

Love, Grief, and Alliterative Verse in Tolkien's Legendarium

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The world is indeed full of peril, and in it there are many dark places; but still there is much that is fair, and though in all lands love is now mingled with grief, it grows perhaps the greater.

Galadriel, in *The Fellowship of the Ring*

The Tale of Tuor and Idril

Aredhel
sacrifices
herself to
save Maeglin
when her
estranged
husband Eöl
tries to kill
him.

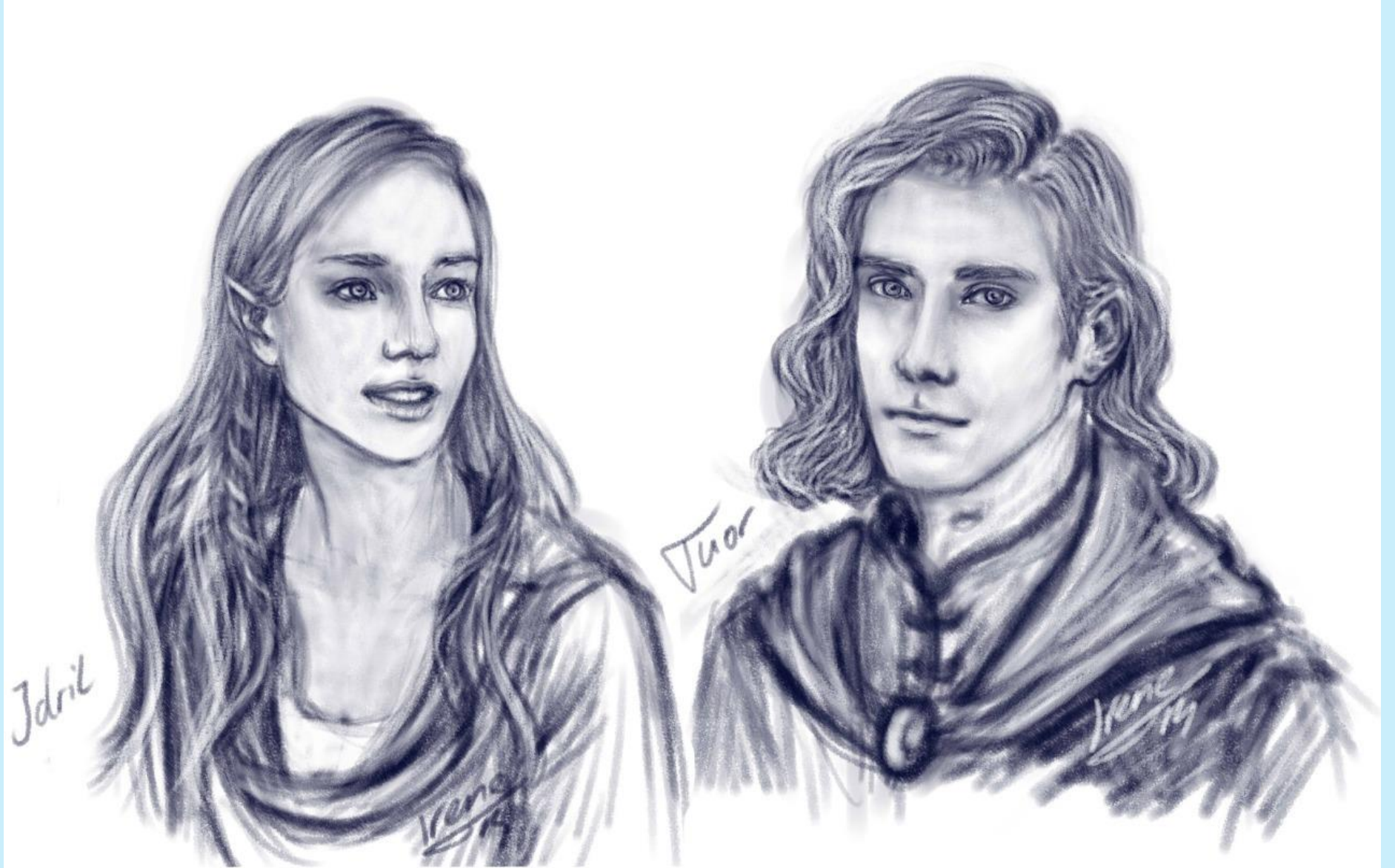


LA CITTÀ BIANCA
L'Artbook del Regno Nascosto di Tolkien

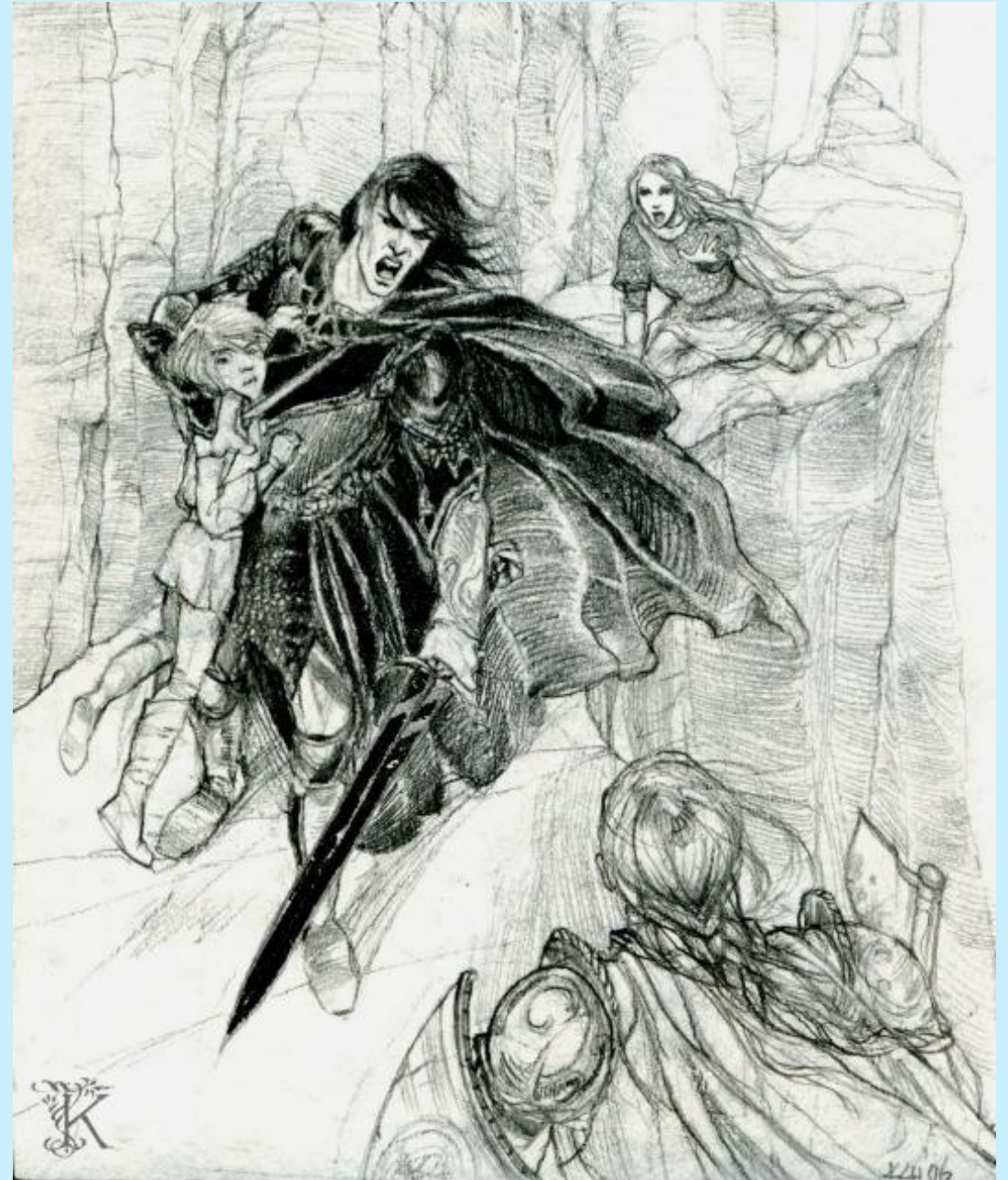
Maeglin loves Idril. Idril
doesn't love him back.
His heart darkens ...



Idril
falls in
love
with
the
mortal
man
Tuor
instead
.



During the sack of Gondolin, Tuor kills the traitor Maeglin to rescue Idril, his wife, and his son Eärendil from Maeglin's clutches.



When
Tuor
grows
old, he
and Idril
sail
together
to Valinor
...



The Tale of Turin Turamber

Beleg, meaning to go and protect Turin, is given Eöl's sword Anglachel



Turin accidentally kills Beleg
with Anglachel when they
come to rescue him from
Orcs



The elf-maid
Finduilas falls in
love with Turin
instead of his
companion
Gwindor



Gwindor is mortally
wounded in a battle Turin
foolishly sought, and Turin
comes too late to save him

...



Then the dragon
Glaurung holds
Turin spell-
bound while
orcs drag
Finduilas past
him among their
captives ...



Turin seeks Finduilas, only to discover that the orcs left her body pinned to a tree when the men of Brethil came to rescue the captives ...



The Tale of Beren and Lúthien



Escaping alone
out of ruin, the
mortal Beren
wanders into
Doriath and
meets the elf-
maiden,
Lúthien, in a
forest glade.
They fall in love.



But Thingol, her father, will not let her marry him unless he brings him a Silmaril from the Iron Crown of Morgoth ...



After many dangers,
Lúthien's power
of song sends
Morgoth and his
court to sleep,
and they
escape with a
Silmaril ...



Only to be
confronted by
Morgoth's dread
hell-hound,
Carcharoth,
which bites off
his hand with
the Silmaril
inside



Thingol relents
and allows
them to marry,
but Carcharoth,
driven mad by
the Silmaril,
comes ravening
into Doriath,
and Beren dies
defeating him ...



Yet Lúthien loves Beren so much that she goes to the halls of Mandos, lord of the dead, and sings of her love and grief, moving Mandos to allow Beren and Lúthien to return as mortals.



Before they died their final death, Beren and Lúthien had a son, Dior, who married Nimloth of Doriath, and they in turn had three children: Elwing, Eluréd, and Elurín.



But that was not the end of grief, for the sons of Feanor attacked Doriath, killing Thingol and many others. But Elwing escaped to the mouths of Sirion with the survivors.



At the mouths of
Sirion, Elwing
married Eärendil.
Their sons were
Elrond and Elros.



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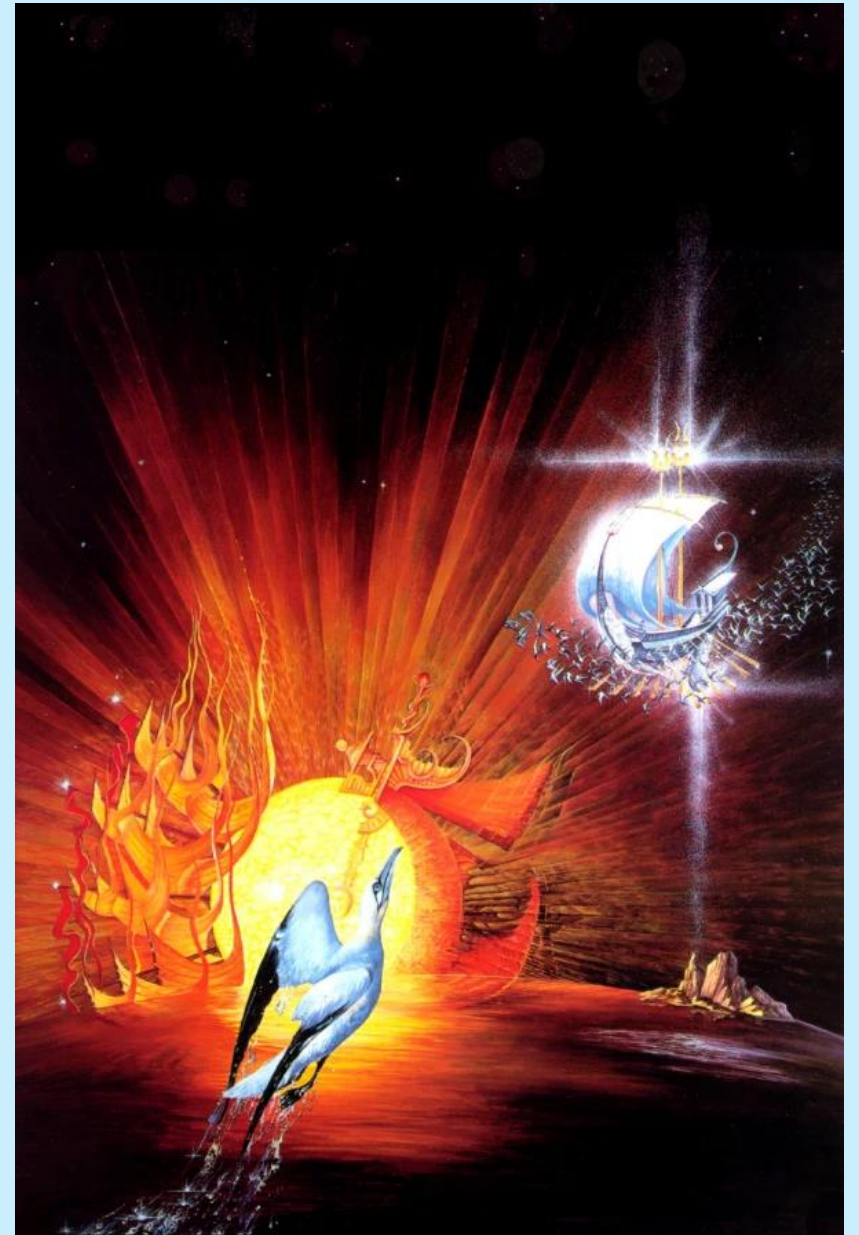
Ēarendil leaves
Elwing and their
sons at the
Mouths of Sirion
while he sails
westward,
fruitlessly
seeking the way
to Valinor.



The sons of
Feanor attack,
seeking the
Silmaril. Elwing is
granted the
shape of a bird
and flies to
Eärendil, bearing
the Silmaril on
her breast.



Together they win through to Valinor, where Eärendil convinces the Valar to act against Morgoth. Eärendil's ship is set to sail in the heavens, but Elwing is able to fly to him when his ship passes near Valinor. They never see Elrond and Elros again.



After all this, it is obvious that love mingled with grief was very much on Tolkien's mind.



Tolkien wanted to write the Silmarillion in AV!

- Multiple early attempts
- *Longest: Children of Hurin*
- *Other fragments (Flight of the Noldoli from Valinor, Lay of Leithian, Lay of Earendil)*

Tolkien and Alliterative Verse (AV)

- **Formative influences**

(Wagner's Ring of the Nibelungs, William Morris' House of the Volsungs, translations of the Poetic Edda & Prose Edda, etc.)

- **Scholarly influences**

(Siewers' theory of Old English alliterative verse – for the first time, modern people understood how AV works)

- **A scholarly career**

(Tolkien spent his scholarly life studying Old and Middle English AV -> biggest achievement, “Beowulf: The Monster and the Critics” on why Beowulf is great literature)

Internal Evidence: The Elves wrote AV!

*In the Lay of Leithian Release from Bondage
In linkèd words has long been wrought
Of Beren Ermabwed, brave, undaunted.
How Lúthien the lissome he loved of yore
In the enchanted forest chained in wonder.
Tinúviel he named her, than nightingale
more sweet her voice, as veiled in soft
and wavering wisps of woven dusk
shot with starlight, with shining eyes
She danced like dreams of drifting sheen,
Pale-twinkling pears in pools of darkness.*

-- Fragment of an alliterative *Lay of Leithian*

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-- Fragment of an alliterative *Lay of Leithian*

From Tolkien's translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*:

“thus linked and truly
lettered as it was in this
land of old”

From the alliterative *Destruction of Troy*:

“By locking of letters that left
were of old”

.

The source of all the grief ...

*Be he friend or foe or foul offspring
of Morgoth Bauglir, be he mortal dark
that in after days on Middle-Earth shall dwell,
shall no love nor law, nor league of gods,
no light nor mercy, not moveless fate,
defend him forever from the fierce vengeance
of the sons of Fëanor, whoso seize or steal
or finding keep the fair enchanted
globes of crystal whose glory dies not,
The Silmarils! We have sworn forever.*

-- Oath of Fëanor and his sons, from *Flight of the Noldoli from Valinor*

But also love even for the grieving...

Finduilas maybe faring lightly
on the sward he saw, or swinging pale,
A sheen of silver down some shadowy hall.
Yet to Túrin was turned her troublous heart
against will and wisdom and waking thought:
In dreams she sought him, his dark sorrow
with love lightening, so that laughter shone
in eyes new-kindled, and her Elfin name
he eager spake, as in endless spring,
they fared free-hearted through flowers enchanted
with hand in hand o'er the happy pastures
of land that is lit by no light of earth,
by no moon nor sun, down mazy ways
to the black, abysmal brink of waking.

-- From *The Children of Hurin*

So Tolkien fans have good reason to use AV to write about Tolkien's world!

- I confess to doing so!

See my Tales of the Avari on AO3:

<https://archiveofourown.org/series/3853291>

- And I am far from the only one

... see for instance: Alliterative Verse for Arda ...

<https://www.silmarillionwritersguild.org/node/7843>

and other works linked from <https://alliteration.net>

- A great opportunity for new fanworks ...

Opportunities!

1. I have proposed a Tolkien alliterative verse fan poetry workshop for Oxonmoot 2025 (contact me if you're going!)

pdeane@alliteration.net

2. I will be releasing a call for Tolkien fan poetry in alliterative verse for Summer, 2026

alliteration.net/call-for-submissions/

