



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,  
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

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Volume 4  
Number 3

Article 1

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3-15-1977

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### Recommended Citation

Kocher, Paul (1977) "The Tale of the Noldor," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 4: No. 3, Article 1.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol4/iss3/1>

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## The Tale of the Noldor

### Abstract

Reviews the history of the Noldor, elves of the First Age, and their continuing influence in the affairs of the Third Age. A retelling rather than a scholarly analysis, based on sources published before the availability of *The Silmarillion*.

### Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Elves, Noldorian—History; Bg Callahan

# THE TALE OF THE NOLDOR

by Paul Kocher

The Valar were pure, immaterial spirits without bodies but capable of incarnating themselves in any forms they pleased. In the beginning, at the command of the One (Eru), they turned their "angelic," "demiurgic" powers to the making of a world later called Middle-Earth. Nevertheless, they were not given the task of creating elves, men, dwarves and its other intelligent denizens. This was the work of Eru himself. Instead, after forming the planet, they dwelled in Valinor, an island in its farthest western seas, there to await the coming of elves and men, "the children of God (Erusen)," and to prepare Valinor for their reception. In this way they became the guardians of the new world under Eru. As part of their guardianship they were charged with the duty of civilizing its peoples, bringing them to a state of thought and conduct pleasing to him (*LOTR* III, 415; *Road*, p. 66; Foster, p. 265).

The elves, who drift westward from their birthplace somewhere in the east long before the First Age begins, have been given qualities of mind and body especially suitable to help this process. They are born teachers, an inquiring, eager, and helpful race. Finding that the trees, which then wholly cover the land, have a capacity for speech but no language, the elves linger long enough to teach them the elvish tongues. Better yet, they inspire the tree-herds to develop their own inherent entish way of speaking. In so doing they win the everlasting gratitude of Treebeard, the oldest of them. Since he is himself one of the first living dwellers on Middle-Earth, he sees them affectionately as children still, "the elf-children," though among the non-arboreal peoples they are the "eldest of all," the first to be created. He appreciates the quick sympathies which make them "less interested in themselves than men are," and he admires their invention of language: "Elves made all the old words: they began it" (*LOTR* II, 67-71).

Among these migrant tribes the Noldor far outshine the rest. Endowed with every good gift of mind and body (including immortality), they also have extraordinary leaders in Feanor, the most brilliant and imaginative scientist the elf race has ever produced, and in Galadriel "the greatest of elfin women," as Tolkien does not hesitate to describe her. Because Treebeard does not mention any of his teachers by name we cannot be sure that Feanor took any part in giving speech to the ents. Considering his deep interest in language, however, it is a fair inference that he did so, and that his later invention of the Feanorian script was one fruit of this experience.

The Noldor, like several other elf-tribes, do not stop after reaching the west coast of the land surface of Middle-Earth. Drawn by a homing instinct already deeply implanted by their Creator, they sail on across the sea to Valinor and the neighboring island of Eressea, where they are to be trained by the Valar as tutors of the barbaric peoples of the mainland. What the Valar hoped to make of them can be seen in Elrond's summary of the motives of the smiths of Eregion (themselves Noldor elves) in forging the three Elf Rings in the Second Age: "Those who made them did not desire strength or domination or hoarded wealth, but understanding,

making, and healing to preserve all things unstained" (*LOTR* II, 282).

The coming of Morgoth, however, sets in motion a chain of events which ruins all such hopes and begins the history of Middle-Earth. The fact that he enters "from the Outside," to use Tom Bombadil's words, probably means that he is not a Vala but a malignant Enemy of Eru wielding unprecedented power (*LOTR* I, 142). What drew him to this particular planet? Since Tolkien does not specify, we can only conjecture. Perhaps a general lust to destroy its beauty and its promise. If not before his arrival, then soon after, a more specific greed for the light of the Two Trees which illumine Valinor, coupled with a perception that in the arrogant genius of Feanor he had found an instrument.

Some scene of temptation and fall seems to have occurred. How Morgoth may have flattered Feanor, or may perhaps have convinced him that the stealing of the light was merely a technical problem which challenged his scientific genius, can easily be imagined. Anyway, Feanor devised a substance called *silma* capable of attracting and imprisoning the light of the Two Trees. With it he fashioned three splendid jewels, or *silmarilli*. Seizing them, Morgoth fled to his vast fortress of Thangorodrim on Middle-Earth, where he set them in his iron crown. Behind him he left Valinor darkened, and Feanor humiliated and enraged.

As a prince of the Noldor Feanor rallied his elves to pursue the thief. "In his pride," writes Tolkien, he foolishly expected "to recover the Jewels from Morgoth by force," and to that end led with him from Valinor "a great part of his people" (*LOTR* III, 314). Foreseeing the wastage of their lives, King Manwe of the Valar forbade them to go. When the Noldor disobeyed his command, the Valar passed on them a sentence of exile. In order to make return to Valinor physically impossible Elbereth, Manwe's Queen, "lifted up her hands in obedience to the decree of Manwe, and summoned up the dark shadows which engulfed the shores and the mountains" and, last of all, her own figure, "with her hands turned eastward in rejection, standing white on Oilosse," highest peak of Valinor (*Road*, p. 60).

Against a power like Morgoth's, bolstered by the orcs and trolls which his cross-breeding experiments produce, the Noldor and their allies, the Edain, the barbaric tribes of men who reach the western sea, cannot prevail. They suffer defeat after defeat. Like many of his kinsmen Feanor is slain in battle (Foster, p. 95). Only when the Valar themselves intervene on behalf of the Noldor does the tide turn against Morgoth. They are induced to do so at last only when Earendil, a mariner elf, sails his ship to Valinor to beg their help. He is enabled to cross Elbereth's barrier shadows by the light of one of the *silmarilli* given him by his wife Elwing. She in turn has received it from her grandparents, the man Beren and the elf maiden Luthien, who "wrested" it from Morgoth's crown after their escape from his dungeons (*LOTR* I, 206; III, 314).

The Valar do not allow Earendil to go home but set him in his ship bearing the *silmaril* at its

masthead to sail the skies forever as a star, a sign of hope to the peoples of Middle-Earth oppressed by Morgoth and his slaves (*LOTR I*, 246-49). So Feanor's offense in stealing the light of the Two Trees does not go altogether unredeemed. The

Vala most likely to have created this new star is Elbereth herself, known as Queen of the Stars, and also as Star-Kindler (*LOTR I*, 88-89).

The physical forces let loose on Middle-Earth by the Valar and by Morgoth in their battles for supremacy are so gigantic that the ocean overruns large areas in the northwest of the mainland, drowning not only Thangorodrim but also a number of neighboring elf and dwarf kingdoms. "Lying under the wave" after "the seas are bent" are such elvish realms as Doriath, Gondolin and Nargothrond (Poster, pp. 61, 115, 182) and the dwarvish cities of Belegost and Nogrod (Foster, pp. 28, 187). But at least Morgoth himself has been completely and finally overthrown.

Because Feanor died in the First Age we will do well to remember that all of his achievements date back to that period, even though they may appear for the first time in the Second or Third Ages. Notable among these are the *palantiri*. In *The Lord of the Rings* we first hear of them when Gandalf eagerly recovers from Saruman the Orthanc stone, the *palantir* placed there by Elendil when he established the North and South Kingdoms at the end of the Second Age. Pippin hears Gandalf humming a song which describes the coming of Elendil and his company of the Faithful to Middle-Earth after the drowning of Numenor:

Tall ships and tall kings  
Three times three,  
What brought they from the foundered land  
Over the flowing sea?  
Seven stars and seven stones  
And one white tree.

(*LOTR II*, 202)

The stones are the seven *palantiri*. "So the likelihood is that after the defeat of Morgoth the Noldor elves gave them to the human Edain who fought as their allies. By the latter they were taken to the island of Numenor when the Valar presented it to them at the beginning of the Second Age as a reward for bringing Morgoth down.

Asked by Pippin whether the *palantiri* were made by Sauron, Gandalf replies that they were "beyond his art...The Noldor made them. Feanor himself, maybe, wrought them, in days so long ago that the time cannot be measured in years" (*LOTR II*, 203). Gandalf confesses that the Orthanc *palantir* "draws one to itself." He longs "to look across the wide seas of water and of time to Tirion the Fair, and perceive the unimaginable hand and mind of Feanor at their work, while both the White Tree and the Golden were in flower!" (*LOTR II*, 204). Inasmuch as the wizard has himself "many powers of mind and hand" his tribute to Feanor's as "unimaginable" is all the more astounding (*LOTR III*, 365). Taken all together, Gandalf's comments amount to saying that the Noldor made the stones under Feanor's direction.

The second statement just spoken by Gandalf refers to a date before the *silmarilli* were made, since after they lost their radiance the Two Trees would be unlikely to flower. But it does not specify the work then busying Feanor's hand and mind. The first statement is clearly about the *palantiri*, but it is vague about the time of their making. The properties built into these stones, however, render them so suitable for use as a means of communication between armies that it is hard to resist a belief in Feanor's designing them for that purpose just before, or perhaps during, the war against Morgoth. For example, "each *palantir* spoke to each," thereby allowing the commander of each unit of a large or scattered body of troops to "see far off and converse in thought" with the officer com-

manding every other unit, one at a time (*LOTR II*, 203). Their advantages for planning and executing a coordinated maneuver are obvious. But one *palantir*, the one placed by Elendil under the Dome of Stars at Osgiliath, was "the chief and master" of them all. Through it he "could survey them all together at one time." Very convenient indeed for a general headquarters, from which a commander-in-chief could hold a conference with all his unit commanders at the same time, plan strategy with them, and survey the whole field of battle at once, retaining the power to alter such plans as unfolding events might require. Since Feanor had made the decision to wage war for the *silmarilli* and was all too well aware of his own genius and, furthermore, was looked up to by the Noldor, he evidently expected to be that commander-in-chief, and fashioned the master stone for his own use in that capacity.

What is made for war is sometimes (though not often) equally well suited for peace. When Elendil distributed the seven stones along the borders of the North and South Kingdoms in the year of their foundation, 3320 of the Second Age, he thought of them primarily as a means of tying the two realms, and their parts, together. No Dark Lord was then in sight. But as the War of the Rings moves towards a climax some three thousand years later, the *palantiri* -- those of them that are left -- have reverted to instruments of warfare (*LOTR II*, 203). Sauron has seized the Ithil-stone, placed by Elendil at Minas Ithil (ominously renamed Minas Morgul). Speaking through this stone to Saruman, now in possession of the *palantir* at Orthanc, he has corrupted and enslaved the wizard. And Denebor, holder of the stone at Minas Anor, Sauron has reduced to a state of despair which leads to suicide. The master stone at Osgiliath perished in the ruin of that once lovely city. The three northern stones at Annunias, Amon Sul, and the Tower Hills lie outside the action of the epic.

These developments bear out Gandalf's rueful remark to Pippin that "there is nothing that Sauron cannot turn to evil uses" (*LOTR II*, 203). But they also reveal that the *palantiri* have inherent powers far beyond those proper to a mere means of open communication. If the owners of two of these stones can "see far off and converse in thought," the plain meaning is that they can not only see each other's faces but also read each other's thoughts without words, if desired. More significantly, if one of them has a strong enough will he can, through the stone, "catch" the other, as Sauron caught Saruman, and dominate him wholly. In such a case the stronger can so "bend" the *palantir* of the weaker that it can no longer reach any other than his own (*LOTR II*, 204). As a preliminary, the weaker finds that he has no power to withdraw himself from contact between the two stones. Gandalf, for example, is afraid to confront Sauron in the Orthanc stone: "I am not ready for such a trial," he confesses, "if indeed I shall ever be so. But even if I found the power to withdraw myself, it would be disastrous for him to see me yet..." (*LOTR II*, 200). Also, when Pippin foolishly looks into the stone he exposes himself to questions which Sauron could have forced him to answer had Sauron not been over-anxious to capture and torture him (*LOTR II*, 199). Both Pippin and Gandalf feel the strong magnetic pull of the *palantir* on their wills, and once Pippin gives in to it he cannot look away until Sauron dismisses him.

The one person who intentionally sets himself to challenge Sauron for control of the Orthanc *palantir* is Aragorn, its rightful owner by descent from Elendil. He has confidence in his strength of mind to break Sauron's hold over it. What follows is a struggle of wills, long and bitter, which Aragorn is just barely strong enough to win. "In the end," he tells Gimli and Legolas at Helm's Deep, "I wrenched the Stone to my will" (*LOTR III*, 53). This victory has important results. Sauron's

self-confidence is so shaken that he launches his armies against Minas Tirith before they are ready. And Aragorn sees, by means of the Stone, great armies of the Haradrim and whole navies of pirates from Umbar coming up from the south to join Sauron in attacking Minas Tirith. These he has to counter immediately by summoning up the ghosts of the oath-breakers after daring to traverse the Paths of the Dead.

Add the fact that the gazer into a *palantir* is able to scan events happening at any time in the past, however remote, and we begin to realize just how "unimaginable" are the hand and mind of Feanor. In the *palantiri* he and his Noldor smiths have produced a wonder more complex and altogether wonderful than even the *silmarilli*. The Seven Stones can explore space as well as time. Like the Rings of Power they exert a hypnotic spell on all the people near them. They confer an ability to read minds. Yet they can be shaped and molded by the will of an owner, so as to trap and enslave weaker wills. If such ownership is challenged they can become battle-fields of wills representing good and evil. On these occasions they serve as symbols in miniature of the main theme of *The Lord of the Rings*, which is the contest between good and evil, centering in the wills of those who take part in it.

Another of the mighty achievements of the Noldor in the First Age was a script. Like other High Elves they spoke a language called Quenya when they first came to Valinor, but they had as yet no systematic way of writing it. The first attempt at inventing one came from a Noldor elf Rumil (*LOTR* III, 395). But the Noldor did not consider "the Tengwar of Rumil," as they called it, flexible enough to take with them to Middle-Earth when they pursued Morgoth there. For use on the mainland Feanor originated "the Tengwar of Feanor" whose letters, while owing something to Rumil's "were largely a new invention." These were the letters which the Noldor brought with them into exile on Middle-Earth, and which became known to their human (Edain) allies. By the Third Age, wherever the Common Speech was spoken it was written in Feanor's script.

But it had a rival. The Sindar, the generic name for those tribes of elves who never crossed the sea to Valinor and Eressea but founded kingdoms on the continent of Middle-Earth, spoke a language called Sindarin, which was not Quenya but which resembled it in essentials. In their kingdom of Beleriand the Sindar developed a form of writing known as "the Cirth." Its letters, being rune-like and angular, best suited to incised inscriptions by sharp tools, lacked a cursive quality. Not so the Feanorian script. Its cursive letters, written with brush or pen, lent themselves easily to all ordinary occasions. So Feanor's Tengwar influenced the Cirth, not vice versa (*LOTR* III, 397). The outcome was a rearrangement and development of the Cirth, culminating in the Alphabet of Daeron, the minstrel to a Sindar ruler, King Thingol of Doriath. It did not supplant Feanor's Tengwar, however, as the standard form of writing among elves. Only in Eregion did the Noldor smiths use Daeron's Alphabet, perhaps because it appealed to the Moria dwarves with whom they were friendly. Whatever the cause, they passed that Alphabet on to the dwarves, who favored it above all others and expanded it into the Angerthas Moria.

The almost universal adoption of Feanor's script shows the many-sided genius of its inventor operating in a field far removed from physical science, that of his other triumphs. The superiority of his Tengwar seems to reside not only in its cursive nature but also in the economy of its letters and their ready adaptability to phonetic variations. Conceivably, Feanor may have devised his script as a factor helping to attract allies among the Sindar and the Edain to join the Noldor in the wars against Morgoth. Whatever his motive, his script is his most enduring and most unifying contribution to the

civilization of Middle-Earth. Ironically, he served the Valar well in this, without intending any such result, while at the same time disobeying them in the whole matter of Morgoth.

Feanor had been dead for many centuries when the Elven-Smiths of Eregion began forging the Rings of Power for Sauron about the year 1500 of the Second Age, but Feanor's ghost was there. The elves were Noldor, carrying on the traditions of their tribe. Celebrimbor, their lord, "the greatest of their craftsmen...was descended from Feanor" (*LOTR* III, 363-64). Galadriel and her husband Celeborn had passed through Eregion on their way to found Lothlorien. But not until the Elven-Smiths settled there about the year 750 to form an independent community had it become permanently occupied.

Elrond summarizes at his Council what happened when Sauron came to the smiths there. The Noldor smiths, he says, had the same "eagerness for knowledge" which had distinguished their ancestor Feanor, and by it "Sauron ensnared them. For in that time he was not yet evil to behold, and they received his aid and grew mighty in craft, whereas he learned all their secrets, and betrayed them, and forged secretly in the Mountain of Fire the One Ring to be their master" (*LOTR* I, 225).

This summary contains some obscurities which need to be cleared up. On the surface it seems to describe a more or less equal exchange between Sauron and the smiths, from which both sides grew more skilful. But this is not what happened. Sauron did not know how to make a Ring of Power. The elves did, by inheritance of Feanor's "secrets," learned in his making the *silmarilli*. This is what Sauron was after, of course. In exchange he could give them only pointers in craft -- that is, in the technique of forging, as compared with knowledge of the theory and method of enclosing vital energies in *silma*. Not the energies of trees, this time, but of whole races of elves, dwarves, and men; and not jewels, but Rings.

The crucial distinction between *craft* and *knowledge* here is the same which Gandalf makes in speaking for Feanor's "unimaginable hand and mind": skill in forging (*craft* of *hand*) as against basic *ideas* and methods (*mind*). Morgoth, it seems, could not, or at least did not, make the *silmarilli*. He could only steal them after Feanor had discovered how by the insight of his *mind*. Similarly, Sauron did not know how to make the *palantiri*. He could only use them after they had been made. And in Eregion the Rings of Power were likewise "beyond his art" until he filched from the Elven-Smiths by treachery the secrets of the art. Morgoth and Sauron are supreme only in evil, which is negative. They lack the mental power to create anything positively new.

Sauron had served Morgoth as the turnkey in charge of his dungeons in the First Age. We must assume that the Eregion elves did not know this or, no matter how strong their appetite for knowledge, they would never have let him in on their potentially dangerous secrets. To them he was the suave, affable stranger who "was not yet evil to behold."

Celebrimbor alone seems to have had some inkling of Sauron's treacherous schemes (*LOTR* I, 255, 266; III, 364). On that fatal day in the year 1600 when Sauron secretly finished forging his One Ring in the fires of Mount Doom and slipped it on his finger, the elf leader in Eregion somehow became "aware of him." He heard the harsh clangor of Sauron's voice reciting the words inscribed in the Ring in the Black Speech, commencing, "One Ring to rule them all..." Then Celebrimbor and his smiths "knew that they had been betrayed." The Rings for Men and those for Dwarves they had already delivered to their appointed recipients. But the Three Elf Rings they still had. Celebrimbor hid these until after Sauron lost the One Ring, when the Three were distributed, one to Galadriel, one to King Gil-galad (given by him before his death to Elrond), and one to Cirdan the shipwright at the Grey Havens

(who later gave it to Gandalf when he first set foot on Middle-Earth) (*LOTR* III, 366).

As the Noldor smiths discovered, the affable Sauron, whom they had welcomed and trusted, turned out to be an implacable enemy. In the year 1695, Second Age, his forces invaded Eregion, laid it waste, and slew Celebrimbor (*LOTR* III, 364). Sent by King Gil-galad of Beleriand, the young Elrond then retreated with the remnants of the Noldor to Rivendell, where he established a refuge for them. Gil-galad, himself a Noldor, indeed the "last heir of the Noldor in exile" could be in a just cause quite as implacable as Sauron in an evil one (*LOTR* III, 363). To his own host of Sindar elves he joined, by alliance with Elendil, an army of men assembled from the North and South kingdoms. This became known as the Last Alliance between Elves and Men. The two leaders fought their way into Mordor itself and there, in an assault on Barad-dur, killed Sauron at the cost of their own lives. Never again were the elves left on Middle-Earth strong enough to attack the Enemy by arms.

One final word about Celebrimbor and his inscriptions on the western door of Moria. Although the door as such was made by Narvi the dwarf, the Noldor leader carved on it words and emblems of his own (*LOTR* I, 318-19; III, 398, 400). When the Fellowship of the Ring see the door, two columns support "an arch of interlacing letters in an Elvish character." Around each column twines a tree "bearing crescent moons." In the center shines a single large star with many rays, which Gandalf identifies as "the Star of the House of Feanor." Legolas recognizes each tree as "the Tree of the High Elves." The words inscribed by Celebrimbor under the two supporting columns reveal the script which he has used: "Here is written in the Feanorian characters according to the mode of Beleriand" followed by the words in those characters: "The Doors of Durin, Lord of Moria...I Narvi made them. Celebrimbor of Hollin (Eregion) drew these signs."

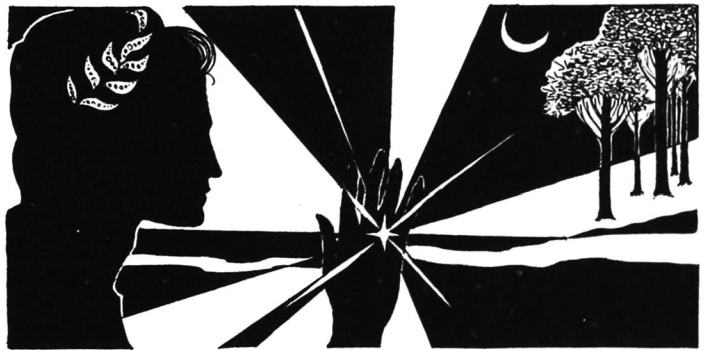
Although the script is Feanorian, the language it writes is Sindarin, as Gandalf says in effect in remarking that "the words are in the elven-tongue of the West of Middle-Earth in the Eldar days." Tolkien says the same thing in Appendix E (pp. 398-400), with specific reference to "the West-gate of Moria." But what are these trees, and what is this one central star which has become the emblem of the House of Feanor? Can the trees represent the Two Trees of Valinor from whose radiance Feanor fashioned the *silmarilli*? The latter question provokes another. What else could they be? And if the trees are reminders of that great exploit of Feanor's why may not the star symbolize Earendil's star composed of a recaptured *silmaril*? If the guesses implicit in these questions are right, the retention of these symbols by a descendant of Feanor many years after his death suggests not guilt but tribal pride in the ancestral feat. It may also explain why these Noldor smiths have not returned to Valinor like most of their tribe.

In the Third Age the tale of the Noldor is primarily the tale of Galadriel. She was, says Tolkien, "the last survivor of the princes and queens who had led the revolting Noldor to exile in Middle-Earth" in pursuit of Morgoth in the First Age (*Road*, p. 60). After his overthrow "most of the Noldor returned into the Far West" but these were the common folk of the tribe. Evidently distrusting Galadriel as their queen, the Valar imposed a special ban forbidding her to come back to the Undying Lands. She proudly replied that she had no wish to do so. Instead, she married Celeborn, a prince of the Sindar, and with him traveled eastward (in the year 750, Second Age) through Eregion and other lands looking for a place to settle, presumably in order to found Lothlorien. They had a daughter named Celebrian, who married Elrond in the year 109 of the Third Age (*LOTR* III, 323). Arwen, future wife of Aragorn, was born of this marriage in the

year 241 (*LOTR* III, 366). She is thus Galadriel's granddaughter and through her has Noldor blood. In 2509, orcs ambushed Celebrian, tortured her, and inflicted a poisoned wound. Weary of the pain and turmoil of Middle-Earth, she took ship for the Uttermost West. Arwen spent many of her youthful years in Lorien with Galadriel, being schooled by her.

Although Galadriel has great respect and loyalty for Celeborn, she obviously exceeds him in wisdom and power, as the Fellowship of the Ring quickly discover (*LOTR* I, 347-95). Being the wearer of Nenyä, one of the three Elf Rings, she has in a real sense created Lorien by its power, and through it now sustains the land in being. More, she has made it the source of the light which not only illuminates Lorien but also shines out from it against the darkness emanating from Dol Guldur, Sauron's stronghold nearby. In effect she makes of her Elf Ring a minor *silmaril* and turns it against evil. She has not been a kinswoman of Feanor for nothing. She has the true Noldor preoccupation with light -- its propagation, its containment, and its projection.

The phial which she gives to Frodo as a farewell gift to be "a light to you in dark places, when all other lights go out" is another example of this knowledge and skill of hers. "In this," she tells Frodo, "is caught the light of Earendil's star, set amid the waters of my fountain" (*LOTR* I, 393). That star, we recall, blazes with the fire of one of the three great *silmarilli*. She has known how to capture it in her Mirror and to make it an aid to Frodo's physical and spiritual safety in Mordor.



Out of her greater understanding Galadriel is much more certain than Elrond that destruction of the One Ring in the fires of Mount Doom will immediately rob all three Elf Rings of their power and will undo the works accomplished with their aid. "Lothlorien will fade" and the elves must either leave Middle-Earth or remain to "forget and be forgotten," she assures Frodo sadly (*LOTR* I, 380). Yet if the One Ring is not destroyed, Sauron will enslave the world. This predicament lay hidden in the very making of the Elf Rings, and Sauron's secret subjection of them to the One Ring he has forged for himself. But the full implications of their entrapment are only now becoming clear to the elves. None of the others will be so badly hurt as will Galadriel, however, for she alone will lose the marvel that is Lothlorien. Hers then is the greatest temptation when Frodo offers her the One Ring, for by accepting and using it she would become ruler of Middle-Earth and preserver of Lorien. By refusing it she gives to the Valar such proof of her loyalty that they revoke their ban against her return to Valinor (*Road*, p. 60). As the epic ends she takes ship from the Grey Havens with Gandalf, Elrond, Gildor, and her own Lorien elves.

In retrospect, Tolkien has made the deeds of the Noldor a continuing major thread in the whole fabric of his trilogy. What would the First Age be without the *silmarilli*, the Second without the *palantiri* and the Rings of Power, and the Third without the wonder that is Lothlorien? Very different and, one suspects, not nearly so enthralling.