

'Beautiful and Terrible': The Significance of Galadriel's Hair in *The Lord of the Rings* and *Unfinished Tales*

LILIAN DARVELL

The significance of hair in the creation of a character is often underestimated. As with any physical feature hair can affect the identity as well as providing an easy form of self-representation, hair is something that constantly grows and because of this it is easy to refashion to express and symbolise. Within a novel the type, colour and style of hair can give a character a recognisable identity as well as giving you the easy constructions that come with that. In *Lord of the Rings* Tolkien, who on the whole does not linger on the physical attributes of any of his characters, describes Galadriel, and her hair is immediately focused upon and described as "a deep gold" (354). Tolkien held an interest in Galadriel and one of his many revisions to her story that we see within the *Unfinished Tales* is prefaced by the continued description of her hair, "the elder said the light of the Two Trees, Laurelin and Telperion, had been snared in her tresses" (296), the importance of her hair is emphasised so much that it is implied by Tolkien that it is the dual colouring of her hair that inspired Fëanor to create the Silmarils. Galadriel's hair is so integral to her character that the name she is known by, which translates to "Maiden crowned with a radiant garland." (Drouot 227), was chosen above her birth (or father) name "Artanis" (*UT* 346) meaning noble woman and her mother-name "Nerwen" (*UT* 296) meaning man maiden and was given to her by Celeborn. The importance of Galadriel's hair within her own story is significant but it also plays a large part in all interactions with her both in *Lord of the Rings* and *The Unfinished Tales*. It is hard to find any criticism directly interacting with the impact of Galadriel's hair, however, there is a large amount dealing with the idea of hair within Literature and it is through a combination of primary text readings and application of 'hair theory' that we can understand Galadriel's hair's role within the texts. I will be exploring the significance of Galadriel's hair in terms of its literary meaning, the impact of its colour on her interpretation and the use of her hair as a gift.

Historically hair has always had a particular impact on the representation of women and beyond the aesthetic aspect it is also treated as being powerful. In the tale of *Bernice and the Lock* hair is sacrificed to the Gods to guarantee the safe passage of Bernice's husband. The story is related to us through fragments but what is clear from both the original written by Callimachus and Catullus' subsequent translation is that the lock narrates the story. This personification of a piece of hair as an independent character is not directly paralleled in *Lord of the Rings*, however, it could be argued that

Galadriel's hair takes on its own persona when it is treated with so much emphasis. Through the tale of Bernice we see the effect hair can have on the wider world. When this tale was parodied by Pope in *Rape of the Lock*, Pope emphasises the importance of hair in attraction; "Fair tresses Man's imperial Race insnare,/And Beauty draws us with a single hair." (2:27-28). Pope maintains that hair as the basis of attraction 'snares' men which implies that the women Pope is referring to hunt with their hair even if, in the case he refers to, the ensnaring was an unwilling one. Beyond the import of hair when it is still attached to the head in this story, it is far more important when removed as it becomes a constellation; this focus on the hair when it is removed, as well as the single minded pursuit of the Baron, shows hair becoming "a totem, a token of attachment" (Gitter 942). This fetishist pursuit of hair is the pursuit of part of person, an 'extension of the living person's charisma" (Ellis 103) and becomes about consumption of the person pursued. This idea of beauty being attached to Hair is also shown through the Norse God Sif. Her hair is cut off by Loki, and whilst he is later forced to replace her hair with gold, her first worry is not vanity but that Thor's love was attached only to her hair; "how greatly Sif prized it because of Thor's love." (Colum 28) This anxiety surrounding not only the threat to her beauty but also the fear that the hair she used to "insnare" (Pope 2:27) will no longer have its wanted impact. Hair is always treated as an important part of a human being and the use of hair in fiction shows a multi-layered symbolism that has been built upon repeatedly to add new layers of meaning.

It would be challenging to talk about Galadriel's hair without focusing on the colour of it. The colour is significant in a number of ways, despite the multi-coloured aspect added in by Tolkien, Galadriel's hair is constantly described as 'golden' and 'fair'. This colour immediately sets her apart, not just from mortals but also from the society in which she was raised, the Noldor 'were tall fair of skin and grey-eyed, though their locks were dark, save in the golden house of Finrod...' (*The Lost Road* 77). This isolation amongst the Noldor serves as a reminder of her Vanyar heritage from her equally golden foremother, Indris. This golden segregation from the other elves serves to highlight the otherness of her hair. In Rossetti's famous painting 'The Lady Lilith' he inscribed it with verse translated from Goethe's *Faust* in which the closing couplet is "Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck bent/And round his heart one strangling golden hair." (216) This reference not only to the infamous figure of Lilith and her golden hair but also the use of the

ensnaring image Pope shares serves to paint an interesting image of ‘goldenness’. The seemingly eternal image of the golden seductress, ‘her gleaming hair was a weapon, web or trap’ (Gitter 945) echoes within *Lord of the Rings* through the outsider’s understanding of Galadriel. When the remnants of the fellowship are confronted by Eomer on the plains of Gondor he says “Then there is a Lady in the Golden Wood, as the old tales say!...Few escape her nets...” (LOTR 432). This immediate association of the ‘Lady’ with entrapment shows the automatic assumption of ‘witchery’. This image of the golden woman is in fact double sided as the



other typecast is also explored by Gitter when she says “the gold on her head was her aureole, her crown, the outward sign of her inner blessedness and innocence.” (946) These contrasting ideas of ‘the golden’ is manifest in Galadriel’s reaction to being offered the ring, we see the two sides warring within her “I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible...Fair as the Sea...All shall love me and despair!” (LOTR 366) Galadriel is expressing her darker side but it is clear the darkness will not manifest itself in her appearance except to

make her more attractive, this moment of consideration is a revelation of ‘the glittering symbolic fusion of the sexual lust and the lust for power that she embodied’ (Gitter 946). This moment of the potential fall into the actualisation of the fears Eomer expressed shows the latent aspect of this personality already apparent in Galadriel, she is neither of the wholly good or the wholly bad. She is “beautiful and terrible” and this is reflected in her reaction to the offer, this offer that is in fact the making of her and the redemption of her youthful abandonment of the Noldor.

Human hair as a gift is well-established in tradition as being commemorative, personal and representative. Within *Lord of the Rings* there is one example of hair being given as a gift and that is Galadriel’s gift to Gimli, this is significant in its representation of a bond between elves and dwarves, its status as an item of power and as a form of courtship. Rosenthal emphasises the importance of the hair as granting the “beholder as stronger *representational* power” (2). The three hairs given to Gimli wholly represent Galadriel’s person better than any portrait could recall, as a part of her body the surrendering of her hair is symbolic of trust, as a totem “acting as a substitute for and agent of the absent beloved” (Oliver 42). Gimli clearly loves, or at least esteems, Galadriel when in their first meeting “wonder came into his face” (LOTR 356) and it is of no great leap of the imagination to say Gimli’s request is closely linked to the esteem he has for Galadriel. This fetishized pursuit of a piece of the person you love is often “reminiscent of medieval romance.” (Drout 227) This use of medieval conventionalities raises Gimli’s love for Galadriel into the somewhat asexual realm of ‘Courtly love’. This is further shown through his defence of her to Eomer, “You speak evil of that which is fair beyond the reach of your thought” (LOTR 432). This inappropriately timed gallantry serves to establish Gimli as engaging with Courtly Love. This sets up a contrast between Gimli and the request for her hair Galadriel had received before this. In the *Unfinished Tales* Fëanor is described as “beholding the hair of Galadriel with wonder and delight” (LOTR 296); his interest in her hair is closely tied with his later creation of the Silmarils despite his dislike of her and her brothers. Fëanor both loved and hated Galadriel, drawn by the beauty of her hair but pushed away by the reminder of his disapproval of Finwë’s remarriage. At length his obsession drove him to beg “three times for a tress, but Galadriel would not give him even one hair.” (UT 296) The rejection caused the two greatest of the Noldor to be “unfriends” (UT 296) forever. This event when put into the context of Gimli’s successful petition shows the importance she is conferring on the Dwarf. Galadriel who was known for her ability to see into the hearts of others and “In [Fëanor] she perceived a darkness that she hated and feared” (UT 297); this implies in turn that Gimli was found to be more acceptable to Galadriel, placing his heart above that of one of the greatest of the Noldor. This is significant not only to the honour that is given to Gimli in front of the elves but also Gimli’s freedom from ‘avarice common to dwarves, known as Durin’s Bane.’ (Chance 56). This proves him to

be worthy of the hair which he acknowledges “surpasses the gold of the earth” (*LOTR* 376). This worthiness is further acknowledged by Galadriel, Gimli is “bold and yet so courteous” (376), which implies Fëanor failed in the basic courtesy requirement of requesting a part of Galadriel’s body. The refusal of Fëanor is echoed in the Rape of the Lock with the Baron going to desperate measures in order to get the hair; in many manifestations the refusal of this token can have negative consequences. In the *Njáls Saga* when fighting for his life Gunnarr breaks his bow string and requests two hairs to string his bow from his wife, Hallgerðr, who refuses on the grounds of a blow he gave her previously. The refusal results in Gunnarr’s death and Hallgerðr being chased from the area. Whilst Fëanor does not die because of Galadriel’s refusal it does cause a rift between them that potentially contributes to his motivation in refusing to send ships back for her and her brothers during the flight from Númenor. The repercussions for refusal can be dire, on the other hand, the rewards for the gift to the giver are extreme. In both *Bernice and the Lock* and *The Rape of the Lock* the locks of hair are commemorated by constellations devoted to them; in the legend Sif is rewarded with new hair but it is also from the remunerations made by Loki that Thor gains his hammer. The most astounding is, of course, the reward given to Galadriel. After her flight from Númenor Galadriel was banned from return but with her refusal of the ring Frodo offers her she is rewarded with the lifting of the ban, an incident that coincides with her gift.

Works Cited

- Chance, Jane. *The Lord of the Rings: The Mythology of Power*. Lexington, KY: Univ. of Kentucky, 2001. Print.
- Clayman, Dee L. "Bernice and Her Lock." *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 141.2 (2011): 229-46. Print.

- Colum, Padraic. "The Children of Odin: Part I. The Dwellers in Asgard: 4. Sif's Golden Hair: How Loki Wrought Mischief in Asgard." *The Children of Odin: Part I. The Dwellers in Asgard: 4. Sif's Golden Hair: How Loki Wrought Mischief in Asgard*. Sacred-texts.com, 1920. Web. 21 Oct. 2013.
- Drout, Michael D.C. *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Print.
- Ellis, Bill. *Lucifer Ascending: The Occult in Folklore and Popular Culture*. Lexington: University of Kentucky, 2004. Print.
- Gitter, Elizabeth G. "The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination." *PMLA* 99.5 (1984): 936-54. Print.
- Knight, Joseph, and John Parker Anderson. *Life and Writings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. London: Walter Scott Pub., [..]. Print.
- Oliver, Kathleen M. "'With My Hair in Crystal': Mourning Clarissa." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 23.1 (2010): 35-60. Print.
- Pope, Alexander, and Aubrey Beardsley. *The Rape of the Lock, an Heroi-comical Poem in Five Cantos*. London: L. Smithers, 1896. Print.
- Richardson, Samuel. *Clarissa*. London: Rivington [u.a.], 1820. Print.
- Rifelj, Carol De Dobay. *Coiffures: Hair in Nineteenth-century French Literature and Culture*. Newark: University of Delaware, 2010. Print.
- Rosenthal, Angela. "Raising Hair." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38.1 (2004): 1-16. Print.
- Tolkien, J. R. R., and Christopher Tolkien. *Unfinished Tales: Of Númenor and Middle-earth*. London: HarperCollins, 2000. Print.
- Tolkien, J. R. R., Humphrey Carpenter, and Christopher Tolkien. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981. Print.
- Whittingham, Elizabeth A., and J. R. R. Tolkien. *The Evolution of Tolkien's Mythology: A Study of The History of Middle-earth*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland &, 2007. Print.

Lilian Darvell: Lilian is an English graduate from the University of Exeter where she studies Tolkien with Professor Nick Groom. She now works for a digital marketing company in Newbury and still dreams about Middle-earth.



This Side of the Standing Stone

REBECCA MARTIN

Still round the corner we may meet
A sudden tree or standing stone
That none have seen but we alone.

In hindsight, Tolkien admitted the Tom Bombadil segment wasn't necessary to the narrative. Some readers wish he'd left it out altogether. Do they also include the Old Forest in their wish-he-wouldn't-haves? I hope not. Here's what happens: In the very beginning of the quest, the sometimes-adventuresome hobbit with a big heart for home ("I feel that as long as the Shire lies behind, safe and comfortable, I shall find wandering more bearable") can put a name to the dangers, but not yet a face. So the idea of the Dark Lord, of Mordor, of his evil servants out even now to find the Shire-dwelling hobbit who's got ahold of the One Ring – this all may make Frodo quake in his, well, in his bare, hairy feet. But it doesn't keep him hiding, terrified, in the hiddenest corner of his beer cellar. It should; the reality is that bad. But it doesn't. Frodo hasn't yet seen the danger with his own two eyes. He, albeit reluctantly, sets out.

He walks across the Shire with his friends, saying quiet goodbyes to beloved apple trees, thorns, nuts, and sloes along the way. Along the way, the three walking fellows stop for breaks and rests, meals and more meals. They lie down in the crooks of trees and nap for the night, with no ill outcome save a fox's surprise and the root-made holes in their backs upon waking next morning. After the first black rider has made his presence known (though not *known*, if you know what I mean), they trip along more carefully off-road, hindered somewhat by thick, tussocky grass and uneven ground ("the trees began to draw together in thickets"), but that's to be expected a stone's throw into the woods from a seldom-used lane. They sup and rest inside the hollowed-out center of a still-living tree ("it was hollow, and could be entered by a great crack on the side away from the road"). At one point, Gildor and his elves walk the three hobbits along farther than they think their tired feet can carry them, but the wakeful prods of the elves are all helpfulness and mercy. Later, the companions three cut across country to avoid the black riders, and the going gets harder; a steep, brambly stream-bed blocks their way; they climb down a ridge and through bushes and brambles and end up off-course. They continue on. The journey's dangers appear early and increase with each passing day. The black riders are so bold (so blasphemous!) as to darken doors as close to home as Bagshot Row. Still, none of these ills touch the hobbits. Not yet. Not in the Shire.

But the home-side journey must end; the real flight from danger, drawing it after them and away from home in a bold, blind heroism, must begin. The friends, now four, soon pass through the Old Forest gate that the alarmist lore of many generations has kept shut tight. From the very doorstep of

Bag End, home was behind and the world ahead, but now home is left for good, and the friends are out in the world. Here, the hobbits get off track, and the hindering hillocks become deep ruts and gullies, sinister ones, that do worse than merely hold them up awhile; the furrows in the Old Forest head the friends off and determine their course for them – always downward, away from where they want to go. Naps in the notches of tree roots become danger-making moments of suffocation, near-drowning, and entrapment on the inside of a very living tree.

Tom Bombadil comes next, and sure, he's an odd addition to the tale. But before his strange and beautiful chapter, from Shire to Old Forest, Tolkien tells us through narrative what the difference is between home and not-home: one is safe – wild, perhaps, but safe – and the other, well. You know what's coming. It's out here, out in the wickeder wild of not-home, that the dark riders bodily attack Frodo, rather than merely track and frighten him. It's on the exiled journey where the sojourners can really be hurt, and indeed they are. No wonder the hobbits always pine for home: it's the place where even wildness is safe and good. No wonder Old Man Willow scares the socks off those of us who wear shoes; trees are not supposed to act like that . . . if they act at all.

It is all very neat, what Tolkien does as his hobbits set out. It's one-for-one: the tufted grass off-road in the Shire slows them up; the thick bracken off-track in the Old Forest takes them down to a more dangerous place. The tree roots are beds, safe if not cozy; the tree roots are tricksters, lulling sleepy hobbits into capture. The inside of Old Man Willow is so terrifying a place ("He'll squeeze me in two!") that, upon reread, it's hard to let the hobbits enjoy the earlier warm, dry spot inside the ancient oak just off the lane to Woodhall, still in the Shire. Many chapters later, things get even worse: orcs force Merry and Pippin on a cross-country journey that is nothing like so gentle or kind as the elves'.

If we hadn't already read the story, if we didn't already know all the near-death that would ultimately befall the hobbits (and the actual death some of their companions), this shift from brackeny streambed to sinister ditch, from trusted root to evil tree, from sheltering tree to suffocating one, would tell us something. Pretend you don't know what's coming. Pretend there's no Bombadil in between to distract from what happens next. Is it any surprise that the hills on the Barrow Downs actually encase the hobbits? That the riders soon close in and do more harm than mere sniffing? Nope. The gate from inside to out is as good as passing a standing stone on the downs, or in any old medieval tale. "There!" said Merry. "You have left the Shire, and are now outside, and on the edge of the Old Forest." Indeed. On one side of the stone, all is known and relatively safe; on the other, everything is changed. And the stream of events flows steadily on from there.