Character Biography
Ailinel

By Oshun

Author's Note: In recognition of *Legendarium Ladies April,*[1] I wanted to call attention this month to a woman character who might have had a major stake in significant events outlined in the texts but who is given no voice. Ailinel is neither a textual ghost nor merely a footnote character but is reduced to name-only while her response, political or personal, to said events might have been significant.

Ailinel was a woman born into the royal family of Númenor when the island kingdom was poised on the cusp of its great Age of Sail. One, however, must scramble to find enough information to bring her to life from the scant references to her in the texts. She appears only within the narrative of the tale of *Aldarion and Erendis*.[2] Born to Tar-Meneldur and Almarian, daughter of Vëantur, Ailinel was not only the daughter of a Númenórean king but a younger sister of Tar-Aldarion who would become known as the Mariner King, instrumental in renewing relations between Númenor and the realm of Gil-galad in Middle-earth.

Ailinel's grandfather Vëantur, although not of royal lineage, had an enormous influence upon the future of Númenor and was the intellectual father of those illustrious Sea Kings of Númenor intoned by Aragorn at his coronation: "Out of the Great Sea to Middle-earth I am come. . . ."[3] Captain of the King's Ships under Tar-Elendil, Vëantur achieved the first voyage from Númenor to Middle-earth six hundred years after its settlement, and "Thereafter seafaring became the chief enterprise for daring and hardihood among the men of Númenor . . . ."

Ailinel first appears in the *Unfinished Tales* in a description of her much-lauded brother Aldarion:

> He had two sisters, younger than he: Ailinel and Almiel, of whom the elder married Orchaldor, a descendant of the House of Hador, son of Hatholdir, who was close in friendship with Meneldur; and the son of Orchaldor and Ailinel was Soronto, who comes later into the tale.[4]

Her son Soronto apparently was an ambitious man and was greatly disappointed after Tar-Aldarion changed the laws of Númenor, allowing a woman to rule after he and Erendis become estranged, leaving them with only the one child, a girl, Ancalimë.[5] According to Númenórean custom and practice to that point, without a male offspring of Tar-Aldarion's marriage to Erendis, Ailinel's son Soronto would have been his de facto heir:

> His [Aldarion's] only child was a daughter, very beautiful, Ancalimë. In her favour Aldarion altered the law of succession, so that the (eldest) daughter of a King should succeed, if he had no sons. This change displeased the descendants of Elros, and especially the heir under the old law, Soronto, Aldarion's nephew, son of his elder sister Ailinel.[6]

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According to Christopher Tolkien's summary of the unfinished notes which make up the last segment of *Aldarion and Erendis,* his father wrote at least a couple of contradictory versions of the exact nature of his revisions to the law relating to succession. One thing is made clear, however: Aldarion's first and final intent was always to ensure that his daughter would succeed to the throne as the first ruling queen of Númenor, leaving Ailinel's son Soronto frustrated in his ambition to rule. Ancalimë also wanted to rule and had "determined that when her day came she would be a powerful Ruling Queen." She is described as "clever and malicious" and one who enjoyed watching the conflict between her parents and alternately took sport in vexing each of them individually.[7]

Christopher Tolkien explains that

> . . . it is said that she remained unmarried so long that her cousin Soronto, relying on the provision of the new law, called upon her to surrender the Heirship, and that she then married Hallacar in order to spite Soronto. In yet another brief notice it is implied that she wedded Hallacar after Aldarion had rescinded the provision, in order to put an end to Soronto's hopes of becoming King if Ancalimë died childless.[8]

This conclusion to the discussion of succession brings to an end Ailinel's role in the story even by reference. We have no way of knowing whether there would have been more narrative relating to family conflicts and opinions that might have drawn Ailinel back into the action if Tolkien had finished *Aldarion and Erendis*. It is not impossible but unlikely.

One might ask a lot of questions, the answers to which could have given lifeblood to a required, but undeveloped, character. We know her brother Aldarion was close to their grandfather Vëantur but know nothing of the historic mariner's relationships to Ailinel and Almiel. Ailinel would have been present during the time period when Erendis and her family were habitués of the court and Erendis first fell in love with her brother and he first began to pursue her. During the long courtship of Erendis and Aldarion, might have Ailinel befriended her future sister-in-law? Her parents encouraged Aldarion to marry Erendis, but how did Ailinel feel about that? Interested? Encouraging? Indifferent? Or even opposed? And, later, how did she react to the estrangement of Erendis and Aldarion?

She married a man whose father was a lifelong friend of her own father. Was this a love match? Or was it arranged on the basis of familial closeness or even for political reasons? Did she have a happy marriage? The texts tell us that her mother tried to foster a close relationship with Aldarion's daughter Ancalimë. What role, if any, might she have played in that? Did Ailinel support the political ambitions of her son? Or was she appalled by her son's temerity and supported her brother's right to alter the laws of succession?

So much fodder for family drama here, but, alas, those stories were never told. Well, there is always fanfiction.

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Works Cited

1. Legendarium Ladies April is an appreciation month for the women of Tolkien's legendarium, founded by Elleth and held annually on Tumblr.
2. *Unfinished Tales, Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife*.
3. *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King,* "The Steward and the King."
4. *Unfinished Tales, Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife*.
5. Ibid.
6. *Unfinished Tales, The Line of Elros, Kings of Númenor*.
7. *Unfinished Tales, Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife,* "The Further Course of the Narrative."
8. Ibid.

About the Author

Oshun's *Silmarillion*-based stories may be found on the SWG archive.

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