
Character Biography

Aulë

By Oshun

Aulë is one of the Ainur, the demi-gods of Tolkien legendarium, said to have been created by the thought of Eru Ilúvatar (the One), which include the Valar and the Maiar. He ranks third in importance among the Valar, following only Manwë and Ulmo. Usually referred to in *The Silmarillion* as Aulë the Smith or Aulë the Maker, he is given the name Mahal by the Dwarves.

Aulë's wife is Yavanna, known as the Giver of Fruits, who is the creator of the Two Trees of Valinor and of all of the plants and animals of the world. These two seem in many ways to be quite the odd couple. In "Of Aulë and Yavanna" in *The Silmarillion*, there is a priceless domestic scene. After her husband's creation of the Dwarves, Yavanna appeals to Eru Ilúvatar for some way to protect her trees against them. The One agrees to the creation of the Ents for this purpose. Yavanna rushes into Aulë's workshop excitedly informing of him of all the details. The taciturn response: "Nonetheless, they will have need of wood" said Aulë, and he went on with his smithy work."

Of all the Valar, Aulë's deeds and works are possibly the most thoroughly documented in *The Silmarillion*. He is presented as one of the most creative, certainly the most independent-minded (which could be interpreted by this reader as one of the most interesting), and perhaps even the most compassionate of Tolkien's pantheon.

Throughout the history recounted in *The Silmarillion*, the nature and role of Aulë is inextricably linked to that of Melkor. Some commentators on the Valar note similarities or parallels between Aulë and Melkor. However, Aulë is never said to be anything other than compliant with the will of Ilúvatar and wishing to preserve the harmony of the original Music of the Ainur. Whereas Aulë creates according to the will of Eru Ilúvatar, Melkor mars and disrupts that which has been created. They are repeatedly described as having a similar nature: "Both, also, desired to make things of their own that should be new and unthought of by others, and delighted in the praise of their skill." The difference is that Aulë sought to build, improve, and teach. "Melkor spent his spirit in envy and hate, until at last he could make nothing save in mockery of the thought of others, and all their works he destroyed if he could" (*The Silmarillion*, "Of the Valar").

The first significant work of Aulë is his participation in the actual creation of the Earth. He is said to have been given by Ilúvatar "skill and knowledge scarce less than to Melkor" (*The Silmarillion*, "Ainulindalë - The Music of the Ainur"). What Aulë contributed to that making of the physical world is summarized neatly and poetically in these words: "His are the gems that lie deep in the Earth and the gold that is fair in the hand, no less than the walls of the mountains and the basins of the sea" (*The Silmarillion*, "Of the Valar"). When the work of the fashioning of Middle-earth had been completed, at the request of Yavanna, after she had planted her first seeds, Aulë made the two Lamps of the Valar, Illuin and Ormal, to light that world and bring it to fruition. He also crafted the Angainor, the chain which was used to bind Melkor after the Valar first stop his rampaging and destruction of their preparation of Middle-earth for the coming of the

First Born. After the destruction of the Two Trees, it is naturally Aulë who designs and builds the vessels for the Sun and Moon.

Aulë's independence leads him into questionable situations. Although constantly compared and contrasted with his fellow Vala, Melkor, he is absolved from bending to the temptation of his science more than once in the text by statements such as "but the delight and pride of Aulë is in the deed of making, and in the thing made, and neither in possession nor in his own mastery; wherefore he gives and hoards not, and is free from care, passing ever on to some new work" (*The Silmarillion*, "Ainulindalë - The Music of the Ainur").

It is relentlessly made clear that for all of Aulë's goodwill, from the perspective of Tolkien's mythology and worldview, he dabbles in a dangerous field of endeavor. His love of craft (science/technology) and his desire to share those skills leads him to first create the Dwarves without gaining the permission of Eru Ilúvatar. This act is quickly followed by contrition on the part of Aulë and forgiveness and acceptance of these unplanned creatures by Ilúvatar. The resolution of the problem is that, after a brief period of consciousness, the first Dwarves are put to rest, not to stir again until after the Elves have awakened and taken their place as the favored First Born of Ilúvatar.

Whereas Tolkien's anti-science bias leads him to draw a close parallel between Melkor the evil maker of things and Aulë, there is a certain ambiguity on the question of science and technology in recognition of the fact that Aulë is shown to be pure of heart and ever loyal and faithful to will of Ilúvatar, ever seeking to abide by the original Music. Yet, when the Valar seek to war against Melkor to curtail his corruption of Middle-earth, Aulë among the Valar alone is ambivalent about taking this measure citing his fear of the destruction it will cause. It is no accident either that Melkor's evil servant Sauron "was of the Maiar of Aulë, and he remained mighty in the lore of that people" (*The Silmarillion*, "Of the Maiar").

Later the relationship of Aulë to the Noldor is of enormous importance to the central story of *The Silmarillion* which is that of the fate of these doomed heroes. The seeds of their tragic flaw are the characteristics they share with Aulë: independent thinking, fascination with the creative process, the desire to make practical use of naturally occurring substances, and the recognition of beauty in knowledge for its own sake. Unlike Aulë, who comprehends the will and prescience of Ilúvatar in the order of their universe, the gifted Noldor do not have this understanding to guide them. Additionally, the Noldor might be seen as having been stymied in their attempt to secure this wisdom by the errors in judgment of the very Valar who would set themselves up as their protectors. The great artificer of the Valar is obviously cast as the natural mentor for this most accomplished and charismatic grouping within the Eldar:

. . . the Noldor were beloved of Aulë, and he and his people came often among them. Great became their knowledge and their skill; yet even greater was their thirst for more knowledge, and in many things they soon surpassed their teachers. They were changeful in speech, for they had great love of words, and sought ever to find names more fit for all things that they knew or imagined. And it came to pass that the masons of the house of Finwë, quarrying in the hills after stone (for they delighted in the building of high towers), first discovered the earth-gems, and brought them forth in countless myriads; and they devised tools for the cutting and shaping of gems, and carved them in many forms.

The Silmarillion, "Of Eldamar and the Princes of the Eldalië"

The Noldor named as direct pupils of Aulë include Mahtan, the father of Nerdanel (the wife of Fëanor), and the incomparable Fëanor himself. Less widely circulated is the knowledge that Galadriel as well is likely to have studied under Aulë. In the *Unfinished Tales*, "Concerning Galadriel and Celeborn," she is said to have had a natural sympathy with the Dwarves because they were the Children of Aulë and "Galadriel, like others of the Noldor, had been a pupil of Aulë and Yavanna in Valinor." However, unparalleled among Aulë's Noldorin acolytes was Fëanor, his greatest triumph and, if one uncritically accepts the Professor's point of view on the exercise of free will coupled with subservience to the Valar, his unmitigated disaster.

One could see the creation of the Silmarils as a feat of skill and craft that rivaled any of either Aulë or Melkor, if not in magnitude, at least in theory. This is reinforced by the reaction of Melkor to Fëanor's famous jewels, who is driven wild with envy and jealousy and seeks to possess them for himself. Fëanor, however, becomes obsessed with his unprecedented creations. He jealously guards them. His hatred for Melkor is surpassed in intensity only by his protective anxiety fueled by his knowledge of the dark Vala's envy of the Silmarils and his desire to take possession of them.

With the destruction by Melkor of the Two Trees, which casts Aman into darkness, the Valar, clothed in omnipotence and self-righteousness, go to Fëanor and demand the Simarils. They hope that Yavanna can use the stones to heal the trees. The infuriated Fëanor mistrusts the Valar who failed to deal with Melkor, thus freeing him to pursue his evil, and who also took sides against him in his own interfamilial strife. It is Aulë, who understands the magnitude of the request, and, with great compassion, pleads with the other Valar not to push too hard. "But Aulë the Maker said: 'Be not hasty! We ask a greater thing than thou knowest. Let him have peace yet awhile.'" A minority of the Noldor did not rebel and leave Aman, "one tithe refused to take the road: some for the love that they bore to the Valar (and to Aulë not least), some for the love of Tirion and the many things that they had made; none for fear of peril by the way" (*The Silmarillion*, "Of the Flight of the Noldor").

The tale of the making of the Rings of Power, wherein the remaining Noldor continue to desire "to increase the skill and subtlety of their works," manifests once more that what Aulë taught them could be used for great good or enormous ill. Aulë's former pupil, turned Melkor's slave, Sauron appears in fair form and entices the Noldor craftsmen of Ost-in-Edhil.

Therefore, they hearkened to Sauron, and they learned of him many things, for his knowledge was great. In those days the smiths of Ost-in-Edhil surpassed all that they had contrived before; and they took thought, and they made Rings of Power. But Sauron guided their labours, and he was aware of all that they did; for his desire was to set a bond upon the Elves and to bring them under his vigilance.
The Silmarillion, "Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age."

Thus, the continued influence of Aulë's legacy upon the Noldor extends to not only through the great events of First Age, but also well into the Second Age, and culminates finally in the great struggle to destroy the One Ring of Sauron at the end of Third Age.

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About the Author

Oshun's *Silmarillion*-based stories may be found on the [SWG archive](#).