for exculpating Galadriel completely in this final account and sees this as another example of Tolkien's "soft-heartedness" that he criticizes in *The Road to Middle-earth*.<sup>14</sup>



All these late changes to the story of Galadriel's Fall and Repentance are rather bewildering. It is easier to point out the inconsistencies, than to come up with a possible explanation. It would be too easy to say (though at least partly true) that Tolkien was a perfectionist and was never completely satisfied with his own artistic creations. Certainly Tolkien in his later years spent a lot of effort, not all of it productive, in trying to elaborate the mythology of the First Age that underlay the *LotR*, part of which was later published posthumously as *The Silmarillion*. Perhaps it would be more true to say that like many authors Tolkien became fascinated by his own artistic creation and felt the need to "fill in the gaps." Certainly, some of the late changes in the characterization of Galadriel,

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<sup>14</sup> P.319, n.10 to pp.212-13; cf. pp.205-206.

especially the portrayal of her as being something of an Amazon in her youth, are quite striking. However, the problem is that these changes are ultimately inconsistent with the characterization of Galadriel in *LotR*, and I think Tolkien realized this. But rather than discarding the story completely, Tolkien at the very end of his life decided to rehabilitate and exonerate Galadriel in a way that can perhaps best be described with Tom Shippey as being a bit “softhearted.”

Tolkien has often been criticized for failing to pay enough attention to women. Such a criticism is certainly unjustified if we consider all the important female figures in *The Silmarillion* tradition, including Idril Celebrindal, Nienor Níniel, Finduilas, Lúthien Tinúviel, Melian, and all the female Valar of whom the most important is Varda or Elbereth Gilthoniel. But even when we turn to *The Lord of the Rings*, Galadriel surely stands out in the minds and hearts of many readers as one of the more important and certainly most beloved characters in Tolkien’s great epic-romance. The fact that Tolkien continued to think about Galadriel and her place in his own private mythology of the First Age right until the very end of his life, indicates also how important Tolkien himself considered her.

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