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**TRANSGRESSING THE CONVENTIONS: THE
DEGREE TO WHICH TOLKIEN BENDS
GENDER NORMS IN THE LORD OF THE RINGS**

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ÖZ

TRANSGRESSING THE CONVENTIONS: THE DEGREE TO WHICH TOLKIEN BENDS GENDER NORMS IN *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

ASLI SENA ÖZARPACI

Bu tez çalışması, gelenekselci ve katı bir Katolik olarak değerlendirilebilecek 20. yy yazarı JRR Tolkien'in eseri olan *Yüzüklerin Efendisi*'nde kadınların yerini araştırmaktadır. Feminist kuram çerçevesinde yapılan araştırma dahilinde yazarın geçmişi, büyümüş olduğu çevrenin yanı sıra içine doğduğu ve süregelen sosyal ve dini değerler, dünya savaşları, Feminist akım ve bir yazın türü olarak fantezi ele alınmıştır. Epik öyküler ve geleneksel yazın alanında çalışan ve Katolik olarak yetiştirilen Tolkien'in, okurlarının dünya görüşüne uygun, cinsiyet farkı gözetilen hikayeler yazdığı düşünülebilir. Ancak yakından bir okuma yapıldığında, Tolkien'in fantezi edebiyatı geleneklerinin dışına çıkarak geleneksel karakterlerin yanı sıra farklı karakterler de yarattığı görülmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Yüzüklerin Efendisi, cinsiyet araştırmaları, feminizm, 20. yüzyıl, fantastik edebiyat.

ABSTRACT

TRANSGRESSING THE CONVENTIONS: THE DEGREE TO WHICH TOLKIEN BENDS GENDER NORMS IN *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

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This study considers the place of women in *The Lord of the Rings* written by J.R.R. Tolkien; who can be considered to be a traditionalist in terms of his social and literary life, and a strict Catholic. Written within the scope of Feminist theory, this study tackles the author's background: the environment in which he lived and the social, religious values into which he was born; the world wars; contemporary attitudes to Feminism; and fantasy as a literary genre. In possession of an academic knowledge of epic tales and traditional stories, and having been raised as a firm Catholic, one may think that Tolkien writes a gender-biased story conforming to the world view of his readership. A closer reading, however, reveals that Tolkien actually amends the well-trodden paths of fantasy literature and creates non-conforming characters as well as traditional ones.

Keywords: The Lord of the Rings, gender studies, feminism, 20th century, fantasy literature.

PREFACE

The purpose of this study is to discuss the way Tolkien portrays men and women in the *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55). While writing this study, I have made use of the Feminist framework as well as gender studies in fantasy-fiction genre. Female figures and how they stand in relation to male characters in the story have been subject to analysis. The significance of the lack of mother figures and how this is compensated; the male figures and how they differ from their counterparts in traditional epic stories are also considered at length. Finally, the Ring and how, as a pivotal symbol, it relates to gender issues within the story are defined.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my supervisor Assoc. Prof. Yıldız Kılıç for her unwavering support and understanding, for broadening my perspective in gender studies and specifically guiding me to further understand Tolkien's place in 20th century English literature. My time studying English Literature has been the best years of my life and I have all the professors and lecturers in the department to thank for that – particularly Dr. Buket Akgün who helped us explore the fantasy genre on a deeper level in her classes. On a private note, I would like to thank my mother who has been a wonderful example for me in life with her courage, wisdom and independence. I am also grateful to my sister Seda and brother Serkan who have supported me not only during the process of writing this thesis by helping me find the best resources, but also throughout my life: I cannot thank you enough for introducing me to the works of Tolkien. Last but not least, I would like to offer my thanks to my dear friends Damla Tanla and Oylun Albayrak Apak for proofreading my work. “May the blessings of elves and men and all free folk go with you!”

İstanbul, 2019

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INTRODUCTION

This study aims at exploring the social role designated for women in the society of an artificial and secondary world created by J.R.R. Tolkien in his fantasy fiction work *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-5). Hence, one of the discussions in this dissertation will be the author's choice of limiting the majority of his female characters to conventional roles; while he is capable of creating non-conforming and bold females with heroic storylines at the end of which, they too are eventually domesticized. Another dimension of the study will be the lack of mother figures or their having no place within the adventure of the Ring, while father figures constitute a large portion of the novel. The fantasy genre mainly revolves around the male, and although we see many families in the novel, mother figures are curiously missing. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to point out the position of Tolkien's women within his artificially created Middle-Earth by making use of the author's Catholic background, his view of women and men in general, and the global wars of the twentieth century.

The place of women, particularly their significant absence in the male populated novel, has been a topic of discussion among Tolkien and English scholars alike. For instance, Brenda Partridge argues that the absence of any sexual desire, and the negation of the women indicate an obsolete outlook, almost bordering on misogyny (*No Sex Please – We Are Hobbits*). Jennifer Neville points out that Tolkien's women are marginalized characters who embrace their traditional roles eventually ("Women" *Reading The Lord of the Rings*, p. 101 – 110). Analyzing the absence of women in relation to the concept of fertility, Hugh Keenan draws a

parallel between industrialization (destruction) and the inevitable disappearance of women (ie. the nurturer, and fertility) (*Tolkien and the Critics* “The Appeal of The Lord of the Rings: A Struggle for Life”, 62-80). He mentions how “Tolkien regards advanced tools and mechanics with suspicion”, and how Saruman has “a mind of metal and wheels” (74). As industrialization is a mechanical force causing the destruction of nature, so all things natural die, and this turns into a struggle for life.

Brought up by his mother who was a Catholic convert, and her friend Francis Morgan, a Catholic priest, Tolkien is heavily influenced by the ideals of Catholicism: he tends to draw a parallel between his few female figures and the Virgin Mary. Therefore the prominent women such as Galadriel the elven queen, Arwen the elven princess and Éowyn the shieldmaiden of Rohan are subsequently described in connection with purity, wisdom, beauty or innocence, which recall the idea of the ‘Angel in the House’¹ from the nineteenth century. It seems like Tolkien classifies women under two stereotypical categories in which women become either angelic or monstrous figures. So that while the female characters paralleling the Virgin are equated with Christian perfection, some of the others are either robbed of their femininity and masculinized or turned into grotesque and scary female figures, reflecting what the author thought a rebellious female would amount to. In addition to this, some of the lowly female characters are reflected as figures who talk a lot but make little sense in conversations governed by masculine practicality.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien writes about a male-driven quest and therefore his tale is dominated by male characters. Although there is no complete

¹ Looking back at this period, we see that this term alludes to the ideal wife as opposed to an equivalent of Virgin Mary. Nevertheless, the idea of the ‘Angel in the House’ is a powerful stipulation of female domesticity.

exclusion of the female, they are generally under-represented as the ever-waiting mothers (almost never mentioned), wives or lovers, and never used in prominent roles to be involved in the mission of the Ring which will determine the future of the Middle-Earth. The absence of female figures in the text is significant, yet the novel does not lack values and concepts traditionally associated with the female: we see powerful displays of love, a devotion for family, and the concept of nurture, yet these are mainly projected through relationships among the males. Exclusivity of such values to the male makes the reader look for the female characters as these are concepts traditionally associated with women.

Tolkien's personal letters reveal that he was not a supporter of social transformation advocated by the feminist movement (Tolkien and Tolkien, 1981: 48). It is especially significant to note that Tolkien thought "it is [women's] gift to be receptive, stimulated, fertilized (in many other matters than the physical) by the male" (Tolkien and Tolkien, 1981: 49). Consequently, his female characters in *The Lord of the Rings* are remnants of mythical or religious figures that pave the way for him to create lives that he and his male readers (supposed audience of fantasy-fiction which is dominated by male ambition and aspirations) are already familiar with. Creating such lives for women in his novel, Tolkien is much at ease in governing them to be objects rather than subjects because like many others he is not sure how to perceive the *New Woman*. In the upcoming chapters, I will be discussing some of the female figures who are allowed a limited freedom, which show Tolkien's ambiguity on the subject.

Tolkien's prejudices towards the Feminist Movement that came with the new century make one consider these new movements from his perspective. Although

women could not gain equal status with men in terms of voting until 1928 (in England), they emerged as a deviation from the traditional woman, demanding their rights and participating more in the active world. These women endeavoured to alter the image of themselves that has been solidified throughout the ages. As Simone de Beauvoir describes in *The Second Sex* (1949),

...Woman is at once Eve and the Virgin Mary. She is an idol, a servant, the source of life, a power of darkness; she is the elemental silence of truth, she is artifice, gossip and falsehood; she is healing presence and sorceress; she is man's prey, his downfall, she is everything that he is not and that he longs for, his negation and his *raison d'être* (de Beauvoir, 1949: 163).

As women struggled to break free from these clear-cut definitions of the social construct, the society was bewildered in placing this new kind of being in social life. While the First Wave Feminists literally 'fought' to gain equal rights with men in active life, there was also a sociologic war to change mentality as described by de Beauvoir. The suffrage movement showed women that they could go beyond their domestic sphere and be a part of the "active" world at large as men had always been; however, it may have caused men, especially those returning from the war, to feel intimidated by the presence of such women within social territory traditionally theirs.

Tolkien was aware of the Feminist Movement but he was more interested in running to the rescue of an essential component of fantasy-fiction: the hero. In *Roots and Branches* (2007) Tom Shippey explicates the reflection of rebellious modernity in literature:

...By the time Tolkien became an Oxford Professor in 1925, popular opinion had changed drastically. These were the years of ascendancy of modernism; of T.S. Eliot and 'The Waste Land'; of Evelyn Waugh and his satirical novels; of E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Group. The connecting factor was disillusionment and irony, especially against anything associated with military virtues. Heroes were out of fashion. It was impossible to take epic, or saga, seriously in the modern world (Shippey, 2007: 199).

As Tolkien shaped his works around the *faerie*, his world order was built upon an emphasis of good and evil, hence the morals of his stories are simple and understandable: just like in fairy tales. Although Frodo might be considered an imperfect hero with his tragic flaws,² the author does not allow the task of the Ring to fail, hence there is always another hero waiting to save the day. With this, Tolkien tried to raise the hero that died with the War and Modernity from its ashes. As a traditionalist, Tolkien wanted balance in his works as well as a counter reaction to the despair that grew with the world wars. The reason why it is important for the Feminist Movement at the time is that Tolkien wanted to reawaken in people's minds the possibility of having a hero, which is based more on the needs of the individual rather than on society (which concerns Tolkien), and he denies women the opportunity of becoming the hero in *The Lord of the Rings*. Although Galadriel and Éowyn, who represent the 'good side', seem to be involved in the mission, the tasks entrusted to them are those that are traditionally considered to be feminine, such as weaving magical elven cloaks for the fellowship, or taking care of the people of Rohan when the king is at war.³ It is true that Éowyn, not listening to her uncle, goes to fight in the war and slays the Witch King of Angmar. However, her active role in the quest of the Ring comes to an end when she is wounded, and sent to the Houses of Healing, where her life as a soldier will end and she will get married to become yet another princess waiting for her husband.

² As the power of the Ring takes over Frodo, he grows vile, insolent, and forlorn, which eventually impacts the fortune of the Ring and the quest.

³ To Tolkien and his contemporaries, a hero would be an active force very much like those from the epic tales. His internalised cultural instruction would teach that nurturing, although something superior to destruction, is a feminine virtue and does not connote the kind of power a hero would have.

On the other hand, five of the most important characters in *The Lord of the Rings* are hobbits: a race which is not considered to be as complete as men or as powerful as the elves. Hence a parallel is directly drawn between hobbits and women. In all three volumes of *The Lord of the Rings* hobbits are treated as burdens or thought to be best left behind while they fight back to be a part of the quest. In that respect, the main heroes of the quest complement the women, and are somehow a reflection of the position of women in a phallo-centric society. However, when we look at the social construction of hobbit society, we see how hobbit women share the same fate as their elvish and human counterparts: they have to stay at home and wait for their husbands (Rosie Cotton) or stand for their rights and be seen as evil noisy beings (Lobelia Sackville-Baggins).

The absence or the under-representation of women in *The Lord of the Rings* highlights the over-representation of the male in the novels. The brotherhood between the characters shows itself even from the titles of the volumes which are *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*. While all three of these titles denote a sense of manhood, the novels also brim with masculine symbols and traits.⁴ While this is not an anomaly in the fantasy genre, it is significant how women are eliminated from any kind of friendship or unification, which would require the traditionally human characteristic of emotions or communication.

⁴ For instance Tolkien gives an immense importance to the horses owned by male leaders such as Gandalf, who has the fastest horse in all Middle-Earth, or Aragorn the future king. Similarly, almost all male characters are armed with swords that have special names and a special kind of power. While Frodo's Sting warns its bearer for the approaching orcs, Aragorn's Narsil not only emphasizes the line of kings Aragorn belongs to but also plays an important part in the tale of the Ring. Likewise Gandalf and Saruman hold staffs of magical power. This importance given to such phallic symbols shows the unconscious importance Tolkien gives to manhood and the kind of fellowship created for such a task, hence his insistence to reject the absence of men and come up with heroes for modern times.

Nevertheless, *The Lord of the Rings* is built around an object, the One Ring, which stands in complete contrast to the phallic symbolism in the novels. While the Ring appears as a manifestation of evil, it is the one thing that is desired by numerous characters. Being circular in shape, a ring may be associated with eternity, perfection and unity; while it is equally possible to see it as a feminine symbol for the womb or the entrance to the womb, the vagina. On the other hand, the Ring is bound with the evil personage of Sauron, who is portrayed as male. Considering all the allusions to the destructive nature of the Ring, and its connection to the fellowship, the Ring also stands as a masculine force in the story. Reading the Ring as the vagina will also masculinize it in terms of a symbol of infiltration, masculine potency and power. This study will also discuss Tolkien's choice of this symbol asking whether the author makes his characters fight for or against the Ring.

The main purpose of the study is to discuss specifically the issue of femininity and feminine presence (and absence) both within the context of the novel, and incidentally within the author's private life and ideas. The study also aims to explore whether Tolkien's neverland Middle-Earth stands as a speculum of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER I

TOLKIEN AND THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Catholicism, War, and Women

This study will trace back to the resonations of the twentieth century and its major social shifts in Tolkien's works, along with the changes in his personal life. Within this framework, it is important to discuss the impact of Tolkien's Catholic upbringing, his ideals moulded by a Victorian and Modern perspective, and the post-war societies in his works.

Born in South Africa in 1892 only to leave it after 3 years, Tolkien was raised by his mother Mabel in the sustained absence of his father who worked in South Africa as a bank manager. It is easy to see the reflection of his mother's Catholic beliefs while we cannot say the same for Mabel herself. The reason why is that when we look at most of Tolkien's works, the image of woman still appears as a miniature of the Virgin Mary, who was especially accentuated in the Victorian era. For instance, Galadriel is the pure and sanctified woman who represents the Virgin Mary; likewise, in all three volumes of *The Lord of the Rings (TLOTR)*, characters like Éowyn and Arwen are portrayed in such a way as to highlight their purity and beauty as opposed to their tenacity. This seems to be a speculum of the mindset of Tolkien as a man and as an author. Although it is possible to see stronger female characters in

his other works,⁵ Tolkien is more in touch with the meek woman or those who are active because of qualities considered to be typically feminine such as foresight or witchcraft. Therefore the story lines and endings he produces for women are limited or overpowered by the shadow of the male in *TLOTR*.

Acting as the head of the house in Africa, Mabel educated her two sons Hilary and John both in terms of culture and religion. She home-schooled them and tried to teach them foreign languages including Latin; told them stories and encouraged them to read (Blackham, 2011: 3). When she converted to Catholicism after the death of her husband, she risked being cut down by her own family as well as that of her husband. Obviously in the 1900's converting to Catholicism and Catholics themselves were still considered to be alien and anti-Anglican. As a result, the Tolkien brothers were raised without the financial support of their grandparents but with the stories of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary as told in the Bible and taught in papal teachings. This, as mentioned before, is an important aspect in Tolkien's works as he not only creates characters that are modelled after the Virgin Mary who represents the virtuous mother, and is therefore an ideal for him; but he also creates a whole new world based on biblical stories and extended moral narratives of good and evil. As the source of this religious world view, Mabel inspires Tolkien to write about wives, daughters and ever-waiting innocent lovers, although she has only partially been one. While she waited for her husband and was a loving mother to her children, she was also a strong figure declaring her independence *within* the

⁵ In *The Silmarillion* and *The Unfinished Tales*, there are many female characters who go beyond the traditional roles ascribed for women. Some of these are Lúthien, Haleth and Idril. These characters are strong-willed leaders (Idril creates a secret tunnel under the city that eventually saves their people during a fire and Haleth becomes a remarkable chieftain of her people when her father and brother die) who do not abstain from risking their own lives to save those that are dear to them.

partiarthal structure with her conversion to Catholicism. Her attitude seems to be one reason why Tolkien was not completely sure of his stance in regard to women in his works: his striving to achieve a balance between the two ideas of being against the idea of the strong woman while conversely supporting and empathizing with it.

Although his father was like a mere shadow from the past, Tolkien's life was not void of male impact. After her conversion, Mabel Tolkien met Father Francis Morgan who supported the family morally and acted as a surrogate father to the Tolkien brothers. As Father Morgan also told them stories and took them out to little trips, Tolkien eventually familiarized himself with the male point of view along with the point of view of late Victorian women. Therefore his wise and old male characters who speak less but act and perceive more seem to be reminiscent of this male impact suggested by Father Morgan and what he stood for in terms of religion and, for Tolkien, of life.

A deeper analysis reveals that *TLOTR* series represented more than a religious ideal of woman for Tolkien and for people around him as this religious ideal is merged with the Victorian idea of the 'angel in the house'. Originating from the ideal woman in Christianity, this concept puts forwards the image of a Madonna-like female image who is selfless, modest, pure and passive. While Tolkien has only a few female characters, none of whom are protagonists, he remains faithful to the ancient classification of women as angels or monsters, adding only a limited dimension to them. His angels portray the Victorian icons of perpetual submission. Raised by a strict Catholic mother and a Catholic 'Father', Tolkien justifies these icons and sees the ideal in characters like Galadriel and Arwen. Another important factor why Tolkien finds relief in such a stereotype is the century he lives in hence

the social changes he faces in society. Although *TLOTR* is a work published in the 1950's the stories are penned long before the publication. Having seen the world wars and the cultural shifts that came about with them, Tolkien is as anxious as his fellow men when it comes to women. As women convert from the idea that "marriage is the true profession of women" to the idea that "new gospels of Education and Work" (Schama, 2002: 160) are needed for women, the social trends change and the new woman arises. Unable to truly comprehend and appreciate the Feminist movement, Tolkien cannot support this new active woman who is creating a stable place for herself in the public sphere. To him, women need to be bound by the protectionism of the male since "he regarded the female intellect as largely inferior to the male" (Carpenter, 1978:169). When Victorian sense of control over life is added to this idea, the result is the creation of female characters who are already familiar to Tolkien and probably familiar to other men in that century. As he does not want to lose that kind of control which has already been established and accepted by the female too, Tolkien continues to make use of the stereotypes. In her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", film theorist Laura Mulvey argues that the male gaze dominates movies while turning women into simple objects to be looked at and states that the gaze could be classified as "voyeuristic" and "fetishistic". She defines voyeuristic gaze as the gaze that declares control over the object, while fetishistic gaze turns the object into a fetish and starts overvaluing it to an unreasonable level (Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", www.wiki.brown.edu). As the cult of *angelic woman* continues to reign in the Victorian era, we could say that Tolkien is in a way using a fetishistic gaze to further idolize the Victorian cult of the angelic woman to an even greater unrealistic extent. His perception is still heavily

affected by Victorian and Christian ideals to put women into descriptive boxes and not let them step out of the given cultural norms.

Although it is mentioned in this study that Tolkien does not have a voyeuristic opinion of women, some of his female characters still tend to portray a foil for others who represent the typical woman. As a result of this, some of the characters who try to take control of their own lives and step up like the New Woman are *somehow* likened to the monstrous woman as opposed to the ‘angel in the house’. For instance Lobelia Sackville-Baggins, Bilbo Baggins’s cousin, is seen as a nuisance when she claims that she is next in line to take ownership of the Bag End. As Victorian language of flowers indicate, lobelia means “distinctive” (“Language of Flowers”) or stands for “malevolence” (*Cinquefoil*, p.134). It seems that Tolkien meant Lobelia to be different from his angelic women, alluding to the well-known contrast of the Virgin Mary and Eve, and through whom he rendered his ideas on how the new woman may possibly be. In fact Lobelia does nothing but stand for her rights. However she is not welcomed by Bilbo and is caricatured by Tolkien as a boring and nettlesome woman. At the end of the novel, Lobelia is applauded by her folk in Shire who declare that during the invasion, “she showed more spirit than most” (Tolkien, 1954: 990); yet Tolkien describes her as “very old and thin” and she has to walk leaning on Frodo’s arm although she insists on “hobbling out on her own” (Tolkien, 1954: 998). In the end she gives back her heart’s desire Bag End to Frodo, who will, later on, give it to his beloved friend Samwise as a present. With all these references at hand, it is not easy to say that Tolkien favoured the Feminists and Feminist activity or stood against them. To him, like many men of the century, assertive women with bold actions are best redeemed like Lobelia at the end even if

they want to manage themselves and “hobble out” on their own. On the other hand, he presents a new and uncommitted view of women that insinuates a possibility to the standard notion of women as unidimensional beings.

Another important aspect of Tolkien's *TLOTR* is the way it is shaped during the years of the second world war and Postmodernism. Written between 1937 – 1948, *TLOTR* does not only stand as a mirror of these major events but also expresses the author's obvious or hidden anxieties and hopes about them. While WWII becomes one of the catalysts of Postmodernism in the arts and the social world, Tolkien cannot help but create an escapist world which reflects his inner struggles and frame of mind about the new century and what it will bring.

Having taken part in the Battle of the Somme during WWI, Tolkien experienced the despair and disillusionment at first hand. Although he was sent back home shortly after the beginning of the battle due to ill health (*Letters*), Tolkien was much moved by the idea that his countrymen died for their nation and wrote a great part of *The Silmarillion* (a history of the Middle Earth in *TLOTR*), while in his sick bed, so that he may give life to the heroic epic he thought England lacked (Coren, 1999: 12). As he was also aware of the disappointment and frustration of the ones left behind, he wanted to turn their rebellion into a possible hope for the future in a made-up world and so he created heroes. Contrary to the individualism of modernity, Tolkien's heroes in *TLOTR* represent a certain need in society; a need for figures that inspire hope, and are very much like saviors for the non-heroes. Tolkien counts on them to *save the world* selflessly and ignite hope. In this respect, it seems more likely that Tolkien disagreed with the rebellious and pessimistic nature of early

Postmodernism, hence the literary tendencies of his contemporaries who had a more grim tone without much hope for the future.

However, by the time Tolkien started writing *TLOTR* with his experiences from WWI, he did not expect a second world war or the tyranny of 20th century leaders. While the victory of the Entente Powers did not satisfy Tolkien, as he never wanted to be a part of the destruction of nature and human beings, his world of the faerie was encouraged by the possibility of a comeback of peace and goodness to the world. With the beginning of WWII, however, a new wave of hopelessness swept several nations and the evil of the Primary World became a constant in Tolkien's Secondary World. In his essay "Tolkien and Iceland: The Philology of Envy", Tom Shippey parallels the evil in these two worlds from Tolkien's perspective saying, "Evil seemed to be unconquerable, to rise again from every defeat. There was a strong impulse to give up, to make terms, to do the kind of deal with Sauron, or with Saruman, which is suggested several times in *The Lord of the Rings*" (Shippey, 2007: 201). Indeed, Tolkien used power at large and the power of the Ring specifically as a mind-tempting force in all three volumes of *TLOTR*; he made examples out of characters in power such as Denethor and Boromir that can be *applied* (and not alluded, as he would say) to the Primary World during and after the world wars. Still, Tolkien maintains his hope for the future with his flawed heroes. When one of them fails another comes up to save the others from Evil. For instance, when Frodo yields to the power of the Ring, Samwise appears to console him and in fact he allows the journey of the Ring to continue with that action. Consequently, his escape world is somehow scoured at the end of it all as he counts on his heroes to bring people/races together (as in the case of the hidden king Aragorn) and to achieve peace.

On the other hand, Tolkien does not seem to have the same level of confidence in his heroines. Although his fixation on the chivalric epic hero is damaged with the wrong choices male characters make or with lesser heroes' appearing to save others; Tolkien cannot come to terms with the possibility that female characters can be completely trusted. Even though he allows Éowyn to cross-dress as a soldier of Rohan to fight the battle of Pelennor and save her uncle King Théoden (with the help of hobbit Merry), Tolkien cannot let her become the hero of the day; he sends her back to where she belongs to get married. As is recorded in the national memory of England (and through myths too), there is no place for a woman to fight in the grand battles that will bring glory. Éowyn explains this quite clearly when she expresses her desire to go along with the men to fight the battle to Aragorn:

All your words are but to say: you are a woman, and your part is in the house. But when the men have died in battle and honour, you have leave to be burned in the house, for the men will need it no more. But I am of the House of Eorl and not a serving-woman. I can ride and wield blade, and I do not fear either pain or death (Tolkien, 1954: 767).

Although one might say that Tolkien is trying to put forward how the New Woman feels when she is left behind and how she cannot contain herself; it is not possible to ignore the rest of the conversation with Aragorn who comes up with a *finer* thesis than the princess when he says that it is not wise to cast away a valuable life such as hers so needlessly, while all Éowyn can respond with is simply a display of her love for Aragorn.

It is true that Modernism creates new kinds of heroes, but to Tolkien, these heroes will not be women. Although he seems to display a neutral stance in the issue of women, he is not able to overthrow the cultural and religious norms he believes in by placing women as heroes – a typically male status and domain. Moreover, the

Christian morality that the society created long before his time might come down if the hero was a woman. If Éowyn was allowed to fight in the battle as a princess, could save her uncle and return home with the rest of the warriors without having to marry but to enjoy her glory, it is doubtful whether Tolkien or his intended readers could handle it. That is the reason why Éowyn becomes Dernhelm, to be able to step out of her usual role as a lady and is limited with an aided glory (and she receives this aid from a hobbit) to fall ill in the end and meet her future husband during her recovery. Once again, Tolkien maintains the balance in his imaginary world by not spoiling the wonted system and trusting manhood to save the day.

Considering the period during which the story was written, it is also easy to see a fear of backlash with regard to feminism. As Feminism was thought to have achieved its purpose with the 'earning' of the right to vote, any more support to it would mean championing women over men and that was intimidating. Tolkien, as a male fantasy writer, could not afford to lose his audience by elevating women in the extraordinary way of giving them credit for power, putting them in charge and depicting them as strong characters. What he did was to create a balance between the adamant male figure and the rising new woman without avoiding the authority of the male or empathizing overtly with the female. In fact, it is highly likely that Tolkien himself was at a loss as to how to handle the issue of the position of women within society and whether it should be discussed within the framework of the idea of the New Woman. Writing for a genre that ironically demands an almost complete alienation of women (or at least follows a certain pattern of witches and beautiful meek ladies as female characters), Tolkien could only do so much for them. As a result of this, *TLOTR* can stand neither as a proof that Tolkien had zero belief in equality between

the sexes nor as his acknowledgement of the emancipation of women. In that respect, we can see Tolkien's fear of social recrimination and inability to manipulate the fantasy genre.

Being a Roman Catholic of mostly traditional views (Carpenter, 1978: 154), Tolkien reflects the world as idealized by his religion and through religious idealism in his works as well, which is another driving force for the above mentioned dilemma regarding the place of women. What he experiences in his personal and social life due to the example set by his mother and the social transformation England goes through as well as the immediate trauma of the war contradicts with the world view he would experience as a part of his religion. As he considers the loss of tradition being a threat (Coren, 2001: p.132) to the world, he cannot simply demolish what he firmly believes in order to support women in their cause or present a different perspective with regards to women in his works. Obviously, this is another point which drives Tolkien to almost shun women in *TLOTR* and not refute the arguments suggested by religious and cultural traditions.

On the whole, there are various reasons that affect the way Tolkien prefers to portray men and women in *TLOTR*, because of these, it is not always possible to see Tolkien in a clear light and to condemn him outright as an anti-Feminist author. Like the rest of his contemporaries he seems to be struggling to understand the radical changes that comes with Modernism, the World Wars and Feminism. Although he acknowledges the outcomes of these movements, he cannot truly accept them as a part of his literary or personal life and let go of the ideals that he would consider the foundation of religion or a healthy society.

CHAPTER II

FEMALE FIGURES IN THE LORD OF THE RINGS

Analysis of the Existing Female Figures⁶

Since there are only a few female figures in the series, it is not very easy to understand the mindset of Tolkien concerning women or Feminism. Consequently, a study particularly on women in Tolkien's *TLOTR* seems like a study on something that barely exists. However, this absence might prove helpful in deciphering the author's inclination in this matter. What this study aims to achieve is to bring out the otherness, marginality and/or stereotypicalness of minor and major female characters in the novels.

A superficial look at Tolkien's *TLOTR* indicates that Tolkien did not really mean his female characters to be central to the narrative as protagonists. The quest for the Ring, which is central to the plot, begins and ends as a masculine issue. Lesser quests within the novel are led and finalized by the members of the fellowship as well.

On the other hand, the one battle is fought for the Ring, which stands as a contrast to the traditional symbol of vessel which implies that the ultimate decision maker is the man and the female is simply an intermediary. Traditionally in fantasy genre and Arthurian literature (which might be taken in parallel with the text we are discussing in this study), the mission would be related to the Holy Chalice: a typically feminine religious relic. As opposed to this tradition, we see the Ring as the eventual mission, which is crucial as a symbol because it is not a traditional religious

⁶ I opt to use the word 'existing' because not all female characters actively take place in the text: some of them are simply named but we never see them.

relic. It is very much pagan, and for Tolkien it somehow reflects the traditions of the Nordic cultures he deeply admires. While the power and the implications of the Ring will be discussed in the upcoming chapters, it is important to note at this point that Tolkien is not simply neglecting or overlooking women but might be inferring more than he actually seems to be.

Before moving on to the female characters within the novel, it is important to take a look at the way Tolkien's Middle Earth is set. Although being a traditional man in his personal and literary life (Carpenter, 1978: 154), Tolkien prefers to dethrone the archetypes of the Sun and the Moon as symbols of men and women respectively. In Middle Earth, the roles of the Sun and the Moon change and the Sun becomes 'she' as the Moon becomes 'he'. This might be just an arbitrary decision on the part of the author while it may well be that he is trying to present a brand new world to his readers who are used to the symbols and archetypes of the traditional novel writers.

Associated with Apollo in Greek mythology, the Sun represents truth and knowledge and is, inevitably, associated with the male. The Moon, on the other hand, is traditionally associated with Apollo's twin sister Athena hence the feminine and represents emotions, the stages of birth, life and death, and mutability of women. Subverting this conventional imagery, Tolkien provides a possibility; an alternative form of existence to men and women in his magical reality.⁷ Gollum, Tolkien's pitiable anti-hero who cannot stand to see the light of the Sun, is therefore challenged by the power of the female in the order of the Middle Earth. Light is the source that

⁷ It is also crucial to note that Tolkien studied Germanic languages and literatures where Sun is always referred to as female and the Moon is male.

does not let Gollum extend his evil in the terrestrial world. With this, Tolkien opens up a door to say that knowledge and reason does not belong to men only, that with a simple twist it is possible to share this power with the female.⁸

On the other hand, we cannot be so bold as to say that Tolkien is a revolutionary and is using this very specific imagery to support women in their cause and show them in a 'light' other than that which has been used throughout the ages. Strictly insisting that he does not like allegory nor makes use of it in his works (*Letters*, p.297-8), Tolkien may simply be playing with the world as we know it. After all, right after Gollum shakes his fist at the female Sun, he finds a womb-like cave and "worm[s] his way like a maggot into the heart of the hills, and vanish[es] out of all knowledge" (Tolkien, 1954: 53). The imagery used here says that somehow Gollum needs the womb and the female to hide himself.

As previously mentioned, there are three main female characters in the trilogy, all of whom seem to represent a certain aspect of the idealized woman or the witch in traditional sword and sorcery tales. In *Women in Science Fiction and Fantasy*, the three are briefly outlined as "Arwen, the elf maid, is the mostly absent love interest of the hero. Galadriel, an elf queen filling the role of the sorceress, and Éowyn, the warrior maiden who gladly gives up both battle honor and her desire for Aragorn to wed Faramir..." (Reid, 2008: vol.I 43). On one level, these three characters alone push the reader to the point of believing that women are simply irrelevant to Tolkien except when they are put on a pedestal and venerated, like the author himself would for his mother and the mother of Christ. On another level, however, his female

⁸ While Tolkien provides this alternative reality for his genre in English literature, he is not the first to do this for the canon: Shakespeare reversed the imagery of the Sun and the Moon several times in his works.

characters become multi-faceted when the author reflects his own inability and confusion to perceive femininity and his predicament concerning where the female should stand in the 20th century. In this respect, the reader might catch glimpses of a wider exploration of the idea of virginity, innocence, obedience or witchcraft as defined in women.

Tolkien owes much of the character of Galadriel, the elven queen to “Christian and Catholic teaching and imagination about Mary” (Burns, 2005: 108). Right from the beginning, with such a clear attribution, Tolkien points out that one of his most important female characters is based on the ideal woman in Christianity. Without a doubt, this makes it difficult for this character to stand out as more than just the venerated queen, who is much respected by everyone and considered to be the pure and grave wife of Celeborn. Throughout all three volumes of the novel too, she keeps up with this image consistently except for rare cases which will be referred to later.

First of all Galadriel is not admired or respected exclusively by elves but by all races, including dwarves, who have a vendetta against the elves. While she has the elves’ respect from the very beginning, she overpowers and gains the respect and admiration of others mostly only after they meet her. The easiest and the most significant example that comes to mind at this point is Gimli the dwarf. Not having heard of the Lady Galadriel (as referred to in Lothlórien) or at least not specifically having stated that he has heard of her, Gimli is very much enthralled by the fairness and beauty of Galadriel when he first sets eyes on her, although to him elves are the enemy. When the Lady refers to the ancient days of Moria and uses the language the dwarves used in the past, Gimli looks up and “it seemed to him that he looked suddenly into the heart of an enemy and saw there love and understanding. Wonder

came into his face, and then he smiled in answer” (Tolkien, 1954: 347). From this point on, Gimli almost dedicates himself to protect the name of Galadriel and challenges anyone who thinks ill of her. In the end, before the company leaves Lothlórien, Galadriel asks whether there is something specific they want from them. When it is Gimli’s turn to speak up, he is shy and, stammering he asks for a strand of her hair to keep it as a pledge of good will between the Elves and the Dwarves. This is the magic of Galadriel working on Gimli and a conventional aspect of women embodied in her.

Frodo’s story with Galadriel, on the other hand, does not only stand as an example for how Galadriel overpowers even different races but also depicts a different aspect of her, one that leads the reader to feel that she is the typical witch in tales. Before discussing this aspect of Galadriel and Tolkien’s choice of this attribute for her, it is important to take a look at the wording the author uses to emphasize Frodo’s feelings regarding Galadriel when the company is leaving Lothlórien. As the Queen presents various gifts to all members of the fellowship (all of which seem to highlight another attribution to Galadriel), Frodo, the hero of this quest, is given a crystal phial. The phial, which will save Sam and Frodo’s life in the next volume, shows her in a ‘light’ that makes her look like the pure queen again, “great and beautiful, but no longer *terrible* (my italics)” (Tolkien, 1954: 367). A phase of being *terrible* has passed so that now she is at this *no longer terrible* point; and the reason for this terrible queen image in Frodo’s mind is related to the experience Frodo had in the chapter entitled “The Mirror of Galadriel” in which he offers the ring of power to Galadriel. While the passage is too long to quote here, what is portrayed is Galadriel’s desire to possess the Ring. As Frodo offers the Ring, she admits that she

wanted the Ring once and now it has come to her: “In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! [...] Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! All shall love me and despair!” (Tolkien, 1954: 356). These are Galadriel’s words to describe herself when she thinks what might happen when she gets the Ring. What Frodo sees in physical reality is very much similar to what she says. In front of his eyes, she grows tall beyond measure, “beautiful beyond enduring, terrible and worshipful.” (Tolkien, 1954: 356)

Galadriel’s struggle against the power of the Ring or her “test” as she calls it, is on the one hand, certainly about the nature of the Ring, which we will come to; on the other, however, it is easy to connect this to Tolkien’s need to make room for a rather typical aspect (ie, a sorceress) in Galadriel’s character. By owning a magic mirror to show people the past, the future, the present or things that they dream about or dread, Galadriel is already a ‘witch’. Magic is a word (as Galadriel puts it) that is also used for the deceits of the Enemy. Therefore, her use of magic can be considered to be perilous, especially when the readers of the 20th century associates her with the stereotypical witches in tales. When she overcomes the desire to accept the Ring, Frodo feels like she shrinks back to a slender elf-woman with a soft and sad voice. She also says that she will “diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel” (Tolkien, 1954: 357). While this could be interpreted as Tolkien being subversive to the point of showing that there is more than one face to a woman, that even the simplest woman might turn into a “terrible queen” against the power of something they desire; hence taking them out of the stereotypical box of the selfless, unambitious woman and revealing their humane nature; it might also be an indication of his

conservative mindset. When the Ring – the symbol for masculine unity and power within the context of *TLOTR*- is offered to Galadriel, for a brief moment she is absorbed by the power of the male, and she becomes the man but only an imitation of one. Tolkien, although he condemns the destructive face of masculinity (with references to war as represented by the two towers in his work), masculinity still remains as the only motive. While it is not directly accessible to women, it is something women (in this context namely Galadriel and Éowyn) aspire to attain.

Many male characters in the series seem to imply that Galadriel is actually a witch before they see her.⁹ In *TT* Éomer says, “Then there is a Lady in the Golden Wood, as old tales tell! ... Few escape her nets, they say. These are strange days! But if you have her favour, then you also are net-weavers and sorcerers, maybe.” (Tolkien, 1954: 422) It seems that he is convinced even before he sees her that she is the evil witch who is mentioned in the tales. In this sense, Éomer stands as an everyman who would label any woman who is rumoured to be the witch just because she is not normative and is unconventional. Likewise, Faramir believes that Galadriel is perilous although he has never met her. Sam, on the other hand, defends her and implies that Faramir’s brother Boromir could see his heart’s desire (The Ring) and his own peril when he was in Lórien speaking to Lady Galadriel. He says:

It strikes me that folk takes their peril with them into Lórien, and finds it there because they’ve brought it. But you could call her perilous, because she’s so strong in herself. You, you could dash yourself to pieces on her, like a ship on a rock; or drown yourself, like a hobbit in a river. But neither rock nor river would be to blame (Tolkien, 1954: 664-5).

⁹ The fact that all these rumours men make around Galadriel come from those who have never actually met her parallels the social anxiety men have around the ‘modern woman’. Men of Middle Earth talk about Galadriel the same way a man (or woman) talk about the powerful and independent woman unleashed upon society in the 20th century.

With this, Sam implies that men are quick to judge the type of women they are not familiar with and blame them no matter what the situation is. What he says may be read as Tolkien making a statement about how unfair it is that people think the Battle of Troy was fought for Helen instead of admitting that men wanted that war. In this sense, Galadriel (and the way Sam is able to see her) becomes an instrument for Tolkien to show that some beliefs occur by custom and are not necessarily innate.

Another typically feminine task that Galadriel does (along with her handmaidens) is the weaving of the cloaks that are presented to the members of the fellowship before they leave Lothlórien. Weaving is not only a form of art but also a form of communication and is characteristically feminine (Kruger, 2002). Although he creates a powerful character like Galadriel, Tolkien is still careful to maintain feminine qualities such as these in order to, to some extent, meet the requirements of the majority view acknowledged by the society of his century. It should, however, not be overlooked that Tolkien adds to the conservative imagery of weaving a subversiveness acknowledged by feminist thinkers as the feminine past-time activity. Tolkien complements Galadriel with weaving, which, as mentioned above, usually has the ulterior motive of conveying a message without speech. Once again Tolkien achieves a balance between his fresh ideas concerning female characters and the expectations of the readers of his genre. Likewise, other gifts Galadriel gives to the fellowship are indications of her feminine traits while showing her in a positive light i.e. the giver, the regenerator, the Virgin Mary. The most important of these are the lembas bread and the wooden box she gives to Sam. Especially with these gifts, Galadriel provides the fellowship with food like a mother and the possibility of rebirth for the Shire as the wooden box she hands contains earth from her orchard

and a silver nut from a Mallorn tree. At the end of the novel, this soil and nut will regenerate life and bring hope back to the Shire. With this, Tolkien highlights the feminine traits that the reader can find in Galadriel, hence justifying his reasoning for taking the Virgin Mary as a model for Galadriel.

While Tolkien explains in his personal letters that the Virgin Mary is the ultimate inspiration for Galadriel, Galadriel is not always as passive or typical as she appears to be in *TLOTR*. Although it is not in the scope of this study, it is beneficial to look at the history Tolkien imagines for Galadriel to have a better reading of her and a better understanding of Tolkien's ideas. In one of his letters to a reader (dated 1967), Tolkien names Galadriel as being one of the Noldor who rebelled against the Valar (*Letters*, p.386). In *The Silmarillion*, the reasons for her taking a part in the rebellion are indicated in a way that emphasizes her restless nature:

...Galadriel, the only woman of the Noldor to stand that day tall and valiant among the contending princes, was eager to be gone. No oaths she swore, but the words of Fëanor concerning Middle-earth had kindled in her heart, for she yearned to see the wide unguarded lands and to rule there a realm at her own will. (Tolkien, 1977: 90)

Galadriel depicted in *TLOTR* is a mellow and unobtrusive version of this rebellious woman who has the curiosity to give up the comfort of her homeland to explore other lands and find herself a place to rule. Published posthumously, *The Silmarillion* offers a pre-*TLOTR* sketch of Galadriel and ultimately shows that Galadriel is not created as a flat character. Obviously, what we see in the trilogy is more of a passive woman without much contradiction but Tolkien's initial creation is something more than this. Galadriel is not simply a witch, a rebel or a beautiful queen; she is a woman with various traits. Galadriel appears like a character looking for redemption in *TLOTR*, especially when she sings the Song of Eldamar which

ends with a repentant line questioning whether she will ever be able to go back to her lands (Tolkien, 1954: 363). In the end she is indeed redeemed and she is no longer an exile and is welcome to return to her home. However, given the fact that she is the one who does not heed the pardon of the Valar in the first place and remains in the Middle Earth with Celeborn, she is still a woman taking ownership of her life. It is true that she cannot get hold of any land to rule in the Middle Earth because she marries Celeborn (another traditional ending for a woman); but she holds the power to carry one of the three rings offered to the elves which ultimately help her embellish Lothlórien, the home she created for herself.

The second female character to be analysed in the study is Arwen the elven princess. Granddaughter of Galadriel, Arwen stands as the ever-waiting lover of Aragorn, the ranger king of men, and seems to lack other qualities that would add another dimension to her character. Like Galadriel, she holds a title and is considered to be “too far above [Aragorn]” (Tolkien, 1954: 1034). However, her title and position do not grant her the freedom to act or take part in the affairs concerning Middle Earth. She appears to be so irrelevant to the main quest that the movie version (2001 – 2003 by Peter Jackson) strives to rectify this lack of representation by making her central and critical when she offers to take the wounded Frodo to Rivendell, as she rides faster than Aragorn. While in the novel we have a more subdued and traditional female character; a typical waiting lover.

One curious aspect of Arwen is that, fair as she is, she is likened to Lúthien by her people and others alike, hence their stories show great resemblance. Just as Arwen, Lúthien also falls in love with a mortal, Beren, and is confronted by her father Thingol who thinks a mortal man cannot be worthy of his daughter (just as

Elrond did). Thingol takes an additional step to prevent the couple's marriage. He asks Beren to bring one of the three silmarils to him, which were stolen by Morgoth, the rebellious Vala. Lúthien follows Beren and helps him take one of the silmarils – in fact, it is thanks to her that they take hold of the silmaril at all. In the end, she gives up her immortality, like Arwen, and marries Beren to start the half-elf lineage. The story of Lúthien and Beren and the silmarils take up a great part of *The Silmarillion* and what Arwen and Aragorn go through seem like a repetition of this, with the only difference that the heroine of this story is inactive and only waits; she is simply in the role of the lover of a great man. Whether Tolkien makes an amendment to the previous version of the same story or offers an alternative for the sake of rewriting this story in a literary sense, he presents something that complies with the majority view. What Tolkien, consciously or unconsciously achieves here is a balance between the possibilities he can see for women and the position patriarchal society can envisage them occupying. However, it is significant to note at this point that Tolkien holds the story of Lúthien and Beren very close to his heart; so much so that the names Lúthien and Beren are inscribed on his and his wife's tombstones.

Third and probably the most controversial female character Tolkien creates for his novel is Éowyn. The shieldmaiden of Rohan, who is referred to as the 'steel lily', is the one character that sums Tolkien's contradiction within himself perfectly. Taking a superficial glance at the character of Éowyn, one could say that she is simply a rebel: a woman who wants to break free from her traditional roles. When she first appears in the novel, she is referred to as 'the woman' tending the old king Théoden, who is poisoned by the words of his then right-hand man Gríma Wormtongue. As the story unfolds, her life as a princess continues and ends as

predicted. However, what she has more to show than what one would see at a first glance.

As the daughter of a mother who died of grief after the death of her husband, Éowyn's future is, to some extent, already written. While she stays at the Golden Hall tending her uncle, she is simply waiting for a suitable match to continue her life as a wife tending her husband and children. These expectations surrounding her, however, are not what Éowyn or Tolkien have in mind. Her character is exceptional in so many ways in that she is the one female character in Tolkien's series to express a desire to bend the rules for women and actually conceive of this as a right. While we cannot see any revolutionary statement about the woman question in this case either, Éowyn certainly makes way for a possibility although she is using the oldest trick: cross-dressing.¹⁰ Traditionally perceived as a means of freeing one from the social construct of gender definitions, cross-dressing helps Éowyn too, when she wants to prove the men surrounding her wrong, and show them that her gender does not define what she can or cannot do. It is only the male discourse that is attempting to define her actions.

Before moving on to what Éowyn does, we could also take a look at what she says and what others say or think about her to get a better portrayal of her character. Even before she acts on her desire to join the war with men, the members of the fellowship are aware that she is more than just a beautiful princess waiting for her future to be dictated by the men around her. When she appears in "The Two Towers"

¹⁰ Obviously, Tolkien is not the first nor the only one that uses this custom in his works. One great example is Shakespeare, who uses cross-dressing to provide more freedom to his female characters in his works. For instance, Portia from *The Merchant of Venice* cross-dresses as a clerk to save one of the characters. Throughout the play, she uses her wits freely while disguised as a male.

for the first time, the narrator describes her in a way that reflects the contradictions she has inside. She is fair but “strong and stern as steel, a daughter of kings.” (Tolkien, 1954: 504).¹¹ When Gandalf convinces Théoden to take his men and fight alongside with them against Sauron, the king names Éowyn’s brother Éomer as his heir but cannot decide to whom he can entrust his people whom he is leaving behind. At that point his trusted man Háma speaks up and says Éowyn should be the one taking care of his people as she is “fearless and high-hearted” (Tolkien, 1954: 512). In the following scene while the men are leaving for war, Éowyn is depicted at the stairs before the Golden Hall alone with a sword in her hand. The last sentence before the chapter ends, likewise, emphasizes her misery and her longing to go with the others instead of tending women, children and old people as she did for her uncle for a year: “Far over the plain Éowyn saw the glitter of their spears, as she stood still, alone before the doors of the silent house.” (Tolkien, 1954: 513). At this point, the reader should already realize that Éowyn is not simply a princess who will be content with the duties assigned to her, no matter how honourable they seem to appear in the eyes of her society.

Her desire to fight, to be loyal to her own nature and remain a woman who has desires rather than imposed obligations become apparent when her eyes shine as she hears of the victory men (Tolkien, 1954: 765) and explicitly expresses her wish to ride to the Paths of Dead with Aragorn, saying she is tired of “skulking in the hills”. When Aragorn reminds her that it is her duty, as she was chosen to care for the people, and that she consented to do this; she bitterly questions her place saying

¹¹ Éowyn is glorified for her affiliation with the male; her strength and her royal lineage. Her warrior qualities are accentuated in comparison with the masculine standard, which proves her superiority among others.

“Shall I always be left behind when the Riders depart, to mind the house while they win renown, and find food and beds when they return?” (Tolkien, 1954: 767). Clearly, she cannot accept her designated role and desires more. When Aragorn answers that unpraised deeds made in the name of protecting one’s house would still be as valiant as the deeds of men fighting in battles, she lashes out to question the roles attributed to women by society and brings up the possibility that women might want to win renown as well as men. She emphasizes her ability to wield blade and her fearless nature, adding that what she fears the most is a cage, “to stay behind bars, until use and old age accept them, and all chance of doing great deeds is gone beyond recall or desire” (Tolkien, 1954: 767). This statement is like a reflection of the 20th century women who managed to explore their inner self and fear to be caged in the domestic realm with the duties traditionally inflicted upon them. Tolkien, without letting Éowyn win this argument, nevertheless gives her the opportunity to speak her mind and shows that there is more to her than just being the niece of a king. Unlike other women in the novels, Éowyn begs and cries to Aragorn to ride with them to death. Obviously, she wishes to go with the company not only because she wants to win renown but also because she loves Aragorn. Still, the fact that her only reason is not love, as typically it would be in other stories featuring women, wins her further dimension and depth.

One of the reasons why Éowyn cannot be considered as a flat character is because she is neither a tomboy, a sexless woman, nor a puppet, therefore she is not extreme. Tolkien drafts an ordinary woman in her, with the exception that he adds a will of her own that is not bound by the norms of society. She is not completely an Amazon or a Valkyrie, which would be refused instantly by Tolkien’s readers.

Rather, as suggested earlier, Tolkien gives Éowyn a sort of limited freedom that he withholds from his other female characters. She is able to question her place within the patriarchal system, ask for more and act on it. However, she is not given the chance to complete her role as an active woman, with Tolkien letting her kill the Witch King of Angmar as a cross-dressed soldier with the aid of Merry the hobbit, then immediately sending her off to the Houses of Healing to meet her future husband, Faramir. In this respect, it is possible to say that Tolkien is “sympathising with the plight of a clever woman who had been trapped by marriage into leading an intellectually empty life” (Carpenter, 1978: 169); while his sympathy cannot go any further both because of the reality of feminism in the 20th century and because he himself does not seem to be involved with the woman question and cannot make up his mind about this for certain.

All thoughts aside, the story Tolkien writes for Éowyn is unusual for his genre and for himself too. One of the most significant parts of her story is her challenge with the Witch King. In the Battle of Pelennor, when her uncle is injured and at the mercy of the Witch King, she stands between the Nazgûl and the king at which the Witch King simply laughs and says that no living man can hinder him. This, in fact, is a reference to a foretelling of Glorfindel the elf who says that the Witch King will not be slayed by a man. The prophecy is fulfilled as Éowyn makes it known that she is not a man. Fearlessly, as any other soldier of Rohan would do for their king, she threatens the creature saying “Éowyn I am, Éomund’s daughter. You stand between me and my lord and kin. Begone, if you be not deathless! For living or dark undead, I will smite you, if you touch him” (Tolkien, 1954: 823). This she says and does naturally. She does not pretend to be someone she is not, and there is no artificiality

to her behaviour. What comes naturally to her; this duality in her character as a soldier contained within the body of a woman, is reflected through Merry's eyes:

Éowyn it was, and Dernhelm also. For into Merry's mind flashed the memory of the face that he saw at the riding from Dunharrow: the face of one that goes seeking death, having no hope [...] She should not die, so fair, so desperate! At least she should not die alone, unaided. (Tolkien, 1954: 823)

This duality she holds is also highlighted by Gandalf the wizard when she lays ill at the Houses of Healing after slaying the Witch King:

"My friend," said Gandalf, "you had horses, and deeds of arms, and the free fields; but she, born in the body of a maid, had a spirit and courage at least the match of yours. Yet she was doomed to wait upon an old man, whom she loved as a father, and watch him falling into a mean dishonoured dotage; and her part seemed to her more ignoble than that of the staff he leaned on [...] But who knows what she spoke to the darkness, alone, in the bitter watches of the night, when all her life seemed shrinking, and the walls of her bower closing in about her, a hutch to trammel some wild thing in?" (Tolkien, 1954: 849)

It is no longer possible for Éowyn to hide what her true nature holds. When she wakes up she says that she might have woken up to health as long as there is an empty saddle of a fallen Rider that she can fill and there are deeds to do (Tolkien, 1954: 850). She settles for the saddle of a fallen rider, hoping she can win renown and make the sphere of men a part of her own world as well. She is aware that other women are not a part of this world, for as soon as she is well, she asks the Warden of the Houses of Healing for news of war as "the women can tell [her] nothing" (Tolkien, 1954: 937). The way she asks the Warden to direct her to the commander of the city is lord-like and dominant. Once again she mentions how she feels as though she has been caged in sloth and idleness because there is no 'deed' for her to do. It is only when she realizes and acknowledges Faramir, her future husband as a man that no Rider could outmatch in battle, that she feels her attitude might seem childish and wayward. It is only then that Tolkien starts blocking Éowyn's way in

placing herself within the world of men as an active woman and writes a traditional future for her in which she becomes a wife and, possibly, a mother.

As the 'steel lily', Éowyn stands as a representation of not only Tolkien's confusion regarding the woman question but also a reflection of the confusion reigning over Éowyn. Making use of the ultimate symbol of purity, the lily,¹² Tolkien emphasizes that sanctified nature of woman that he believes to exist both because of his religious beliefs and the beliefs of the society he was raised in. His Amazonian heroine still needs to be pure and beautiful; her golden hair flowing like a river, highlighted in almost every description. Physically and in terms of virtues, she is very much like the woman Tolkien and his readers are used to. However, Tolkien cannot deny that Éowyn, and on her behalf women in general, may be toughened or may be born with a strength that would eventually turn them to steel. At this point it could also be said that Tolkien portrays Éowyn as a lily made of steel because she has the rebellious part of herself that makes her stop abiding the rules and live by those of her own. She may show passivity, and in the end be redeemed to live the life of a lily (letting Tolkien restore the order in his story), yet she has the courage that somehow Tolkien wants to approve. Although she seems to have come to terms with the rules set by the patriarchy and the majority view, when she says that she no longer wants to be a queen but a healer (Tolkien, 1954: 943), her words are not necessarily a renunciation of her ideals. Considering the fact that Tolkien opposed the idea of destruction and cherished nature, it might be said that Éowyn becomes the

¹² Traditionally, lily is associated with Virgin Mary. We find examples of this association as far back as Venerable Bede. With its white petals, lily symbolizes the innocence and purity of Virgin Mary. Similarly, Éowyn is the innocent maiden who is piously looking after her sick uncle, and with her cherub-like golden locks and slim figure, she looks physically innocent too.

woman who is in touch with nature (preservation) as opposed to the killer fighting of men (destruction). In this respect, the character of Éowyn is one of the most controversial creations by the author: making an ultimate statement of how much of a dilemma the woman question is for the majority view; how Tolkien can see the possibility of steel lilies hence another aspect that can intrinsically be found in women and how much of this society can digest.

Other than these three main female characters, Tolkien has minor figures that reflect the stereotype of the ideal woman. One is the nature spirit Tom Bombadil's wife Goldberry the "water-lady" (Burns, 2005: p.115). Much like her husband, Goldberry embodies an air of the otherworldly. She is never referred to as a human being; she is the river daughter and seems to have no race. Nevertheless she is like Arwen and Galadriel in terms of portraying stereotypical aspects of women. When the the hobbits are rescued from the Old Man Willow in the Old Forest by Tom Bombadil, Goldberry welcomes them like a typical house wife, cooking for them and tending their needs. Although Tom seems to be in touch with the house work as well (i.e. preparing a bath for the hobbits, calling them for meals, etc.) Goldberry is still the graceful wife who is domesticated while she shows supernatural qualities.

It is vital to consider the role of Tom Bombadil within the story of *TLOTR* in order to determine the true place of Goldberry. When Frodo asks Goldberry who Tom is she simply says "He is" (Tolkien, 1954: 122), which seems to imply that he is a god-like being, "the Master of wood, water, and hill" (Tolkien, 1954: 122). Considering that in Goldberry's portrayal Tolkien makes sure he emphasizes her familiarity to water, it is possible to see the above quotation as Tom being not only the Master of the natural world but also of Goldberry. Therefore Goldberry's

representation as a supernatural female is overshadowed by the power of Tom, which puts her back into a descriptive box and rids her of any dominance she could potentially have.

On the other hand, Tolkien's constant imagining of Goldberry as a part of nature or nature itself (as in her being the river daughter) underhandedly paves the way for the idea that Tolkien, as a lover of nature, is in fact elevating Goldberry not because she is the obedient wife of Tom but because she is innately a goddess. While Tolkien's strict Catholic upbringing is undeniable, it would not be far-fetched in the least to consider the possibility that Tolkien, creating his own universe, is giving a chance to Paganism, the religion of Nature, so as to add another dimension to his characters. This notion takes us to a point in history when in Anglo-Saxon paganism women could exist individually; not as extensions of their male leaders or not as perfect/evil creatures that inspired men in one way or another.

A similar character to Goldberry is Samwise's lover Rosie Cotton, who appears at the end of the trilogy only. Very much like the earthly version of Goldberry, Rosie is the perfect epitome of the ever-waiting lover, never giving up hope that Sam will return; although she appears to be simply a name without any character of her own. Rosie takes on the role of the nurturing female and restarts life in the Shire in the aftermath of the war, bearing Sam's babies, reassuring readers that while Frodo, the hero of the story, chooses a life of solitude the natural cycle of life will continue with the stable relationship between Sam and herself. The last page of *TROT* depicts a family portrait with Rosie drawing Sam inside their hole and putting their baby daughter Elanor on his lap, as Sam takes a deep breath and says, "Well, I'm back" (Tolkien, 1954: 1008). With this picture, Tolkien restores the faith

of his readers in the most traditional way. Still he does not necessarily imply that this is the role cut out for Rosie and all women on her behalf. Rather, he considers this as hope; without any agenda about gender quarrels. It is true that we are not made aware of Rosie's life much outside of her union with Sam. It might as well be that she has an occupation in the village or has larger prospects in life than simply getting married. However her role in this journey is *to be the hope* that Tolkien values deeply. In this respect, the Tolkien fan author Mary Borsellino's description of Rosie shows how Tolkien attributed much more to this character than simply being the lover or the mother:

She [Rosie] represents many of Tolkien's opinions of women, as well as embodying feminine energy at the culmination of an often wholly masculine narrative. She's the maiden, mother, and crone, and the goddess and mortal being. Wartime sweetheart and baby-boom parent, guardian and matron of the Shire-Eden. The end of *Return of the King* is, in many ways, the arrival of the Queen. (Strugis, 2006, <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol24/iss3/10/>)¹³

Likewise, in one of his personal letters to Milton Waldman, Tolkien emphasizes the significance of the elementary, saying,

I think the simple 'rustic' love of Sam and Rosie (nowhere elaborated) is *absolutely essential* to the study of his (the chief hero's) character, and to the theme of the relation of ordinary life (breathing, eating, working, begetting) and quests, sacrifice, causes [...]" (*Letters*, p.161).

Celebrating the importance of this simple love and the hope it represents, Tolkien reassures both his readers and himself that it is this selflessness and focus on the regeneration of life that will restore the peace that has been lost. It is true that he does so by placing Rosie in a positive yet traditional role but this is not before Rosie helps Frodo and Sam to fight the Ruffians.

¹³ Also available at <http://maryborsellino.com/monkeywench/lotr/rosie/spring/>.

In addition to his pure women, Tolkien depicts examples of the monstrously feminine as well. While we cannot really place Tolkien at either end of the spectrum in gender disputes, the fact that he is a traditionalist makes it almost certain that it is not easy for him to escape the roles conventionally attributed to sexes. Therefore he lacks a certain dimension when it comes to his monstrous women. He appears to see them as villains who need to be redeemed or confuted. Two important female characters are Bilbo's cousin Lobelia Sackville-Baggins and the female spider Shelob, both of whom agree with the monstrous-feminine definition Barbara Creed makes when she applies Kristeva's and Freud's notion of the abject: "That which does not 'respect borders, positions, rules', that which 'disrupts identity, system, order'" (Reid, 2008: vol.1 118). Neither Lobelia nor Shelob is under male authority and they have their own rules for surviving within society or, in the case of Shelob, among other (all male) predators. This takes them another step away from 'tough woman' and turns them into figures bordering on the monstrous. While Lobelia is not necessarily feared the way Shelob is feared based on her powers, the male figures from the story always seem to try to avoid her from the very beginning because she is claiming ownership of some material possession she believes she deserves. In that respect, although she is not terrifyingly superior with the power she holds, she is still a figure to be feared in the story, and takes herself a step further up than the 'tough woman'.

From the very beginning, Lobelia is described as a shrewish hobbit who sets her sights on Bilbo's luxurious smial Bag End and simply gets silver spoons as a gift¹ when Bilbo leaves the Shire for good. She is considered to be a contemptible figure among the Shire folk and in Gandalf's words she has "...a face that would have

curdled new milk” (Tolkien, 1954: 39). With all the negative traits attributed to her, Lobelia is in opposition to the ‘angel in the house’. She is active, she claims her rights and most importantly, she is not ruled by her husband (who is in fact Bilbo’s cousin), or her son; rather she seems to rule over them.¹⁴ While we can catch glimpses of moderation with Tolkien’s depiction of his angelic female characters, his monstrous women need redemption and do not seem to be approved of by the author until that moment of redemption arrives.

Constantly depicted with an umbrella in her hand,¹⁵ Lobelia earns renown and respect only when she puts her shrewishness to good use by going against the ruffians in the Shire.¹⁶ While she stands as the strong willed active woman all through the novel, in the end she is captured and locked down by the ruffians. When Frodo manages to cast the Ring into the fire of Mount Doom and the Shire is scoured, Lobelia is freed but she is no longer tough. The “Poor thing”, as referred to in the final volume, is now very old and thin. She gives her one desire Bag End back

¹⁴ Bilbo’s gifts for the people in Shire are quoted in a few paragraphs, including the sarcastic reasons why they receive the particular gift. For instance Dora Baggins, Bilbo’s oldest surviving female relative who happens to have a reputation for good advice, gets a large waste-paper basket. Angelica, who seems to be very much interested in the way she looks, receives a convex mirror from Bilbo. The reason why Lobelia gets silver spoons is explained with Lobelia’s habit of ‘acquiring’ a great deal of Bilbo’s spoons. While the reasoning for all the gifts share a certain sense of humour, it is also scornful and caricaturizes these characters, demeaning the traits that are celebrated by themselves or others.

¹⁵ Lobelia’s umbrella is very much like a limb; like a third hand for Lobelia. The silver spoons she ‘puts her hands on’ from the Bag End drop out of her umbrella. The same umbrella unfurls against Saruman’s ruffians at the end of the novels. It is as if she is obtaining the power she needs from this one object. When we look back at classics, we see that umbrellas are mostly used as a symbol of protection and shelter (Protas,

<http://www.umich.edu/~umfandsf/symbolismproject/symbolism.html/U/umbrella.html>), and are usually offered to women by men. In Lobelia’s case, however, the umbrella is in her hands by default and she will not let any men take it away from her nor let them disdain her in any way.

¹⁶ Lobelia, who has been a rebel against the prominent male hobbits from the very beginning, is one of the few who is fighting against the ruffians at the end of the novels. This quality of hers, which is obviously told to be one that is not favourable, becomes something that can be legitimized when Lobelia uses it to attack the ruffians. That is why, at the very end, Tolkien gives Lobelia a chance for a redemption and some sort of pathos.

to Frodo and leaves everything she has to homeless hobbits when she dies. This is nothing other than a redemption for Lobelia. When she is freed, she still has her umbrella in one hand and though she refuses to lean on others, she eventually does yield. She is touched by the applause she gets too as she has “never in her life been popular before”. With this, Tolkien ties the loose end Lobelia creates with her bold character and order is restored as is in the case of Éowyn.

Shelob, the evil spider, is unlike any other female character. Her evil is unmatched among all female characters and she is the one example of a monstrous woman. She is not like Lobelia, who is mildly monstrous because she steps out of the image of the ideal woman and since she does not live by the rules of patriarchy; Shelob feeds on other living things mostly males, since where she dwells is “not for woman” and she enjoys this. On the other hand, she is not the only one of her kind. The history of the Middle Earth revealed in *The Silmarillion* depicts Ungoliant, the progenitor of Shelob (Tyler, 2000: 497), as a vicious female too. With a sense of history, Tolkien creates a figure that has a specific gender yet one that overthrows the traditional qualities of women not only by establishing her own rules but also by attacking the opposite gender, which is acknowledged to hold the power within a well-functioning society, with its penis-like needle. She is associated with death, she lives and kills in the darkness, and takes great pleasure in it. In this respect, she is the direct opposite of the pure woman that is almost completely removed from the physical as represented by Galadriel. Her lust and appetite, which allude to an unattractive sexuality as is mentioned in *Perilous Realms* (Tolkien, 1997: 117), turn

her into the devouring woman that terrifies men.¹⁷ Indeed, Shelob does not only intimidate Frodo, Sam or Gollum, who are small in stature, but also the big folk like Sauron, Saruman and the orcs.

As one extreme end of the female stereotype, Shelob appears to be at war with the occupant of the other extreme end, Galadriel in the one chapter she is mentioned. As soon as Sam and Frodo realize that they have been trapped by Gollum, they try to find a way to escape the tunnels Shelob dwells¹⁸ in and suddenly Sam remembers⁸ the phial Galadriel gave to Frodo before he left. From that point on a war of contrasts (as binary opposition on many levels such as light vs. dark, good vs. evil, life vs. death, etc) starts. Galadriel's phial of light shines against Shelob's dark tunnels and in the end becomes one of the factors that helps defeat Shelob. Subsequently, Galadriel, the pure Lady cooperates with the majority view represented by Frodo and Sam, in this case in order to annihilate Shelob the dark Lady. As Sam *pricks* her with his sword² and he himself crashes to the ground, he hears the same voice again and remembers the Phial of Galadriel. Taking this to the primary world would give us an 'Eve' and a 'Mary' who help men rid the world of Eve and restore order in which men are the only ones¹⁹ who can be independent and powerful. This historically relatable position is what Tolkien seems to approve of.²⁰

¹⁷ This type of sexuality appears as a quality of the powerful woman in the 19th century texts, and considered to be detrimental to patriarchal discourse.

¹⁸ With reference to her dwelling, her fight with Sam, the fact that she eats her own offsprings, is in league with Sauron, and everyone else is scared of her, Shelob is female sexuality materialized. She is the opposite of phallic in that sense.

¹⁹ In fact Sam hears the voice of Galadriel from afar, which places Galadriel into Shelob's lair to be present, at war with her foil.

²⁰ The story of Shelob's partial defeat (partial in that it is not known whether she dies or not – she simply withdraws with pain) is reflected in a way to ascertain that she died because of her lust. Her encounter with Sam, which resembles a vicious sexual encounter, starts with her having the upper hand. She is described as having no soft spot except for her eye – the Eye that belongs to Sauron the

In this respect, although Tolkien might be considered to have simply avoided the woman question or used stereotypes to manage the expectations of his target audience; the bestial woman with desires and lust is still a source of intimidation for him. Similarly, the woman taking on the phallic weapon and becoming the man (the abuser, the attacker) will not solve the woman question of his time. Both these images of women (women turning into the oppressor or woman lusting after her own desire) are repulsive to Tolkien even if, at times, he can be sympathetic to the ideological war women wage against men and society to assert their rights. Once more taking this to the Primary World and to his own century, it could be said that Tolkien is against any kind of aggressive attack (to environment or to people) particularly by women; an example of which can be the Suffragettes and the physicality of their political demonstration undertaken during the first wave of feminism.

The spider aspect of Shelob and the act of spinning (in her case webs) something which is traditionally attributed as being a woman's preoccupation, creates a parallel with Galadriel. While Galadriel's spinning is for a good purpose, Shelob's is only for death. This creature which desires death for all others including her own offsprings then becomes the "entrapping female, weaving webs of shadow" (Tolkien, 1997: 120). Therefore the kind of danger she suggests is not only on a

enemy, making her a part of him although she seems to be the queen of her own lair. As Sam pierces her eye she stumbles and yields to the stroke but attacks Sam once more with her huge belly. Yet Sam waits with his sword held up. "... and so Shelob, with the driving force of her own cruel will, with strength greater than any warrior's hand, thrust herself upon a bitter spike. Deep, deep it pricked..." (Tolkien, 1997: 712) This passage does not only demonize Shelob more than she is already described to be but also draws a dark picture of the woman who is given into her lust. Clearly, Tolkien cannot stand what Shelob represents in the Primary World and lets her own lair devour her. It is also crucial to note that in the 19th century, the monstrous woman was defined also by her sexual propensity, rive and insatiability being on par with that of the male as it would be considered as a threat to male potency.

literal level, but it is on a metaphorical level too. Considering the fact that there has never been a female within those caves except for Shelob, it would be safe to say that her webs catch only males and turn them into preys that cannot move. Once they are trapped she pricks them with her limb's sting and turns this into a vile sexual encounter where one side is feeble and defenceless. At this point, Tolkien does not make a differentiation of sexes but rather he condemns this act and the fact that once someone takes on the power and the rulership, then the end is inevitably doomed.¹ Obviously, the female being in possession of such power is even more scary for Tolkien and the men of his age, hence his portrayal of the female species at both extremes of the spectrum. Galadriel's presence within the picture of Shelob might be explained with this argument as well. Galadriel's spinning to make cloaks still validates her as a 'Mary' putting her ability as a woman in good use, while Shelob turns this feminine way of expression into something deadly and attacks the male, the *regular* order. Her transgression of this traditional image makes sure that she is considered as a monstrous figure, a femme fatale on the inside for the Primary World of Tolkien's time.

With his present female characters introduced, Tolkien seems to stand his ground in the women question. However, the main reasons why he is depicting an undeniable facet of femininity, and not making any particular statement about egalitarianism are his background as a traditionalist, a Catholic, and fear of losing his audience. Tolkien is a lover of nature as much as a lover of Catholicism and tradition. He might send Éowyn back home to get married but he does not do that for the sake of making her the secondary person, the insignificant extension (more like a plain inactive figure as opposed to a person with her own ideas and passions) in this

story necessarily. It might also be that he wants her to be on the healing side as opposed to the world of the male where aggression and brutality destroy the nature he so admires. As Éowyn submits to the will of the masculine world where she has to let go of her own passions to survive, she says:

I stand in Minas Anor, the Tower of the Sun,” she said; “and behold! the Shadow has departed! I will be a shieldmaiden no longer, nor vie with the great Riders, nor take joy only in the songs of slaying. I will be a healer, and love all things that grow and are not barren.” And again she looked at Faramir. “No longer do I desire to be a queen,” she said. (Tolkien, 1954: 943)²¹

Obviously, this is still a submission in a feminist point of view, however, one way to interpret this sentiment would be (bearing in mind that Tolkien is the classicist he is) he is preventing woman, the protector of nature, from joining the world of destruction and war led by men. By attributing to Éowyn a desire “to love all things that grow”, Tolkien consciously distances her from the male world of war.²² The association with growth ascribes her a form of purity; however, it is one distinct from traditional concepts of purity, such as those associated with the Virgin Mary. Therefore, his arguments revealed in *TLOTR* are far more complex than they seem to be at first glance. While he cannot get away from the codifications of his time, he does not simply turn a blind eye to women. Women are, first of all, the wives, the daughters, the nurturing figures for him not only because he believes this ideal but because his readership¹ dictates this way of thinking. On the other hand, he is able to

²¹ Shelob’s deadly web can easily be read as a subversion of the traditional characteristics of the patriarchal world where women are trapped by marriage and domestic duties and are expected to procreate. In this sense, marriage becomes violent behind doors and women become the preys in the web. It might be far-fetched to expect Tolkien to consider marriage and procreation as binding necessities for women yet it is possible to think her web as defensive as opposed to other weapons that are instruments of attack.

²² On the other hand, it is significant to note that Tolkien is making a choice between creating a protector female character and subjugating women for the greater needs of conservative society, and in the end he goes for the latter.

see the possibilities in women aside from these traditional qualities. While this will take us away from *TLOTR*, it is crucial to note that he is capable of presenting female characters that go beyond the conventional. One of these is Erendis from *Unfinished Tales* (1980). The wife of King Aldarion, Erendis is a stubborn and strong-willed woman who refuses to submit to the will of her husband and eventually separates from him. While this might seem ordinary, Tolkien in fact adds a different dimension to Erendis when he describes her advising her daughter Ancalimë to be as independent:

...Thus it is, Ancalimë, and we cannot alter it. For men fashioned Númenor; men, those heroes of old that they sing of – of their women we hear less, except that they wept when their men were slain. Númenor was to be a rest after war. But if they weary of rest and the plays of peace, soon they will go back to their great play, manslaying and war. Thus it is; and we are set here among them. But we need not assent. If we love Númenor also, let us enjoy it before they ruin it. We also are daughters of the great, and we have wills and courage of our own. Therefore do not bend, Ancalimë. Once bend a little, and they will bend you further until you are bowed down. Sink your roots into the rock and face the wind, though it blow away all your leaves. (Tolkien, 1980: 207)²³

As is indicated in *The Uncharted Realms of Tolkien*, this passage is entirely Tolkien's work and has not been altered by his son Christopher Tolkien in the editing process before publication.²⁴ Hence, Tolkien's women are not hidden behind masks of domesticity only. Tolkien seems to be able to hear and sympathize with the possibilities and ideas that might be nesting in a woman's mind although he cannot give them mobility or what he can give and thinks safe to give is rather limited. As mentioned before, there are many reasons why Tolkien cannot exceed certain limits when it comes to women. His background, his beliefs, the century in which he lives

²³ In *The Inklings*, C.S. Lewis describes Tolkien as a man who "thinks literature is written for the amusement of men between thirty and forty" (Carpenter, 1978: 22)

²⁴ Some of Tolkien's works have been published post-humously, edited by his son Christopher Tolkien. While *Unfinished Tales* is one of these, some of JRR Tolkien's original work has been kept untouched in the editing process.

and his indecision in the matter makes his work seem like an epic of men in which women are simply minor elements within the development of the plot and serve only as reminders of the *existence* of the feminine (in good and bad extremes). Indeed, his personal letters reveal his traditional view on women and how men can be superior to women in terms of intellect. However it is also not possible to consider him as an objector to the dispute surrounding women. As quoted previously, Tolkien is sympathising with clever women who are trapped in marriage and domesticity. This statement alone is proof that while Tolkien cannot tear himself away from the traditions and norms he is used to, he can understand what restriction means to a clever mind - be it a woman's or a man's.

In conclusion, Tolkien's ideas on the woman issue seem contradictory because Tolkien himself does not specifically avoid or become engaged in this question. Once again his letters show that he is aware how significant the change women demand is yet he does not want to categorize and label them in a certain way. As a result, the possibilities his female characters harbour may, at times, imply more than that which is seen at first glance, turning them to complex characters that reveal Tolkien's own conflict along with the conflicts of the century.

Lack of Mother Figures and the Missing Entwives

While we cannot present a solid argument saying that Tolkien was particularly interested in the woman question, it is a fact that the volumes of his *TLOTR* do not abound with female characters, and on the contrary, they especially lack mother figures along with others. The absence of Entwives, for instance, stress the danger of extinction among the Ents, the force of nature that Tolkien roots for,

and the fact that neither Aragorn's nor Arwen's mothers are mentioned in the novels (and only in the appendix briefly) seem to point at a radical problem. While Tolkien's choice to omit the mothers and wives of some crucial characters (such as Aragorn, Théoden, Denethor or Arwen) may not necessarily mean that he consciously avoided their presence or that he had an ulterior motive in doing that, it might as well refer to the traditional oppression and omission of women.

Representing one traditional aspect of women, *entwines* stand for the source of regeneration, hence their absence is one big loop for Tolkien who admires nature and the fertility it represents. In relation to that, unlike other missing female characters, *entwines* become a subject of worry as the ents intensely look for them. While the readers do not encounter the question of Arwen's mother not being present in the novels, the absence of the *entwines* and the reason why they are gone are emphasized. This argument could be directed to the extent that the ents, with their desire to continue living in the woods without any boundaries, represent nature unbound; whereas the *entwines*, who leave the woods to create chartered mini woods of their own, i.e. gardens, represent the man-made. Consequently, the missing *entwines* recreate the conflict between nature and culture in the eyes of the author who believes in the power of the organic against the industrialized, the man-made, the corrupted and the ordered.

As opposed to this argument, there is also the possibility that Tolkien considered this act of rebellion as a statement on the part of the female/the *Entwives* to recreate nature which is ultimately controlled by other forces to do evil. The *Entwives'* moving away from the Ents to make gardens of their own where they can have full control of the soilage, might be woman's desire to bring back life and

preserve it in a land where nature can turn against itself at the hands of the evil (in this case Sauron and Saruman).

Opposing almost everything that industrialization, machinery and technology brings, Tolkien cannot accept the Entwives' rebellion,²⁵ albeit to create a secondary nature in which peace can be achieved. Therefore Entwives end up creating gardens which are, in the end, called Brown Lands. Neither order nor peace can be achieved as the nature is already defiled as a consequence of entwives' leaving. What Tolkien needs is not women leaving their primary duty of procreation and running after something that has been lost, but nature intact (not only the surroundings but also the natural cycle of birth and death) in which traces of the sacred can be found.

Putting aside the fact that they are never seen throughout the novels, Entwives are the females most often mentioned without ever being seen as opposed to the wives and mothers of significant characters²⁶ (and also the entire female kind of the dwarf race).²⁷ Male characters crucial to the plot almost never grow up in a family

²⁵ Entwives created lush gardens. When they were estranged from their husbands (ents) they left Fangorn (their forest) and started creating their own lands. I interpret this, although the garden is still a part of nature and is organic, as an artificial and chartered form of nature (as opposed to the huge woods where they used to live). In the story, we are told that Entwives disappeared later on and no one ever hears of them again while their gardens were destroyed by the evil forces of Sauron, hence these gardens are now called the Brown Lands.

²⁶ We do not know if Entwives reproduce, hence it is not possible to say that they are mothers in certainty.

²⁷ The wording is important in that Tolkien seems to imagine ents as the preceding existence and female kind comes after them hence taking the name ent-wives, being, in name, nothing but an extension of the male ents. Nevertheless, Tolkien gives a curious image to entwives by letting them go to find order and peace in nature, which the author himself admires deeply. Thus the entwives, who appear to be dependent on the ents, go on their own way and establish gardens which are now Brown Lands because of the destruction of Sauron (Tolkien, 1954: 465). By the end of the third volume, Treebeard and other ents are still looking for the missing entwives who have not died but gone away to find peace for it is not possible for the line of ents to continue without the entwives. Considering that procreation and the continuation of the natural order are crucial in Tolkien's beliefs, it is possible to read this as an elevation of the female kind and not simply because of prolificacy of women but also because they might be the ones chasing peace and order and let go of their dependence to stand alone in sorority.

where there is a woman (a mother or a lover). Bilbo, Frodo's uncle and the ultimate initiator of the Ring quest, never mentions a lover or a mother and insistently avoids his cousin Lobelia who demands her rights on Bag End. He never gets married and adopts his cousin Frodo who inherits Bag End. Likewise, Frodo never mentions a mother but grows up with a male idol and surrounded by male friends (Samwise, Pippin and Merry). He never feels intimate with a female. He simply admires the beauty and grace of certain female characters (such as Arwen and Galadriel) and not once does he think of women in a sexual context. His relationship with his companion Samwise suggests something more than mere comradeship (which will be mentioned later on) while he shuns women almost altogether. As the story of Bilbo and Frodo is finalized, we find that nothing has changed and that both their existences will be void of female impact.

Other major characters such as Aragorn, the hobbits, Arwen, Boromir and Faramir also do not have mother figures in their lives. Most of them are never mentioned within the story and some are merely said to have died. Aragorn's mother Gilraen, for instance, is only mentioned in the appendix and even then she is not emphasized as an important mother figure who changes his life. The reader only knows that she gets married very young and advises her son to give up on his love for Arwen for her lineage is greater than his. When he does not listen to her she leaves for Eriador, to her own land, to live alone. Boromir, Faramir, Éowyn and Éomer also share the same fate and grow up without a mother figure. We do not hear of their story however, only of their death. Celebrian, Arwen's mother, is mentioned only briefly, and again, her story is about how she died and how, in the end, Arwen was raised by his father Elrond.

As mentioned, the entire race of dwarves lack female kind altogether. Once again, it is in the appendix that Tolkien prefers to explain how dwarf women are so few in number and they are kept in secret so that other races will not see them. When they leave home, they dress up as men and that is why they are confused as male dwarves. Tolkien also touches upon the subject of slow increase in population as “less than one-third of dwarf-men are married since not all women take husbands: some desire none; some desire one that they cannot get, and so will have no other. Men also do not have much interest in getting married because they prefer their crafts over women” (Tolkien, 1954: 1053). In this sense, what Tolkien does is to create female characters as tough and strong-willed as their male counterparts while making life choices. However, these women are lost (or have to cross-dress to survive among the strangers) and cannot be found in any work that Tolkien creates. Once again, Tolkien puts forward an image and comes up with a reputation for women,²⁸ but then hides it in an appendix. His robust and distinct characterization of Éowyn is not strong enough to extend to other female characters. In the Middle Earth, which is a secondary world, women are not completely overlooked yet their role is mostly what has been traditionally cast for them by society. At times where Tolkien tries to show another dimension of women he is rather timid and biased yet he still tries to give glimpses of a possibility for them in the primary world where women are actually trying to change the gender roles long embraced the society. In this regard, his elevation of women in the traditional and religious sense does not

²⁸ Tolkien creates a positive representation of a strong woman who is able to make their own life choices without support from anyone. However, he does not mention this in the base story, and is somehow ‘hiding’ these in the appendix, which is not the core but an almost optional extension of the story. As a man of his century and tradition, he makes use of the appendix to provide these details so his male-dominant readership will take this more lightly.

uncover much of his thoughts about the waves of feminism yet his attempt to display a different side of women without definitions somehow shows that he is not indifferent and just neutral.



Tolkien's Monstrous Women

Among the few female characters Tolkien presents in his work, his wicked/monstrous characters are not necessarily evil because they actively engage in the devilish, but because they are more assertive, steadfast women with resolution. As opposed to traditional fairy tales and epic stories, Tolkien's *TLOTR*, which is written also with the purpose of creating a historical epic for England, lacks even the evil sorceress. The closest Tolkien gets to having an evil sorceress in his work is with Galadriel who happens to be referred to as "the Mistress of Magic" by Faramir (Tolkien, 1954: 652) and "sorceress of the Golden Wood" by Wormtongue (Tolkien, 1954: 502), and is regarded as such only because of the fear planted in these men's hearts with the myth of the "evil witch" traditionally coded in their minds. In a way, Tolkien dispels the stereotype of the evil witch and turns it into the image of a pure and sanctified woman. This is in itself another stereotype for women, yet Tolkien prefers not to give Galadriel, the most powerful female character in the series, the role of the evil witch. Although when she is tested by the power of the ring she seems to unleash a darker side to herself, she is still not the traditional evil sorceress that might be called the monstrous woman.

Lobelia and Gollum's grandmother, who take ownership of their rights, are women of assertive nature and are portrayed as difficult women in patriarchal society. Gollum's grandmother is mentioned only once within the storyline of Gollum (as his grandmother without any identity besides her domestic role) and her name is never revealed. Nevertheless, the power she holds as the head of the family finds itself a place in the novels. Tolkien himself refers to the kind of matriarch she is

in one of his letters to a reader explaining that she had a family of high repute, wealthier than most. While describing her place within the family as matriarch, Tolkien also mentions the structure of families among the hobbits and says that they are mostly run on dyarchy, “in which master and mistress had equal status, if different functions” (*Letters*, p.293). Providing examples from hobbit families with ‘matriarchs’ Tolkien continues to say that it is not possible to suppose that a strict matriarchal system was developed and the word matriarch was used not in an anthropological sense but “meant simply a woman who in fact ruled the clan. No doubt because she outlived her husband, and was a woman of dominant character” (p.296, *Letters*). Tolkien seems to suggest that holding this kind of power within the family requires a dominance of character for women so that they can claim their space. They are not evil or monstrous per se but in order to become a leader within the society of the hobbits, women need to be stout and determined. The problem is that although Tolkien explains this system as a statement of fact in his letters, his novel caricaturizes and looks down on women who stand up for their rights. For instance, Lobelia is never favoured by any of the characters for being a strong woman who might be the next matriarch and her endeavor to claim the Bag End is expressed in a tone that make her look ridiculous, boring and spiteful. She is even accused of being a thief as some valuable articles that belong to Bilbo “somehow fall inside her umbrella” (Tolkien, 1954: 38), giving the sense that she is not the rightful owner of the Bag End, but that she wants to possess it by being assertive. As mentioned in previous chapters, she is redeemed in the end when the Shire is occupied by Sauron’s forces. She fights her last battle against the enemy with the

umbrella she uses to mooch Bilbo's belongings and then loses her son and becomes as mellow as any other female character in the novels.

Tolkien's only monstrous female is Shelob who is the last child of Ungoliant, the female counterpart of Melkor from *The Silmarillion*. Her gender is evident with the use of 'she' in her name and she is described as a great danger to all; so much so that she is instrumental in Gollum's master plans to take back the Ring from Frodo. As mentioned previously, Shelob does not take a master and simply lives to feed her appetite devouring men. As is suggested in the *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, it is possible that Tolkien considered "entrapment and poisoning as forms of female evil" (Drout, 2006: 606). Therefore she is one extreme stereotype of the monstrous female that has physically turned into a beast that reflects her desire to kill viciously and to express herself with webs of defence at the same time. Once again, Tolkien pictures a woman with a sword in her hand but he is not oblivious to the web she spins to tell her own story; that she needs to protect herself in a world ruled by men in order to survive. Her web, unlike that of Galadriel, brings death and attacks the male actively instead of simply building a protective shield yet this might be considered as an inversion of a woman's place within marriage when it is not an association of love. The woman would be trapped and violated in such a marriage just as Shelob entraps the male in her webs and attacks them. While this inversion might have been considered by Tolkien, it is one fact that Tolkien, who idolizes the Virgin Mary, will not side with Shelob, who is actively using her powers to do evil.

Tolkien does not have the traditional evil female as a witch or sorceress. The women that he characterizes as more nettlesome and stand up for themselves, and all are supported to some extent and redeemed in the end at. What this proves is that he

is not completely oblivious to the woman question and that he can understand and see what women are striving for yet he is only able to provide his arguments within limitations designed by his Roman Catholic and Victorian upbringing.



CHAPTER III

THE MALE AND MASCULINITY IN THE LORD OF THE RINGS

Comradery and Its Importance

Tolkien's story abounds with male characters, with a central theme of male bravado and comradery; and the one quest in the series is determined by the male with only a few women who have little or no effect on the outcome. Heroic male characters are bound to one another in admiration and brotherly love; therefore, as necessitated by epic fantasy, Tolkien's *TLOTR* brims with masculine power and friendship. However, Tolkien appeases for this by representing the male in a relatively reduced, if not thwarted, manner.

Without a doubt, the most important indicator of male companionship is the fellowship of the Ring: a council of men convened by a wise figurehead (Elrond) and comprising of nine men of different races. The council alone is enough proof that Tolkien likes to bestow the capacity of decision making upon men. Although an essential figure in the quest of the Ring, Galadriel is not called to this meeting while she has been portrayed to be a leading force in the previous White Councils. For *TLOTR* specifically, then, Tolkien wants to solidify the traditional view of his society concerning the superiority of the male mind. Women are not only shunned in the fellowship but also they are specifically commanded to stay behind during the course of the war. The discourse used to make Éowyn stay and tend the domestic needs of their people, for instance, is very masculine in that their reasoning is simply explained with a shallow statement underscoring her gender.

Tolkien's most important characters in the *TLOTR* are powerful male figures of status and title, and they are adorned with symbols that connote phallic potency. Gandalf, the wise father figure of the fellowship, is given not only a magical staff but also Shadowfax, the fastest horse of the Middle-earth. Although not specifically described in the novels, Gandalf's staff is the one thing that grants him strength to encounter the evil forces such as Balrog and Saruman. Likewise Saruman is given a wizard's staff which provides him with the same, perhaps greater power, yet he is manipulated by Sauron and the Ring, hence misuses this power. While this is another issue to be discussed in relation to power and gender, that Saruman's phallic wand emphasizing his masculinity and status (as he faces Gandalf and breaks his staff at the tower of Orthanc) cannot be denied.

Swords are equally important for the men of the Middle-earth. Swords that strong male figures such as Aragorn and Boromir carry are not only symbols of a lineage but also they show character. While Aragorn commands the dead with Narsil, which signifies the return of the king, Boromir cannot let go of the hilt of his broken sword as he dies since it stands for his valour and the dynasty to which he belongs. Therefore, these weapons are not simply props for their wielders. They are a part of their identity and underscore their manhood and strength in a world that values such qualities. Similarly, Frodo has a weapon suitable for his size and he inherits it from Bilbo. The Sting, which is elven-made, warns its carrier in case of an approaching danger. It does not denote status or power, and on the contrary, it emphasizes Frodo's smaller figure with its size yet it has a character of its own just like the other weapons in the story. Sting becomes the impaler as Sam tries to rescue Frodo from Shelob. In that sense, Sting is the penis, the masculine power governing the politics

of the Middle Earth. In the end, it is not really Sam that sends Shelob back to her lair but Sting that proves its masculinity inspite of its size. Consequently, masculinity rules out the possibility of a female overpowering the male.

The same discourse applies to the relationship between the men and their horses. Almost all the men in the novels have their own horses or are given horses to provide them mobility in contrast to women who are bound to the house, hence they lack mobility. Éowyn, the only female character that disobeys the patriarchy, is able to ride a horse only when she is disguised as a male soldier and she shares it with Merry. Living in the land of horses (Gondor) where men are considered to be horse masters, Éowyn never gets the chance to ride one until she becomes a man. She attains her freedom only when she renounces her femininity and shares this freedom with a half man that is, within the scope of this study, considered in parallel with women.²⁹ Likewise, Merry is given Stybba by Théoden the king which somehow projects what the king thinks of Merry. Just like Stybba, Merry is small and cannot keep up with the bigger folk and he would be a nuisance if he rode with them to the war. The discourse the king uses here is identical to the one he uses for Éowyn. In this regard, women and the hobbits are equally inferior to the world of men in terms of being active.

²⁹ As suggested under 'named weapons' entry in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, when a weapon is transferred or re-forged it undertakes a new purpose and finds a new life while "lifting any hardship from its previous owner" (Drout, 2006: 704). This applies to weapons born by Aragorn and Frodo as well. Isildur's broken sword Narsil is re-forged and renamed as Anduril and its new bearer Aragorn acknowledges his lineage, commands the dead and becomes the king thanks to it. In case of Sting, Bilbo gives the sword its name when he encounters spiders in Mirkwood. Similarly, Sam uses it to kill a relatively bigger spider Shelob. While this does not seem like giving a new purpose to the new bearer, there is a progression as Sam manages to defy Shelob, the mother of all spiders.

Another symbolism can be noted with the use of keywords such as ‘fellowship’, ‘towers’ and ‘king’ in the naming of volumes. While all three denote masculinity and masculine power, they do not necessarily represent the masculine in a positive light. In his *Letters*, Tolkien simply makes it clear that he is unsure of which two towers he is referring to with the title “Two Towers” which lets us think that he might “suggest either the union of the forces of evil or the opposition of good and evil – order and chaos” (Drout, 2006: 673). In this sense, Tolkien might be considering the masculine power towering over the Middle-earth as rather corrupt and malignant.

Writing for an age that is struggling with the freshly introduced theories regarding gender; and for a genre that overlooks the female almost completely except for stereotypical roles, Tolkien constructs a world that *seems* to render hegemonic masculinity and one that is traditional in many respects. It is true that Tolkien’s world is not progressive in terms of gender equality and that his work exuberates with traditional women and traditional symbols of manhood; yet his men are not necessarily the macho figures from epic tales. *His men* are in touch with their feelings and are not afraid to weep or show affection. They are not pervasive and have their moments of weakness that are clearly depicted, hence for Tolkien, masculinity is not necessarily identified by war, destruction and an unreasonable kind of power that keeps men from being expressive – at least that is his perception in his secondary world where he is reaching for the ideal in many instances. In her article “Men, Halflings, and Hero Worship”, Marion Zimmer Bradley exemplifies how significant the expression of feelings in heroes is for Tolkien:

... They are *not* the stiff-upper-lip unemotional ones of the modern English-speaking peoples. Affectionate and emotional displays are permitted not alone to women and children, but to men; thus Legolas trembles with terror and wails aloud before the Balrog without his courage or manliness (if this word may be used of an Elf) being suspect: Boromir weeps in passionate repentance after his attack on Frodo, and when he is slain, Aragorn kneels at his side so “bent with weeping” that Legolas and Gimli are dismayed, fearing he too has “taken deadly hurt.” The men display affection freely, e.g., Faramir parts from Frodo with an embrace and kiss; this is simply a pattern of manners and does *not* in itself merit mention as ballast for the thesis that the major emotional threads of the story are drawn between men (Isaacs and Zimbardo, 1968: 110).

Similarly, Maureen Thum argues in “The “Sub-Subcreation” of Galadriel, Arwen and Éowyn: Women of Power in Tolkien’s and Jackson’s *TLOTR*” that:

Contrary to those who see Tolkien as an anti-feminist writer, I wish to argue that Tolkien by no means underwrites the binary views of gender construction outlined [...]. He is no feminist. Nevertheless, he subverts traditional views of gender roles throughout his writings. (Thum, 2005: 235)

In this sense, it is possible to say that Tolkien likes the idea of individuals in touch with their feelings and, in a way, “reconfigures the male identity” (Jenkins, 1992: 187) while adding a rather ambiguous progression to the woman issue. The socialized duality is therefore flattened as male figures are given the chance to show their affection, giving way to a feminised male culture as opposed to a dysfunctional one.

The friendship portrayed among the male characters in the novels is one that celebrates emotional intimacy and comradery. Although these two may appear to be on the two opposing sides of the spectrum of relationships, it could be interpreted in parallel to the medieval relationship between a knight and his page, between a soldier and his batman. The commitment, subordination, and the sense of duty that is implied in such relationships is particularly seen between Frodo and Sam throughout the story. Calling him “sir” and “Mr. Frodo”, Sam shows how he sees Frodo as his master, while Tolkien “clearly establishes the relationship between Sam and Frodo as ‘master’ and ‘servant’ by spreading those two descriptors throughout the text”

(Hooker, 2008: 40). Therefore what may be interpreted as a ‘homoerotic’ relationship is in fact very much similar to one that can be read in relation to a military communion.

Working as Frodo’s gardener at Bag End, Sam is dragged on the quest of the Ring, yet he is not any less courageous than a page or a batman would be when it comes to protecting Frodo. When Frodo explains how dangerous their journey will be, telling him how likely it is that none of them will come back, he says:

“If you don’t come back, sir, then I shan’t, that’s certain,” said Sam. “*Don’t you leave him!* they said to me. *Leave him!* I said. *I never mean to. I am going with him, if he climbs to the Moon, and if any of those Black Riders try to stop him, they’ll have Sam Gamgee to reckon with, I said.* They laughed.” (Tolkien, 1954: 85)

We come to realize that Sam proves these are not simply words and shows his loyalty to Frodo over and over again within the story, even when Frodo is intoxicated by the power of the Ring, and does not wish to share it with Sam. He loves him not only because of a sense of duty but also because he loves him as a friend, master, and peer. In many instances throughout the novel, we witness him calling Frodo “dear”, typically associated with a feminine narrative. While this is at times interpreted as ‘homoerotic’, it could be read as an expressive love as well. Having taken hobbits in parallel with women within the scope of this study, we could also say that Tolkien is taking the untypical male portrayal a step further with the relationship between Frodo and Sam as they express their love and concern more when compared to other characters.

While Tolkien’s male characters appear to be in pairs most of the time (Legolas – Gimli, Frodo – Sam, Merry – Pippin), there is an overall compassion and brotherly love among them as well. There is such great bond between them that at

the end of the series, we see Peregrin name his first-born son Faramir after the Prince of Gondor.

In conclusion, Tolkien creates a great bond amongst his male characters that borders on deep comradeship and friendship, and one that is not shown to be present amongst the females. In this respect, we can say that Tolkien's isolating female characters from one another while he brings forth a close-knit relationship amongst the male shows how he still sticks to the epic tradition of making an example out of the man, and writing masculinity as the ultimate goal. By feminising the male protagonists (and ascribing traditionally feminine qualities to the male), he also disposes of the need to use female characters so as to argue for the positive attributes of love and nurture.

CHAPTER IV

THE RING AND ITS SYMBOLISM

Traditionally used as a symbol of devotion, dignity, and legally binding oath particularly in the Germanic tradition, the Ring stands out as a compilation of all these as well as a symbol of masculine unity in *TLOTR*. Looking back at Germanic myths, Northern European traditions, as well as Biblical stories, we can see that the ring is *predominantly* associated with men of status who are at war, who initiate wars because of the ring, or who are after magical rings. In this respect, the ring can be read as a feminine symbol. While the Ring has a round (hence feminine) shape unlike traditional religious relics, it relegates to the female almost completely,³⁰ and indicates a more masculine union, alluding to the masculine fellowship that comes to the forefront in the novel. Therefore, I will be reading the Ring as a complex combination of male and female that opens up two different paths for both within the scope of this study.

First of all, the Ring shows a set of similarities to Germanic myths. As David Day mentions in his book *Tolkien's Ring*:

“[...] Tolkien's Ring itself is intended to be the archetypal Ring on which all other ring quest cycles were based. The truth, of course, is quite the opposite, although Tolkien's Ring makes its unique contribution to that ancient tradition. (Day, 15)”

Tolkien's One Ring is particularly likened to Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in which a ring is forged and stolen, and then cursed to have its wearer as its slave (Alex Ross; “The Ring and the Rings”). Although Tolkien denies the alleged

³⁰ The quest of the Ring is encircled by male actors exclusively. Therefore, although the Ring can be read as displaying both male and female qualities, the quest itself is predominantly male.

resemblance (Day, 179), his Ring is very much like an echo of Wagner's. Similarly, the story of the Ring shows resemblance to the archaic ring quests that appear in Norse mythology, the Volsunga Saga, Celtic and Saxon myths. Ultimately, Tolkien's One Ring becomes the one constant that power is symbolically bestowed upon, and something that would replace the traditional symbol of the chalice, for which a pilgrimage-like quest is started.

The quest of the Ring and its origin can be traced back to Tolkien's history of the Middle Earth that is *The Silmarillion*. Sauron, who becomes the enemy in *TLOTR*, initiates the forging of the rings of power, and finally forges the one Ring for himself in the fire of the Mount Doom, very much like an alchemist or a smith from the Germanic myths. The sole purpose of the One Ring is inscribed on this accessory while being made: "One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, One Ring to bring them all, and in the darkness bind them." Sauron, who is referred to as 'He'³¹ throughout the novel, materializes the concept of power through the Ring, and turns the sacred oath that is traditionally taken with the Ring into something negative. In the process of forging the ring he adds a part of his malevolent spirit, which would add to the power of the Ring in manipulating others to bring forth their dark side. With the spirit of the masculine arch enemy trapped inside it, the one Ring becomes the man. It is true that Tolkien would refer to masculinity as the ultimate goal (hence female characters' desire to take on masculine roles as opposed to being

³¹ It is important that Sauron materializes in the body of a male, and that Tolkien prefers to portray him as a man because he, like many other components in the novels, is a part of the destruction of the Middle Earth through wars and a desire for power. While Tolkien's stand with regards to gender equality is not easy to decipher, it is easy to see from his letters and fictional works that he equated destruction, and the annihilation of nature with men. Although this is not a progressive perspective within feminist scope, he is admitting that it is mostly the masculine claim for power that brings wars.

comfortable in their own skin) yet in many instances as portrayed above, he shows the destructive face of the male as well. An adamant dissident of industrialization, Tolkien seems to somehow equate the man-made that is created through the destruction of nature with the male since they are the ones that hold the power. Therefore, although the masculine is the ideal, its corruption cannot be denied for Tolkien.

When it comes to the reception of such power by the female, we see that the only female character to whom the Ring is offered is Galadriel. While it is not specifically stated, we do not see any woman wearing the Ring or claiming ownership of it. When Galadriel is offered the one Ring,³² she imagines herself as an evil queen with great power, yet resists the temptation to wear it. In this respect, she is rejecting the idolization of power, and remains a protector for her realm.

Forged by a male, and standing as the ultimate union of masculine powers, the ring as rejected by a female uncovers the decay and destruction of the male to some extent. Again, although masculinity is the ultimate goal for a male author, what it symbolizes within this context is rather equated with the pillaging nature of the male. Tolkien, not being at peace with the destruction of nature, is making a statement about the worship of power through the material, hence the defilement of God's work, a criticism of men, the holders of authority.

On another note, reading the Ring symbol as masculine identity will help us understand why masculinity is *still* the ultimate goal. Throughout the series, we hear from different sources how the one Ring affects its bearer, and how it causes chaos

³² Galadriel possesses a power ring of her own called Narya. While this ring is not affected by the evil of the one ring, it holds much less power compared to Sauron's ring. Galadriel uses its protective powers to shield her lands from the evil of the Middle Earth.

not only for the one who wears it but also for the Middle Earth and its races. Still, as the masculine ideal, the Ring remains the one thing that is desired to be attained. In parallel to this, masculinity, however destructive its ideals might become, will remain the one thing that is desired.

On the other hand, it is equally possible to read the Ring as a feminine symbol. Among the acutely phallic symbols used in the novel, the ring stands out with its round and feminine shape. As much as it can be the masculine unity and the ideal that is desired, it also appears as one mysterious token strictly chased after by men. Men are the ones that offer opinions and claim ownership over the Ring. This is similar to how men step up to discuss issues that concern women and the female body. In parallel to this, the Ring becomes a symbol of female infiltration every time a man takes it over and claims ownership of it. Men transfer their lust for power to the Ring, and relieve themselves of the burden of desire and an inevitable destruction. Still, in the end, men appear as the ultimate decision makers in *TLOTR*.

Although it is not easy to say that Tolkien's One Ring translates into something that exceeds an overall lust for power, as pointed above, the Ring shows both masculine and feminine traits. While the comradery of the men-only fellowship is embodied in the Ring, it is equally easy to see Sauron's eye (which is depicted like a giant vulva in the movies) as an extension of the Ring whose life depends on this external source of power. Consequently, Tolkien's Ring and the Ring quest become a re-telling of power struggles not only among men but also between men and women.

CONCLUSION

As discussed throughout this study, it is difficult to decipher Tolkien's view of the women's movement in the 20th century. On the one hand, he creates women that suggest, albeit in a limited way, female empowerment, and on the other, he wipes out maternal influences almost altogether, (di Giovanni, 2011: 6) endeavouring to stand his ground as an Oxford don who writes in a male orientated fantasy genre. Still, considering the text through binaries enables a multi-layered context in analysing and understanding the *TLOTR*. In that respect, when reading Tolkien's women, it is helpful to read his male characters in parallel.

It is true that Tolkien's female characters, who do not abound within the novel, are mostly limited to traditional roles or defined according to male expectations. There are only a couple of females who show characteristics of stronger women, who are able to express themselves in the material world, thereby obscuring the line between the masculine and feminine spheres. Nevertheless, they are, somehow, silenced or restored back to their former selves in the end. For instance, Éowyn, who is one of the most important female characters with her active role in the active world, is curtailed by marriage. As Robin Anne Reid states in her essay "Female Bodies and Femininities in *The Lord of the Rings*", Tolkien adopts the patriarchal solution of marrying Éowyn with Faramir although in the original draft of the novel he had planned her death (Vaccaro, 2013: 109). This is indictive of his overall mindset regarding women: on the one hand he grants some true power, on the other, he abnegates freedom and authority to them. An illustrative statement comes from di Giovanni when she states, "For every way in which [Éowyn] is given

extradordinary power, she is also given a push back towards traditional female roles.” (di Giovanni, 2011: 13) Indeed, when we apply this statement to all his female characters, we see that Tolkien is making sure that at least some of them have one trait that will grant them mobility in the masculine world (a world which is mainly taken as the ideal), while he immediately overshadows these traits by using traditional roles. For instance, Galadriel is given the strongest ring among the elves, which is called the Ring of Adamant. The adjective in itself shows a strong will, and strength. However, her mobility in the Middle Earth is limited to Lothlórien, and although she is a ring bearer herself, she does not have a great say in the quest of the Ring. Likewise, Lobelia, who is portrayed as a traditional lower-class woman with a rather troublesome personality, acts very much like Éowyn as she attacks a ruffian twice her size. Again like Éowyn, she is attacking the enemy to protect what is dear to her, namely the lands in which she lives. This *heroic* behaviour culminates in Lobelia’s being locked up by the ruffians for redemption. Éowyn’s redemption, on the other hand, comes when she has to stay at the Houses of Healing, where she meets her future husband.

One prevalent reason why Tolkien's views on women requires further analysis in parallel to his views on men is because although he is not able to place his female characters outside the traditional roles assigned to them by religion, society, and the expectations of masculine fantasy genre devotees, he is subverting the traditional masculine roles to a certain extent. Tolkien's male characters show proclivity towards being expressive and show a longing and heroic respect for each other that extends to a physical level. When Gandalf falls on Khazad-dûm, remaining members of the fellowship do not shy away from showing their sadness: they

become emotional, and weep. They embrace to show emotional support, which is not what the traditional English hero is usually seen to do. This is particularly evident in relationships among the hobbits. For instance, when Merry and Pippin fall into the hands of the orcs, their anguish is described as: “A great longing came over them for the faces and voices of their companions, especially for Frodo and Sam, and for Strider.” (Tolkien, 1954: 85) As previously mentioned, Sam, who is the closest comrade to Frodo, shows as much love to Frodo as he would to Rosie Cotton, his one and only love back in the Shire. He is very protective when it comes to Frodo, and Tolkien mentions him watching Frodo sleep, taking his hand, and blushing while holding it. As di Giovanni points out in her essay, Sam’s love for Frodo is beyond everything that is at stake (di Giovanni, 2011: 33). We see the extent of his love when he abandons the quest almost altogether when Frodo is wounded:

He flung the Quest and all his decisions away, and fear and doubt with them. He knew now where his place was and had been: at his master’s side, though what he could do there was not clear. (Tolkien, 1954: 344)

Again, in di Giovanni’s same essay, the appearance of Tolkien’s men is also highlighted. It is emphasized that their visual appearance is adorned with attributes that are traditionally considered to be feminine. Tolkien’s men have “flowing locks”, and they are associated with light, very much like their female counterparts (Tolkien, 1954: 43).

While these displays of emotion and reference to seemingly feminine physical attributes, allow for a reading that borders on the homoerotic and ‘brotherly romance’ like (bromance), and since Tolkien uses this discourse for all his men, and not simply his hobbits who are placed in the same spheres with women, we can say

that his intention is to give his masculine heroes a make-over. As the definition of masculinity changes over the years,³³ Tolkien applies these aspects to his heroes as well. As opposed to classic epic male heroes, Tolkien's men are able to repent, and seek absolution (di Giovanni, 2011: 26). They also are aware of their position, and how flawed men can be, hence ask others' advice; even from women (Wheaton, 2006: 23).

Since we argue in this study that hobbits are mainly equated with women, it is also significant to define the masculinity of the race. To quote Wheaton from her work "Masculinity in the LOTR":

The masculinity of hobbits is akin to a childlike innocence, or adolescent boyhood, and this is in a sense represented by their physical stature. Frodo and the hobbits become feminised and thus subordinated due to their size, their childish nature, and their lack of what can be considered masculine traits. (Wheaton, 2006: 27)

Hobbits are treated as fragile beings who happen to be at the very core of the Ring quest. I would like to draw attention to this detail particularly because it does not only stand as a deviation from the traditional idea of masculinity but also it paves the way for the *possibility* of turning women into heroes as well. Again, although Tolkien's women seem to be peripheral to the main storyline, some of the traits that are attributed to them as well as the traits of the redefined hero make it possible to read some of the female characters as revolutionaries for the genre. Thanks to this fluidity, and a slightly modified version of the male hero, Tolkien's heroines also find a place in the novel. In Tolkien's world, gender equality is not the most crucial

³³ From 19th century onwards, the concept of hero has changed radically. As pointed out in *Byronic Heroes in 19th Century*: "The defamiliarising effects of the early 20th century –modern warfare in particular- shifted an emphasis in literature from immense passions, pride, and self-possession to suffering and emasculation. The cult of the common man prevailed over the cult of the hero." (Wootton, 2016: 5)

issue the world is facing. To him, as an admirer of nature, the destruction of the natural world can only be prevented when men and women cooperate. It is an undeniable truth that his females are overshadowed by the masculine force, and the masculine discourse that is adorned with religious and cultural dogmas, yet from time to time he provides a possibility for female characters to actually make a change. These characters are mainly portrayed as “tough women” who move freely within their domains. However these are short-lived outbursts by Tolkien, because the reparation that is persistently required by the male discourse does not help them progress further. As is mentioned in *Women in Science Fiction*, “[t]he tough woman may serve as a hero, but fails to provide a progressive or multifaceted representations of women” (Reid, 2008: 122). While Tolkien is willing to create heroes of all kinds and sexes, his religious and tradition-bound convictions limit him to an extent that makes the woman question almost absent in the novel.

In her essay, Robin Anne Reid mentions how Tolkien’s women find a place for themselves in the novel and in the carnal world (Vaccaro, 2013: 105). Building its story around the quest for the Ring, hence appearing as a ‘spiritual journey’ novel, *TLOTR*’s major setting is the road. Almost all of the characters are travelling with a purpose. As William Henry Harrison points out in his essay “Éowyn the Unintended: The Caged Feminine and Gendered Space in *The Lord of the Rings*”, in Tolkien’s eyes, the natural instinct for women is to remain at the hearth to produce and nurture children. Mobility and chasing after glory is consigned to the men. It is with Éowyn that Tolkien changes this stereotype in *LOTR*:

... Originally, Éowyn was conceived as a flagrant rule-breaker, a woman who could enter the space of the road freely, as a woman. However, Tolkien did not write that Éowyn. Instead, she enters the masculine space of the road and

becomes an adventurer by subterfuge, disguising herself as a male [...] [w]hether or not he did so intentionally, Tolkien has created a character who deconstructs the cultural definition of the road as a space of masculine freedom, proving herself more than able to hold her own in the larger world and to grow through the road experience. The fact that she must do so in male garb is, itself, a demonstration of the limitations of genre. (Harrison, 2013: 18)

Tolkien is therefore not only limited by his personal background and outlook in life but also by the readership he is appealing to. Traditional epics and fantasy literature have rigid stereotypes when it comes to gender roles. The reason why it is so significant that Tolkien bends the definitions and expands them, albeit slightly, is because his classicist qualifications as well as the intransigent definitions of his genre may have made it impossible. In this sense, while Tolkien is not really egalitarian when it comes to gender roles, it can be said that he is still observant of the issue.

Tolkien's shift from the representation of the typical male heroes immediately finds resonance in the possibility of creating new heroes who are more in touch with their feelings, and also heroes who can be near monsters. As Jane Chance mentions in her work *Tolkien's Art: A Mythology for England*, Tolkien presents Gollum, alongside his heroes, a creature with a divided self, as the key character in the novel (Chance, 1979: 148). Gollum, who was a hobbit just like Frodo the main hero of the quests, is described with dark details, convincing the reader to not like him. As the story unfolds, however, we come to understand and almost relate to him, and eventually, we see how Gollum was like Frodo, and how he changed over the course of time. This subtle change can be seen over Frodo in parallel with the obvious outcome that can be seen in Gollum. It is also significant to see how Tolkien makes Gollum a part of the solution and the rescue at the very end: when Frodo is not able

to throw the Ring into the fires of Mount Doom as the power of the Ring grows stronger and the subtle change that we referred to which has already taken over Gollum makes it possible for him to save Middle-Earth, Gollum is the one who makes the saving of the Middle-Earth possible by chewing off Frodo's finger. Although he does not do it consciously, Gollum *almost* becomes a hero as he destroys the Ring and Sauron, and saves the Middle Earth.

As the image of the hero is reshaped in the novel, Tolkien also points to the difference between healthy and unhealthy masculinity. Tolkien's strictly traditional male characters, such as Denethor, is depicted as an obsessive, corrupt steward whose feelings seem inaccessible unlike his son Faramir. In parallel to this, when we look back at the fellowship, we see that it is formed of sons as opposed to fathers. Jane Chance points this out in *Tolkien's Art*:

The necessity for the young figure to become the savior her (like the *novus homo*) of the old is introduced by Tolkien in the first pages of the *Fellowship*. [...] The old hobbits view those who are different, or "queer", as alien, evil, monstrous, or dangerous because the fathers themselves lack charity, pity, and understanding. [...] The "New Man" represented by the Hobbits Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin then must overcome a natural inclination towards "oldness", toward the life of the senses inherent in the Hobbit love of food, comfort, warm shelter, entertainmet, and good tobacco (Chance, 1979: 120).

Once again, the kind of malignant masculinity as brought forward by war, the symbolism of the Ring, and the destruction of nature is amended to some extent. With his new male identities (and new heroes), Tolkien is expanding the limits of his genre, and provides more fluidity between sexes.

In conclusion, although Tolkien's overall approach to the woman question is not obvious in *LOTR*, and although, at first glance, we cannot really see progressive female characters who stand up as heroes or step outside the typical feminine roles,

Tolkien still seems to be creating a new world order where races and sexes work together for a cause. As an individual who has been through two world wars, Tolkien is more interested in the outcome of the quest for the Ring ie. the destruction of evil, which is more immediate, as opposed to a more in-depth engagement with equality. Brought up by a surrogate father and a mother converted to Catholicism, Tolkien is able to show progress for his female characters only by making male characters more emotionally accessible rather than designing different scenarios for the female counterparts. While this cannot be taken as a progressive step in terms of Feminism and the Feminist ideal, fantasy author Tolkien, who is a significant member of the male-dominant writers community that would consider the female as the 'other' and the 'lacking' in relation to the male still inspires hope for the female through a deeper reading.

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