Character Biography

Elemmírë

By Oshun

Elemmírë is the Vanyarin Elf who wrote the Aldudénië—a work that immortalizes the story of the events of the day when darkness fell upon all of Valinor with the destruction of the Two Trees by Morgoth and Ungoliant. The lament is implied to have been the definitive account of the period of the Darkening of Valinor, as it is said to have been familiar among all of the Eldar:

So the great darkness fell upon Valinor. Of the deeds of that day much is told in the Aldudénië, that Elemmírë of the Vanyar made and is known to all the Eldar. Yet no song or tale could contain all the grief and terror that then befell. The Light failed; but the Darkness that followed was more than loss of light. In that hour was made a Darkness that seemed not lack but a thing with being of its own: for it was indeed made by malice out of Light, and it had power to pierce the eye, and to enter heart and mind, and strangle the very will.¹

Elemmírë is also the name of one of Varda’s stars, which she created when she discovered that the Children of Ilúvatar were due to soon awaken in the darkness of Middle-earth:

Then she [Varda] began a great labour, greatest of all the works of the Valar since their coming into Arda. She took the silver dews from the vats of Telperion, and therewith she made new stars and brighter against the coming of the Firstborn. . . . Carnil and Luinil, Nénar and Lumbar, Alcarinquë and Elemmírë she wrought in that time, and many other of the ancient stars she gathered together and set as signs in the heavens of Arda.²

It would not seem like a farfetched extrapolation to assume that the Vanyarin poet/bard was named after that star, although nothing more than the paragraph cited above from The Silmarillion details the history or origins of the famous Eldarin writer. We know nothing of the age, the family, or history of Elemmírë, and only that she hails from the Vanyar. Nowhere in the texts is there a pronoun which would have indicated whether she/he is even male or female. We do not know if Elemmírë was born in Middle-earth before or during the great march across mountains and to the sea preceding the exodus to Valinor or if she might have been born and come to maturity during the golden age of Valinor.

When I did my usual cursory check for fanfiction, I found that as of January 1, 2018 there were forty-six stories on Archive of Our Own that contained Elemmírë as a character and twenty-one on the Silmarillion Writers’ Guild. Although I did not read every single one of them, I did skim a lot of them, and the vast majority appear to be written with the character as a female. I would have expected fewer stories given the paucity of canon references and a single appearance in the narrative. There may have been a time in Tolkien fandom history when one might have expected the default male version to predominate, although, that has never entirely been the case when minor characters have lacked a gender-specific pronoun or definition. I am thinking of a Dwarven woman character in the early 2000s. The first time one encountered Narvi the Dwarf as a female character was in the story Speak Friend and Enter by Thevina Finduilas posted on the Henneth Annûn Story Archive in 2004.³ Her interpretation was groundbreaking at

The Silmarillion Writers’ Guild Reference Library
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The reader of *The Silmarillion* might grow accustomed to, although in many cases not accepting of and often objecting to, the practice in Tolkien’s world of the default gender being male unless we are otherwise advised. Much earlier in the post-Tolkien years, women fantasy writers universally acknowledged their debt to his work, while continuing to seek their own path. Awarding-winning fantasist Patricia McKillip noted that, "Even in college I thought I should write at least one volume from a woman’s point of view—as LeGuin did in the Earthsea trilogy—because there were no women for me in Tolkien." The current generation of readers, and this is especially true amongst readers and writers within the world of Tolkien fanfiction, often opines dissatisfaction with Tolkien's paucity of female characters. The fact that such a significant number of fanworks include Elemmire provides an opportunity for fanfiction writers to make a small correction to that imbalance. Furthermore, as Elleth notes, there is a linguistic basis for reading Elemmire as a woman and leaving some space for female characters in cases where the language leaves a canon character's gender ambiguous and something of a protest of the male-as-default because -ë in Quenya can be either an abstract/neutral or a feminine suffix, and even though it shows up in some male names (Ardamírë, though that arguably references the Silmaril much as elf-Elemmírë probably references the planet, and then shortened to -mir in Atanamir, Boromir, Faramir) it's not grammatically male."

In the Appendix to *The Silmarillion* discussing Sindarin and Quenya elements in naming, the variation used in Elemmírë is noted, "mîr ‘jewel’ (Quenya mírë) in Elemmírë, Gwaith-i-Mírdain, Miriel, Nauglamír, Tar-Atanamir," only the second mention of the poet’s name within the book.

One might be reminded of the lament of Maglor when one comes across the reference to Elemmírë’s Aldudénië—two tragic tales of dark days and near indescribable suffering, singularly noteworthy amongst the poetic works of the Eldar memorialized by reference alone without any examples of their texts in *The Silmarillion*.

It is not usual to reference fanfiction in one of these character biographies. One often tries to limit oneself to the original texts and/or tomes by notable academics or from known journals, but in this case there is a beautiful description of Elemmírë’s sad song in the fanfiction story *There Will Be Singing* by StarSpray that seemed a fitting ending for this piece:

> It was Elemmírë who first took up her harp in the long night after the Darkening, and she who first lifted her voice again in song beneath the stars, while the Vanyar mourned in silent Valmar, and the Noldor gathered by angry torchlight in Tirion, and the Teleri waited anxiously by their ships in waved-washed Alqualondë. Her song was the Aldudénië, though it was a poor rendering into words of the grief they all felt at the deaths of silver Telperion and golden Laurelin, the most blessed of trees."

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Works Cited

1. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Darkening of Valinor."
2. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of the Elves and the Captivity of Melkor."
3. This story is still available on line at Thevina's Tolkien Fanfiction and Research Articles. Accessed 12/31/2017. It won awards for the year 2004 in both the now-defunct Mithril Awards and Middle Earth Fanfiction Awards.
5. Private email correspondence, dated 29 December 2017.

About the Author

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