
Character Biography Gildor Inglorion

By Oshun

Gildor Inglorion is a fitting choice as a biography subject for Back to Middle-earth Month. He is yet another link between the history of the Elves of the Elder days as recounted in *The Silmarillion* and that of the Men, Hobbits, and Dwarves of the Third Age upon whom many of the readers of *The Lord of the Rings* focus. Gildor appears in the saga shortly after Frodo and his companions depart on their quest to safely dispose of the One Ring. Gildor and his company are the first Elves to meet Frodo and the Hobbits in the area of Woody End, a forest in the Eastfarthing of the Shire (1). Compared to how far each of the Hobbits will travel before they reach the end of their tale, they are still very close to home. Fleeing from the Ringwraiths whom they call the Black Riders, the Hobbits see and hear sounds which warn them that some very different beings are near.

'These are High Elves! They spoke the name of Elbereth!' said Frodo in amazement, 'Few of that fairest folk are ever seen in the Shire. Not many now remain in Middle-earth, east of the Great Sea. This is indeed a strange chance!'

The hobbits sat in shadow by the wayside. Before long the Elves came down the lane towards the valley. They passed slowly, and the hobbits could see the starlight glimmering on their hair and in their eyes. They bore no lights, yet as they walked a shimmer, like the light of the moon above the rim of the hills before it rises, seemed to fall about their feet. They were now silent, and as the last Elf passed he turned and looked towards the hobbits and laughed. (2)

Of course, the sparkle of starlight on their hair and its reflected gleam in the eyes of the Elves not surprisingly grabs the attention of the reader. The Hobbits, with their pointed ears, large hairy feet and notably short stature, are creatures of fantasy fiction, equally absolute in their strangeness and distance from Men as any Elf. Nonetheless, the Hobbits epitomize an earthiness and simplicity that ground them in the mundane, while Gildor and his companions manifest a spark of the divine. These are no ordinary mortals glowing as they do with the luster of a uniquely Other aspect of goodness and refinement.

By introducing Gildor and his Elves, Tolkien provides his reader a glimpse of a larger world beyond the Shire, presenting not only a new ally for the Hobbits but giving us a view into the long history of Arda which precedes this tale. Gildor is the vehicle for introducing into *The Lord of the Rings* the role and nature of the Elves among the free peoples of Middle-earth. There is never any doubt as to whose side the Elves are on and that Frodo and the Hobbits will depend upon them for support.

It is Gildor who also provides the first insight into another major aspect of this story. The tale of the One Ring and its disposition is not the only element of drama within this fantasy novel. The poignant tale of the courageous fight of the long defeat of the Elves drawing to its resolution and their passing from Middle-earth serves as the backdrop for every aspect of the Fellowship's

adventure. At the apex of the book is the tale of the ascendancy of Men as the principle movers and guardians of Arda, taking over that role from the Elves who preceded them.

Who Is Gildor Inglorion?

'I am Gildor,' answered their leader, the Elf who had first hailed him. 'Gildor Inglorion of the House of Finrod. We are Exiles, and most of our kindred have long ago departed and we too are now only tarrying here a while, ere we return over the Great Sea. But some of our kinsfolk dwell still in peace in Rivendell. (3)

In referring to himself and his company as Exiles, Gildor identifies them as Noldor. He claims to be one of those who followed Fëanor to Middle-earth in order to regain the Silmarils stolen by Melkor, to avenge the death of their first king Finwë, and to free themselves from the gilded cage of the paternalistic Valar in Aman. They are a remnant of those rebel Elves who wished to re-establish themselves in Middle-earth, seeking, as Galadriel is said to have done, the fulfillment of their "dreams of far lands and dominions that might be her own to order as she would without tutelage" (4).

Christopher Tolkien opines in the sixth volume of *The History of Middle-earth*:

At first, I think, my father thought of these Elves as 'Dark-elves'; but he now decided that they (and also the Elves of Rivendell) were indeed 'High Elves of the West', and he added in Gildor's words to Bingo on p. 60 (see note 18): they were 'Wise-elves' (Noldor or Gnomes), 'one of the few companies that still remain east of the Sea', and he himself is Gildor Inglorion of the house of Finrod. With these words of Gildor's cf. the *Quenta Silmarillion* §28, in V.332:

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 the West and North . . . But ever as the ages drew on and the Elf-folk faded upon earth, they would set sail at eve from the western shores of this world, as still they do, until now there linger few anywhere of their lonely companies.

At this time Finrod was the name of the third son of Finwë (first Lord of the Noldor). This was later changed to Finarfin, when Inglor Felagund his son took over the name Finrod (see I.44), but my father did not change 'of the house of Finrod' here (FR p. 89) to 'of the house of Finarfin' in the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings*. (5)

The name Gildor Inglorion of the House of Finrod provides more controversy than clarification as to the precise identity of this particular Noldorin exile.

Many readers have speculated based upon the phrase "Gildor Inglorion of the House of Finrod" that he is either a heretofore unmentioned son of Finarfin or even a son of Finrod Felagund. As noted, *Inglor* is the name used for Finrod the eldest son of Finarfin throughout numerous drafts during the period when Tolkien was referring to Finarfin by the name of Finrod.

In the biography published earlier here of Finrod Felagund, I mentioned the discussion relating to the likelihood or not of Gildor being a son of Finrod:

It is generally accepted that Finrod had no wife when he left Aman, but left behind a beloved named Amárië. She is mentioned in the published *Silmarillion* in the “Index of Names” as a “Vanyarin Elf, beloved of Finrod Felagund, who remained in Valinor.” (For further details on Amárië, see [SWG Character Biography of Amárië.](#))

There is no mention of children of Finrod in the texts. This, however, has not prevented ongoing discussions relating to the question of ‘who then is Gildor Inglorion?’

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The statement that he is of the House of Finrod and uses the name *Inglorion*, i.e., *son of Inglor* (the name Tolkien used for Finrod for decades and the one to be found throughout most of the volumes of *The History of Middle-earth*), might, according to some readers, link him directly to Finrod. (6)

The Shibboleth of Fëanor notes that “Finarfin's father-name was Arafinwë (Q: ‘Noble [son of] Finwë’). His mother-name was Ingalaurë (‘Inga-gold’)” (7). This is yet another possible source for the descriptive name *Inglorion*. It is impossible to definitively link Gildor *Inglorion* to either Finrod Felagund and/or Finarfin.

This reader would be one of those to speculate that the Elf who calls himself Gildor *Inglorion* is neither a son of Finarfin nor of Finrod Felagund. He seems more footloose and less regal. Time may have mellowed him, but it did not soften Galadriel, who still seems intimidatingly intense in the *LotR*. Finarfin’s children were eager to explore Middle-earth. We have examples of that in Galadriel and her brothers and most of all in Finrod. One could read that as a way in which Gildor resembles the children of the House of Finarfin. However, they always approached their travels about Middle-earth as leaders.

Gildor does not take upon himself a direct responsibility for the larger concerns of the Ringbearer, which we find later in the *LotR* texts on the part of the remaining Elf-lords of Middle-earth, Elrond, Galadriel, or Celeborn and even the very independent-minded Thranduil. Gildor and his company seek to protect the Hobbits, but not to instruct or advise them.

One of the best-known citations relating to Gildor’s encounter with the Hobbits is the following one relating to the affairs of Wizards and the reticence of Elves for advising Mortals:

Gildor was silent for a moment. 'I do not like this news,' he said at last. 'That Gandalf should be late, does not bode well. But it is said: *Do not meddle in the affairs of Wizards, for they are subtle and quick to anger.* The choice is yours: to go or wait.'

'And it is also said,' answered Frodo: 'Go *not to the Elves for counsel, for they will say both no and yes.*'

'Is it indeed?' laughed Gildor. 'Elves seldom give unguarded advice, for advice is a dangerous gift, even from the wise to the wise, and all courses may run ill. (8)

While acting to protect the Hobbits from the Black Riders and providing temporary respite in their journey, Gildor nevertheless is less forthcoming than others of his brethren who assume of

the burden of assisting more aggressively in the fight against Sauron. Gildor and his group do take immediate measures to help the Hobbits avoid the Nazgûl.

'O Wise People!' interrupted Pippin eagerly. 'Tell us about the Black Riders!'

'Black Riders?' they said in low voices. 'Why do you ask about Black Riders?'

'Because two Black Riders have overtaken us today, or one has done so twice,' said Pippin; 'only a little while ago he slipped away as you drew near.'

The Elves did not answer at once, but spoke together softly in their own tongue. At length Gildor turned to the Hobbits. 'We will not speak of this here,' he said. 'We think you had best come now with us. It is not our custom, but for this time we will take you on our road, and you shall lodge with us tonight, if you will.'

'O Fair Folk! This is good fortune beyond my hope,' said Pippin. Sam was speechless. 'I thank you indeed, Gildor Inglorion,' said Frodo bowing. '*Elen sila lúmenn' omentielvo*, a star shines on the hour of our meeting,' he added in the high-elven speech. (9)

A few points about Gildor are of particular importance in the above-quoted passages. First, Gildor knows who the Black Riders are and seeks to protect the Hobbits from them and, secondarily, we see that Frodo speaks the high-elven (Quenya) of the exiled Noldor to the Elves. Gildor reminds his company that if they wish to protect any confidences from the Hobbits, they should note that Frodo can understand them.

'Be careful, friends!' cried Gildor laughing. 'Speak no secrets! Here is a scholar in the Ancient Tongue. Bilbo was a good master. Hail, Elf-friend!' he said, bowing to Frodo. 'Come now with your friends and join our company! You had best walk in the middle so that you may not stray. You may be weary before we halt.' (10)

Despite Gildor's cheerful tone, there is a hint of the fatigue Elves eventually experience within the Circles of the World in his demeanor and a deliberate distancing himself from the affairs of Mortals.

The Elves have their own labours and their own sorrows, and they are little concerned with the ways of hobbits, or of any other creatures upon earth. Our paths cross theirs seldom, by chance or purpose. In this meeting there may be more than chance; but the purpose is not clear to me, and I fear to say too much.' (11)

This attitude and aspect is reminiscent of what Tolkien describes as one of the flaws among the Elves in later Ages of Arda.

. . . Elves can live forever, slowly aging, but never growing old, suffering neither sickness nor other weaknesses of the flesh. In a world of constant mutability where everything else ages and dies, such a gift can lead to boredom or stagnation or the desire to dominate the lesser races. As Tolkien explains in a letter to Michael Straight, immortality led to the elvish melancholy that appears many times in the trilogy; as they form alliances with and get to know members of the other races, the mortals die and new generations come along (Letters 236). This becomes a great burden as ages pass and the world changes around them, but they remain constant. This leads to two of the

weaknesses displayed by the Elves--constantly looking to the past and an unwillingness to change. (12)

Who Are the Elves of *The Lord of the Rings*?

The Elves of the LotR are far indeed from any diminutive airy fairy creatures of gossamer wings perched upon flowers or mushrooms of the children's tales common at the time that Tolkien created his Quendi and their history.

Hammond and Scull note that Tolkien's Elves are not diminutive in any sense. They refer to Tolkien's statement that "The Quendi were in origin a tall people" (13). He goes on to make a distinction between the Eldarin peoples who went on the Great March and crossed the sea to the west, claiming that those who completed the journey and crossed over to Aman were taller than those who stayed behind. There is no possible comparison which can be made to the Leprechaun of Irish folkloric tradition, much less its modern day bowdlerization in popular culture. One can, however, in see in the Quendi and, in particular, the Eldar, and among the Eldar, most especially the Noldor, some characteristics in common with the *Tuatha De Danann* of Ireland.

If one were to rely upon Tolkien's stated intentions only, one would believe there are little or no similarities between what has popularly been labeled as Celtic mythology and the myth that Tolkien wished to create. He tried to make it abundantly clear that he strove to achieve something uniquely English and not tainted with the term Celtic or other non-English traditions when he said

But once upon a time (my crest has long since fallen) I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story – the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths – which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country. It should possess the tone and quality that I desired, somewhat cool and clear, be redolent of our 'air' (the clime and soil of the North West, meaning Britain and the hither parts of Europe: not Italy or the Aegean, still less the East), and, while possessing (if I could achieve it) the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic (though it is rarely found in genuine ancient Celtic things). (14)

One of my favorite short articles about themes and influences in Tolkien's works is one written by Tolkien scholar Dimitra Fimi (University of Wales Institute, Cardiff) which analyses the influence of Celtic mythology upon Tolkien's work. Fimi respectfully takes great pleasure in pointing out the instances of the Celtic influences which do manifest within Tolkien's work. She makes note of the similarities between the myths of the *Tuatha De Danann* in Ireland and the Noldor in Middle-earth, of which Gildor and his troop are an example.

. . . the Tuatha De Danann are not clearly defined as "demons" or men, but appear as semi-divine beings. This can be compared with the nature of the Elves, who are inferior to the Valar, the "gods," but superior to men. Significantly, Cross and Slover refer to the Tuatha De Danann as "large, strong, and beautiful beings who mingled with mortals and yet remained superior to them" (1969, 1), a description that could perfectly fit Tolkien's Elves. The Tuatha De Danann are also described as craftsmen, warriors, poets and magicians, and they acquired these skills in the northern islands of the world. This is

paralleled by Tolkien's High-Elves, who learn arts and crafts from the Valar while being in Valinor, the island of the "gods" in the West. This is what ultimately differentiates the High-Elves from the Grey Elves, who never saw the light of Valinor. (15)

The semi-divine characteristics of the Elves are the apparent outward manifestations of otherness contained in those first impressions of Gildor's wandering company as seen through the point of view of the Hobbits in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. If one had read *The Silmarillion* before reading the FotR, one might have held a very different perception of Elves in one's mind. The Elves of *The Silmarillion* certainly manifest significant skills in arts and crafts which take on magical dimensions when compared to the accomplishments of ordinary Men. However, despite such specific and notable superiorities, the *Silmarillion* Elves are presented as flawed, passionate, and exquisitely, painfully human. By comparison, the Elves of *The Lord of the Rings*, viewed through the awestruck eyes of Hobbits who have never seen their like, project a semi-divine aspect.

The first sighting of the Elves by the company of the four Hobbits that September evening of the great year of 3018, was shrouded in descriptions of an ethereal beauty, the sound of Elven voices singing the hymn to Elbereth Starkindler, the Valar most beloved of the Quendi. One is transported by a kind of awe and given a view of these special beings who, having awakened under starlight, never lost their love for the star-studded firmament and its mythical creator. It is open to discussion whether the difference between the Elves of *The Silmarillion* and the Elves of LotR is more in the eye of the beholder/narrator or an actual change over time.

One clear voice rose now above the others. It was singing in the fair elven-tongue, of which Frodo knew only a little, and the others knew nothing. Yet the sound blending with the melody seemed to shape itself in their thought into words which they only partly understood. This was the song as Frodo heard it:

*Snow-white! Snow-white! O Lady clear!
 O Queen beyond the Western Seas!
 O Light to us that wander here
 Amid the world of woven trees!
 Gilthoniel! O Elbereth!
 Clear are thy eyes and bright thy breath!
 Snow-white! Snow-white! We sing to thee
 In a far land beyond the Sea.
 O stars that in the Sunless Year
 With shining hand by her were sown,
 In windy fields now bright and clear
 We see your silver blossom blown!
 O Elbereth! Gilthoniel!
 We still remember, we who dwell
 In this far land beneath the trees,
 Thy starlight on the Western Seas. (16)*

One hears nothing again from Gildor Inglorion in the trilogy of books until very near the end of the final volume, *The Return of the King*, when Frodo and his companions arrive at the Grey Havens. Fittingly, Gildor Inglorion who told Frodo when he met him that his people were merely

biding their time until they could sail back to the so-called Elvenhome, has arrived himself to take the same boat as Frodo.

With almost perfect symmetry Tolkien writes that Frodo sings a humble Hobbit walking song. The Hobbits once again become aware of Gildor's presence when they hear fair Elven voices singing the hymn to Elbereth.

And as if in answer, from down below, coming up the road out of the valley, voices sang:

A! Elbereth Gilthoniel!
silivren penna míriel
o menel aglar elenath,
Gilthoniel, A! Elbereth!

We still remember, we who dwell
In this far land beneath the trees
The starlight on the Western Seas.

Frodo and Sam halted and sat silent in the soft shadows, until they saw a shimmer as the travellers came towards them.

There was Gildor and many fair Elven folk . . . (17)

Works Cited

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 16. *The Fellowship of the Ring*, "Three Is Company."
 17. *The Return of the King*, "The Grey Havens."
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About the Author

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