

# Norse influences on galadriel in the fellowship of the ring



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J. R. R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy is a testament to the man's passion for mythology. As was also the case with his zeal for philology, Tolkien utilized elements of mythology to reinvent the past, creating a living, breathing, nearly palpable world through great depth of detail and breadth of material. One of the manifestations of these interests can be found in the character Galadriel in the first book of his trio, *The Fellowship of the Ring*. In it, Tolkien infuses Galadriel with facets of Norse mythology, namely the goddess Freyja with her power, beauty, and magic crafts, and the all-knowing Norns. The influence of the Norse goddess Freyja on the creation of Galadriel suffuses her (Galadriel's) character with an aura of authority and supremacy among all other elves. One apparent manifestation of this power is in the names of Freyja and her twin brother Frey, which respectively translate to "Lady" and "Lord" (Sturluson 52). This title undoubtedly reflects the prominent status of both of these deities, with Frey called "an exceedingly famous god" (52) and Freyja "the most renowned of the goddesses" (53). Celeborn and Galadriel are also referred to as "the Lord and Lady" (Tolkien 338) of the fabled Lothlorien, which Legolas describes as "the fairest of all the dwellings of my people" (326). Galadriel and Celeborn have clear supremacy in this land, as do Freyja and Frey amongst the pantheon of gods and goddesses. The environment of Lothlorien itself is similar to Freyja and Galadriel. The mythical land is depicted as a place where "no shadow lay" (340) and "no blemish or sickness or deformity could be seen in anything that grew upon the earth. On the land of Lorien there was no stain" (341). The ability to ward off evil, combined with this idea of "no blemish," reflects the description of Freyja with Freyr and Galadriel with Celeborn as simultaneously "beautiful and powerful"

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(Sturluson 52) / “grave and beautiful” (Tolkien 345). Power and gravity are demonstrated in the way both Freyja and Galadriel use their dwellings. Freyja allows one half of humans slain in battle to sit in her hall, where warriors are soothed by her enchanting music and loveliness until they are reunited with their wives (Anderson 186), while Galadriel invites the fellowship to Lothlorien for similar respite. “I feel as if I was inside a song, if you get my meaning,” says Sam while traveling to Lothlorien, to which Haldir knowingly replies “You feel the power of the Lady of the Galadhrim” (342). Additional traits common to Freyja and Galadriel are their gift-giving and their affinity for jewelry. Freyja is known for craft, and a few of her alternate names – particularly “Gefn” (Giver) and “Syr” (Sow) – affirm this talent (Sturluson 59). One example is the magical “cloak of bird feathers” she makes that allows the wearer to disguise himself as a bird (Cotterell and Storm 192). Galadriel also creates enchanted gifts, including cloaks described as “light to wear, and warm enough or cool enough at need” and could provide “great aid in keeping out of sight of unfriendly eyes” (Tolkien 361). Freyja’s greatest treasure is a necklace likened to “a constellation of stars in the night sky” which she acquired by sleeping with four dwarfs, but for having “debased her divinity” she must “stir up war in Midgard” as punishment from Odin (Cotterell and Storm 198, 187). Galadriel possesses a ring that “twinkled as if the Even-star had come down to rest upon her hand” (Tolkien 355) and is tempted by another “Great Ring,” but she admits that taking it would have yielded destruction just as Freyja’s greed stirred up war: “Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning. Stronger than the foundations of earth. All shall love me and despair!” (Tolkien 356). Freyja’s magic art of seidr resembles Galadriel’s powers. Seidr, “an ecstatic <https://assignbuster.com/norse-influences-on-galadriel-in-the-fellowship-of-the-ring/>

kind of sorcery... [in which] it seems the mind can be sent forth” (Dobat 166) allows Freyja to see and affect the future. She introduces the art to the Norns, nearly omniscient beings said to “ shape the lives of men” by predetermining their destiny (Sturluson 44). Galadriel can also tell the future, as when she predicts the arrival and blindfolding of the fellowship before they arrive: “ It seems that the lady knows who and what is each member of your company” (Tolkien 341). She also admits to “ knowing what was and is, and in part also what shall be” but insists she “ will not give... counsel, saying do this, or do that. For not in doing or contriving, nor in choosing between this course and another, can I avail” (348). Water is another theme that runs through these stories. The Norns preserve Yggdrasil, the tree on which everything lives, using healing water from the spring of Urd (translated as “ destiny”) where they reside (Sturluson 45); Galadriel uses a well as a mirror to “ show things that were, things that are, and things that yet may be” (352), which helps Frodo and Sam accomplish their quest to save the world. Also, water in both places has curative powers. The spring of Urd is said to be so sacred “ that everything that comes into the spring becomes white as the film that lies within the eggshell” (Sturluson 46), while one crossing the curative river Nimrodel in Lothlorien “ felt that the stain of travel and all weariness was washed from his limbs” (330). Tolkien uses Norse mythology not simply for cultural reference or comparison but as material with which to construct his new kind of folklore. By drawing upon the characteristics of Norse deities Freyja and the Norns to create Galadriel, he infuses her with history and authenticity that would be absent from a character totally invented. Tolkien’s use of myth extends well beyond Galadriel, and scholars continue to scour the trilogy for new evidence of this significant, but often

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subtle, influence. Works Cited Anderson, Rasmus. Norse Mythology. 4th. Charlottesville, VA: S. C. Griggs and company, 1884. Web. Andren, Anders, Kristina Jennbert and Catharina Raudvere. Old Norse Religion in Long Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes and Interactions. Nordic Academic Press, 2006. Web. Cotterell, Arthur and Storm, Rachel. The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Mythology. London: Anness Publishing, 2008. Print. Keary, Annie. The Heroes of Asgard. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1871. Web. Sturluson, Snorri. "The Deluding of Gylfi." The Prose Edda. Ed. Jean I. Young. Berkely: University of California Press, 1992. Print. Tolkien, J. R. R.. The Fellowship of the Ring. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994. Print.