

## Character Biography Írimë (Lalwen)

By Oshun

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Írimë is the younger of two daughters of Finwë, the First King of the Noldor, and his second wife Indis. She has a half-brother Fëanor and two full brothers Fingolfin and Finarfin. All three of her male siblings have large stories well-represented in the pages of *The Silmarillion* as edited by Christopher Tolkien. In addition, she has an older sister Findis who, like her, is given scant attention in the texts. Neither Írimë nor Findis made the cut to be included in Christopher Tolkien's published *Silmarillion*.

Since the first publication of *The Lord of the Rings* in 1954-55, many readers have considered the paucity of female characters in J. R. R. Tolkien's trilogy not only a disappointment but also a serious flaw in his work. Edith L. Crowe sums up this response when she writes, 'The most problematic aspect of Tolkien is indeed the disappointingly low percentage of females that appear in his best-known and best-loved works, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*' (272).<sup>1</sup>

There are comparatively more major female characters in *The Silmarillion* than in *The Lord of the Rings*. One finds a greater variety and, one might argue, women with greater agency than those in *The Lord of the Rings*. (*The Hobbit*, of course, has none.) Without even flipping through the pages of *The Silmarillion*, several women come to mind, although most of them fare considerably better if one consults *The Histories of Middle-earth*. There are women who forge their own destinies or have distinct opinions and take sides on issues of importance. There are leaders, doers, wise women, thinkers, artists, craftswomen, independent women, and adventurers. An aficionado of Tolkien's entire legendarium beyond *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* might think immediately of Lúthien, Miriel Serindë, Nerdanel, Indis, Melian, Aredhel, Anairë, Elenwë, Galadriel, Haleth, Morwen, Finduilas, Andreth and so many more--this without touching a book--and not including any of the women who were named characters/major players, including ruling queens, in Númenórean history.

And yet, still, the number of women is small in comparison to men, and the stories of their lives and actions are less developed, with the exception of Lúthien. Although there were fewer female characters than male characters to begin with in unfinished drafts, Christopher Tolkien nevertheless greatly pruned the number of women, and the accounts of the deeds of the remaining ones, when he sat down to pull together a coherent version of *The Silmarillion* from all of his father's unfinished texts.

In Douglas C. Kane's book *Arda Reconstructed: The Creation of the Published Silmarillion*,<sup>2</sup> the author documents many changes, big and small, from the original texts to Christopher Tolkien's finished *Silmarillion*, including what he considers large numbers of cuts relating to women characters and/or their stories. In an interview with Michael Martinez, Kane notes:

Just as I expected would be the case, the most controversial of the major changes that I detailed in the book has been my identification of the reduction of the role of female characters in the story. Some people have strongly agreed with me on this point, and

others have strongly disagreed (particularly Carl Hostetter [linguist, author, and editor of *Vinyar Tengwar* journal published by the Elvish Linguistic Fellowship], as I note above), but either way it has certainly generated some forceful feelings. None of the lively discussion that I have had on this point has convinced me that my analysis is incorrect, but if I had an opportunity to do any major revisions to the book, I would probably try to rephrase some of that to make it more clear that I don't believe that there was an intentional action on Christopher Tolkien's part to reduce the roles of the female characters in the story. However, I still believe that that is a clear result of the editing process.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to this pruning of women and their stories, one of the major disappointments for many readers relates to the great number of textual ghosts\* and/or women named only in footnotes or genealogies. Some might consider the daughters of Indis and Finwë among the most frustrating of those, in light of the prominence in the texts of their close male kinsmen. While these sisters are rarely mentioned in scholarly articles, the lack of their presence in *The Silmarillion* is often noted in fandom discussions.

The entire question of textual ghosts has been expanded upon by Elleth, a long-time and well-respected writer, artist, and researcher in Tolkien fandom circles. She notes:

\*The term Textual Ghosts was coined by Dwimordene in a 2008 MEFA [Middle-earth Fanfiction Awards] review of Pandemonium\_213's fic *Moon of the Sea*, describing "the women who litter the Tolkien histories as textual ghosts, artifacts deduced by the presence of offspring or perhaps a name".<sup>4</sup>

As the founder and principle author of "The *Textual Ghosts Project*," Elleth further notes in introducing her list of unnamed, unsung women in Tolkien's work that

The women listed here are the "known unknowns", meaning that it can be reliably assumed that a woman in their position must have existed, but even so the Tolkienian genealogies are overwhelmingly male-dominated, as they invariably describe patriarchal systems - as such, there must also be "unknown unknowns", that is, daughters, sisters, aunts and other female relations who were completely erased (not even recorded as [x number of] daughters), further upping the tally of invisible women.<sup>5</sup>

This is not likely to be the best forum in which to resolve the question of the role of women or, by contrast, the concept of masculinity in Tolkien's work (if ever either could be resolved), but it is impossible not to raise it when one encounters the erasure—by Tolkien himself or Christopher Tolkien—of Finwë's daughters. One cannot but consider the myriad ways both subtle and dramatic in which this alters the tone of the tales. Both fan fiction writers and published writers of fantasy note the lack of women and the restriction of their roles in Tolkien's work.

Although the women fantasists accept some of Tolkien's premises, they differ strongly with him on the subject of women's roles. The most obvious "anxiety" for women writers results from the presumption that female characters in the Secondary World must be restricted to the roles played by women in our primary world's medieval romances-- object of the quest, mother, temptress, witch--or else absent, as in epics such as *Beowulf* or the *Song of Roland*. The late twentieth-century writers are unanimous in believing that Tolkien *should* have swerved from this presumption in his attitude toward

women, whether expressed overtly in characters such as Rosie Cotton or Arwen, or implicitly by their absence. They ask: Where are the Dwarf women?"<sup>6</sup>

But to return to the account of these two daughters of Finwë, we will find the latest reference to them in *The Shibboleth of Fëanor*. Earlier, one reads as well of a third daughter, Faniel, who is apparently, however, dropped by Tolkien before his latest drafts.

In *The Lost Road and Other Writings*, Finwë and Indis are said to have had, in addition to their sons, three daughters called therein Findis, Faniel, and Finvain.<sup>7</sup> It seems one of the daughters was lost before the latest versions. Tolkien drafted several genealogies in the 1950s, relating nearly exclusively to Finwë's descendants, which still contained three daughters. Christopher Tolkien notes that:

<sup>26</sup> At least eight years and probably more divide them from the present 'excursus', whose date is fixed as not earlier than February 1968; but my father clearly had them in front of him when he wrote this, and alterations made to the latest of the four agree with statements made in it. In all these tables there are still three daughters of Finwë and Indis: Findis, Faniel, and Írimë (see X.207, 238, and also X.262, where Finvain appears for Írimë), and no correction was made. In the excursus Faniel has disappeared, and the younger daughter appears both as Írimë and Írien (see note 28).<sup>8</sup>

In a footnote (28) to *The Shibboleth of Fëanor*, Christopher Tolkien explains why he thinks his father included both of the names Írimë and Írien to refer to the second daughter of Finwë and Indis.

<sup>28</sup> [It is strange that my father should give the name of the second daughter of Finwë as both Írimë and Írien within the space of a few lines. Possibly he intended Írien at the first occurrence but inadvertently wrote Írimë, the name found in all the genealogies (note 26).]<sup>9</sup>

The name Írimë and not Írien is the one commonly used in references to this daughter, unless her mother name Lalwen is used. Although Tolkien scholarship largely ignores the daughters of Finwë, admirably, Tolkien commentator Michael Martinez does not. He writes of them in his popular article, "It's All in the Family: The Finwëans," even mentioning Faniel.

Originally, Finwë was to have three daughters by Indis. Christopher Tolkien mentions that, from 1959 through 1968, this was the case in the several genealogies his father prepared for the Finwëans. However, the second daughter, Faniel, is never mentioned in "The Shibboleth", and it may be that Tolkien intended to drop her from the family. As provided in the Shibboleth, Írien (originally called Írimë, the third daughter) was born between Fingolfin and Finarfin. She was also called Lalwendë, and it was this name which was Sindarinized into Lalwen. She and Fingolfin were very close and she accompanied him into exile.<sup>10</sup>

*The Shibboleth of Fëanor* is the source for the mother-name for Írimë, which is Lalwendë, shortened form given as Lalwen. It is said to be the name by which she was generally known.<sup>11</sup>

All we are told of the life history of Írimë/Lalwen is that she was close to her brother Fingolfin and went with him to Middle-earth. We know nothing of her life there or where she might have lived, although we may assume with Fingolfin. Michael Martinez mentions speculation about

possible scenarios for her life based around the note that mentions that she and Fingolfin were close and that she accompanied him into exile.

We hear nothing more of her, but some people have wondered if Aranwë, the father of Voronwë, might not be Lalwen's husband or son. Presumably, Lalwen settled in Hithlum and may have been slain or captured after the Nirnaeth. And since she was close to Fingolfin, she may have actively supported his claims to the kingship.<sup>12</sup>

One guess is as good as another as long as it does not directly contradict canon texts. This one apparently does not. But neither is it any more authoritative than many other speculations made without hard evidence. The reader never learns whether Írimë/Lalwen survives the Wars of Beleriand and the War of Wrath. In the final analysis, her choice to accompany the Noldorin exiles to Middle-earth tells us that Írimë has an independent mind. No husband is mentioned, so one assumes that without having formed that bond, her loyalty was her own to give, her choice was independently made. Therein must lie a story, but the story is never told. Írimë disappears into that vast ephemeral crowd of "Textual Ghosts."

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**Author's Note:** I would like to thank Elleth for inspiration, Ignoble Bard for reading a very rough draft of this copy, and Dawn Felagund for her usual quick and thorough copycheck.

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## **About the Author**

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