
Character Biography

Gilfanon

By Darth Fingon

Gilfanon, a Noldorin Elf counted among the exiles, is a character appearing only in Tolkien's earliest stories found in the Book of Lost Tales. As a guest of Lindo and Vairë at the Cottage of Lost Play, he is introduced to the mariner Eriol as Gilfanon of Tavrobel who dwells in the House of the Hundred Chimneys. His history is briefly explained:

[L]ong had he dwelt away from the Noldoli, faring with Ilkorins in Hisilómë and Artanor, and thereto had he become as few Elves did a great friend and companion of the Children of Men of those days. To their legends and their memories he added his own knowledge, for he had been deep-versed in many lores and tongues once in the far days of Kôr, and experience had he beside of many very ancient deeds, being indeed one of the oldest of the fairies and the most aged that now dwelt in the isle[.] (1)

Continuing in that same passage, Lindo hints at Gilfanon's great wisdom and respected status when he suggests Eriol stay for a time with Gilfanon in Tavrobel in order to gain further understanding of the Elves.

In the first volume of Lost Tales, Gilfanon is present for the telling of three tales: *The Tale of the Sun and Moon*, during which he chides Lindo for making the story too long (2), *The Hiding of Valinor*, where he stays silent and is only mentioned in passing at the end, and *Gilfanon's Tale*, which is unfortunately incomplete. *Gilfanon's Tale* is meant to include *The Travail of the Noldoli and the Coming of Mankind*, but the completed narrative portion only covers a brief account of how a Dark Elf named Nuin discovered the sleeping Men far in the east (3). The remainder of *Gilfanon's Tale* exists only as a series of rough outlines. Had it been completed, Gilfanon would have been given the important role of relating to Eriol the entire history of the Noldor from their exile through to the fall of Gondolin, as well as the story of the awakening of Men and their coming into Beleriand.

The second Lost Tales volume does not contain the name Gilfanon in any finished narration. Instead, he appears as Ailios (4), and as the narrator of only one tale: *The Nauglafring* (5). As Gilfanon, he shows up only in the rough outline for the end of the Tales:

Eriol ... [g]oes to Tavrobel to see Gilfanon, and sojourns in the house of a hundred chimneys - for this is a condition of his drinking limpë. Gilfanon bids him write down all he has heard before he drinks. Eriol drinks limpë. Gilfanon tells him of things to be; that in his mind ... he believes that Tol Eressëa will become a dwelling of Men. Gilfanon also prophesies concerning the Great End, and of the Wrack of Things, and of Fionwë, Tulkas, and Melko and the last fight on the plains of Valinor. (6)

After this, as is the case with many of the characters who populate the Lost Tales, Gilfanon of Tavrobel disappears. He is not seen in any of Tolkien's later writings. He does not, however, disappear entirely from the history of Arda. Following the Lost Tales, two important changes are made. First, the name Gilfanon is recycled for use by a Telerin Elf who briefly appears to

challenge Fëanor at Alqualondë and is thrown into the sea (7). Second, some of his history and much of his purpose are rolled into the character of Pengolod (also: Pengolodh). In his notes on the *Annals of Valinor*, Christopher Tolkien is

much inclined to think that [Pengolod's] literary origin is to be found in Gilfanon of the *Lost Tales*, who also lived at Tavrobel (which now first emerges again); there Eriol stayed in his house ... and Gilfanon bade him write down all that he had heard (II. 283), while in the preamble to AV Eriol saw Pengolod's book at Tavrobel and translated it there. Moreover Gilfanon was of the Noldoli, and though in the *Lost Tales* he is not associated with Gondolin he was an Elf of Kôr ... while Pengolod was also an Elf whose life began in Valinor[.] (8)

In this way, through Pengolod, Gilfanon retains a critical role in the history of Arda even if his original incarnation has been lost.

Works Cited

1. Book of Lost Tales vol. 1, p 175
2. *ibid.* 88-89
3. *ibid.* 231-233
4. Whether Ailios was renamed Gilfanon or Gilfanon is meant to be a different character altogether replacing Ailios is unclear. In some of the notes it sounds as if Gilfanon replaces Ailios as a character; however, in the indices to both Lost Tales volumes, Ailios is listed as an earlier name for Gilfanon. See BoLT1 p 197 & BoLT2 p 69.
5. Book of Lost Tales vol. 2, p 221
6. *ibid.* 283
7. Shaping of Middle-Earth, pp 9-10
8. *ibid.* 274