

In addition to academic work there was the School Club. E.W. Badger listed the activities covered by the Club as

cricket and football [rugby, not soccer], music and swimming, use of the library of 2500 books, the right to attend and speak at the school debating and literary society, membership of the natural history society... and a copy of the school *Chronicle*, which is published six times a year<sup>8</sup>.

Boys had to pay a small annual subscription to belong – two shillings and sixpence by 1911. Almost all boys were members of the Club.

There is nothing to show whether Ronald and Hilary Tolkien were members of the Club when they were younger (Hilary started at King Edward's in January 1905). According to the report on 'Debating Characters' for 1910-11 (ref. 11) J.R.R. Tolkien had been a member from 1909, whereas Christopher Wiseman had first spoken in 1907. Tolkien made his maiden speech in October 1909 when he was seventeen. It was reported that he made a 'good humorous speech'<sup>11</sup>. Before this speech at the Debating Society in English he had previously spoken in the annual Latin debate, in March 1909. By his last year Tolkien was Secretary of the Debating Society, Secretary of the Football Club, Captain of Measures' house and in his final term the Editor of the *Chronicle*, with W.H. Payton.

At King Edward's attendance and physical exercise at the gymnasium were compulsory, other sports were voluntary as they were part of the Club. There was no space for a sports field in the centre of Birmingham; boys had to take the tram two miles along the Bristol Road to the playing-fields at Eastern Road. Tolkien became house-captain in 1910 and gained his colours in the next season, by '(legitimate) ferocity' as he wrote to his son Michael<sup>2</sup>. In 1911 he combined several interests by writing a humorous epic poem about a house rugby match, *The Battle of the Eastern Field*. This first appeared in the *Chronicle*, March 1911.

There will be more about this poem and Tolkien's friends in the next *Mallorn*. And in the meantime we hope you will be able to come on the visit to King Edward's School from Sarehole, Birmingham, in May.

*Maggie Burns is at Birmingham City Library.*

1. *KES Blue Book* - 1901 onwards, this appeared twice yearly, January and September

2. Tolkien, J.R.R. *Letters* London: George Allen & Unwin 1981 p70

3. *Old Edwardians Gazette* – the Old Boys' magazine, 1890 onwards, at least once a year, sometimes more often.

4. Hammond, Wayne & Scull, Christina *The J.R.R. Tolkien Reader's Guide*

London: HarperCollinsPublishers 2006

5. *KES Reports* (later called Accounts) annual from 1887 onwards. Financial information about all the Foundation schools. This includes school fees, statistics about the pupils and their ages, and teachers in the various schools. The records of Governors' meetings and the KES admissions registers are manuscript and are held in the King Edward's School Archives at the Foundation Office in Edgbaston. The St. Philip's admissions register is manuscript and is held at the Oratory, Edgbaston.

6. Carpenter, Humphrey, *J.R.R. Tolkien A Biography* London: George Allen and Unwin 1977

7. MS St. Philip's Admissions Register 1902

8. Badger, E.W. *King Edward's School 'School' 14-17*. ed. R. Latimer. London: John Murray 1908

9. *KES Lists* – 1859 onwards, twice yearly (July and December): similar information to the *Blue Book* but in different formats.

10. Tolkien, Christopher, *The Return of the Shadow* London: HarperCollins 2002

11. *KES Chronicle*, 1872 onwards. In Tolkien's time there were usually two editions a term.

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## Commentary: (V)Arda Marred - The Evolution of the Queen of the Stars

*Kristine Larsen*

One of the most powerful characters, of either gender, to appear in the published form of *The Silmarillion* is undoubtedly Varda (Elbereth), Queen of the Stars. Complementary in abilities to Manwë, her spouse, she above all others is said to be feared by Melkor. She creates the first generation of stars in the early history of Eä, fills the Two Lamps with light, and hallows the Silmarils. Her creation of the second generation of stars, to illuminate the coming of the Elves, is called the "greatest of all the works of the Valar

since their coming into Arda”.<sup>1</sup> Last she creates the Big Dipper (Valacirca), set to swing around the northern sky as a symbol of Melkor’s eventual demise. Varda also plays a seminal role in the creation of the Sun and Moon, and designates their motions in the heavens. It is therefore understandable that the Queen of the Stars is referred to more than a dozen times in *The Lord of the Rings* (mostly calls for her protection), including the explanation by Aragorn that the name of Elbereth is more deadly to the Witch King of Angmar than any blade.<sup>2</sup>

However, as Flieger warns us, “the published *Silmarillion* gives a misleading impression of coherence and finality, as if it were a canonical text.”<sup>3</sup> Among the significant changes found throughout the evolution of Tolkien’s *legendarium* are the roles and relative importance of the various Valar. This paper will investigate the waxing and waning of Varda’s characteristics and relative importance as reflected in five very specific actions – her role in the creation of the primordial stars, greater stars, Valacirca, Two Lamps, and sun and moon – as well as descriptions of her attributes of power.

### **First Iteration: *The Book of Lost Tales* (c. 1916-1926)**

In *The Book of Lost Tales*, Varda, who “at the playing of the Music had thought much of light that was white and silver, and of stars”, is generally depicted as lesser in power to her husband, and seems to accomplish little of note without his (and Aulë’s) guidance. Here Varda’s original efforts of star creation are described as “playing”, in which she “set but a few stars within the sky”.<sup>4</sup> As in later tales, Aulë created the Two Lamps, but here their light was “gathered lavishly from the sky” by Manwë and Varda. After the destruction of the Lamps, Varda “wished to gather new store” of light from the heavens to “set a beacon on Taniquetil”, but was overruled by her husband. Instead, he requested that Ulmo gather some of the liquid light found in “blazing lakes and the pools of brilliance” which he brought back to Valinor to fill “two great cauldrons that Aulë fashioned”.<sup>4</sup>

In Valinor Varda largely has the role of stelliferous interior decorator, resulting in the house of Manwë being “spangled” with stars, and the dwelling and gardens of Lórien being set with stars for his “pleasure”.<sup>4</sup> Even her role as the creator of the greater stars is devalued, as these stars became an afterthought, *following* the coming of the Elves. Indeed, what eventually becomes her greatest work, the Valacirca, is originally attributed to Aulë: “Some have said that the Seven Stars were set at that time by Varda to commemorate the coming of the Eldar... yet the Seven Stars were not set by Varda, being indeed the sparks from Aulë’s forge whose brightness in the ancient heavens urged Varda to make their rivals; yet this did she never achieve”. Therefore Varda’s greater stars are a mere copy of a mightier, albeit accidental, work of a male Vala. The removal of the Valacirca from her hands also stands in opposition to her later role as an active threat to Melkor, a symptom of her lesser importance relative to later texts.

Finally, not only is her role as star-kindler greatly diminished and devalued, but so initially is her role in the creation and regulation of the Sun and Moon, both largely ascribed to Aulë and Manwë. For example, Manwë “bade therefore Ilinsor, a spirit of a Súrule who loved the snows and the starlight and aided Varda in many of her works” to pilot the Ship of the Moon. It is fair to say that the first iteration of Varda bears little resemblance to the powerful Elbereth Gilthoniel of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, to whom the Elves (and Elf friends) “call at need.”

### **Second Iteration: Before *The Lord of the Rings* (c.1926-1937)**

Between c. 1926-1930, Tolkien composed what he termed the “Original ‘Silmarillion’”, a sketch of the mythology required as background material for the tale of Túrin he had begun in 1918.<sup>5</sup> A close reading offers some interesting changes from *The Book of Lost Tales*. The creation of the Two Lamps is inferred to have been done by anonymous Valar. Unlike the earlier work, there is a single session of starmaking, which Varda (Bridhil) does, being “moved” by the darkness of the Outer Lands. It is written that the Eldar

awaken “at the making of the stars,” an important aspect of Varda’s relationship with the Eldar that endures throughout the evolution of the main legendarium. The creation of the Sun and Moon and their “appointed courses” are credited to the Valar in general.

A far more detailed explication of the mythology was written in 1930. The *Quenta Noldorinwa*, or *Quenta*, reveals a slowly evolving role for Varda. The creation of the Two Lamps is again accomplished from the light “scattered over the airs and lands and seas” but by the Valar in general.<sup>5</sup> As in the *Sketch*, Varda places the stars into the sky in a single act, the lack of a primordial starmaking apparent by a reference to the “unlit skies” prior to this event. However, in this work we have the creation of the “Sickle of the Gods” (the Big Dipper) by Varda, “the emblem of the Gods, and sign of Morgoth’s doom”. Christopher Tolkien explains that the first appearance of this concept actually occurs prior to this work, in lines 2666-71 of *The Lay of Leithian* which he dates to April 1-6, 1928.<sup>6</sup> As in the *Sketch*, the creation and administration of the sun and moon is generically accomplished by the Valar.

In his commentary to *The Lost Road*, Christopher Tolkien attempts to disentangle the complex chronology of several works composed after the *Quenta* but before the commencement of *The Lord of the Rings*, including (in approximate chronological order) the “earliest” *Annals of Valinor* (AV1), the *Later Annals of Valinor* (AV2), the *Ainulindalë* (text B), and the *Quenta Silmarillion* (QS).

AV1 offers a new synopsis of the early history of Middle-earth, in which the Two Lamps are made by Aulë and no mention is made of the source of their light.<sup>7</sup> As in the *Sketch* and *Quenta*, the stars are created by Varda just prior to the awakening of the Elves, and Varda creates the “Sickle of the Gods... as a threat to Morgoth and an omen of his fall”, after which the Elves awaken. In later revisions, Tolkien explicitly stated that the creation of the Sickle happened last and as Christopher Tolkien points out, in this text the Elves awaken at the completion of the stars’ creation, rather than at the stars’ making in general (as in the *Sketch* and *Quenta*). In doing so, Tolkien emphasizes the importance of the Valacirca (as it becomes known) as an omen of Morgoth’s eventual demise, and hence increases Varda’s power and relative importance. In AV1 “the Gods made the Sun and Moon and sent them forth over the World.”

The *Later Annals of Valinor* (AV2) contains a further elevation of importance of Varda’s creation of the Sickle of the Gods, as it is here called “the mightiest of the works of Varda”.<sup>7</sup> In the *Ambarkanta*, which Christopher Tolkien places in this same general time period but after AV1, it is written that “Varda ordained the courses of the stars, and later of the Moon and Sun”.<sup>5</sup> In the *Ainulindalë* text B we have Tolkien’s thoughts from this period on Varda’s general attributes:

Varda the most beautiful... [was] the Queen of the Valar, and was the spouse of Manwë; and she wrought the stars, and her beauty is high and awful, and she is named in reverence.<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly, in this still-early cosmology, it is said that it is Manwë not Varda whom the Elves and Men love most.

In 1937 Tolkien composed a revision to the *Quenta* known as the *Quenta Silmarillion* (QS) manuscript, which was to remain (with some revisions) the main working version of the legendarium until the completion of *The Lord of the Rings*. Varda is termed “the maker of the stars, immortal lady of the heights, whose name is holy.”<sup>7</sup> There is only a single epoch of starmaking, which concluded with Varda’s creation of the Sickle of the Gods, and the Elves awoke at the “opening of the first stars.” As in the *Quenta*, the Lamps were created by the Valar, but similar to the *Ambarkanta*, Varda is responsible for the motions of the Sun and Moon:

These vessels the Gods gave to Varda, that they might become lamps of heaven, outshining the ancient stars; and she gave them power to traverse the region of the stars, and set them to sail appointed courses above the earth.<sup>7</sup>

Thus by the time of the commencement of *The Lord of the Rings*, Varda continued to evolve toward the embodiment of the power of light that she ultimately became in the novel.

### Third Iteration: Varda circa *The Lord of the Rings* (c. 1938-1951)

During the later writing of the novel, significant changes were apparently being made to Varda's attributes of power. For example, although Varda's name was "holy" pre-*Lord of the Rings*, and she undoubtedly had high stature due to her creation of the stars as well as governance over the sun and moon, there is no mention in the "Silmarillion" texts of her central role in *The Lord of the Rings*, namely as the Power whose name is invoked by the Eldar and to whom the Eldar call in times of need. In fact, the first mention of this (and several other expansions of Varda's powers) in the 'Silmarillion' tradition is in the 1951 text called *LQI* by Christopher Tolkien (Phase 1 of the *Later Quenta Silmarillion*).<sup>8</sup>

In this work we find the first mention since the *Book of the Lost Tales* of a primordial as well as pre-Eldar star creation. After the destruction of the Lamps that Aulë had made, the "Earth was dark, save for the glimmer of the innumerable stars which Varda had made in the ages unrecorded in the labours of Eä."<sup>8</sup> Mandos later pronounces the doom that the Eldar "should come in the darkness and should look first upon the Stars.... To Varda ever shall they call at need." Varda then begins her second starmaking, now said to be of "new stars and brighter against the coming of the First-born" including the Sickle of the Gods, finally named the Valakirka.

It is in *The Lord of the Rings* itself and (to the knowledge of this author) no other text that we find another important power attributed to Varda, in relation to Earëndil. In Bilbo's Rivendell song, we hear

The Silmaril as lantern light  
And banner bright with living flame  
To gleam thereon by Elbereth  
Herself was set, who thither came  
And wings immortal made for him,  
And laid on him undying doom,  
To sail the shoreless skies and come  
Behind the Sun and light of Moon.<sup>2</sup>

Here, and only here, are we told that it is Varda who sets Earëndil and the Silmaril into the sky and governs his motions. For example, in the *Sketch* and the first version of the *Quenta*, seabirds give him the power to sail the skies in search of Elwing, while in second version of the *Quenta* is the origin of the idea that the Valar in general set him in the sky.<sup>5</sup> This concept persists in the *Quenta Silmarillion* and in fact appears in the published form of *The Silmarillion*. There are at least fifteen texts of Bilbo's poem,<sup>9</sup> but the poem's history suggests that the first reference to Varda (Elbereth) appears in version C (which was ultimately published in the novel). This reference persists even after the poem was further modified, appearing in the "final form" of the poem, version F. The date of version C is not determined with certainty, but appears to be no earlier than December 1944 and perhaps as late as several years afterwards.<sup>9</sup> In addition, since it is Varda who is responsible for the Star of Earëndil and by default its light in the heavens, each mention of the light of this star in *The Lord of the Rings* (such as in the phial of Galadriel) and its powers is yet another reflection upon the might of Varda.

As Christopher Tolkien notes in *Morgoth's Ring*, his father returned to the cosmogonic myth of the *Ainulindalë* before writing *The Return of the King*. During this time, he became concerned with the scientific realism of his cosmology, including what he later termed "the astronomically absurd business of making the Sun and Moon".<sup>8</sup> During the period c.1945-1948, Tolkien experimented with a radical departure from the canonical cosmology in a text termed *Ainulindalë C\**. The world was round from the beginning, and the sun coeval with the Earth. Given Varda's role in the formation and regulation of

the Sun and Moon in the published form of *The Silmarillion*, and the abandonment of the Two Lamps in the *Ainulindalë C\**, it is clear that the adoption of such a serious departure from the main legendarium would herald a downward shift in the relative power and role of Varda. It is also said that Manwë alone knows what Iluvatar has in store for the Elves at the Great End, in contradiction with later texts which state that he and Varda both may know.

Tolkien abandoned this text and afterwards crafted the C text, and, prior to 1951, the D text. Both texts have it that Iluvatar chose a place for Arda in the “midst of innumerable stars” but it does not state that Varda created them. In a late revision to the D text, Varda is said to have “wrought the Great Stars” which Christopher Tolkien interprets as meaning she created only these.<sup>8</sup> Text C has no mention of Varda’s role in the Two Lamps, while Text D echoes the published version of *The Silmarillion*, having Aulë make the Lamps, Varda fill them with light, and Manwë hallow them.

#### **Fourth Iteration: The Legendarium after *The Lord of the Rings* (c. 1951-1960)**

After the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* (circa 1958), Tolkien once again set to revise the legendarium, through texts which followed (with revisions) from LQ1 and related works, as well as further radical departures from the standard ‘Flat World’ mythology, during a period of “prolonged interior debate” concerning the scientific inadequacies of his cosmology.<sup>8</sup> In the former category are LQ2 text and the *Annals of Aman* (AAM).

The revision of the LQ2’s *Valaquenta* text (Vq2) is precisely the text which Christopher Tolkien selected for the published form of *The Silmarillion*, and includes a much enlarged and enhanced version of Varda’s powers and importance:

With Manwë dwells Varda, Lady of the Stars, who knows all the regions of Eä. Too great is her beauty to be declared in the words of Men or Elves; for the light of Ilúvatar lives still in her face. In light is her power and her joy. Out of the deeps of Eä she came to the aid of Manwë; for Melkor she knew from before the making of the Music and rejected him, and he hated her, and feared her more than all others whom Eru made.... When Manwë there ascends his throne and looks forth, if Varda is beside him, he sees further than all other eyes.... And if Manwë is with her, Varda hears more clearly than all other ears.... Of all the Great Ones who dwell in the world the Elves hold Varda most in reverence and love. Elbereth they name her, and they call upon her name out of the shadows of Middle-earth, and uplift it in song at the rising of the stars.<sup>2</sup>

The breadth of Varda’s powers recounted here certainly reflects her majesty as implied in *The Lord of the Rings* in a way that previous ‘Silmarillion’ texts fail to do. LQ2 also contains a unique reference to her power which does not appear in the final *Silmarillion*:

[Ungoliantë] would not dare the perils of Aman, or the power of the dreadful Lords, without a great reward; for she feared the eyes of Manwë and Varda more even than the wrath of Melkor.<sup>8</sup>

The final ‘Silmarillion’-based text which appears in the *The History of Middle-earth* is the *Annals of Aman* (circa 1958). Varda is apparently responsible for two starmaking episodes in this text, the second of which (including the creation of the Valakirka) is “the greatest of all works of the Valar since their coming until Arda”.<sup>8</sup> The Eldar awaken after the completion of this great labor, and “beheld first of all things the stars of heaven. Therefore they have ever loved the starlight, and have revered Varda Elentárie above all the Valar.” She fills the Two Lamps and is given the vessels of the Sun and Moon, which she sets in the sky and determines their motions. As in other post-*Lord of the Rings* texts, Varda’s powers appear to be at their zenith, logically supporting the repeated references to her in *The Lord of the Rings* (and the published form of *The Silmarillion*).

As noted, it is during this same time that Tolkien embarked on a series of experimental revisions to his cosmology in an attempt to achieve a closer alignment with the real universe. Of the eleven essays published as “Myths Transformed,”<sup>8</sup> only the first four

mention Varda directly, while text VI also impacts the presumed nature and powers of Varda as written in other texts. This work affirms that Melkor “must be made far more powerful in original nature.... The greatest power under Eru (sc. The greatest created power).” This directly contradicts the *Valaquenta*, where Melkor “feared her more than all others whom Eru made”<sup>2</sup> and is also at odds with the inferred power of Varda in *The Lord of the Rings*.

In text I, Tolkien wrote that “the Sun and stars were all older than Arda. But the placing of Arda amidst the stars and under the [?guard] of the Sun was due to Manwë and Varda before the assault of Melkor.” In text III Tolkien explained that Aman had been covered by a dome of “mist or cloud down through which no sight would pierce nor light. This dome was lit by stars – in imitation of the great Firmament of Eä”. This planetarium-like dome also kept out the polluted light of the Sun after the rape of the Sun’s fire-spirit Árië by Melkor, as described below.

Text II consists of two related narratives, here denoted as IIa and IIb, and a short note. Text IIa lays out a cosmology similar to the actual universe, where the Sun and Earth are the same age, the Moon is created by the Valar to foil the nefarious designs of Melkor, and the Solar System is set “in the void ‘amidst the innumerable stars’”. It is further said that because of this Varda “cannot be said to have ‘kindled’ the stars, as an original subcreative act – not at least the stars in general.” Instead, she sets “certain stars” in the sky after the first battle with Melkor “as ominous signs for the dwellers of Arda to see.” Her “original chief concern” in this revised cosmology is the “Primeval Light”, from which the Two Trees are lit. But as Tolkien himself understood, this revised myth poses problems for calling the Eldar the “Star-folk” due to their awakening after the creation of the great stars. Text IIa attempts to save the appearances by having Melkor envelop the sky in a dark cloud before the coming of the First-born. At the appointed time, “Varda arises in her might and Manwë of the Winds and [they] strive with the Cloud of Unseeing.” After some dramatic struggle, Manwë manages to blow away the cloud just in time for the Eldar to awaken and behold the stars, including the Valakirka.<sup>8</sup> The appearances have certainly been saved, but at what cost? One may argue that in this story Varda’s connection to the Elves is significantly minimized. Here, we not only have Arda Marred, but perhaps one could argue Varda Marred as well.

Text IIb explains how Varda was given a holy light by Ilúvatar, which she brought into Eä. It is for this reason that she is “the most holy and revered of all the Valar, and those that name the light of Varda name the love of Eä that Eru has, and they are afraid, less only to name the One.”<sup>8</sup> Once in the world, Varda selects the fire spirit Árië to accompany the sun and gives her some of the holy primordial light. This light is permanently lost to the world after Melkor rapes Árië and she commits suicide. The Moon is constructed by Manwë, Varda, and Aulë in order to prevent Melkor from causing trouble under the cover of night. In a short note which Christopher Tolkien associates with these texts, his father wrote that Varda gave the holy light to the Sun, the Two Trees and to “the significant Star”, whose “meaning is nowhere explained.”<sup>8</sup> Given the massive revisions here planned in the cosmology, might it be possible that this reference is to the Evening Star (i.e. Venus), especially if Tolkien meant to dissociate this heavenly body from Earëndil and the Silmaril? In text IV, we read

Varda was in Eldarin and Númenórean legends said to have designed and set in place most of the principal stars; but being (by destiny and desire) the future Queen of Arda, in which her ultimate function lay, especially as the lover and protectress of the Quendi, she was concerned not only with the great Stars in themselves, but also in their relations to Arda, and appearance therefrom.<sup>8</sup>

She is therefore said to have designed the major constellations, notably including the Valacirca. Tolkien writes that it is chiefly from her creation of the Dome of Valinor described above “but also from her original demiurgic labours” that she has the title “Star-Kindler.” Among the ‘Myths Transformed’ texts, this essay arguably presents the clearest explanation for the Eldar’s love for and reverence of Varda. But this text also describes Varda as the “most foresighted of all the Valar, possessing the clearest memory

of the Music and Vision in which she had played only a small part as actor or player, but had listened most attentively.” Christopher Tolkien points out that a similar description is instead assigned to Nienna in the AAm\* text of the *Annals of Aman*.<sup>8</sup> In labeling her action in the primordial drama “a small part” and painting her in the passive role of attentive listener, Tolkien significantly curtails Varda’s potency relative to the ‘Silmarillion’ texts of that era and *The Lord of the Rings*.

Christopher Tolkien has found that references to the Dome of Varda persist in revisions to the *Annals of Aman* as well as the *Later Quenta Silmarillion*, demonstrating that although these experimental texts were not integrated into the legendarium *en masse*, certain aspects were incorporated. Another possible example can be found to the final revision of the *Ainulindalë* text D, where Varda’s starmaking is limited to the “Great stars.” However, the fact that these experimental texts remained largely that – experiments – possibly reflects an understanding by Tolkien that “his ‘old’ mythology was a more successful construction than his later conception.”<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusion

As with any mythology, Tolkien’s legendarium evolved in its repeated telling, leading to sometimes significant changes in the relative importance and powers of certain characters. This analysis has demonstrated that Varda, Queen of the Stars, is a vivid example of this character development. From her earliest stages as companion of Manwë who “played” at placing stars into the heavens, Varda had clearly become one of the mightiest of the Powers by the time of the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, perhaps only second to Ilúvatar himself. However, in light of the ‘Myths Transformed’ texts and their related amendments to works such as the *Annals of Aman* and the *Ainulindalë* D, one can speculate that Varda might have, to paraphrase Galadriel, diminished and gone into the West, if Tolkien had continued tinkering with the legendarium in any concerted way.

Hammond, quoting an unnamed ‘enthusiast’, reminds us that “there are Tolkien’s *latest* thoughts, his *best* thoughts, and his *published* thoughts, and these are not necessarily the same.”<sup>10</sup> Perhaps from Varda’s point of view, with the exception of the anomalous ‘Myths Transformed’ essays, these three may actually be close to synonymous.

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