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## A Critical Exploration of Costume Design Possibilities in Tolkien's Legendarium

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Running Head: Costume Possibilities in the Legendarium

**A Critical Exploration of Costume Design Possibilities in Tolkien's Legendarium**

**An Undergraduate Honors Thesis**

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**Fall 2018**

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### **Abstract**

Tolkien's Legendarium has in many ways codified modern fantasy. Illustrations and film adaptations of it have had far-reaching consequences on popular culture, building an 80-year tradition of visual depictions of Tolkienesque fantasy. Particularly, Elven characters are usually depicted wearing costume inspired by Victorian notions of Western medieval costume. In this paper I seek to approach the design of original costume for the Ñoldor from a different perspective, free from the established traditions of other designers' and illustrators' work.

The preliminary research focuses on searching the source materials of the Silmarillion and select texts from the Histories of Middle Earth. I looked at what happened to historic dress in Primary World cultures which existed in similar geographies and cultural climates to the Ñoldor in various stages of their history, focusing on materials, construction techniques, social markers, and values expressed.

The result is two preliminary designs of costume that could have plausibly been worn by the Ñoldor, with an explanation of how the design process for each was informed by textual clues from Tolkien's writings, extrapolation from Primary World cultures in similar social and geographic contexts, as well as my own intuition as a costume designer.

### **Acknowledgements**

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### **Introduction and Explanation of Importance**

The canon of stories set in J. R. R. Tolkien's world of Arda, known as the Legendarium, has been depicted in a variety of visual media including live action and animated films, stage musicals, video games, and illustrations. These visual depictions have been dominated by a Victorian, Anglocentric costume style, characterized particularly by Pre-Raphaelite-influenced costume for the Elves. These depictions also portray "good" characters as overwhelmingly white, despite the fact that the texts are often ambiguous or in direct contradiction to this interpretation. Since the Lord of the Rings has in many ways codified modern fantasy, such depictions have far-reaching consequences on popular culture.

In this project I approached costuming of the Legendarium from a different perspective, free from the established traditions: the current traditions of Tolkienesque fantasy and the older tradition of Victorian medievalism on which it is based. My designs were informed by three factors: textual clues, extrapolation from Primary World cultures in similar social and geographic contexts, and inspiration from cultures that inspired Tolkien. Since my expertise lies mostly in European and to some extent central Asian costume, I did not attempt to incorporate styles from other parts of the world which I am not as familiar with, but I made an effort to depart from the England/France area, instead incorporating a strong Baltic and Caucasian influence.

### **Glossary of Key Terms**

Ainur – quasi-angelic beings who function as the pantheon of deities in Middle Earth. They are divided into the Valar and lesser Maiar (Tolkien, 1979, Valaquenta).

Aman - a continent across the ocean to the west of Middle Earth (Tolkien, 1979, p. 32).

Arda – the name for the world in which the Legendarium is set, referring to the planet itself rather than the entire universe. A subset of Eä (Tolkien, 1979, p. 394).

Armscye – the opening in a garment into which a sleeve or armhole facing is set (Barnhart & Barnhart, 1987, p. 113).

Bullion – a dense embroidery stitch made by running a thread through a coil of thread or metallic wire (Barnhart & Barnhart, 1987, p. 262).

Ëa – the name for the world in which the Legendarium is set, referring to the entire universe (Tolkien, 1979, p. 10).

Fad – a fashion trend characterized by its rapid adoption and short lifespan (Barnhart & Barnhart, 1987, p. 763).

Fagoting – a technique for sewing seams with a decorative openwork stitch (Barnhart & Barnhart, 1987, p. 764).

Fëa – the spirit or soul of an Elf (Tolkien, 1993, p. 218).

Hröa – the corporeal body of an Elf (Tolkien, 1993, p. 218).

Legendarium – the works and stories of J. R. R. Tolkien concerning Middle Earth and the surrounding lands (Tolkien, letter 163, June 7 1955).

Middle Earth – a continent on Arda where the Lord of the Rings and the bulk of the Silmarillion takes place (Tolkien, 1979, p. 424).

Primary world – the so-called real world in which we live (Tolkien, 1966, p. 36).

Valinor – a specific, habited region of Aman (Tolkien, 1979, p. 32).

### **Literature Review and Discussion of Existing Designs**

The most prominent Tolkien illustrators of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Alan Lee, John Howe, Ted Nasmith, and the Brothers Hildebrandt, all illustrated the character of Galadriel in Lothlorien, and comparing these illustrations provides a good example of the codified nature of dress in depictions of Tolkien's Elves. Greg and Tim Hildebrandt's (1976) Galadriel is unquestionably

pre-Raphaelite; she wears a trained white gown with full trumpet sleeves girt in gold and extremely reminiscent of Edmund Leighton's 1901 painting *The Accolade* (Leighton, 1901). In Alan Lee's rendition (N.D.), Galadriel also wears white, the trimmings on her gown and her girdle of silver rather than gold. Lee's Galadriel's gown has close-fitting sleeves with points over the hand, a full-length grey mantle, and a band of ornamentation around the wide round neckline. John Howe (1991) depicts Galadriel in a lilac gown, fitted in the bodice and relatively full in the skirt, with gold trimming around the neckline similar to the silver trim in Lee's Galadriel, with slashed undersleeves pointed over the hand and white oversleeves puffed at the shoulder and left hanging like very full tippets. Howe's Galadriel is facing away from the viewer but what is either trimming or a girdle is visible in gold around her waist, as well as bands of gold around her upper arm and the hem of her gown. Ted Nasmith's (1995) Galadriel seems to draw stylistic inspiration from the sword-and-sorcery genre, wearing a rather primitive-looking columnar sleeveless white gown, once again with a silver girdle tooled with art-nouveau styled patterns. All of the Galadriels except for Lee's wear simple golden circlets.

In *The Hobbit* (Rankin, 1977) and *The Return of the King*, (Rankin, 1980) directed by Rankin and Bass, Elrond wears varying shades of dove grey (some of which might be interpreted as purple in the film's muted color palette) in an ensemble inspired by early 20<sup>th</sup> century fairytale illustrations. The base layers of his ensemble are difficult to distinguish but appear to be a robe of dark grey with relatively wide sleeves, with bands of white at the cuffs, as well as what might be a dark inner mantle. Elrond's outer mantle is the most visible garment, with a high stylized collar, draped around the back and shoulders in a very art-nouveau manner and fastened with a chain and two brooches across the chest.



*The Lord of the Rings* (1978) directed by Ralph Bakshi (Bakshi, 1978), places Elrond in a simple white t-shaped tunic that looks more like a late 1970s t-shirt than anything else, with a red mantle draped over one shoulder and fastened around the neck, a wide belt, and a large medallion worn on a chain.

*The Lord of the Rings* trilogy of films (Jackson, 2001, 2002, 2003) directed by Peter Jackson with costumes designed by Ngila Dickson, draws heavily from earlier depictions. Female Ñoldor like Galadriel and Arwen wear the pre-Raphaelite gowns favored by the 20<sup>th</sup> century illustrators, almost always with trumpet sleeves and bands of trim around wide round necklines (occasionally high collars are substituted on more masculine-styled ensembles) and shoulder seams, the girdle so omnipresent in the illustrations transformed into a fabric sash which reflected the same y-shaped line. Male Ñoldor like Elrond take inspiration from Rankin/Bass' Elrond, with high-necked mantles and wide sleeves, in heavy velvets and brocades influenced once again by pre-Raphaelite paintings.

In terms of scholarly articles, searches for key words 'Tolkien and dress' as well as 'Tolkien and costume' found few useful results. In "Vague or Vivid?: Descriptions in *The Lord of the Rings*," published in *Tolkien Studies* Vol. 10, Nils Ivar Agøy (2013) discusses Tolkien's use of descriptive language and finds that Tolkien typically describes dress rather sparsely, leaving room for the imagination.

"Racism And Middle Earth," (Askmiddleearth, 2014) an article published by the blog *Ask About Middle Earth*, explores the racism inherent in the Legendarium, as a product of Tolkien's own upbringing. Besides being a very good discussion of the issues with racism in the Legendarium, it also reveals that many popular conceptions of the peoples of Middle Earth are

not consistent with the way that Tolkien envisioned them. I mention this article as it brings to light the problems associated with a Western Eurocentric visual portrayal of Arda.

Karen Wynn Fonstadt, a cartographer, has written a book called the *Atlas of Middle Earth* (Fonstad, 1981) which derives information about population shift, biomes, etc. from the geographic information presented in the original texts. This is essential information for creating plausible costume for the peoples of Middle Earth as it provides a base from which to extrapolate fiber availability and cultural trade.

Robin Anne Reid's essay in the book *The Body in Tolkien's Legendarium: Essays on Middle-Earth Corporeality* (Reid, 2013) discusses the iconography of Tolkien's descriptions of women, touching on color symbolism in dress and the extent to which Tolkien described the clothing of various female characters, touching also on the ways Tolkien describes the bodies of his Elven characters. Gabrielle Lissauer's book *The Tropes of Fantasy Fiction* (Lissauer, 2015) is a general discussion about how visual tropes in fantasy can be used to create associations and build expectations, including tropes of costume.

### **Development Plan**

Because of the vast scope of Tolkien's world of Eä and the cultures therein, I narrowed my focus to the Ñoldor, one of the divisions of the Elves. Since the Ñoldor feature the most prominently in the *Silmarillion* and other texts concerned with the First Age of Arda (rather than in Third Age works such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*) we are provided with a significant amount of information about their culture and language but virtually no descriptive passages about their dress. This to my mind makes them an ideal culture to explore in this project as there is information to work with but also room for a variety of visual interpretations.

The preliminary research focused on the source materials of the Silmarillion and select texts from the Histories of Middle Earth. The first step was to develop a timeline of events which might have a notable effect on dress (migrations, war, various other types of demographic shift, technological advancements, succession of monarchs, etc.) This timeline was used in the rest of the research phase and in the design process itself to provide some measure of temporal stability. The next step of the research phase was to search for descriptions of dress, however minute, in the source texts and compile them in relation to the timeline.

After preliminary research I focused on what I refer to as similar-context Primary World cultures; that is, I looked at what happens to dress in cultures of the so-called real world, which exist in similar geographies and cultural climates to the Ñoldor in various stages of their history.

The creative project proper was much less of a straight-forward process than the research phase. I began by dividing my timeline into distinct periods of dress and created a visual timeline consisting of very rough gesture sketches intending to show how silhouettes might change over time. I then chose a particular point in time (just before the creation of the Silmarils) to focus on for detailed designs.

For the rest of the project I explored possibilities for a variety of costumes for Ñoldor in my selected period, including costumes for various genders, socioeconomic classes, professions, affiliations and occasions. I created 2 ensembles in half-scale (to reduce costs of materials, as well as construction time), documented the process with photographs and provided justification for my material choices.

### **Design Process and Creative Works**

To imagine an entirely new fashion one has to imagine a fashion history from which to build. At the start of the project I spent a good portion of time imagining the circumstances

surrounding the birth of clothing in Arda, to establish Elvish attitudes towards the body and dress and the reasons for them, as well as to give a foundation for my work. The roots of Elven culture of any kind are traced back to the region of Middle Earth called Cuiviénen. To conceptualize the Ñoldor's deepest attitudes towards clothing and create a starting point for a speculative history of their dress I tried to visualize the sort of world in which dress was born. The Quendi (the Elves' earliest name for themselves before sundering into various groups) (Tolkien, 1979, p. 48) awoke to a world of starlight and dusk, the sun and moon not having appeared yet, and the light of the two Trees in Aman dispersed over a great distance. The exact location of Cuiviénen is unknown but it was somewhere in the Northeast of Middle Earth (Tolkien, 1979, p. 48). The name of the inland sea of Helcar, meaning "Icy," (Tolkien, 1992, p. 292.) indicates that the region was rather cool, with cold winters and mild summers. This gives us our first clue to shape how we will think of Elven clothing in the next ages: in the Primary World examples of early clothing fall into two categories: draped or sewn. Draped clothing, found in areas nearer to the equator such as Mesopotamia, is generally cool to wear while still providing protection from the sun and other elements, while clothing which is sewn from cut pieces to fit the body relatively closely provides better heat retention and is found in cooler climates like north Europe and North America. The inhabitants of Cuiviénen would most likely, then, develop sewn clothing to keep their bodies warm, making simple trousers and t-shaped tunics. There is no evidence of agriculture or animal domestication at this time, so textiles would have to be made of fibers found in the wild, such as nettles. These fibers could be woven with inkle and tablet looms; or by using a twining method on a large frame or between two trees (C. Vance-Grayson, personal communication, June 1, 2018).

With a starting point established, we can continue to develop a rough timeline of a hypothetical evolution for Elven dress, noting important events that would have an effect on clothing.

### **Timeline**

(Note that the exact amount of time passing between most of these events is unclear)

The Arrival of Oromë: after some unspecified number of years dwelling in Cuiviénen, the Quendi have their first encounter with the angelic Ainur in the form of Oromë the Hunter (Tolkien, 1979, chp. 3; 1993, p. 219). Oromë's arrival and the information he brings with him will affect clothing by altering the Elves' conception of selfhood and the body: by bringing awareness of the Ainur as god-figures (which could potentially alter or introduce conceptions of modesty) and the knowledge of the endurance of Elven souls—or *fëa*—and eventual re-embodiment. Thus, at this point in time, while the body is not exactly *expendable*, its role as a housing for the much more enduring *fëa* becomes much more important than the idea of body as an essential part of the self.

The Valar, the greatest of the Ainur, invite the Elves to travel to the land/continent of Aman, both for the protection of the Elves and for their fellowship (Tolkien, 1979, chp. 3). The journey itself from Cuiviénen to Aman itself is long and somewhat eventful but for the topic at hand it is not worth discussing in detail aside from mentioning the fact that this is the point where most scholars recognize the subdivision of the Quendi, that is, all of Elvenkind, into the various races of Elves, one of which is the Ñoldor, who are the focus of this project.

Arrival in Aman: the arrival of the Quendi in Aman is one of the most drastic turning points in Elven fashion history. The two factors that have the greatest effect on Elvish dress are climate and the introduction of leisure time that comes with the development of agriculture and

the departure from hunter-gatherer society. According to cartographer Karen Wynn Fonstad, the climate of Valinor would most likely be warm all year, or at least temperate with warm summers and mild winters (Fonstad, 1981). With the warmer climate comes access to new fibers such as cotton, linen, and silk (Hollen, Saddler, & Langford, 1973). Food security and the absence of danger combined with knowledge of immortality causes the purpose of dress to shift away from pure protection of the hröa and more towards expression and adornment, possibly showing more skin and using finer fabrics. The *Silmarillion* implies that there were no flowers east of Valinor at this point in Arda's history, (Tolkien, 1979, p. 62) so this is when floral patterns might appear for the first time in Elven textile design. Thus begins the Noontide of the Blessed Realm (Tolkien, 1979, p. 67).

The Noontide of the Blessed Realm: during this period Rúmil, a scholar from the city of Tirion in Aman, invented the first writing system (Tolkien, 1979, p. 67) which could then bring about the invention of fashion. The ability to write down and share information is revolutionary, making it possible for people who are physically far apart to talk about what each other are wearing. This is when clothing and fiber arts become an art form, with the work of revered artisans such as Míriel being especially sought after.

The Ñoldor spend this period inventing, discovering, and developing new technologies, crafts, and art forms. One of the artisans that draws the most attention from Tolkien is Míriel, who earned the epithet Serindë, meaning “the broideress,” for her skill of weaving and embroidery (Tolkien, 1979, p. 67). We know from early versions of the *Silmarillion* that pieces done by Míriel specifically was held in very high esteem and in later years were treasured as heirlooms (Tolkien, 1993, p. 185).

The Death of Míriel: Míriel was married to Finwë, the king of the Ñoldor, and had a son named Fëanor who would become the greatest craftsman of the Ñoldor. The birth of Fëanor exhausted Míriel's spirit (Tolkien, 1979, p. 68) which departed to Mandos (the Elvish analogue to the afterlife). The death of Míriel served as a stark reminder that Elves can die. This dramatic shift in the collective mood of Valinor would certainly prompt aesthetic changes in fashion, perhaps a shift back towards modesty and more somber colors and designs. An exploration of the Míriel's death and its effects on Elven fashion could be an entire paper in itself.

The Second Marriage of Finwë: sometime after Fëanor's adolescence, Finwë remarried a lady of the Vanyar (one of the other two races of Elves who came to Valinor). Finwë's new Vanya wife Indis would surely introduce Vanyar fashion to the Ñoldor court. Vanyar tend to be less practical (in the sense that that word can ever be applied to Elves) than the Ñoldor, being less concerned with craft and knowledge and more interested in poetry and reverence for the Valar (Tolkien, 1992, p. 136). In my interpretation this is the point where I bring in inspirations from the Caucasus Mountains, such as sweeping shaped sleeves, jewel-tone velvets, and gossamer veils.

Fëanor Matures: the lifetime of Fëanor before the darkening of Valinor brought even more technological advances, opening up new possibilities for design. The art of creating synthesized gemstones (Tolkien, 1992, pp.137-139) changes the patterns popular for textile design and embroidery to accommodate these large gems into their design, and the level of chemistry knowledge needed to create these gems might also be applied to creating acid dyes in new vibrant colors. Metallic bullion embroidery could potentially become popular and mechanically-minded artificers might create jacquard looms.

### **Information Inferred From Primary Texts**

In terms of fiber availability, It seems quite obvious to me that silk would be available in Valinor (although not Middle Earth) given the latitude and the fact that the raising of silk worms and the spinning of silk is the craft that seems compatible with Tolkien's idea of pure science (Tolkien, letter 135, October 24, 1952) and the jurisdiction of Yavanna. I don't think that synthetic fabrics would be available, as their manufacture requires the use of fossil fuels and, as we have seen throughout the *Silmarillion* and the *Lord of the Rings*, the use of manufacturing with fossil fuels is associated with evil and the corrupted *maiar* of Aulë, found in Sauron's corruption of Númenor and Saruman's conquest of the Shire (Tolkien, letter 96, January 30, 1945; Tolkien, letter 135, October 24, 1952). Regarding the usage of silk, I do not think that silk would be scarce in Valinor, and therefore would not be a symbol of status as it is in the Primary World (although it may become so in later ages of Middle Earth). Instead, status through dress is indicated by workmanship. I considered the idea of silk painting as surface adornment but in the end I decided not to keep this idea as painting does not seem to be one of the arts which Tolkien indicates as being beloved by the Elves. Instead Tolkien places the emphasis on embroidery, several times citing embroidery among the most treasured crafts of the Ñoldor (Tolkien, 1979, p. 35; Tolkien, 1992, p. 135). Plant fibers such as cotton or linen are probably also available, as mentioned earlier.

One of the essential questions to ask when designing costume for any culture is: how does this culture view the body? According to the *Laws and Customs of the Eldar*, Tolkien's Elves had a distinct *fëa*, or spirit, and *hröa*, or physical body. The division is practical as well as conceptual: while the *hröa* is capable of dying, the *fëa* is immortal (within the duration of the world) and can exist without a *hröa* or be embodied into a new *hröa*. Thus self-hood is attached to the incorporeal *fëa* and the body is a housing for the self rather than an extension of the self



(Tolkien, 1993, p. 217). What does this mean for costume, then? Clothes do not function as an extension of the body (and body image) and therefore the self as they do for mortal men. The body itself is not the art to be highlighted by revealing or concealing garments, but a canvas to display the art of the clothes themselves. This is a subtle difference but an important one in terms of design and aesthetics.

### **Creative Design Research Questions**

How slowly or quickly do fashions change? This is a question that puzzled me for a while, given the timescale in which the Elves live. I decided that overall silhouettes evolve quite slowly, due to the long lifespan and absence of death of the Elves, but do indeed evolve (just as Tolkien has shown linguistic drift to occur). However, fads—which derive from a sense of novelty and whimsy rather than a changing worldview—would come and go as they do in the primary world, with their birth and disappearance happening in a shortening timeframe as developing technology facilitates communication.

To what extent is Elven clothing gendered? Tolkien writes about Elven gender roles in the *Laws and Customs Among the Eldar*, published in *Morgoth's Ring* (1993). The main difference seems to be that, in general, women tend to be concerned with healing, renewal, and study while men deal more with the dealing of death, (i.e. hunting, or warfare if needed) creation, and invention. Tolkien makes a point to mention that these gender roles are general and flexible rather than rigid and strict.

In terms of clothing, these gender differences don't manifest themselves in any meaningful way besides the practical differences that come from different occupations being more prevalent with certain genders. I decided the most noticeable difference would be in the undershirts which, while mostly the same shape, for men have an opening that only reaches to

mid chest and buttons at the neck, while women's shirts have a center front opening all the way down closing with buttons to facilitate potential breast-feeding, recognizing the general theme of women as nurturers and creators of life.

I next answered the fairly straightforward question of who makes the clothes and the related but more nuanced question of who sets the fashions. In his discussion of Elven gender roles Tolkien mentions that Elven women usually take on roles dealing with cloth and clothing, mentioning specifically spinning, weaving, "fashioning," and adornment (Tolkien, 1993, p. 231). Since Ñoldor society values artistry and craftsmanship, it seems plausible that Ñoldor clothing would be made by specialized weavers and tailors.

I decided that in my interpretation fashions are set by a combination of top-down and bottom-up processes. The artisans who design the clothing build off of each other's creative processes. For the sake of simplicity I am going to use the word *designer* to refer to any of the artisans involved in the creation of clothing, be they textile designers, broiderers, or those who draft and drape patterns and design the final garment. As soon as one designer's innovation arrives on the scene other designers are quick to create their own interpretation. At the same time designers strive to have a style that is recognizably their own as well as to tailor each design to the personal needs and preferences of the individual wearer (obviously mass-production is not present here, for reasons I mentioned earlier about manufacturing versus pure science).

The last few questions I answered prior to designing were sociological: how does clothing communicate status? What else might clothing need to communicate or express in this culture? Is clothing used to set the wearer apart or help them conform? In Valinor, materials like silk and metallic threads are not necessarily scarce, so status is communicated by demonstrating one's own skill, or connections to important people. With few markers for gender incorporated

into dress, one of the most important communicative functions of dress is denoting profession. For example, agricultural workers might wear trousers that are fuller and shorter than the standard formal trousers demonstrated in my prototypes, and gathered below the knee. Shorter jackets are worn by people who tend to have more active jobs while long overrobes are worn by scholars and people who have more sedentary jobs.

Clothing is used as a means of self-expression as well as to indicate in-group status as members of families or subcultures, political groups, or rival ideological factions. Just as Fëanor and his supporters distinguished themselves linguistically by retaining Fëanor's Shibboleth (Tolkien, 1996, p. 331), they also identified themselves with the red plumes on their helmets (Tolkien, 1979, p. 75). Later, as Melkor began to spread division and dissent among the Ñoldor this will become a much more important function of clothing.

### **Primary World Inspirations**

In a world created by a philologist and shaped by linguistics, it makes sense to let linguistics guide my creative processes. Tolkien himself was heavily influenced by Finnish when developing his Quenya language and the Elves who spoke it (Tolkien, letter 163, June 7, 1955), so I looked to the clothing of Finnish and other Uralic peoples for inspiration. I saw the Misty Mountains that the Quendi crossed on their journey to Aman as a sort of analogue for the Ural Mountains, and used the traditional costume of Eastern Uralic ethnic groups such as the Khanty as my basis for early Elvish clothing, and then pulled more influence from Finnish costume as I developed my designs. I spent several months living in southern Finland and working in the textile collection of the Helsinki University Museum with my sketchbooks always at hand, trying to develop a sense of the Finnish design philosophy and what made Finnish clothes recognizably Finnish. I looked to Finnish design especially for inspiration in terms of

attitudes towards the body and material. The cold climate of Finland requires many layers of clothing during the winter, obscuring the body and leading to a disconnect between garment and body similar to that experienced by the Elves. Finnish designers tend to manipulate the cut and style lines of their clothes in such a way so as to emphasize the qualities of their materials, such as bold textile designs or the unique hand of wool felt. This resonated with my understanding of Ñoldor clothing as a means to showcase textile design and craftsmanship.

I also wanted to incorporate design elements that would be familiar to audiences acquainted with the pre-Raphaelite tradition of Legendarium costuming, but keep drawing from non-Indo-European cultures. I found what I was looking for in the Caucasus, particularly in Georgian and Adyghe costume. Inspiration from the colors, textiles, embroidery, and sleeve styles of Caucasian costume helped me incorporate aesthetic cues into my designs that would help audiences recognize them as *Elvish*.

### **Final Physical Prototypes**

The first ensemble I designed was for a male Goldsmith (figure 1, figure 2, figure 3). The ensemble is quite formal as well as traditionally cut; however, with the jacket and the overskirt removed and the shirt untucked from the trousers it could be much more casual. The shirt is cut in a design based off of the cut-on-the-square shirts of traditional Khanty costume (figure 7, figure 8). The front panel is made of silk and wool brocade is all that shows once the vest is on, giving the impression that the entire shirt is made of fancier fabric when really the bulk of the shirt is made of much cooler and more comfortable fine linen. The fagoted seams done in silk thread indicate the Ñoldor values for fine workmanship even in basic everyday items. The standing collar and pointed cuffs (figure 9) are visual cues that allude to the previous pre-Raphaelite traditional depiction and help the audience connect this design to their previous ideas

of Elves. While this project is intended to break pre-conceived notions, it is *still costume design*, and thus the designs still have to assist in storytelling by relating to the audience's web of preconceived ideas of who wears what. The shirt tucks into brocade trousers (I used polyester because that was what was available, but they would probably be made of more wool/silk blend in situ) which are wide-legged and simple in design in order to showcase the design of the brocade. The fullness in the trousers is achieved with wide inverted box pleats at the center front and center back. The back pleat fastens with a hook and eye which can be easily moved to adjust the width of the pleat and therefore the waist measurement of the trousers, providing size flexibility over the long lifespan of the Elven wearer (figure 10).

The shirt and trousers combination on its own can serve as a casual ensemble but the addition of a vest and a velvet surcoat and overskirt adds a new level of formality. The vest (figure 5, figure 6) is modeled after Finnish folk costume with wide triangular armholes, while the surcoat is more Caucasian in style, with hanging sleeves serving as an ideal canvas to showcase embroidery by a revered brooder. The embroidery is done on a piece of fine mesh which is then cut out and tacked to the velvet, so that the valuable embroidery can easily be removed and transferred to a different garment when the surcoat begins to wear out (figure 4). The surcoat is cut to hang loosely from the shoulders while remaining in place, and a cut-out on the back showcases a panel of gold maille made by the wearer himself, the fineness and suppleness of the piece is a subtle testament to his own skill as a smith.

I designed the second ensemble (figure 11, figure 12, figure 13) for an academic woman, perhaps a philosopher or historian. She is a little bit more fashion-forward than the smith, which shows especially in her shirt, which she wears untucked and belted (figure 15). While her shirt is based on the same cut-on-the-square design as the previous shirt, this one has a much slimmer

cut allowed by the pin tucks in the chest, (figure 16) and the fullness in the sleeves is achieved by slashing and spreading rather than by gathering a rectangle, which concentrates the fullness at the wrist. (This sleeve design would probably not be a good option of the smith even if he did like the look of it, as it has a shallow cap and is notorious for binding at the shoulders when the arms are raised. The rectangular design of the smith's sleeve allows for a significantly freer range of movement.) The shirt is made of lightweight linen and, like the smith's shirt, incorporates sections of showier fabric, but in a more stylized way, using iridescent silk chiffon in the sleeves and collar for a color-blocked effect. Despite being modern, casual, and deceptively simple, the shirt is an example of incredibly fine workmanship, as evidenced by the tiny tucks, the silk thread fagoting in the side and shoulder seams, (figure 17) and the sleeves, which even in half-scale took me upwards of six hours each to make and set into the shirt.

The trousers are of similar design to the smith's trousers, being wide-legged and made of a floral brocade, but fastening at the sides. Instead of an overskirt and short surcoat suit, a similar silhouette is achieved with a long sleeveless overrobe. The pattern of the robe has extreme flare from shoulder to hem, and side panels with what would be the side seams shifted towards the front. The armholes are the same wide, triangular armholes inspired by Finnish costume as seen on the smith's vest. The robe is made of silk velvet and underlined with silk satin to provide structure to the flare. A waist stay inserted into the interior of the side seams causes the robe to be fitted to the body in the front, but full and loose in the back (figure 14). The wide panels of the design are ideal for surface ornamentation to be added, if the wearer so chooses.

## **Discussion**

Overall I think this project was successful. I was severely limited by time and could not devote as much detail to many aspects of the project, which is why I want to encourage other scholars and designers to think about their own interpretations of costume in the Legendarium and possibly exploring deeper into certain areas. I was also limited by the materials that were available to me. I was unable to find many silk and wool brocade fabrics in production and thus had to resort to substituting some polyester brocade in my prototypes.

I wanted to depart from Eurocentric visions of Elven costume, but I was limited by my own knowledge of the Primary World, which specializes in European fashion history. I was able to avoid specifically Indo-European influences in my design, but I wish I had been able to bring more inspiration from outside Europe altogether. I would love to see a similar project from someone familiar with the fashion histories of Asia, Oceania, Africa, or the Americas.

I hope that this study will encourage a shift in the way we imagine Tolkien's characters, leading to a much more diverse conception of the Legendarium. I also hope that the method of creating a fictional fashion history that I demonstrated in my design process will be useful to costume designers adapting other fantasy projects for visual media.

### **Ideas for Further Exploration**

Patternmaking: as humans we tend to divide our bodies into Front and Behind (or possibly, seeable and un-seeable.) This is reflected in the way we conceptualize patterns, creating front and back pieces with side seams and reflection across the center line. Could Elves conceptualize and divide the spaces of their bodies differently? Instead of golden rectangles could their sacred geometry be circular, or spiral-based, and how would this effect the construction on their clothes? I explored this somewhat by eliminating or manipulating the side seams in everything but the undershirts of my designs, but it could be taken further. I have

mentioned that twining, a method of weaving in the round, would be accessible and probable for the early Quendi of Cuiviénen, which could make for some interesting designs.

Embroidery design: one of the only aspects of dress that Tolkien mentioned often is embroidery. What might a typical Ñoldor embroidery design look like? Could the family and personal crests drawn by Tolkien be incorporated into these designs? Where on the body would embroidery be placed? What motifs would be popular and how would they reflect Ñoldor values, for example, would we see designs of the Two Trees or constellations, or abstract patterns and fractals inspired by the Ñoldor's beloved gems and minerals?

Supply chains and garment life cycles: I mentioned the idea that clothes would be made by specialized artisans. How many of these clothing artisans are there? Would they come to a client's home for measurements and fittings or would they have a shop? How involved is the client in the design process? What does cheap clothing look like? There are also questions raised by the long lifespan of Elves and the comparatively short lifespan of textiles. Is there a way to design garments as modular, with pieces that can easily be replaced as they wear out? Could embroidery be done on mesh or organza and basted to clothes, then removed and applied to a different garment when the item it was originally on wears out? Are clothes discarded as soon as they exhibit fraying or small holes, or is it culturally expected to mend your clothes and continue to wear them as long as possible?

Later ages of Middle Earth: in this paper I designed for a point in time just before the Darkening of Valinor, in a period of peace and plentiful resources. My timeline could be extended into the later events of the Silmarillion and even the Third Age and the War of the Ring. War and geographic displacement have marked effects on resource availability as well as the psyche of a cultural group, which translates into dress. How might the dress of the Ñoldor



change as they go to war, lose access to the silk that was so readily available in Valinor, experience several abrupt changes in leadership, and have to face more death than they have seen since Cuiviénen?

### **Conclusions and Implication**

The lack of material found in my literature review suggests that potentialities for dress in the Legendarium is an area that has not been explored before, and I think that it is an area that could yield many interesting papers and discussions in the Tolkienist sphere. I am excited to see the response to this paper.

I think an important next step would be for various other scholars and artists to conduct their own projects similar to this one. I do not intend for my designs in this project to be seen as definitive, that is, designs for what *should be*, but rather to put forth one possibility of what might or could be. It is my belief that the codification of the visual element of Tolkien's secondary world has inhibited the potential impact of the Legendarium. The wide scope of Arda allows for a myriad of interpretations, each one of which enriches the collective experience of Tolkien fandom and scholarship. My hope is to encourage a diversity of interpretations, a phenomenon which currently seems to be happening in the realm of fanworks but does not seem to have been explored in the academic capacity as shown in this project.

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Appendix



Figure 1. Sketch of a formal ensemble for a male Elven metalsmith



Figure 2. Formal ensemble for a male Elven metalsmith, front.



Figure 3. Formal ensemble for a male Elven metalsmith, back.



Figure 4. Sleeve detail of surcoat.





Figure 5. Shirt and formal vest for a male Elven metalsmith, front.



Figure 6. Shirt and formal vest for a male Elven metalsmith, back.



Figure 7. Shirt for a male Elven metalsmith, front.



Figure 8. Shirt for a male Elven metalsmith, back.



Figure 9. Shirt sleeve detail



Figure 10. Back closure of trousers for a male Elven metalsmith



Figure 11. Sketch of an ensemble for a female Elven scholar



Figure 12. Ensemble for a female Elven scholar, front.



Figure 13. Ensemble for a female Elven scholar, back.





Figure 14. Robe for a female Elven scholar, interior and waist stay.



Figure 15. Shirt for a female Elven scholar.



Figure 16. Shirt for a female Elven scholar, details.



Figure 17. Shirt for a female Elven scholar, side details.