Beautiful and Sublime – and Never Mind the Pointed Ears

Visualising the Elves throughout the Centuries[1]

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1. Introduction

The world of the elves was changed for good in the first decade of the 21st century when Peter Jackson's movie adaptations of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* were successfully screened in cinemas all around the world. The tall, fair-skinned, blue- or grey-eyed, blonde, and slightly androgynous *Albi Jacsonenses* became the prototypical elves of the 21st century and dominated the way the denizens of Faërie have been depicted in art, movies, video games, role playing games, graphic novels, anime etc. It could therefore be argued that Tolkien's Elf, in the *interpretatio Jacsonensis*, has become the dominant paradigmatic model for the first decades of the 21st century.[2]

Yet while a post-Jackson audience may take the paradigmatic *Albus Jacsonensis* as a cultural given, it has not always been clear how one should visualise the Tolkienian Elf, and the pre-Jackson imaginary of Faërie featured depictions of elves that differ considerably from what we now take for granted.

In the following, I am going to explore the question of which earlier models provided the artists with the inspiration for their visualisations of figures such as Legolas or, to a lesser extent, Galadriel. In a first step, I am going to investigate the predominant popular ideas of elves and fairies in the last decades of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries – an era during which Tolkien's imaginary, which found its culmination in the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, was developing. Subsequently, I will discuss how Tolkien's Elves were depicted by the various artists illustrating both *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–55) and conclude with

1 My thanks to Dr. Allan Turner for his expert comments and criticism. All (remaining) mistakes are my own.

2 There exist, of course, alternative traditions such as the disturbingly sinister yet alluring elves in Susanne Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* (2004) and its adaptation as a TV mini-series in 2015.

some thoughts on the influence of Peter Jackson's two movie trilogies, *The Lord of the Rings* (2001–2003) and *The Hobbit* (2012–2014).

Fig. 1: Elves leave Middle-earth

2. »Ye light fairy things tripping so gay« – Victorian Flower Fairies and Diminishing[3]

There are many people who would have loved the 'Prologue' of *The Lord of the Rings* to feature not only chapters such as 'Concerning Hobbits' or 'Concerning Pipe-weed', but also something like 'Concerning Elves' or 'Concerning Lembas'. However, since the account of the War of the Ring is »hobbito-centric« (Tolkien 2000: 237), these readers had to wait for *The Silmarillion* (1977) and other posthumously published texts such as *Unfinished Tales* (1980) or *The History of Middle-earth* series (1983–1996). There they would find finally more in-depth information about the history of the Elves, their customs, and cultural characteristics.

Tolkien must have been aware that the few facts given about the Elves would make it difficult to visualise them in a way that accorded with Tolkien's largely implicit conception of them and the way that they fitted into his fictional world. He addresses this problem in Appendix F of *The Lord of the Rings*, where he writes first

3 Fimi, in chapters 2 to 4 (2008: 13–67) of her excellent study *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History*, discusses the development of the elves and fairies in the relevant folklore and literature.

about his choice of using the term Elf/Elves for referring to the Quendi and then – for the first time in a text accessible to the public at large – gives a general description of their appearance:

> This old word [Elf/Elves] was indeed the only one available, and was once fitted to apply to such memories of this people as Men preserved, or to the makings of Men's minds not wholly dissimilar. But it has been diminished, and to many it may now suggest fancies either pretty or silly, as unlike to the Quendi of old as are butterflies to the swift falcon – not that any of the Quendi ever possessed wings of the body, as unnatural to them as to Men. They were a race high and beautiful, the older Children of the world, and among them the Eldar were as kings, who now are gone: the People of the Great Journey, the People of the Stars. They were tall, fair of skin and grey-eyed, though their locks were dark, save in the golden house of Finarfin; and their voices had more melodies than any mortal voice that now is heard. (Tolkien 2004: 1137, Appendix F)

Tolkien, like Jacob Grimm,[4] resorts to an older word and concept. In Tolkien's case, he is eager to distinguish his inhabitants of Faërie from the fairies of folk lore and contemporary popular Victorian and Edwardian imagination. This is also the motivation for his use of terms like 'diminished' and 'butterflies', which refer to the widespread imaginary of the diminutive, winged flower fairies, against which he had to re-establish the older tradition of the majestic denizens of the Otherworld.

One of the challenges that the young Tolkien encountered when writing about these otherworldly beings was the unregulated existence of numerous names and concepts. Carl Linnaeus's systematic classification of the natural world stopped short of dragons, sirens, unicorns and the like,[5] and the proponents of the Enlightenment had neglected the systematic classification of the supernatural world. In the case of the mysterious and (at its inception) baffling term 'hobbit', Tolkien could rely on his philological and artistic talents to 'uncover' and develop the meaning and concept behind the word.[6] Yet when exploring the complexities of the denizens of the Otherworld, he would need more than a children's story to make sense. The English language knows a plethora of terms for all kinds of beings related to the supernatural,[7] of which the French-derived 'fairies' was the most popular one. Faced with such an unregulated terminology and an equally chaotic diversity of concepts,

4 See Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie I* (Cap. XVII, esp. pp. 365–369), where he differentiates between *Elben* on the one hand, and *Elfen* and *Feen*, on the other.

5 See Honegger (2019: 17–20) on Linnaeus's treatment of the dragon within his systematic classification.

6 See Honegger (2023a: 142–147) for a summary of the scholarship on this topic.

7 See, for example, the list given in the second volume of *The Denham Tracts* (Denham 1895: 77–80), where we also find, on page 79, 'hobbits'.

Tolkien at first chose to call some of his (Elvish) denizens of Faërie 'Gnomes',[8] i.e. 'the wise'. Luckily, Tolkien realised that the etymological fit of the label might satisfy his scholarly instincts, yet was likely to provoke unwanted associations with other types of 'gnomes' among the general, less etymologically astute audience.[9] Yet 'fairies' was not really an alternative. Ever since William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595) and Michael Drayton's *Nymphidia or The Court of Faery* (1627), the term has become associated with diminutive, mostly harmless creatures who have little in common with the demonic 'ylfe' of the Old English epic *Beowulf* (ca. 800 AD), the threatening inhabitants of the Otherworld in the Middle English romance *Sir Orfeo* (ca. 1330),[10] or some of the protagonists[11] in Edmund Spenser's *The Faërie Queen* (1590/1596), who are »high-minded and powerful, perilous and fair, as well as indistinguishable in size and shape from mortal men« (Hillman 2018: 35).

Indeed, the predominant paradigm of 'fairies' during the Victorian and Edwardian periods was one of diminutive prettiness in the tradition of Mercutio's Queen Mab (*Romeo and Juliet* I, 4) and Drayton's *Nymphidia*. This breed of fairies became popular with the appearance of the aptly named Peaseblossom and Mustardseed who, next to Cobweb and Moth, have come to represent the enchanted realm of forests and meadows in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The popularity of the play ensured their presence throughout the centuries and the theatre costumes both reflected and influenced contemporary visualisations of fairies. Consequently, most of the fairies encountered on stage, in the early movies, in book-illustrations, or on postcards were of the flower-fairy type.

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8 See *The Book of Lost Tales 1* (Tolkien 1994: 237–245). These Gnomes were the Noldoli, which later became the Noldor Elves.

9 He faced a similar problem with his orcs, which developed out of the (hob-)goblins found in *The Hobbit*. See Honegger (forthcoming) for a discussion of this problem.

10 The Middle English *Sir Orfeo* (ca. 1300) was known to Tolkien at the latest from his *A Middle English Vocabulary* (1922), which was made as a supplement for Sisam's anthology of *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose* (1921) (see also Honegger 2010). The poem features elves that are at once courtly, noble, and threatening: the king of Faërie abducts Orfeo's wife Heurodis and keeps her at his court. The Otherworld shown in the poem is similar to our own world and Tolkien's description of Faërie fits it very well: »*Faërie* contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted« (Tolkien 2008: 32). See Tolkien's translation of *Sir Orfeo*, especially lines 141–161 (Tolkien 1995: 126), where we are given a description of the King of Faery and his retinue and the realm of Faërie with its castles, woods, pastures etc. We have here obviously a synthesis of Celtic (*sidhe*) and classical mythological (Hades, Orpheus) elements that are interpreted within a medieval-courtly framework.

11 Spenser refers to them as Elfe, Elfin Knight, Faerie, or Faerie's son.

Fig. 2: Fairy revel by Warwick Goble (1920)

It is therefore no surprise that the depiction of the 'sprites of the wood' in one of Tolkien's early texts, the poem 'Wood-sunshine' from July 1910, is still in accordance with the predominant flower-fairy tradition.

> Come sing ye light fairy things tripping so gay,
> Like visions, like glinting reflections of joy
> All fashion'd of radiance, careless of grief,

O'er this green and brown carpe; not hasten away.
O! come to me! Dance for me! Sprites of the wood,
O! come to me! Sing to me once ere ye fade!
(Carpenter 1995: 55)

Fig. 3: Still from the movie La Fée aux choux (Alice Guy, France 1896/1900)

We do not have any known illustrations to this early poem, but it should be quite clear that the 'fairy things' mentioned in the text are not the same as the later Quendi Elves but rather like »butterflies to the swift falcon« (Tolkien 2004: 1137, Appendix F).

Probably best known and of relevance for Tolkien is James M. Barrie's (1860–1937) play *Peter Pan*. Peter made his first appearance in *The Little White Bird* (1902)[12] and gained popular and lasting fame in the West End stage play *Peter Pan; or, the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow* (1904),[13] which was then expanded into the novel *Peter and Wendy* (1911). In between these texts he underwent a rather interesting development from the ghost of a deceased baby boy floating to Kensington Gardens to spend there some time with fairies and other sprites, to the Peter Pan of the Disney movie from 1953.[14]

12 Chapters 13–18 were published independently in 1906 as *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*.

13 Tolkien attended a performance of *Peter Pan* in April 1910 at the Prince of Wales Theatre in Birmingham and was obviously quite impressed (Scull and Hammond 2017, *Chronology*, p. 23).

14 This movie Peter Pan is based on the play and its later novelization, and has little in common with the baby ghost of the original *The Little White Bird* (1902). See also the illustrations by Arthur Rackham, which show a realistically painted baby boy floating across the rooftops of London – a scene hardly associated by any post-Disney movie audience with Peter Pan.

The diminutive flower fairies survive in form of Peter's companion Tinker Bell[15] and Peter's imploration of the audience to save the poisoned Tinker Bell by loudly proclaiming their belief in the existence of fairies has become the emotional climax of every performance. These fairies, as encountered in the play and its later spin-offs,[16] are the relatives of the harmless diminutive sprites known from the nursery tale books. Consequently, the artists illustrating these texts have availed themselves of the pictorial elements typical of the flower-fairy tradition. Disney's movie is thus the logical endpoint of this development and has become in itself foundational for the later perception of fairies.[17]

Fig. 4: Tinker Bell by Diarmuid Byron O'Connor (2005)

15 On stage, Tinker Bell was usually represented as a darting light and her speech was produced with bells.

16 This is not to say that even the tiny flower fairies could not have a rather tempestuous temperament, as Tinker Bell proves.

17 This is reinforced by the later Tinker Bell film series (2008–2015).

Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was relevant not only for its proto flower fairies, but also for the preservation of the more threatening aspect of Faërie in the form of Oberon and Titania and, to some extent, Puck. While Shakespeare took inspiration for the latter from Reginald Scott's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), which features a demonic hobgoblin of that name,[18] the play also preserves the tradition that links the inhabitants of Faërie to the mythological tradition of antiquity (Titania) and the medieval chivalric romances (Oberon). Furthermore, the royal couple's conflict about the boy who had been stolen by Titania from an Indian king even makes use of the traditional motif of the changeling, i.e. the belief that fairies exchange human babies with their unattractive fairy offspring. In the centuries after Shakespeare, these more sinister aspects tended to be dissociated from the diminutive fairies and were projected onto the less attractive inhabitants of Faërie, such as the goblins, hobgoblins, leprechauns etc., so that the fairies themselves could develop into childlike representatives of unspoiled nature. This also led to an association between fairies and children, which found its culmination in the Victorian and Edwardian eras.

Fig. 5: Fairy King and Queen (1910)

18 See Ryan (2009) for a detailed discussion of the origin of Puck.

In spite of this general trend towards depicting fairies as a diminutive and cute species, the alternative tradition of portraying them as the disturbing inhabitants of a sinister and mysterious Otherworld had not died out completely. The very same J.M. Barrie who created Tinker Bell and the fairies of Kensington Garden, has given us also the sinisterly threatening, human-abducting fairies of *Mary Rose* (1920). The haunting play revolves around the eponymous heroine who is twice abducted into the Otherworld while visiting a remote Scottish island. While she returns the first time after 21 days and does not possess any memory of the time spent in the Otherworld, the second time she is absent for decades and upon her return encounters her grown-up son who is now older than herself. The play makes use of many of the traditional elements connected to Faërie, such as how time there passes differently, but it never shows the denizens of the Otherworld on stage. This makes them even more mysterious and unwittingly follows Tolkien's recommendation, which he formulated in his 1939 Andrew-Lang lecture 'On Fairy-stories', of not depicting the supernatural on stage:

> In human art Fantasy is a thing best left to words, to true literature. […] But Drama is naturally hostile to Fantasy. Fantasy, even of the simplest kind, hardly ever succeeds in Drama, when that is presented as it should be, visibly and audibly acted. Fantastic forms are not to be counterfeited. Men dressed up as talking animals may achieve buffoonery or mimicry, but they do not achieve Fantasy. This is, I think, well illustrated by the failure of the bastard form, pantomime. The nearer it is to 'dramatized fairy-story' the worse it is. (Tolkien 2008: 61f.)

While stage productions may be well advised to avoid presenting fairies in any form (*pace* Shakespeare) so as not to endanger the audience's suspension of disbelief, book illustrations and paintings do not suffer from this problem to the same degree. And indeed, we have no lack of visualisations of the flower-fairy types by artists such as (Emma) Florence Harrison (1877–1955) or Cicely Mary Barker (1895–1973). What we do not have, however, is a comparable paradigmatic visual tradition for the beautiful and sublime and sometimes awe- and fear-inspiring denizens of Faërie. Again, Tolkien's texts and illustrations are of relevance.

3. »He loved elves, though he seldom met them; but he was a little frightened of them too.« (Tolkien 2002: 92): Tracing the 'Other' Tradition

The first time the readers of Tolkien's published tales had the chance to encounter Tolkien's Elves was in *The Hobbit* (1937), more specifically in the context of the company's approach to Rivendell in the third chapter 'A Short Rest'. When Bilbo rides

into the valley, his first impression is: »Hmmm! It smells like elves!« (Tolkien 2002: 91). The olfactory encounter, which is indicative of the semi-humorous treatment of things in the first half of *The Hobbit* and which makes it so difficult to achieve a consistent visualisation, is then complemented by the auditory element of Elvish speech, laughter, and song: »So they laughed and sang in the trees; and pretty fair nonsense I daresay you think it. Not that they would care; they would only laugh all the more if you told them so. They were elves of course« (Tolkien 2002: 92). And then finally we see them: »Soon Bilbo caught glimpses of them as the darkness deepened. He loved elves, though he seldom met them; but he was a little frightened of them too« (Tolkien 2002: 92).

Although the inhabitants of Rivendell, as Hillman (2018: 33) points out, are not part of the flower-fairy tribe and definitively not of diminutive size, the narrator's description still contains several elements that link them to their Victorian and Edwardian counterparts.[19] First, they are laughing and singing 'pretty fair nonsense'. Second, they are 'in the trees' – both elements prominent in the flower-fairy tradition. The presence of flower-fairy characteristics renders a clear visualisation of the scene problematic. I have found only two artists who chose to visualise this scene for their illustrations of the novel. The first one is Michael Hague (1948-), who illustrated this scene for the 1984 illustrated edition of *The Hobbit*.[20] Mindful of the fact that Tolkien's Elves of Rivendell are human-sized people, he shows us two figures clad in flowing medieval garb who are playing their harps while balancing rather precariously on the branches of the trees. The second artist to attempt a visualisation of Bilbo's encounter with the singing Elves is the Latvian painter Laima Eglīte (1945-). The illustrated Latvian edition of *The Hobbit* (1991) shows diminutive, shining, insect-winged fairies hovering in the trees[21] and thus clearly harks back to the Victorian prototype of the insect-winged flower fairy.

How, we may ask, are two such radically different interpretations of the same scene possible? The answer lies, on the one hand, in the scant and ambiguous evidence available in the original text and, on the other, in the absence of authorial il-

19 David Wenzel, in his graphic novel adaptation of *The Hobbit* (1990), visualises the inhabitants of Rivendell as human-sized people in medievalising clothes with pointed ears. However, the welcome scene where Elrond embraces Gandalf (Wenzel 2006: 25) contains some elements in the depiction of Elrond's retinue that echo illustrations of Titania and Oberon and her following from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (see, for example, Sir Noel Paton's *The Quarrel of Oberon and Titania* (1849) at (Wikipedia, online).

20 Since the picture is protected by copyright, I have to refer the interested reader to the pictures found on the net. See, for example (Rolozo Tolkien, online). It can be found on page 243 of the edition of *The Hobbit* (1984) illustrated by Michael Hague and also featured in the 1986 Ballantine Books Tolkien Calendar.

21 Since the picture is protected by copyright, I have to refer the interested reader to the pictures found on the net. See, for example (Merriner 2019, online).

lustrations of Elves.[22] Indeed, there exists only one painting that arguably contains Elves: *Taur-na-Fuin* from 1928.[23] The picture lived multiple lives, but in the version relevant for our discussion, it shows how the Sinda Beleg finds the elf-prince Gwindor who escaped imprisonment by Morgoth. Both figures are so tiny that a less than careful viewer is likely to miss them. They are actually hardly bigger than the mushrooms growing in the forest, and though Beleg carries an oversized sword in his belt, they are reminiscent rather of the flower-fairy tradition than the heroic vision of the Elves that Tolkien developed in his legendarium. On the other hand, *The Hobbit* as an originally largely independent children's tale, still has one hairy foot in the world of Victorian and Edwardian children's literature, and its elvish protagonists therefore retain occasionally some of the characteristics of their flower fairy counterparts. This ambiguity is also visible in the depiction of the Wood-elves, whom Bilbo and the dwarves encounter during their attempt to traverse Mirkwood. The first indication is given by Bombur's account of his dreams of a feasting company and the sound of far-off laughter and song.[24] Eventually, they follow the light and the sound of voices and come upon a company of feasting Wood-elves who, in good traditional fairy fashion,[25] disappear as soon as they notice the intruders. This procedure is repeated a few times until, after the interlude with the spiders of Mirkwood, all but Bilbo find themselves prisoners in the dungeons of the royal palace of the Wood-elves. These treat the dwarves decently since, as the narrator points out, the »Wood-elves were not goblins, and were reasonably well-behaved even to their worst enemies, when they captured them« (Tolkien 2002: 221). Indeed, a few pages before, the readers have been given a rather extensive description of the origin of the Wood-elves:

> The feasting people were Wood-elves, of course. These are not wicked folk. If they have a fault it is distrust of strangers. Though their magic was strong, even in those

22 This lacuna may have inspired some of the illustrators with non-British backgrounds to draw from their own cultural heritage.

23 The picture was first published in 1979 in *Pictures by JRR Tolkien* (no. 37, no pagination). It can be accessed, for example, at (Kelley 2022, online). See also Douglas A. Anderson's comment in his *The Annotated Hobbit* (Tolkien 2002: 297, note 11): »Tolkien's own artwork does not provide any further clues, for in the only drawing in which he depicts elves, they appear as very small figures, and features such as ears are not visible. See the drawing *Taur-na-Fuin* in *Artist* (No. 54).«

24 See: »At times they heard disquieting laughter. Sometimes there was singing in the distance too. The laughter was the laughter of fair voices not of goblins, and the singing was beautiful, but it sounded eerie and strange, and they were not comforted, rather they hurried on from those parts with what strength they had left« (Tolkien 2002: 199).

25 The earliest extant textual witness for this tradition is probably to be found in Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, where the young knight happens to come upon a company of twenty-four dancing women who all disappear as soon as he approaches.

> days they were wary. They differed from the High Elves of the West, and were more dangerous and less wise. For most of them (together with their scattered relations in the hills and mountains) were descended from the ancient tribes that never went to Faerie in the West. There the Light-elves and the Deep-elves and the Sea-elves went and lived for ages, and grew fairer and wiser and more learned, and invented their magic and their cunning craft in the making of beautiful and marvellous things, before some came back into the Wide World. In the Wide World the Wood-elves lingered in the twilight of our Sun and Moon, but loved best the stars; and they wandered in the great forests that grew tall in lands that are now lost. They dwelt most often by the edges of the woods, from which they could escape at times to hunt, or to ride and run over the open lands by moonlight or starlight; and after the coming of Men they took ever more and more to the gloaming and the dusk. Still elves they were and remain, and that is Good People. (Tolkien 2002: 218f.)

I have quoted the passage in full since it illustrates several points that are of relevance for the visualisation of the Elves. First, we note an almost complete absence of any information concerning their appearance. Second, the narrator (Tolkien) is indulging in a bit of a digression into the history of the different Elvish tribes as to be found in the (at that time unpublished) texts of his legendarium. The problem with this passage is that it gives, on the one hand, a great deal of historical-ethnographical information yet, on the other, it does not help with our problem of how to visualise these Good People.

Scouring the entire text of *The Hobbit*, I found only few passages giving us any hints towards the appearance of these Elves. Thus, we get to know that the Wood-elves are »all dressed in green and brown« (Tolkien 2002: 204) and that »at the head of a long line of feasters sat a woodland king with a crown of leaves upon his golden hair, […]. Their gleaming hair was twined with flowers; green and white gems glinted on their collars and their belts; and their faces and their songs were filled with mirth. Loud and clear and fair were those songs, […]« (Tolkien 2002: 206). Furthermore, »[i]n a great hall with pillars hewn out of the living stone sat the Elvenking on a chair of carven wood. On his head was a crown of berries and red leaves, for the autumn was come again. In the spring he wore a crown of woodland flowers. In his hand he held a carven staff of oak« (Tolkien 2002: 223). This is better than nothing yet still leaves much to the reader's or artist's imagination, and most illustrators focus on the Elvenking rather than his retainers since the greater part of the scant information relates to his person. Not quite surprisingly, the resulting visual concretisations differ considerably. Horus Engels's black-and-white illustration to the German translation of *The Hobbit* (*Kleiner Hobbit und der große Zauberer* 1957) is arguably the earliest published depiction of a Tolkienian Elf (Weirdlandtv 2021, online). It shows an aristocratic-looking gentleman in tight-fitting medievalising clothes. He is, as described in the text, sitting on a chair of carven wood; on his head we can see a crown

of berries and leaves, and he holds a long and slim sceptre in his right hand. The Elvenking's face expresses both nobility and a certain haughtiness, and Engels's visualisation captures very well the ambiguity exhibited by the denizens of the Otherworld, at least since the Middle English *Sir Orfeo*.

Two decades later, the movie directors Arthur Rankin and Jules Bass opt for a radically different interpretation of both the Wood-elves and the Elvenking. Instead of a slightly ethereal and aristocratic figure, the audience of the animated movie version of *The Hobbit* (1977) faces an ugly emaciated greenish gnome-like creature (cf. Cedmagic, online) reminiscent of H.G. Wells's Morlocks rather than the sprites of the wood. However, this is not the acme of strangeness, which is arguably reached in the 1991 Latvian edition of *The Hobbit*. Laima Eglīte, who presented us the insect-winged flower fairies in the trees of Rivendell, astonishes the readers with an illustration of the Elvenking as a winged green alien (cf. Merriner 2019, online). In between we have the 1984 (paperback 1987) edition of *The Hobbit* illustrated by the American artist and illustrator Michael Hague. His pictures are characterised by their subdued and earthy colours, and his Elves sport the medieval dress that has become standard since the 19th century depictions of the Middle Ages and lack clearly distinguishing features such as (visible) pointed ears. The overall effect of Hague's 'idealised historic realism' is that his Elves are no longer discernible from his normal human beings, and his depiction of Thorin in front of the Elvenking in his halls (Tolkien 1984: 153) could serve as an illustration of any medieval tale. This also explains why the aforementioned depiction of the Elves in the trees in Rivendell strike a discordant note – they are not sufficiently otherworldly to get away with such antics. This may be also one of the reasons why Hague's illustrations have found an appreciative following among Tolkien-aficionados, yet they have not had much of an impact on the development of the mainstream imaginary of Tolkien's works in general and his Elves in particular – they are simply too much like normal medievalised people.[26] The same is also true for David Wenzel's depiction of the Elves in the graphic novel adaptation of *The Hobbit* (1990), though he makes a point of showing his Elves' pointed ears as a distinguishing feature.

Things have been put back on track, so to speak, by Jackson's movie trilogy of *The Hobbit* (2012–2014) in which the American actor Lee Pace gives us an iconic Thranduil (cf. Hobbit Wiki, online). Lee Pace, with his 1,96 metres, not only looks the part, echoing the haughty nobility of Horus Engels's illustration, but he also succeeds in imbuing his character with an uncanny otherworldly cruelty that is reminiscent of the Elvenking in *Sir Orfeo* and may have inspired Marc Warren's interpretation of The Gentleman in the BBC adaptation of *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* (2015). Pictorially,

26 See also the other illustrations where Elves occur (cf. Tolkien 1984: 169, 237, 253). The last example shows Bilbo presenting the Arkenstone to Bard and the Elvenking, and differs considerably from Laima Eglīte's interpretation of the same scene.

Jackson also solves the problem of the glaring discrepancy between Legolas, the Elvenking's son, and his father, as depicted e.g. by Rankin & Bass or Eglïte. Ever since the publication of the animated movies *The Hobbit* (Rankin & Bass 1977) and *The Lord of the Rings* (Bakshi 1978), people commented on the contrast between the goblin-like Elvenking in the Rankin & Bass version and the traditionally handsome beach-boy type Legolas in Ralph Bakshi's movie – which has been a source of scathing humour for decades and led to the creation of memes such as »Apparently, Legolas gets his looks from his mother …« (Merides 2009, online).

Fig. 6: Rhiannon riding in Arbeth (Mabinogion 1877)

One point that is important in the depiction of the Wood-elves, and especially of the royal underground palace, is the connection forged to the Celtic *sidhe*. The term *sidhe* originally denotes the earthen mounds which are, according to Irish folklore and mythology, the homes of the *aos sí*,[27] the People of the Mounds, who are often associated with or identified as elves and fairies. Tolkien himself strengthened the *sidhe* connection not only through his description of the royal underground palace, but also by means of his drawing 'The Elvenking's Gate' (cf. Tolkien Gateway 2010, online) as an illustration for the first edition of *The Hobbit*. The black-and-white picture

27 The older form of *aos sí* is *aes sídhe*, and thus *sídhe* is often used to refer to both the mounds and their inhabitants.

shows a tree-lined pathway running straight up to a monolithic entrance to a hill on the other side of a river. This *sidhe* connection is important for the visualisation of the Elves since it links them to the Celtic myths and legends, which became widely popular thanks to Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of *The Mabinogion* (1838–1845). Already the first edition was lavishly illustrated and presented the inhabitants of the Otherworld as normal-sized men and women in standard Victorian medievalising dress.

These tales, as well as their illustrations, would provide inspiration for many 19th-century artists, not least the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which was founded in 1848. Their way of visualising motifs and scenes from history, literature, religion, legend, and myth proved highly influential for generations and marked the ennoblement and transformation of the hitherto popular folktale motifs to suit the aesthetic sensibilities of the cultural elite. As a consequence, the fairies and elves of folklore grew up, both literally and culturally, and became part of high culture. It is this tradition that gives us elves at once alluring and somewhat frightening or, to use Rudolf Otto's terminology, *tremendum et fascinans*.[28] Had we to select one particular painting to illustrate this new development, I would opt for John Duncan's (1866–1945) *The Riders of the Sidhe* from 1911 (Robertson 2022, online).

Fig. 7: The Riders of the Sidhe (1911) by John Duncan

We don't know whether Tolkien ever saw this particular picture, but it can be seen as representative of the entire 'new' tradition of visualising the denizens of Faërie,

28 Otto coined these terms in his study *Das Heilige* (1917).

providing an alternative to the diminutive flower fairies of Shakespeare and Drayton.

We could summarise the development in Tolkien's work in his own words, as quoted by Douglas Anderson, who writes: »Tolkien concluded the paper [on the poet Francis Thompson, March 1914] (according to the club's secretary) with the observation, 'One must begin with the elfin and delicate and progress to the profound: listed [sic] first to the violin and the flute, and then learn to hearken to the organ of being's harmony.'« (*AnHob* 205, note 9). And that is what Tolkien does: he progresses from the ubiquitous Victorian flower fairies to the noble inhabitants of the Otherworld as found in *The Mabinogion* – a development that becomes more explicit with the change of genre from children's tale (*The Hobbit*) to adult epic (*The Lord of the Rings*). Whilst the darker and more ominous elements in *The Hobbit* could be seen as 'intrusions' from a different tradition, *The Lord of the Rings* is soon embracing this 'tradition', and we are moving on from the flute and the violin to the organ.

4. »They were a race high and beautiful [...]« (Tolkien 2004: 1137, Appendix F): Elves in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Nowadays the Elves of *The Lord of the Rings* are no longer in danger of being confused with their diminutive winged Victorian cousins twice removed. The very first encounters with members of the Quendi, such as the hobbits' meeting with Gildor Inglorion in the Shire or later with Glorfindel, suggest a noble, wise, and somewhat remote people. Again, detailed descriptions of their concrete appearance are missing, and the image created in the mind of the readers is based on allusions and indirect references. It is only at the Council of Elrond that an Elvish protagonist comes into focus. Legolas, the son of King Thranduil of *The Hobbit* fame is selected to represent the Elves within the Fellowship (Tolkien 2004: 275). Although we have now a permanent presence of an Elf in the narrative, the information about his appearance remains sparse. All we get is a very general description on the occasion of his introduction at the Council of Elrond. The narrator briefly sketches the different people who have gathered at Elrond's home, and in this context Legolas, too, is mentioned: »There was also a strange Elf clad in green and brown, Legolas, a messenger from his father, Thranduil, the King of the Elves of Northern Mirkwood« (Tolkien 2004: 240). Later, we get to know that he had a »fair Elvish face« (Tolkien 2004: 255) and was equipped with »a bow and a quiver, and at his belt a long white knife« (Tolkien 2004: 279). Indeed, bow and arrow seem to be his weapons of choice, and he uses them to great effect in the fights and battles to come. His martial skills and woodcraft are aided by his keen eyesight (cf. Tolkien 2004: 281 and 423), his light tread (cf. Tolkien 2004: 292, 312, and 429), and the Elvish ability of »resting his mind in the strange paths of Elvish dreams, even as he walked open-eyed in the light of this

world« (Tolkien 2004: 429; cf. also Tolkien 2004: 442). More helpful are comparisons such as »Legolas was standing, gazing northwards into the darkness, thoughtful and silent as a young tree in a windless night« (Tolkien 2004: 426)[29] or details about his physiology mentioned in passing: »But Legolas stood beside him, shading his bright elven-eyes with his long slender hand« (Tolkien 2004: 430). We thus get the impression of a slim, light-footed, yet strong and energetic Elf – an impression that is validated by the Rohirrim's choice of steed to carry both Legolas and Gimli. They give him a »smaller and lighter horse, but restive and fiery« (Tolkien 2004: 439) which he rides without saddle or bridle. All these elements do not constitute a full description in the *effictio* tradition and are rather indebted to the *notatio* tradition,[30] yet they suffice to suggest a certain type. Interestingly, before Peter Jackson's first movie trilogy, most illustrators of *The Lord of the Rings* were reluctant to portray Legolas. The earliest prominent visualisation occurs within the context of Ralph Bakshi's animated movie (1978). Bakshi opts for a cleanshaven, blonde, grey-eyed beach-boy type of beauty. Bakshi's Legolas is as tall as Aragorn but with a slender build, and his pointed ears are hidden most of the time by his hair.[31] All in all, Bakshi's Elf keeps close enough to what we find in the original text, but he fails to become the paradigmatic model for later artists. Inger Edelfeldt's depiction of Legolas in the 1985 Ballantine Books Tolkien Calendar (cf. The One Ring b, online), for example, differs considerably. Her Legolas is dark-haired, and his general appearance is reminiscent of an Asian warrior rather than of a Californian beach boy.

I expected to strike gold and find the paradigmatic Elvish warrior-prince in all his glory in the 1992 centenary[32] edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, which had been beautifully illustrated by Alan Lee. The result was, on the one hand, somewhat disappointing but, on the other, in tune with Tolkien's handling of the Elves. They are there in Lee's atmospheric illustrations yet not so much centre stage but blending into the

29 The young tree image occurs also in the slightly more detailed description of Legolas in a comment by Tolkien in reaction to »'pretty' or 'ladylike' rendering[s] of Legolas: 'He was tall as a young tree, lithe, immensely strong, able swiftly to draw a great war-bow and shoot down a Nazgûl, endowed with the tremendous vitality of Elvish bodies, so hard and resistant to hurt that he went only in light shoes over rock or through snow, the most tireless of all the Fellowship.'« (Tolkien 1992a: 327).

30 *Effictio* is a largely standardised description of a person's (typically a woman's) appearance from head to toe. An example can be found in the chapter 'Amplification and Abbreviation' (pp. 36–37) in Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova* (ca. 1210). *Notatio* is a largely standardised description of a person's (typically a man's) character by means of his virtues and qualities. An example can be found in Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars Versificatoria* (ca. 1175, p. 66).

31 See, for example, the 'group picture' of the Fellowship (cf. u/elfocuro 2022, online).

32 'Centenary' here refers to Tolkien's 100th birthday. He was born 3 January 1892.

surroundings and therefore often almost invisible to the casual observer.[33] Elves feature for the first time prominently in the watercolour depicting the hobbits' meeting with Gildor Inglorion and his companions in the Shire (Tolkien 1992b: 96/97).[34] There we get a good and unobstructed look at (presumably) Gildor and some of his fellow Elves, both male and female. They all wear flat shoes (not boots!), leggings-type trousers, and tight-fitting, long-armed tunics over which they don a cloak. They are all beardless and have long fair hair that falls in strands (maybe even small braids?) over their shoulders. Lee also makes a point of showing clearly two of their ears: they are not pointed (nor are those of the hobbits)![35] Later paintings for the volume show mostly Legolas, who fits the mould established by Gildor and his companions.[36] Thus, we first encounter Thranduil's son in the illustration depicting the Council of Elrond (Tolkien 1992b: 272/273). There we see a beardless, slim Elf with light brown hair facing a seated, bearded Elrond who seems of heavier build. This impression is further supported by the picture showing the Fellowship in front of the Doors of Moria (Tolkien 1992b: 320/321). Legolas is standing next to Boromir, and he is somewhat shorter than the Gondorian, which is in accordance with Tolkien's text. The style of Lee's illustrations shows strong influences from the British artist Arthur Rackham (1867–1939), whose paintings of e.g. Wagner's *Ring* cycle proved influential and whom Tolkien knew and appreciated. Lee, like Tolkien, progressed in his artistic career from the diminutive sprites that haunt the British countryside to the noble inhabitants of the Otherworld.[37] Yet Lee gives us already in the 1978 volume *Fairies* (illustrated together with Brian Froud) not only the Victorian flower fairies, but also the more disturbing creatures that populate the realm of Faërie, such as spriggans, leprechauns, goblins etc. Most importantly, he also includes illustrations in the style of those found in *The Mabinogion*, with its mythological characters similar to the Gaelic Daoine Sidhe. Thus, Froud and Lee's illustrations for *Fairies* (1978), together with Lee's watercolours for the 1982 edition of *The Mabinogion*, provide the imaginative foundation for Lee's visualisations of Tolkien's work. On the one hand, the goblins and other menacing sprites of British folklore are the direct ancestors of

33 This is also true for the few instances where we have Elves in the illustrations of the 1997 edition of *The Hobbit*. See the Elves swimming in the Loudwater or resting on the banks of the river in Lee's illustration (Tolkien 1997: 49/50).

34 The illustrations in the 1992 edition are not included in the pagination, so I indicate their place by giving the numbers of the adjoining pages. 96/97 in this case means that the illustration can be found between pages 96 and 97. Alternatively, the painting can be accessed at (The One Ring a, online).

35 The ears of Lee's goblins and orcs, however, are clearly pointed.

36 See also the picture showing the 'Three Hunters' (Tolkien 1992b: 448/449) where we see Legolas depicted from behind.

37 See Honegger (2023b) for an in-depth discussion of Alan Lee's role in the development of the *Albus Jacsonensis*.

his goblins and orcs as found in Lee's illustrations for *The Lord of the Rings* (1992) and *The Hobbit* (1997), whereas, on the other hand, the Daoine Sidhe inspired his depiction of Tolkien's Elves.

Ever since the 1980s, Lee's vision of Tolkien's Elves gently influenced the way generations of readers visualised Legolas and the other Fair People, yet it was never the sole or even the dominant type. This changed when Alan Lee and John Howe became chief conceptual designers for Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* movie trilogy. Howe's fame was based on his illustrations for book covers (e.g. the iconic Gandalf) or board games. However, elves had not featured prominently in his work, apart from a few specimens on covers and arguably one Elf in his depiction of the Battle of the Five Armies.[38] His one known rendition of Legolas occurs in 'Legolas and Gimli at Helm's Deep' from the 2001 *Tolkien Calendar* (cf. Howe 2002, online). The picture was painted in 1999, so during the time when he was working for Peter Jackson, and although it shows Legolas almost in full, we see very little of his face since he wears a helmet and full body armour.[39] Consequently, we can merely establish that he has long blonde hair and no beard, so it seems that Jackson's Elves are based mainly on Alan Lee's paintings. In the case of Legolas, we can argue that Jackson's version is basically Alan Lee's visualisation of the Wood-elven prince rendered in HD.[40]

Jackson's Elves become so successful because they take up some older elements, refining and adapting them to fill a gap in the visual tradition. As a consequence, they become the hegemonic model for how to envisage the non-diminutive inhabitants of Faërie and provide the starting point from which further developments take place. While Jackson's *The Hobbit* (2012–2014) movie trilogy, on the one hand, reinforced the hegemonic picture of the blonde, blue/grey eyed, fair-skinned, slim, martially skilled Elf, it also, on the other hand, opened the door for variations of this basic pattern, most prominently in the form of the red-haired female Wood-elf Tauriel. Jackson had already tried to counterbalance the numeral predominance of male protagonists in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* by upgrading Arwen in his first movie trilogy. However, Arwen, as the daughter of Elrond Half-elven and the granddaughter of Galadriel, has never been intended as representative of the 'average Elf' – she has always been too much in a category of her own. The introduction of a newly invented female Elf character was thus merely a logical step towards a greater gender parity. And to make her a redhead earned Jackson some more brownie points on the

38 The Elf can be found in the pop-up version of *The Hobbit* (Tolkien 1999, last pop-up page, right-hand corner). Other Elves appear, e.g., on the cover of *Elf Fantastic* (1997), edited by Martin H. Greenberg.

39 Howe, as a re-enactment player and specialist in all questions of medieval and early modern armour, is likely to have influenced the realisation of Elvish armour.

40 Lee's ethereal Elves still survive in Jackson's movies in the first encounter of the hobbits with the Elves riding towards the Grey Havens and, of course, in the presentation of Lothlórien and its inhabitants.

inclusion scale. This trajectory has been followed and developed by video-game and Fantasy artists, so that the Amazon Prime series *The Rings of Power* (2022-) features Elves and other protagonists with an obviously non-white Caucasian background, most prominently the Elf Arondir (played by Ismael Cruz Córdova). Additionally, we see a differentiation by means of hairstyles. The long-haired Elf-lords such as Gilgalad (Mark Ferguson) or the she-Elves such as Galadriel (Morfydd Clark) are contrasted with short-haired Elves, such as military-style Arondir or the 1950s blow-dry style Elrond (Robert Aramayo) and Celebrimbor (Charles Edwards). We haven't seen an Elf with a beard or a moustache yet, but since Círdan the Shipwright sports a beard,[41] I am preparing myself mentally to possibly encounter a hipster-style Elf in the next season of *The Rings of Power*.

Depending on one's point of view, these new variations and deviations from the hegemonic *Albus Jacsonensis* have been either heavily criticised as a woke aberration or welcomed as part of the adaptation of Tolkien's legendarium for a 21st-century audience.[42] Tolkien himself did not visualise any of his Elves with an African or Oriental ethnical background – primarily because he based his legendarium largely on the cultural heritage of north-western Europe.[43] Yet this does not exclude variation (cf. Shippey 2005). As we have seen, Círdan breaks the mould of the beardless Elf, and we have enigmatic figures such as Eöl the Dark Elf,[44] whose name is suggestive, though, it is unlikely that Tolkien did envisage him as an 'Elf of Colour'.

5. »[…] a Lady in the Golden Wood, as old tales tell!« (Tolkien 2004: 432): Galadriel, the Lady of Lothlórien

Galadriel is probably the most iconic female figure from *The Lord of the Rings*. She has featured prominently in Tolkien-related publications, such as the various Tolkien Calendars, from a very early date.[45] She is also one of the protagonists who is de-

41 »As they came to the gates Círdan the Shipwright came forth to greet them. Very tall he was, and his beard was long, and he was grey and old, save that his eyes were keen as stars; and he looked at them and bowed, and said: 'All is now ready.'« (Tolkien 2004: 1030).

42 See Stuart (2022) for an excellent study of race and racism in Tolkien's works.

43 See Honegger (forthcoming) on the possible Oriental origin of the 'little people' (aka fairies) in the context of the Turanian-origin theory.

44 He features in chapter 16 'Of Maeglin' of the 'Quenta Silmarillion' (Tolkien 1977: 131–139). The epithet 'Dark Elf' seems to refer to his choice of dwelling place in the darkest place of the forest of Nan Emloth and his predilection for the night and the stars rather than the sunlight and is not likely to suggest an 'ethnic' background since he is »of the kin of Thingol« (Tolkien 1977: 132).

45 See, for example, 'Galadriel' by Tim Kirk (1975 Ballantine Books Tolkien Calendar), 'The Ring of Galadriel' by the Brothers Hildebrandt (1976 Ballantine Books Tolkien Calendar), 'The Gift of Galadriel' by the Brothers Hildebrandt (1978 Ballantine Books Tolkien Calendar), 'Galadriel

picted consistently as a tall, golden-haired, fair-skinned lady dressed in white. This uniformity in the visualisation has its roots most likely in the equally consistent characterisation in Tolkien's text. Thus, she is first introduced to the reader when the surviving members of the Fellowship come to Lothlórien and are greeted by Galadriel and Celeborn:

> Very tall they were, and the Lady no less tall than the Lord; and they were grave and beautiful. They were clad wholly in white; and the hair of the Lady was of deep gold, and the hair of the Lord Celeborn was of silver long and bright; but no sign of age was upon them, unless it were in the depths of their eyes; for these were keen as lances in the starlight, and yet profound, the wells of deep memory. (Tolkien 2004: 354)

This impression is further strengthened by various references that compound the image of a tall woman in white.[46] Yet while the outer appearance seems clearly fixed, the impact she has on the different members of the Fellowship may vary. Sam, for example, when trying to describe Galadriel to Faramir, gives the following characterisation:

> Beautiful she is, sir! Lovely! Sometimes like a great tree in flower, sometimes like a white daffadowndilly, small and slender like. Hard as di'monds, soft as moonlight. Warm as sunlight, cold as frost in the stars. Proud and far-off as a snow-mountain, and as merry as any lass I ever saw with daisies in her hair in springtime. But that's a lot o' nonsense, and all wide of my mark. (Tolkien 2004: 680)

This is about as close as Sam will ever get to Petrarchan love-poetry with its paradoxical elements, and it is not 'wide of the mark' at all. Sam's words capture some of the paradoxical nature of the Good People itself, who appear at times enticingly beautiful or cute, at others sublime and even threatening. And the link to the Petrarchan tradition points also in the direction of another important element in the visualisation of Galadriel: that of the *domna*, the courtly lady of the troubadour tradition, which is actualised in the courtly relationship between Gimli and Galadriel.[47]

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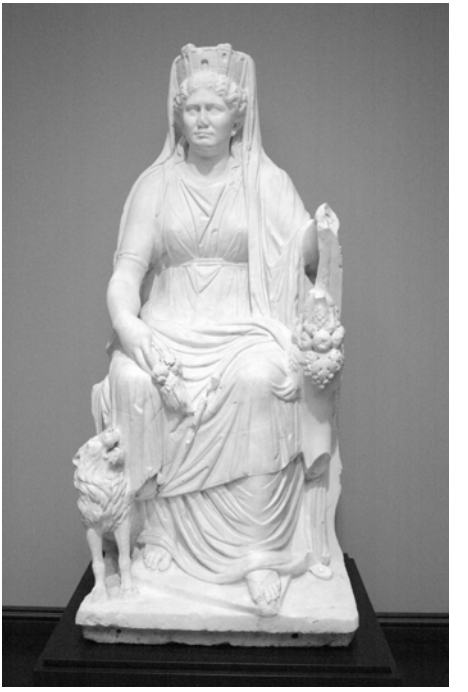
and Celeborn' by Rowena Morrill (1981 Ballantine Books Tolkien Calendar), 'The Mirror of Galadriel' by John Howe (1991 Ballantine Books Tolkien Calendar), 'The Mirror of Galadriel' by Alan Lee (1993 Ballantine Books Tolkien Calendar), and 'Lady Galadriel' by Ted Nasmith (2002 HarperCollins Tolkien Calendar).

46 See, for example: »Tall and white and fair she walked beneath the trees. […] and the Elf-lady beside him was tall and pale.« (Tolkien 2004: 361) or »In the midst of the vessel sat Celeborn, and behind him stood Galadriel, tall and white; a circlet of golden flowers was in her hair, and in her hand she held a harp, and she sang.« (Tolkien 2004: 372).

47 See Honegger (2023a: 184f.) for a possible interpretation of the relationship between Gimli and Galadriel within the framework of courtly love.

Linked to this is the veneration of the Virgin Mary, and indeed Tolkien himself made the connection between Mary and Galadriel (Tolkien 2000: 288).[48] The Catholic element is important because it alerts us to the potential influence of the numerous paintings, statues, stained glass windows etc. depicting the Virgin Mary and other female saints.[49] This then links Galadriel to the 'Weisse Frauen'[50] of the Germanic tradition who, in turn are part of the White Goddess archetype.[51]

Fig. 8: Statue of a Seated Cybele with the Portrait Head of her Priestess (AD 50)



48 Tolkien also sees Elbereth as a kind of Virgin Mary figure, which has been analysed in depth by Kowalik (2013).

49 One of the origin stories about the fairies/elves links them to the Luciferian rebellion in Heaven. They are, according to this tradition, those angels who tried to remain neutral in the conflict between God and Lucifer, and who were then exiled onto earth. See Sugg (2018: 20–30). Eventually occurring similarities of the Elves to the angels as represented in the iconography of the Catholic church are therefore not completely unfounded.

50 See Grimm (1992, II: 803–809).

51 See Graves's classical study *The White Goddess* (first edition 1948; expanded edition 1966).

As a consequence, Galadriel may be seen as the primary embodiment of female Elvendom, yet she is at least as much the living archetype of the White Goddess and, as such, transcends her role as female Elf. Consequently, the internal economy of modern movie narratives aims to counterbalance this by filling the gap in the matrix for the 'average female Elf' by bolstering the role of existing female Elves, such as Arwen, or even inventing less exalted ones, such as Tauriel.

The Rings of Power series, by contrast, faces the challenge of presenting an approachable young Galadriel who has not yet achieved the exalted status of White Goddess. The resulting persona keeps the outer appearance of Galadriel as established by Tolkien and most of the artists and movie makers since Tim Kirk, yet her status suffers a radical downsizing to that of a heroic 'human' military leader, and the White Goddess persona does not play a role (yet). As such, the young Galadriel (Morfydd Clark) can be seen as a more typical representative of female Elvendom than her older self (Cate Blanchett).

6. Conclusion

Fig. 9: The Fall of the Angels

The appearance of the fairies, elves, and other sprites in Victorian art and literature constitutes a mere fraction of their history which is said to have its origin in the time before the creation of the Earth. Within the framework of »the great heresy

of fairyland« (Sugg 2018: 25), the denizens of Faërie have been interpreted as fallen angels who had tried to remain neutral in the conflict between God and Lucifer.

As a result, they had been exiled from Heaven to Earth where they dwindled and lost their original aspect. Within this framework, the flower fairies of the Victorian era and their less cute but equally diminutive cousins are angelic exiles and their descendants. This late stage of the imaginary of the elves and fairies dominated illustrations, paintings, dramatic and musical performances on stage, and even photography and early film[52] and thus provided the original setting for Tolkien's Elves. The story of the visualisation of the elves in the 20th and 21st centuries is, as I have shown in the preceding paragraphs, intimately linked with the development of Tolkien's legendarium and the role of the Eldar. While Tolkien's earliest known poems like 'Wood-sunshine' (1910) still feature woodland sprites that are indebted to the Victorian tradition, we soon notice that Tolkien, with the rise of the Eldar, reaches back to an alternative tradition of the human-sized denizens of Faërie. Echoes of the co-existence of the two concepts are still to be found in e.g. Tolkien's description of the Elves of Rivendell in the children's tale *The Hobbit* (1937), yet he was aware that he had to distinguish between the different categories of (super)natural beings and, eventually, to get rid of the flower fairy element. He did so, for example, in the third chapter of *The Book of Lost Tales 1* when describing 'The Coming of the Valar and the Building of Valinor':

> About them [the Valar] fared a great host who are the sprites of trees and woods, of dale and forest and mountain-side, or those that sing amid the grass at morning and chant among the standing corn at eve. These are the Nermir and the Tavari, Nandini and Orossi, brownies, fays, pixies, leprawns, and what else are they not called, for their number is very great: yet must they not be confused with the Eldar, […]. (Tolkien 1994: 66)

Indeed, they must not be confused with the Eldar, and it can be argued that the modern differentiation between the human-sized Elves and the lesser sprites of the countryside is due to the popularity of Tolkien's work. Without the success of *The Lord of the Rings* both as a text and as a movie trilogy, the image of the Elf might be still indebted to the flower fairy tradition. Other authors would and actually did come up with concepts of Elves that differ radically from the Victorian tradition and are closer to Tolkien's Eldar, such as the elves in Poul Anderson's novel *The Broken Sword*, which was published on 5 November 1954, just three months after *The Fellowship of the Ring* (29 July 1954). Yet despite the critical acclaim for Anderson's novel, it was never able to rival the popular success of Tolkien's epic and consequently Anderson's depiction

52 See the photographs of the famous Cottingley fairies and the Cabbage fairy of the early film *La fée aux choux* (1896) by Alice Guy (running time: 1 minute).

of the elves never gained sufficient influence to challenge the noble Eldar of Middle-earth. Looking back at the development of the Elves from flower fairy to the *Albus Jacsonensis* and beyond, I sometimes wonder what would have happened if Tolkien had never published his epic tale. But as it is, chance favoured his conception of the denizens of Faërie, »if chance you call it« (Tolkien 2004: 126).

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Fig. 6: Rhiannon riding in Arbeth, from the *Mabinogion* translated by Charlotte Guest, 1877, available online: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhiannon#/media/File:Charlotte_Guest_Rhiannon.jpg [accessed: 9 February 2024]. Public domain.

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Fig. 9: Fall of the Angels. Michael casts out rebel angels. Illustration by Gustave Doré for John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, 1866 (Book VI Lines 874 875). Available online: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paradise_Lost_1.jpg [accessed: 9 February 2024]. Gustave Doré, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.