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WOMEN IN THE FICTIONAL WORKS OF J.R.R.
TOLKIEN

University — Université

CARLETON UNIVERSITY, OTTAWA, ONTARIO

Degree for which thesis was presented — Grade pour lequel cette thèse fut présentée

MASTER OF ARTS

Year this degree conferred — Année d'obtention de ce grade

1976

Name of Supervisor — Nom du directeur de thèse

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WOMEN IN THE FICTIONAL WORKS OF
J. R. R. TOLKIEN

by

C

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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September 10, 1976

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines female characters in the fictional works of John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, with the emphasis on The Lord of the Rings. The main purpose of the thesis, stated in the introduction, is to establish the importance of Tolkien's female characters. Following the introduction is an examination of the quest-war story traditions which provide a base for the trilogy. The second chapter deals with the role, status and function of women in the societies of Middle-earth, the world in which The Lord of the Rings is set. The next five chapters deal with individual female characters (Eowyn, Arwen, Galadriel, Goldberry and Shelob) who are important to the trilogy. The women of Tolkien's shorter fictional works are also considered in a separate chapter. The final chapter draws together the basic arguments of the thesis, and concludes that the female characters are of vital and intrinsic importance to Tolkien's works.

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Introduction

The importance of women and the contribution they make in J. R. R. Tolkien's fiction, particularly The Lord of the Rings, are not recognized by the vast majority of his critics. Many writers ignore the females, concentrating instead on Tolkien's religious philosophy, cosmology, mythology, writing style, thematic considerations, linguistic structures, theories of fantasy; in fact, almost any facet of his secondary world except its women. This is the case in such articles as Edmund Fuller's "The Lord of the Hobbits: J. R. R. Tolkien";¹ R.J. Reilly's "Tolkien and the Fairy Story";² Charles Moorman's "The Shire, Mordor, and Minas Tirith";³ Burton Raffel's "The Lord of the Rings as Literature";⁴ Samuel H. Woods Jr.'s "J. R. R. Tolkien and

¹ Edmund Fuller, "The Lord of the Hobbits: J.R.R. Tolkien," in Tolkien and the Critics: Essays on J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings", ed. Neil D. Issacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 17-39. Hereafter cited as TC.

² R.J. Reilly, "Tolkien and the Fairy Story," TC, pp. 128-50.

³ Charles Moorman, "The Shire, Mordor and Minas Tirith," TC, pp. 201-17.

⁴ Burton Raffel, "The Lord of the Rings as Literature," TC, pp. 218-46.

the Hobbits";⁵ Gerald M. Garmon's "J. R. R. Tolkien's Modern Fairyland";⁶ George W. Boswell's "Proverbs and Phraseology in Tolkien's Lord of the Rings Complex";⁷ and John Timmerman's "Tolkien's Crucible of Faith: The Sub-Creation".⁸

Not all critics are oblivious to the fact that Tolkien's secondary world is not totally masculine. In their articles "Tolkien and Frodo Baggins"⁹ and "The Meaning of The Lord of the Rings",¹⁰ Roger Sale and Dorothy Elizabeth Klein Barber both note that Galadriel's phial successfully routs Shelob. But they have nothing to say about Galadriel and Shelob as characters. Rather, the elf-queen and the giant spider are treated merely as expressions of Tolkien's theme.

⁵Samuel H. Woods Jr., "J.R.R. Tolkien and the Hobbits," Cimarron Review, 1 (Sept. 1967), 44-52.

⁶Gerald M. Garmon, "J.R.R. Tolkien's Modern Fairyland," West Georgia College Review, 6 (1973), 10-15.

⁷George W. Boswell, "Proverbs and Phraseology in Tolkien's Lord of the Rings Complex," University of Mississippi Studies in English, 10 (1969), 59-65.

⁸John Timmerman, "Tolkien's Crucible of Faith: The Sub-Creation," The Christian Century, 91 (June 5, 1974), 608-11.

⁹Roger Sale, "Tolkien and Frodo Baggins," TC, pp. 247-88.

¹⁰Dorothy Elizabeth Klein Barber, "The Meaning of The Lord of the Rings," in "The Tolkien Papers," Mankato Studies in English, No. 2, Mankato State College Studies, 2, No. 1 (Feb. 1967), 38-50. Hereafter cited as TP.

Other critics complain about the lack of sexuality and romantic love in The Lord of the Rings.¹¹ Gerard O'Connor¹² and Doris T. Myers¹³ take a more extreme position, claiming that Tolkien's women are disenfranchised, underprivileged and repressed. There is yet another school of thought whose members busy themselves by stating that, artistically speaking, Middle-earth's females are failures. The exponents of this theory include David M. Miller, who declares that "Tolkien is wise in avoiding the intricacies of the female, for he handles them badly";¹⁴ Catharine R. Stimpson, who finds that "he makes his women, no matter what their rank, the most hackneyed of stereotypes [who] are either beautiful and distant, simply distant, or simply simple";¹⁵ and Douglas

¹¹ Examples occur in Bill Cater's article "Lord of the Legends", Sunday Times Magazine, 2 January 1972, p. 24; "The Epic of Westernesse", Times Literary Supplement (London), 17 December 1954, p. 817; and "Heroic Endeavour", Times Literary Supplement (London), 27 August 1954, p. 541.

¹² Gerard O'Connor, "Why Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings Should Not Be Popular Culture," Extrapolation, 13 (1972), 48-55.

¹³ Doris T. Myers, "Brave New World: The Status of Women According to Tolkien, Lewis and Williams," Cimarron Review, 13 (Oct. 1971), 13-19.

¹⁴ David M. Miller, "The Moral Universe of J.R.R. Tolkien," TP, p. 60.

¹⁵ Catharine R. Stimpson, J.R.R. Tolkien, Columbia Essays on Modern Writers, No. 41 (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 18.

Parker, who notes that the women "are slightly less than stock figures".¹⁶ Lin Carter depreciates the characterizations of Aragorn, Frodo and Sam, and goes on to say that the "women characters are particularly weak, almost embarrassingly unconvincing".¹⁷ His opinion is endorsed by Fritz Lieber, who unequivocally states that Tolkien is "not interested in women".¹⁸ William Ready deals the unkindest cut of all. With one breathtaking statement, he disposes of, not only the women of the story, but nearly everyone else as well: "The elves and men of Tolkien's relation are his poorest subcreation, save for his women".¹⁹

¹⁶ Douglass Parker, "Hwaet We Holbytla . . .," Hudson Review, 9 (Winter 1956-57), 607.

¹⁷ Lin Carter, Imaginary Worlds: The Art of Fantasy (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973), p. 121.

¹⁸ Quoted by Carter, p. 117. Lieber goes on to say that Tolkien is not really interested in his villains either. In fact, Tolkien is immensely interested in every facet of his subcreation. In Daphne Castell's interview, Tolkien discusses the history of Middle-earth and remarks "There's one exception that puzzles me -- Berúthiel. I really don't know anything of her -- you remember Aragorn's allusion in Book I (page 325) to the cats of Queen Berúthiel, that could find their way home on a blind night? She just popped up, and obviously called for attention, but I don't really know anything certain about her; though, oddly enough, I have a notion that she was the wife of one of the ship-kings of Pelargir" (p. 147). Tolkien develops the story of Berúthiel, who is mentioned only once in The Lord of the Rings, for another half-page, a strong rebuttal to Lieber's declaration of Tolkien's disinterest.

¹⁹ William Ready, Understanding Tolkien and "The Lord of the Rings" (New York: Paperback Library, 1968), p. 54.

Finally, there are those critics who can find nothing good at all in Tolkien's work. The foremost of these is Edmund Wilson, whose main charge against The Lord of the Rings is "an impotence of imagination".²⁰ His comment that "the fair ladies would not stir a heartbeat"²¹ is a corollary of that statement. Mary Ellmann finds the work to be one of "breathhtaking puerility",²² but her sarcastic comments on all aspects of the trilogy (including its females) are too concerned with being clever to be either illuminating or constructive.

To all these critics and commentators, Tolkien's females are unimportant, uninteresting, undeveloped, unconvincing, unbelievable and unworthy of any favourable notice.²³ This thesis will attempt to show that they are wrong in all these respects. An examination of the quest-war story genres in literature will show some of the literary

²⁰ Edmund Wilson, "Oo, Those Awful Orcs," The Bit Between My Teeth (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1965), 326-32.

²¹ Wilson, p. 331.

²² Mary Ellmann, "Growing Up Hobbitic," New American Review, No. 2 (1968), p. 218.

²³ This is not to say, of course, that there has been no reasonable criticism of Tolkien's women. Lucile Torkelson's article "Return of the Hero", Milwaukee Sentinel (8 November 1967), part III, 1-4, contains some sensible comments on Middle-earth women. Paul H. Kocher's book Master of Middle-earth: The Fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972) also has some perceptive criticism. But level-headed, open-minded critics on the subject seem to be a rare species.

influences present in The Lord of the Rings, establish the traditions in which Tolkien created the trilogy, and provide insight into the roles and functions of its women.²⁴ A detailed discussion of women in Middle-earth societies, and studies of individual characters will illustrate their importance, use and development. The association of women with the forces of nature will then be investigated. The females of Tolkien's poems and short stories will be considered in a separate chapter. The final chapter will draw some conclusions.

²⁴ The fact that I examine only the quest-war story genres in relation to The Lord of the Rings does not mean that these two are the only literary influences present in the trilogy. It would be both interesting and profitable to study the connection between Tolkien's fantasy and the occurrence of fantasy in the works of his contemporaries, for example, in science fiction. Several critical works have already been written dealing with the literature of Tolkien; C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams, and much more could be done in this field. In this thesis, however, I have chosen to limit myself to the influences of the quest-war story traditions.

CHAPTER I -- Sources and Traditions for the Depiction of Women in The Lord of the Rings

Middle-earth, the world of The Lord of the Rings, can accurately be described as a "man's world", a fact that is the result of mythological and literary influences and traditions. The trilogy is primarily concerned with a quest and a war. The outcome of the quest will affect all Middle-earth, and the war spreads from Gondor in the south to Rohan in the west and the Shire and Erebor in the north, and has vast implications for all the peoples of those countries.

In mythology, literature and fact, neither quest nor war has ever been notable as a field for feminine achievement. A glance at such books as David Adams Leeming's Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero and Joseph Campbell's The Hero with a Thousand Faces, both of which take the quest as a major theme, might well be a discouraging experience for a woman. The scarcity of female questors is indicated by surveying the table of contents in Mythology. In the chapter entitled "Trial and Quest", dealing with the central experience of the mythological and/or literary characters that he is studying, Leeming lists the names of thirteen typical quest protagonists, and not one of them is a woman.¹

¹Heracles, Prometheus, Theseus, Kutoyis, Kyazimba, Gawain, Percival, Gilgamesh, Seth, Quetzalcoatl, Faust, Jesus, and Dionysos.

The most famous quest in literature, the Quest for the Holy Grail, was undertaken only by men. Tolkien's earlier book, The Hobbit, a "prequel"² to The Lord of the Rings, is also the story of a quest. Not only does no female journey with Thorin and Company to the Lonely Mountain, no girl or woman appears at all during the course of the story.³

In quest tales, any woman involved in the proceedings is usually found in one of two rather limited roles. W. H. Auden points out that "Even when his [the hero's] motive for undertaking the Quest is erotic, the lady has to remain in wait for him either at the start or the end of the road."⁴ If she remains at home when the hero begins the quest, she must perforce run the house, estate or country in her lord's absence. According to Le Livre de Trois Vertues (c. 1407),

²Daniel Grotta-Kurska, J.R.R. Tolkien: Architect of Middle Earth (Philadelphia: Running Press, 1976), p. 10.

³The quest tales of the Holy Grail and The Hobbit are in fact rather atypical in their treatment of women. King Arthur remains in Camelot to look after Britain while his knights go in search of the Grail, a religious rather than a sexual object. In The Hobbit, Bilbo, a bachelor (a marital status unusual among Hobbits), leaves his home untended during the year he is away looking for treasure. When he returns, he finds that at least one female, Lobelia Sackville-Baggins, has taken advantage of his absence to appropriate several of his possessions, notably his silver spoons, in an action that is reminiscent of the behaviour of Penelope's suitors. However, Lobelia is not mentioned by name in The Hobbit, being grouped with the Sackville-Baggins in general.

⁴Wystan Hugh Auden, "The Quest Hero", TC, p. 49.

a lady "should be able to replace her husband in every way, to manage an estate, to budget money and to understand the law."⁵ Comparatively little attention is paid to this feminine role by literary artists. They and their audiences were much more interested in the hero and his quest, rather than what was happening in his household. For example, in Guy of Warwick, a romance of the fourteenth century, Guy, having developed a taste for adventuring during his courtship of the fair Felice, is unable to settle into matrimonial bliss. He soon leaves to continue his interrupted career of dragon-slaying and giant-killing, abandoning his bride to the domestic problems of running a household and estate. Attention is, of course, focused on Guy's exploits rather than Felice's everyday routine of sedentary management.⁶

The universal role of the heroine of the quest story is that of the object of the hero's quest. This is the case in numerous myths and fairy tales. The company of female quest objects includes Eurydice; Emer, the beloved of Cú Chulainn; and a veritable army of unnamed females who

⁵Margaret Adlum Gist, Love and War in the Middle English Romances (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1947), p. 16.

⁶"The History of Guy Earl of Warwick", in Early English Prose Romances, ed. William J. Thoms (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., n.d.), pp. 331-408.

inspire the hero to great deeds, usually by their unsurpassable beauty, as happens in "The Sleeping Beauty", "The Princess on the Glass Hill", "Prince Hyacinth and the Dear Little Princess" and "The White Snake".⁷ The heroine as quest object is also to be found in the Middle English romances, a form of literature familiar to Tolkien. In The Squire of Low Degree, for example, the Squire first suffers imprisonment for the love of the Princess of Hungary. After his release, he must still go on a quest and win a name for himself before he can marry her.⁸ In Guy of Warwick, Felice is initially the object of Guy's quest, before her role is changed by marriage. The heroine is "the unfailing inspiration and the long-sought, hardly-won reward of the hero's valour."⁹

As for the activity of war, female warriors are not unknown in myth, literature or history. Amazons existed in Greek and Roman traditions; Edmund Spenser created

⁷"The Sleeping Beauty", "The Princess on the Glass Hill" and "Prince Hyacinth and the Dear Little Princess" can be found in Andrew Lang's The Blue Fairy Book (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1965); "The White Snake" can be found in Lang's The Green Fairy Book (New York: Looking Glass Library, 1960).

⁸"The Squire of Low Degree", in Middle English Metrical Romances, ed. William Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale, II (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1964), 719-755.

⁹Adelaide Evans Harris, The Heroine of the Middle English Romances (1928; rpt. Folcroft, Pa.: Folcroft Press, 1969), pp. 34-35.

Britomartis, the warrior princess who defeats every man she encounters. Similar figures are Ariosto's Bradamante and the Scandanavian-Teutonic Brunhild. Perhaps because they were governed by necessity rather than artistry, the roll call of historical female warriors is somewhat more extensive. There is the half-legendary Queen Boudicea; the Countess of Montfort, who fought at the siege of Hennebont; Blanche of Champagne, who defended the rights of her minor son for fourteen years; and Blanche of Castile, who organized two fleets, broke up a league of barons in 1226 and repelled an attack by the English in 1230.¹⁰ The most famous female warrior of all is, of course, Joan of Arc.

Yet these examples, notable as they are, are few and far between in the innumerable stories that deal with war. It is an overwhelmingly masculine activity. As in quest literature, the women are often left behind to manage domestic affairs, as did Penelope and the mothers, sisters and wives of the Crusaders. If they are so unfortunate as to belong to the losing side, they are often forced to endure a siege, with all its attendant hardships and miseries, before being defeated, captured, sold into slavery, or killed. This was the fate of the Trojan women as depicted by Euripides. Historically speaking, women involved in a war could expect no better treatment than their literary counterparts.

¹⁰Gist, pp. 146-47.

Edward I, for instance, "extended no chivalric courtesies to the Queen of Scotland and her ladies, when they fell into his power, but kept them imprisoned."¹¹

As well as the literary traditions surrounding the themes of quest and war, Tolkien's fiction is also influenced by a certain "family" of myths and literary works. This "family" is what W. H. Auden, a pupil of Tolkien who shared many of the latter's interests, has termed "the Northern thing."¹² The "Northern thing" encompasses the mythology and literature of the pre-Christian Scandinavians, Celts and Teutons, including the Anglo-Saxon poem Beowulf and the Arthurian legends. Auden goes on to say that "Tolkien is fascinated with the whole Northern thing People seem to divide -- they're attracted by either the Northern thing or the Southern thing, by Scandinavia or the Mediterranean -- and for Tolkien north is a sacred direction."¹³

While the treatment of goddesses and heroines is not noticeably expansive, and comparatively few women play important roles in surviving Scandinavian myths, it is gratifying to note that those who are present often have distinct and individual personalities and exercise a fair

¹¹ Gist, p. 147.

¹² Quoted in "Elvish Mode," New Yorker, 41 (15 January 1966), p. 24.

¹³ "Elvish Mode," p. 24.

degree of power and influence without benefit of masculine intervention. In "The Lay of Thrym", for example, Freya flatly refuses to accede to the frost-giant's demand for her hand in exchange for Thor's stolen hammer, and says so in no uncertain terms. Her fellow deities, although annoyed by her decision, accept it and make no effort to change her mind. In the same poem, when the Asgardians gather to discuss the situation, the poet makes a point of saying that "goddesses with them [the gods] sat in council to consider how/To recover the holy hammer of Thunder".¹⁴ In other words, the counsel of the goddesses is considered to be just as valuable as that of the gods.

While the mortal women of Scandinavian myths and legends do not always act admirably, they are usually accorded personalities as distinct and forceful as those of their male counterparts. For example, in "The Waking of Angantyr", Hevor dares to visit the Hjorbard graves despite all warnings, and wrests the sword Tyrting from the grave of her father, overcoming the initial opposition of his ghost: "Such courage of heart I cannot refuse."¹⁵ C. S. Lewis notes that "The position of women in the Sagas is,

¹⁴"The Lay of Thrym," The Elder Edda: A Selection, trans. Paul B. Taylor and Wystan Hugh Auden (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), verse 11.

¹⁵"The Waking of Angantyr," The Elder Edda: A Selection, verse 25.

indeed, higher than that which they enjoy in classical literature; but it is based on a purely comprehensible and unemphasized respect for the courage or prudence which some women, like some men, happen to possess. The Norsemen, in fact, treat their women not primarily as women but as people."¹⁶

With regard to women, Tolkien's work shows the influence of Scandinavian culture in his use of the Valkyrie figure, and his belief that women ought to be treated "as people", an attitude that will be examined in Chapter II. The effect of Celtic and Teutonic culture is seen almost exclusively in the character and activities of Eowyn, who will be discussed in Chapter III.

The influence of Beowulf on Tolkien's writing is another matter. In 1936, Tolkien made an address before the British Association entitled "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics".¹⁷ According to Donald K. Fry, this essay "completely altered the course of Beowulf studies".¹⁸ It is inevitable that Beowulf and the society, culture and values

¹⁶ Clive Staples Lewis, The Allegory of Love (1936; rpt. Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 9.

¹⁷ William Ready, Understanding Tolkien and "The Lord of the Rings" (New York: Paperback Library, 1968), p. 16. Tolkien's essay was reprinted in The Beowulf Poet: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Donald K. Fry (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), 8-56.

¹⁸ Fry, p. ix.

that it depicts should have an influence on Tolkien's own literary creation. Tolkien was the first to point out a fact later illustrated by John Tinkler in his essay "Old English in Rohan";¹⁹ namely, that the language of the Rohirrim is, for all practical purposes, Old English: "The language of Rohan I have ... made to resemble ancient English"²⁰

The treatment of women in Beowulf has a definite influence on the depiction of women in The Lord of the Rings. Only three females appear in person in the poem, and only a very few more are mentioned during the course of conversation. Hrothgar's queen, Welthow, has very few functions. She acts as a hostess to the Danes' illustrious guests (which involves such duties as offering the stirrup cup), has children to carry on the royal line, and (one assumes) oversees the other women of the household. She certainly has no power of her own. The power and status that she does possess derive entirely from her position as Hrothgar's wife. When he dies, she retains no power in the court.

¹⁹ John Tinkler, "Old English in Rohan," TC, 164-69.

²⁰ John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, The Return of the King (Toronto: Methuen Publications, 1975), p. 414. Hereafter references to The Fellowship of the Ring, The Two Towers and The Return of the King will be cited in the text by volume number: I, II and III.

Higd, Higlac's wife, is a younger edition of Welthow. The poet describes her as "a noble queen" and "young/But wise and knowing beyond her years" (ll. 1926-27). "Finn's wife, Hnaf's sister" (l. 1071) does not even merit a name. Like many fantasy princesses and romance heroines, she exists solely through her relationships with men. Her story is ample testimony to the typical helplessness of women who belong to warrior societies, and the unhappy lot of those forced into distasteful marriages in a futile effort to establish peace.

Thrith is the only woman mentioned in the poem who distinguishes herself by her individuality. Refusing to fit neatly and without complaint into the role of submissive, subordinate and subservient non-entity, she attempts to assert herself as a person and exercise some power independent of her male relations. By doing so, she displeases the poet, who calls her "niggardly" (l. 1929) and informs us that she was "an imperious princess with a vicious tongue/ ... so fierce and wild" (ll. 1932-33)²¹ that she struck terror into the hearts of her father's followers. This is clearly an undesirable state of affairs, so her "wise father" (l. 1947), apparently unable to control her himself, solves the problem by marrying her to Offa, who subdues her (by what means the poet does not say). She is eventually praised for "her generous heart, and her goodness, and the high/And most noble paths she walked, filled/with adoring love for that

²¹ All quotations from Beowulf are Burton Raffel's translation, published in New York and Toronto by New American Library, 1963.

leader of warriors, "Her husband" (ll. 1952-55). Thrith's bid for independence was doomed from the start: she had the whole weight of society against her.

The treatment of women in Beowulf as related to The Lord of the Rings is, as might be expected, an important element in Tolkien's portrayal of the Rohirrim society, culture and values. This point will be mentioned again in the discussion of Éowyn.

The other female who makes a personal appearance in the pages of Beowulf is, of course, Grendel's mother. She also is not accorded her own name, and is seen only in relation to her son. Her influence on The Lord of the Rings stems from her role as mother, her connection with darkness and the underworld, and the power of evil. In all these respects she has a definite effect on the depiction of Shelob, who will be discussed in more detail later.

Woman's role in quest and war stories is also illustrated in Arthurian legends. In the Arthurian tradition woman is a source of delight but also a source of confusion and destruction. They are safely allowed one traditionally feminine role as inspirations for manly valour: Arthur's knights spend much of their time rescuing maidens from various threats, before riding on to new adventures. If the woman remains a passive object and leaves all the activity to the man, all is well. When she steps out of the narrow confines of this role, however, problems arise for all concerned.

Guenever is an excellent example of a woman who creates ambivalent attitudes in men. As queen, she inspires love in the courtly love tradition, as in the episode of Sir Meliagrance, which is not totally unacceptable, although the abduction is unexpected and leads to trouble. As a person, she means something to both Arthur and Lancelot, and it is in this situation that the ultimate destruction of the Round Table is rooted. The message is clear: as an object, the woman has a useful, if passive, function, which lies in inspiring men to achieve their full potential for valour and courtesy. However, when a man becomes interested in her as an individual in her own right, complications arise, and the perfect masculine camaraderie found between such knights as Roland and Oliver becomes impossible. W. H. Auden points out that "To take a man on a journey is to cut him off from his everyday social relations to women, neighbours, and fellow-workers. The only sustained relation which the Quest Hero can enjoy is with those who accompany him on his journey, that is to say, either the democratic relation between equal comrades-in-arms, or the feudal relation between Knight and Squire. Aside from these, his social life is limited to chance and brief encounters."²² When the hero stops questing and returns to the court, he inevitably encounters the women who have been excluded from the journey, and, from the

²² Auden, p. 49.

masculine standpoint, "introduce a woman and good and evil have a way of getting all mixed up."²³

This concept is illustrated in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, an Arthurian Middle English romance with which Tolkien was extremely familiar: the version edited by Tolkien and E.V. Gordon "made his [Tolkien's] name known in the classrooms",²⁴ The woman, on her husband's orders, acts as a temptress and places Gawain in an embarrassing situation. As an impersonal hostess, Gawain can accept her without difficulty; when she tries to instigate a personal relationship, the knight is thrown into confusion and can barely cope with the new development. When the truth is revealed, he requests to be commended to her, and then delivers a tirade against women:

And comaundez me to pat cortays, your comlych fere,
Bope pat on and pat oper, myn honoured ladyez,
pat pus hor knyzt wyth hor kest han koyntly bigyled.
Bot hit is no ferly paz a fole madde,
And purz wyles of wymmen be wonen to sorze,
For so wat3 Adam in erde with one bygyled,
And Salamon with fele sere, and Samson eftsone3
Dalyda dalt hym hys wyrde -- and Dauyth perafter
Watz blended with Barsabe, pat much bale poled.
Now pese were wrathed wyth her wyles, hit were a wynne huge
To luf hom wel, and leue hem not, a leude pat coupe.
For pes wer forne pe freest, pat folzed alle pe sele
Exellently of alle pyse oper, vnder heuenryche pat mused;
And all pay were biwyed
With wymmen pat pay vsed.
paz I be now bigyled,
Me pink me burde be excused.

(ll. 2411-27)

²³David M. Miller, "The Moral Universe of J.R.R. Tolkien," TP, p. 60.

²⁴Ready, p. 16.

As Katharine M. Rogers points out, this invective is typical of the misogyny so prevalent in the Middle Ages.²⁵ If a woman remains in her proper place (in the domestic background, or in danger), she is tolerated. But if she attracts attention to herself as an individual, she is condemned because of the problems she creates for men.

The influence of Arthurian legends also appears in the work of Edmund Spenser, whose Faërie Queene, like The Lord of the Rings, is concerned with quests and wars. Spenser's influence on Tolkien's trilogy will be discussed in Chapter III.

Until quite recently, the woman's point of view in the quest-war story traditions has been ignored in favour of the masculine attitude. In his novel The Once and Future King T. H. White eloquently expresses the position of Guenever and, through her, all women:

People are easily dazzled by Round Tables and feats of arms. You read of Lancelot in some noble achievement, and, when he comes home to his mistress, you feel resentment at her because she cuts across the achievement, or spoils it. Yet Guenever, could not search for the Grail. She could not vanish into the English forest for a year's adventure with the spear. It was her part to sit at home, though passionate, though real and hungry in her fierce and tender heart. For her there were no recognized diversions except what is comparable to the ladies' bridge party of today. She could hawk with a merlin, or play blind man's buff, or pincimerille. These were the amusements

²⁵ Katharine M. Rogers, The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1966), p. 60.

of grown-up women in her time. But the great hawks, the hounds, heraldry, tournaments -- these were for Lancelot. For her, unless she felt like a little spinning or embroidery, there was no occupation -- except Lancelot.²⁶

The emotional requirements of the quest genre and the war story genre are summed up by C. S. Lewis:

Their favourite stories [of the Dark Ages] were not, like ours, stories of how a man married, or failed to marry, a woman We are mistaken if we think that the poet in the Song of Roland shows restraint in disposing so briefly of Alde, Roland's betrothed. Rather by bringing her in at all, he is doing the opposite: he is expatiating, filling in chinks, dragging in for our delectation the most marginal interests after those of primary importance have had their due The deepest of world emotions in this period is the love of man for man, the mutual love of warriors who die fighting against odds, and the affection between vassal and lord.²⁷

Historical facts and literary traditions based on historical facts have a definite effect on the depiction of the quest and war in The Lord of the Rings. This being the case, one might reasonably expect that women will not be too much in evidence in the trilogy, and when they do appear, that they will play perhaps no more important a role than that of Welthow in Beowulf. That is, they would be confined

²⁶Terence Hanbury White, The Once and Future King (Collins: Fontana Books, 1958), p. 469. Guenever's problem is that she refuses to be satisfied with the role that Welthow plays, and insists on being more than the Danish queen is allowed to be. By demanding recognition as a distinct person, rather than disappearing into her role as Arthur's queen, Guenever creates chaos in the masculine world of the court.

²⁷Lewis, p. 9.

to the roles of the mistress of the court (read chief housewife), hostess, nurse to the injured and mourner to the dead.

Tolkien was fully aware that the quest-war story traditions had a limiting effect on the portrayal of women. He once commented about the activities in The Lord of the Rings: "These are wars and a terrible expedition to the North Pole, so to speak. Surely there is no lack of interest, is there? I know that one interviewer explained it: it is written by a man who has never reached puberty and knows nothing about women but as a schoolboy, and all the good characters come home like happy boys, safe from the war. I thought it was very rude -- as far as I know, the man is childless -- writing about a man surrounded by children, wife, daughter, granddaughter."²⁸ In fact, although the traditions of the quest, war story and "the Northern thing" tend either to repress or exclude women, Tolkien has improved on the not terribly wide spectrum of activities open to women in such works as Beowulf or the

²⁸Grotta-Kurska, p. 117. Grotta-Kurska does not specify which critic Tolkien was referring to, so it is impossible to make an absolutely certain identification. However, I believe that the offending commentator was Edwin Muir, who wrote: "The hobbits, or halflings, are ordinary boys; the fully human heroes have reached the fifth form; but hardly one of them knows anything about women, except by hearsay. Even the elves and the dwarfs and the ents are boys, irretrievably, and will never come to puberty Boys moving in a boy's world, with a boy's idea of heroism, romance, women, good and evil, are not fully human" From "A Boy's World," Sunday Observer (London), 27 November 1955, p. 11.

Arthurian legends. Rather than neglecting or totally ignoring women as his critics have maintained, he puts more in of and about them than one would expect of a tale that is influenced by "the Northern thing" and belongs to both the quest genre and the war story genre. In the following pages I shall examine, among other things, how his attitude towards women and his treatment of them in his work is affected by the basic sources discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER II -- Women in Middle-earth's Societies

Having looked at women in the mythological and literary genres and traditions on which The Lord of the Rings is based, we can now turn to the work itself. In this chapter I will examine women in the different societies of Middle-earth: what they do or do not do, and how they are affected by the attitudes and customs of their social group.

This chapter is the longest and perhaps the most difficult of the entire thesis. It is an unfortunate necessity that it must come so early, and I can only hope that the reader will possess his or her soul in patience and not be unduly dismayed, bewildered or infuriated (reference to the Appendix might prove useful). An examination of women in Middle-earth societies must be made before it is possible to deal with specific characters. By looking at the roles, positions and treatment of women in each society, Tolkien's general attitude towards the women of his subcreation can be revealed. By discovering what is expected of women by the societies of which they are members, it should be possible to gain a clearer and more complete impression of the individuals who are studied in detail in the following chapters.

As an essential part of his subcreation, Tolkien created eight groupings to inhabit his secondary world:

Wizards, orcs, Valar, Elves, Dwarves, Hobbits, Ents and humans. These different races¹ form societies which are built upon various premises and foundations. Male and female characters from each species fit into certain roles, according to the structure of their social group.

In the non-human social orders, the normal arrangement provides freedom, under recognized authority, to both sexes. Role choice is open to both male and female, and neither sex is subjugated by the other. Like the Norsemen, non-humans treat their women as people.²

Of the non-humans, it is not surprising to discover that the angelic community of the Valar and the exalted elvish societies have no sexually-based social restrictions. Being inherently noble, wise and knowledgeable, the Valar and the Elves bind all individuals by just and reasonable laws, and the proper authorities and leaders expect to be recognized. Within these limits, however, everyone is allowed freedom; it is assumed that both men and women can make their own decisions, and, by their choices, create their own destinies.

¹ Tolkien did not clearly indicate whether the Wizards, orcs, Valar, Elves, Dwarves, Hobbits, Ents and humans are to be considered as different species or different races.

² See C. S. Lewis' comment, quoted above on page 14.

In the cases of the Dwarves, Ents and Hobbits, this freedom within the laws that affect everyone, is also possible. Although the roles offered by the social structure and its customs may be limited, both males and females decide which roles they wish to assume. There is neither familial nor social pressure upon individuals of either sex to choose a position or function which is personally distasteful.

In the human societies, however, the pattern changes. In Númenor, Arnor, Gondor and Rohan, there appear definite restrictions based exclusively on sex. Númenor, whose society was probably influenced to a great degree by the Elves, eventually and belatedly allows more extensive freedom to women. Even in Númenor, however, equality between the sexes is not automatically built into the social structure, but introduced more than one thousand years after the creation of the society.

In Middle-earth, the three human societies of Arnor, Gondor and Rohan are more restrictive. Although women are often respected and admired as individuals, as a sex they are allowed to fill only a limited number of traditionally feminine roles, dictated either by biology or by custom and tradition.

I. Wizards and orcs

The Wizards and orcs, although not human, do not conform to the pattern followed by the Valar, Elves, Dwarves, Hobbits and Ents. The five Wizards sent to Middle-earth by the Valar all "came ... in the shape of Men" (III, p. 365). It is perhaps to be regretted that there were no female Istari. Of the five, Gandalf is apparently the only one who fulfills his responsibilities. Although they are sent specifically "to contest the power of Sauron, and to unite all those who had the will to resist him" (III, p. 365), Saruman succumbs to the temptation of evil; Radagast is a cowardly fool who does nothing decisive and wishes only to stay out of trouble. The other two wizards are apparently either dead or totally ineffectual; they are neither sent for nor consulted.

Given an entirely male company with one outstanding success in the midst of four resounding failures, an interesting question arises: what effect would a Wizardess have? Certainly one could expect added complexities in the story. Tolkien, perhaps seeing the necessity of developing yet another character and evolving her role, decided that any benefit a female Wizard might confer on The Lord of the Rings would be cancelled by the problems that would arise through the creation of such a character. Moreover, a powerful Wizardess would detract from Galadriel's character, power and accomplishments. A weak one is

expendable, the role of magic-wielding jellyfish already being filled by Râdagast.³ Therefore, the Istari (or at any rate Gandalf) achieve their goal without a Wizardess.

Orcs, like the Wizards, are a special case. They are also non-human, but no one would accuse them of following a sexual pattern established by any other species of Middle-earth. There are different kinds or breeds of orcs and some indications of social structure, but Tolkien does not say much about them, either as individuals or a species. Nowhere does a female of the species appear; nowhere is one mentioned. Tolkien has little to say on the subject. The reader is told that orcs are "spawned" (I, p. 341), are "bred" (II, p. 142), that the races of man, orc and goblin have been "mixed" (II, p. 142), and that "Azog was the father of Bolg" (III, p. 354; emphasis mine). Just how the spawning, breeding and mixing takes place is not explained; nor, for that matter, is Bolg's mother.

Tolkien's reticence on the subject is understandable. The orcs are a loathesome creation, and how they propagate is a distasteful matter into which he evidently preferred

³Galadriel, Gandalf, Elrond and Saruman are the most powerful non-humans (besides Sauron) in The Lord of the Rings. Of the four, only the first two perform any impressive feats of magic or give any real show of strength. Elrond's power lies in counsel and knowledge rather than action, and as for Saruman: "I think he has not got much grit, not much plain courage alone in a tight place without a lot of slaves and machines and things, if you know what I mean. Very different from old Gandalf" (II, p. 172).

not to inquire. If there are such things as female orcs, goblins or trolls, then they are evidently not used for the purposes of war. However, the question of their existence must remain open.⁴

II. Valar

According to Robert Foster, the Valar, or "angels", who are the guardians of Middle-earth, are organized in a hierarchy of kings and queens, Manwe the Elder King and Elbereth his wife being the chief rulers.⁵ The power structure is based on the ultimate authority of Eru (that is, God)⁶ and the secondary authority of Manwe. Exactly how the hierarchical system functions under these two is impossible to say,⁷ but all the Valar may choose what courses they wish

⁴It is worth mentioning that troll-women are found in Scandinavian mythology. They are depicted as unattractive, malevolent and aggressive towards both gods and humans, and neither Thor nor the hero Grettir had any hesitation about dispatching them as quickly as possible. See John Arnott MacCulloch, The Celtic and Scandinavian Religions (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1948), p. 122.

⁵Robert Foster, A Guide to Middle-Earth (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), p. 266.

⁶Foster, p. 88.

⁷Despite their hierarchical social structure, the Valar seem to be fairly democratic. Most of their major decisions, such as the overthrow of Morgoth and the temporary abdication of their guardianship, seem to be reached by agreement and consensus. The resolution to cast Valinor in shadow is Manwe's "decree" (Donald Swann and John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, The Road Goes Ever On: A Song Cycle, p. 60); whether the other Valar had anything to say on the matter is not stated. Incidentally, it should be mentioned that because the Undying Lands, ...

to follow and for what purposes to use their power. They are responsible for their own actions.

A number of Valar exercise this possibility of choice in a way that in part creates the history and events of Middle-earth, and affects the fates of countless individuals of all races.⁸ The marriage of Melian, a Vala, to Thingol Greycloak, the Eldarin King of Doriath in Beleriand, is an example of the Valar's freedom of action.⁹ Her decision also has Biblical connotations: "And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men and they bore children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown."¹⁰

⁷(cont'd) where the Valar live, "were removed forever from the circles of the world" (III, p. 317) near the end of the Second Age, they are not geographically a part of Middle-earth.

⁸Another Vala that affects Middle-earth's history through his decisions is Morgoth. In an episode that is meant to recall the fall of Lucifer, Morgoth and a number of lesser Valar (including, possibly, Sauron) choose evil, poison the Two Trees, steal the silmarilli and flee to Middle-earth. The results of their actions are the shadowing of Valinor, the revolt of the Noldor and numerous wars, deaths and great deeds in Middle-earth.

⁹No male Vala makes a similar decision and marries an "inferior".

¹⁰Genesis, chapter 6, verses 1, 2 and 4.

In Tolkien's history the sexes of the divine and non-divine participants is a reversal of the Biblical situation: a female "angel" marries an Elf, a member of a race inferior to her own. But the union does produce a "giant", so to speak, in Lúthien, one of the greatest women in the history of Middle-earth, and the ancestress of "giants".

The Valar had specific functions, both as individuals and a group. As a collective body they supervised such activities as the riddle game.¹¹ The most prominent Vala in the trilogy is Elbereth Gilthoniel, whose power and authority is second only to Manwe and Eru. She kindled the stars at the creation of the world, and is the only Vala praised and worshipped as an individual in The Lord of the Rings. Her function was to aid the distressed people of Middle-earth afflicted by danger: "As a 'divine' or 'angelic' person Varda/Elbereth could be said to be 'looking afar from heaven' She was often thought of, or depicted, as standing on a great height, looking towards Middle-earth, with eyes that penetrated the shadows, and listening to the cries for aid of Elves (and Men) in peril or grief. Frodo ... and Sam both invoke her in moments of great peril. The Elves sing hymns to her."¹²

¹¹Foster, pp. 266-67.

¹²Donald Swann and John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, The Road Goes Ever On: A Song Cycle (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975), p. 65. Hereafter cited in the text as Road.

As a protectoress, Elbereth is extremely powerful. Discussing the attack on the Nazgûl on Weathertop, Aragorn says: "'all blades perish that pierce that dreadful King. More deadly to him was the name of Elbereth'" (I, p. 210).

Because of her connection with stars, Elbereth also has power over light and dark: "After the destruction of the Two Trees and the flight from Valinor of the revolting Eldar, Varda lifted up her hands, in obedience to the decree of Manwe, and summoned up the dark shadows which engulfed the shores and the mountains and last of all the fana (figure) of Varda, with her hands turned eastward in rejection, standing white upon Oiolosse " (Road, p. 60).

The literary influence of the Virgin Mary upon the character of Elbereth is noticeable. Richard Purtill points out that the address "'O Light to us that wander here'" (I, p. 88) "recalls certain Roman Catholic hymns to the Blessed Virgin",¹³ hymns that Tolkien certainly would have known. The protective aspect of the Virgin is also used in the creation of Elbereth. And, like Mary, Elbereth, although not the very highest authority of the universe, is yet very powerful and much revered. Her power of light and divine ability to protect both appear in the elvish hymn heard by Bilbo and Frodo in Rivendell: "'O! Elbereth who lit the

¹³Richard Purtill, Lord of the Elves and Eldils: Philosophy and Fantasy in C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 117.

Stars, from glittering crystal slanting falls with light like jewels from heaven on high the glory of the starry host. To lands remote I have looked afar, and now to thee, Fanuilos, bright spirit clothed in ever-white, I here will sing beyond the Sea, beyond the wide and sundering Sea. O! Queen who kindled star on star, white-robed from heaven gazing far, here overwhelmed in dread of death I cry: O guard me, Elbereth!" (Road, p. 64).

Elbereth is the only Vala whose name appears with any frequency within the narrative of The Lord of the Rings. Tolkien says more about her characteristics, powers and deeds in the appendices and the notes to The Road Goes Ever On, than about any other divinity. It is her influence, rather than Manwe's or Eru's, which is requested by the trilogy's characters, and which makes an impression upon the reader. It is her feminine authority, rather than the ultimate masculine authority, which dominates the work.

III. Elves

The Elves are the wisest, most exalted and most thoughtful people in Middle-earth. Therefore, it is appropriate that the Elves establish no social barriers based on sex, recognizing the freedom of each person to self-determination.¹⁴

¹⁴The recognition of each person's freedom and the desire not to interfere with it, plus the traditional elvish policy of non-involvement, are the reasons that Elves are, as Frodo finds, reluctant and generally unhelpful counsellors.

When Fëanor defies the Valar and returns to Middle-earth in pursuit of Morgoth, a number of "princes and queens" (Road, p. 60) also lead their people in support of Fëanor. It is quite possible that the queens and other elvish women actually fought beside the men in the War of the Great Jewels, for at the end of the First Age, Galadriel "was the last survivor" (Road, p. 60) of the leaders of the revolt. Prevented from returning to Eldamar because of her decision to follow Fëanor, Galadriel, with her husband Celeborn, creates a new life for herself in Middle-earth.

Lúthien Tinúviel is another outstanding example of an independent woman. Recalling the choice of her mother and foreshadowing the story of Arwen and Aragorn, her descendants, Lúthien is the first Elf to make the momentous decision to marry a human and give up her immortality so that she can join him in death. Their lives are full of hardship, danger and heroism: "'Tinúviel rescued Beren from the dungeons of Sauron, and together they passed through great dangers, and cast down even the Great Enemy from his throne, and took from his iron crown one of the Silmarils, brightest of all jewels, to be the bride-piece of Lúthien to Thingol her father'" (I, p. 206).¹⁵ In this case the traditional quest roles are reversed. The princess rescues the knight from

¹⁵ Lúthien's and Beren's story is supposed to be fully depicted in Tolkien's yet unpublished work, The Silmarillion.

captivity, demonstrating that Tolkien does not believe that courage, fortitude and resourcefulness are exclusively masculine virtues.

Lúthien successfully combines the traditionally male role of warrior and the female role of mother. Although she herself passes from the world, she bequeaths to her descendants her history and tradition of heroism: "'nobler is Aragorn's¹⁶ spirit than the understanding of Sauron; for is he not of the children of Lúthien? Never shall that line fail, though the years may lengthen beyond count'" (III, p. 152).

Lúthien is not the only elf-maiden of her time who independently and courageously makes a momentous choice about her future. Idril Celebrindal also marries a mortal man, Tuor of the House of Hador, Third House of the Edain. Their son is Eärendil, who weds Elwing, the granddaughter of Lúthien. When Eärendil responds to the desperate need of Elves and humans and undertakes the journey to Valinor to gain assistance, Elwing gives her husband the silmaril won by Lúthien and Beren as a token to gain entrance to the Undying Lands.¹⁶ When Eärendil's ship and the jewel are set in the sky by Elbereth as a star, it becomes a sign of hope to all those in Middle-earth oppressed by evil, and an agent for Elbereth to use when she aids those who call upon her.

¹⁶Unfortunately, Tolkien does not tell us what happened to Elwing.

This creation of history would have been impossible without the freedom of choice open to all Elves. More specifically, the success of Eärendil's mission is ultimately due to the actions of Lúthien, Idril, Elwing and Elbereth.

The story of Nimrodel and Amroth is an inset, a story that shows the power of love and contributes to Tolkien's myth. Amroth's passion for Nimrodel is so strong that life without her is worthless. Nimrodel was one of the Elves that left Lothlórien when the Dwarves released the Balrog, and she intrepidly tries to make the dangerous journey over the White Mountains. She fails and is lost, but leaves descendants in Dol Amroth. Her elvish blood prevents the members of Prince Imrahil's family from degenerating, a fate that eventually overtakes many people in Gondor.

During the Third Age, the elven communities of Rivendell, Mirkwood and Lothlórien are separated from the rest of the world. Because of this isolation, the freedom and independence allowed to elven women by their societies cannot serve as examples to the humans of Middle-earth.

Elven women are able to fulfill all their potential.¹⁷

¹⁷The question of elf-women and political power will be referred to in the discussion of Galadriel. However, whether the heir(ess) is male or female, the question is complicated by the fact that, unless they are killed in a battle, Elves are immortal, and therefore power is seldom transferred. An exception is Lúthien's father Thingol, who either died or returned to the Undying Lands sometime after his daughter and her husband perished. Dior, Lúthien's son, was "Thingol's heir" (I, p. 206).

Like the men, they are restricted only by the laws and traditions that apply equally to all Elves. They are given credit for being intelligent individuals capable of making their own decisions and organizing their own lives. No social customs are outraged if they choose to assume the traditionally masculine role of warrior if the need arises. Such women as Galadriel, Lúthien, Idril, Elwing and Nimrodel are successful in the roles of wife and mother, and their children continue the tradition of heroism established by their parents.

IV. Dwarves

The sketchy Dwarf creation myth (III, p. 352) makes no mention of women (perhaps a concession to dwarvish reticence). Tolkien is evasive on the subject, covering the situation with the interestingly vague statement: "concerning the beginning of the Dwarves strange tales are told both by the Eldar and by the Dwarves themselves; but since these things lie far back beyond our days little is said of them here" (III, p. 352).

The women are few in number, no more than one third of the entire people (III, p. 360). Tolkien tells us little about them, but they seem to enjoy social independence and have the same racial character traits as the males. They have the dwarvish passion for secrecy, and seldom go abroad except when the necessity is urgent. In such circumstances

they dress like the males, whom they are said to resemble to such an extent that other peoples cannot distinguish between the two sexes. When they do undertake a journey, judging by the example of *Dís*,¹⁸ they are tough, intrepid and quite capable of matching the "stronger" sex stride for stride. *Dís*, Thorin's sister, travelled with her family and their followers from the wreck of the Kingdom under the Mountain over the Misty Mountains into Eriador, and north into the Ered Luin.

In the central issue of matrimony, both sexes are allowed to make their own choices, apparently without any familial or social pressure: "not all the women take husbands: some desire none; some desire one that they cannot get, and so will have no other" (III, p. 360). It is refreshing to encounter a society that accepts, without question or comment, the idea that some women actually prefer to live without a husband. Moreover, despite the fewness of their numbers and the uncertainty of their racial survival, no one exhorts the women to be fruitful and multiply. The lack of social pressure stems from the fact

¹⁸ *Dís* takes her name from the Scandinavian *disir* (singular *dis*) who were female deities. Their functions in northern mythology are not always clear and occasionally contradictory. They were regarded as guardian spirits of one community, one family or one man. Sometimes they were closely associated with women and fertility. The *disir* were also identified with the Valkyries, the *norns*, or spirits of the dead. See E.O.G. Turville-Petre's *Myth and Religion of the North* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), pp. 221-27.

that it is quite common for male Dwarves to choose the joys of bachelor life over wedded bliss: "As for the men, very many also do not desire marriage, being engrossed in their crafts" (III, p. 360).

Perhaps in keeping with the dwarvish predilection for secrecy, Tolkien does not say how the women occupy their time, a rather sizeable omission, considering that Dwarves tend to have a life span of more than two hundred years to fill. However, it is probable that most or all would possess the creativity and skill with tools that is such a strong racial characteristic of the Dwarves. It is likely that some of the women who prefer to remain unmarried do so because they, like many men, are married to their art and find one life-partner sufficient.

There is conspicuous silence on the subject of Dwarf women and warfare. We are not told if they become soldiers or leave the fighting to the men. However, considering their independence and freedom from social constraints based on sex, the theory that they can actively participate in war if they choose, does not seem unreasonable.

The place of women in the Dwarves' political structure is interesting but impossible to determine with any certainty. All the Dwarf leaders mentioned in The Lord of the Rings are male, but it is entirely possible that their authority was based upon the fact that they were the eldest members of their generations. Dis, "the only dwarf-woman named in these

histories" (III, p. 360), is the youngest of her family, and the date of her death is not given. Therefore it is impossible to know whether Thorin's authority did not descend to her after his demise because of her sex, her personal wishes, or because she had predeceased her brother.

V. Hobbits

Hobbits are closer to human beings in ancestry than are either Elves or Dwarves (I, p. 11), and it might be assumed that this relationship would have as one of its consequences sexually-based social restrictions imposed upon female Hobbits that are not found in other non-human communities. However, this is true only to a limited extent.

The political structure of the Shire is almost non-existent. There are only three offices, two of them hereditary and nominal. The Thainship is a position inherited by the eldest son of the Took family; similarly, the eldest son of the Brandybucks becomes the Master of Buckland. The Hobbit rate of procreation being what it is, apparently there has never been a time in more than fourteen hundred years of Shire history when the question of female succession has had to be considered. These are the only two cases where sexual discrimination is built into Hobbit society.

The only elective office is that of Mayor of Michel Delving. Whether this position was open to females is an interesting point to discuss but impossible to resolve. Only three Mayors are mentioned in The Lord of the Rings: Will Whitfoot, Frodo and Sam. However, there is no reason to assume that someone like Widow Rumble, who supported herself and, after Sam's marriage, looked after the Gaffer, could not have been eligible for the office.

In considering the amount of political power open to female Hobbits, mention should be made of Gollum's grandmother. According to Gandalf, Gollum's family was "of high repute, for it was large and wealthier than most, and it was ruled by a grandmother of the folk, stern and wise in old lore, such as they had" (I, p. 62). This head of the family "was a matriarch, a great person in her way" (I, p. 66), and when Gollum became corrupted by the Ring, the family looked to her for the solution of the problem: "his grandmother, desiring peace, expelled him from the family and turned him out of her hole" (I, p. 63). This incident lies nearly six hundred years in the past and a long distance from the Shire, yet it is an illustration of a female Hobbit holding considerable power and authority.

Unlike Elves, Dwarves and humans, Hobbits neither value nor practise the martial arts: "At no time had Hobbits of any kind been warlike, and they had never fought among themselves" (I, p. 14). The question of female

participation in war therefore never arose, although it should be noted that in the Battle of Bywater, "the last battle fought in the Shire, and the only battle since the Greenfields, 1147, away up in the Northfarthing" (III, p. 295), apparently only male Hobbits participated. Whether this was by the choice of the female Hobbits is not stated.¹⁹

Being an agricultural society, one of the most common roles open to the women of the Shire is that of farmer's wife. Two typical examples are Mrs. Maggot and Mrs. Cotton. Both are cheerful, competent and efficient people who enjoy the lives they have chosen.

At least one critic²⁰ believes that Rose²¹ is nothing more than Sam's reward for a task well done. Rose, however, makes her own decision, and has very definite feelings on.

¹⁹ Sam does tell Farmer Cotton "It isn't safe yet for Mrs. Cotton and Rose to be left all alone" (III, p. 287); neither he nor Farmer Cotton want women involved in the fighting.

²⁰ David M. Miller, "The Moral Universe of J.R.R. Tolkien", TP, p. 59. On this subject, Tolkien says "Sam ... had other deep concerns [that is, Rose] though he put his service first." Quoted by Daphne Castell in "The Realms of Tolkien", New Worlds, 50, (Nov. 1966), p. 151.

²¹ As is appropriate in an agricultural society, the names of the Shire's female inhabitants are connected with nature: "To their maid-children Hobbits commonly gave the names of flowers or jewels" (III, p. 413). According to Ad de Vries' Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery (Amsterdam and London: North Holland Pub. Co., 1974), a rose is a symbol of (among other things) fertility, physical and spiritual love, and wholeness (pp. 391-93), "Belladonna" is a more enigmatic choice. Why should Bilbo's mother be given the name of the "deadly nightshade", which represents a fatal gift, ...

the subject: "'It seems she didn't like my going abroad at all, poor lass; but as I hadn't spoken, she couldn't say so. And I didn't speak, because I had a job to do first. But now I have spoken, and she says: 'Well, you've wasted a year, so why wait longer?' 'Wasted?' I says. 'I wouldn't call it that.' Still, I see what she means'" (III, p. 304). After Frodo's departure, it is Rose and Elanor that console Sam for the loss of his master, and make him "'one and whole, for many years'" (III, p. 309). Having chosen her roles as wife, mother and first lady of the Shire, Rose fulfills all three and lives the kind of life she wants.

Like Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin, female Hobbits are also capable of gaining fame (in some cases, notoriety) in their own right. Bilbo's mother "was the famous Belladonna Took, one of the three remarkable daughters of the Old Took"²² We are not told why Belladonna was famous or remarkable, and clearly part of her status comes from her family connections. Yet "famous" and "remarkable" are not adjectives that Hobbits use lightly, and whatever Belladonna did to earn them, she evidently achieved

... silence or loneliness? (de Vries, pp. 44-45). (Perhaps it has something to do with her fame or remarkable-ness, which leaves room for all kinds of interesting speculations.) "Primula" is the primrose (primula vulgaris) and is connected with spring and fertility, and inconstancy and death (de Vries, p. 342). Perhaps the association with inconstancy and death refers to Sandyman's story that Primula pushed her husband out of the boat.

²² J.R.R. Tolkien, The Hobbit (London: Unwin Books, 1974), p. 2.

recognition as an individual, rather than as a member of the Took family.

Primula Brandybuck, Frodo's mother, also gains a kind of legendary status. Both she and her husband drowned while boating on the Brandywine River, and various explanations are offered for the disaster, including Sandyman's: "'I heard she pushed him in, and he pulled her in after him'" (I, p. 31). The Gaffer discredits the story, but the fact that it gained enough credence to be repeated is an oblique, back-handed tribute to Primula's personality.

The most strikingly individual female Hobbit is Lobelia Sackville-Baggins. Lobelia is the driving force behind her family's ambition to obtain Bag End. She is more persistent than her husband when the place is left to Frodo, and she continues the campaign after her husband's death. She is evidently a formidable opponent, as indicated by a conversation between Frodo and Gandalf:

"I thought it was Lobelia."

"Then I forgive you. But I saw her some time ago, driving towards Bywater with a face that would have curdled new milk."

"She had already nearly curdled me. Honestly I nearly tried on Bilbo's ring. I longed to disappear."
(I, p. 48)

She is also renowned as a shrewd buyer, an uncomfortable neighbour and a generally unpleasant person. However, among her virtues must be listed considerable courage, demonstrated by her defiance of Sharkey's men, and her insistence on walking out of prison instead of being carried. She is also

a person of strong family feeling, shown by her love for her son, which is reciprocated. Lotho's death and her imprisonment create in her a compassion that had previously not been part of her personality. She resolves the quarrel with the Baggins branch of the family by leaving her money to Frodo to help dispossessed Hobbits. Her spirit and belated attempt to cure the evil inadvertently caused by her son make her a more palatable character.

Hobbit females were restricted because of their sex only in their ineligibility for the positions of Thain and Master. Otherwise they were limited, like the men, only by custom and inclination, and were left free to make their own decisions as to what they wanted to do with their lives. Since the Shire was basically rural and Hobbits were peaceful and domestic by preference, most inhabitants were farmers, craftspeople or gentry, usually with large families. If most females were wives and mothers, these were roles that were freely and cheerfully chosen, just as most of the males chose to be husbands and fathers.²³

²³"Bilbo and Frodo were as bachelors very exceptional, as they were also in many other ways, such as their friendship with Elves" (I, p. 16).

V. Ents

The story of the Ents and the Entwives²⁴ is the ultimate example of total freedom for females in Middle-earth. Unlike the Elf, Dwarf and Hobbit societies, there are apparently no binding laws on any Ent, whether male or female. There is no political hierarchy. Treebeard is the only recognized authority. His power is limited to request and persuasion, and based upon the fact that he is the oldest Ent.

Each individual is allowed to do as he or she chooses; there are no restrictions. However much one may disapprove of another's conduct, there is no attempt to curtail his or her activities. Treebeard's description of the Entwives' behavior contains a note of incomprehension and disapproval, but nowhere is there any suggestion that he remonstrated with them or tried to convince them to change their ways:

"But our hearts did not go on growing the same way; the Ents gave their love to things that they met in the world, and the Entwives gave their thoughts to other things, for the Ents loved the great trees, and the wild woods, and the slopes of the high hills; and they drank of the mountain-streams, and ate only such fruit as the trees let fall in their path; and they learned of the Elves and spoke with the Trees. But the Entwives gave their minds to the lesser trees, and to the meads in the sunshine beyond the

²⁴ It is rather regrettable that the female Ents are known as "Entmaidens" or "Entwives". However, if Treebeard is the eldest of the race, then those who came after him apparently took their racial name from him. It does add to the impression that the Entwives were noteworthy only in relation to the males.

feet of the forests; and they saw the sloe in the thicket, and the wild apple and the cherry blossoming in spring, and the green herbs in the waterlands in summer, and the seeding grasses in the autumn fields. They did not desire to speak with these things; but they wished them to hear and obey what was said to them. The Entwives ordered them to grow according to their wishes, and bear leaf and fruit to their liking; for the Entwives desired order, and plenty, and peace (by which they meant that things should remain where they had set them). So the Entwives made gardens to live in. But we Ents went on wandering, and we only came to the gardens now and again."

(II, p. 79)

In allowing freedom to all, a conflict between two different ways of life develops. The Ents become wanderers and the Entwives prefer to occupy themselves in a more domestic fashion. Yet neither life-style is "pure". The Ents wander through different forests but always return to Fangorn. The Entwives cultivate the fields and meadows around Fangorn, but eventually leave their original home to cross the Anduin and create new gardens. After their crops are laid waste the Entwives apparently leave in search of new lands.²⁵ Initially the Ents searched extensively for them. "'But/ as time passed we went more seldom and wandered less far'" (II, p. 80).

By the end of the Third Age, the Ents have remained hidden in Fangorn so long that they are remembered only by

²⁵ I say "apparently" because there is no direct textual evidence as to what actually happened. It is possible that the Entwives were destroyed by the same disaster that turned their gardens into the Brown Lands.

the Elves. Humans who once worshipped the Entwives for their agricultural teachings believe the entire species to be a legend, while the Dwarves and Hobbits are ignorant of them. The Ents and the Entwives combine the two life-styles of wandering and domesticity in a way that is ultimately disastrous for both males and females.

Catharine Stimpson in her short critical work J.R.R. Tolkien misses the point of Treebeard's story. Her discussion of the episode is as follows:

Tree-shepherds, the oldest of living creatures on Middle Earth [sic], speech pupils of the Elves, the Ents are fond of wandering. They also respect other things. Less spiritually refined, the Entwives are fond of order and prosperity. They also push other things around, including, one presumes, the fourteen-foot-high Ents. Anticipating divorce decrees on the grounds of mutual incompatibility, the Entwives settle down to garden. The Ents visit them less and less. Then, the Entwives lose first their Entmaiden charms, and next their fertile waves of grain. Justice, the Ents imply, has been done. Yet, moping in the safety of nostalgia, the Ents now search for their ladies and fancy a reunion in the West. Only sadly do they blame the Entwives for Ent unhappiness and the general void of Entlings [sic].²⁶

Stimpson's interpretation of the text contains several serious misreadings. Nowhere does Treebeard lead the reader to assume that the Entwives insist on domestic superiority to the extent of pushing the Ents around: such action would be a violation of the freedom permitted to all Ents, male and female. No mention is made of "divorce (or of marriage,

²⁶Catharine R. Stimpson, J.R.R. Tolkien (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 19.

either, for that matter); Fimbrelthil may have lost her "Entmaiden charms", but she is still "very fair" (II, p. 79) in Treebeard's eyes; and there is no moralizing on the theme of "justice".²⁷ Treebeard is genuinely sorrowful about the separation. When he hears the description of the Shire, his first thought is of the Entwives. He tells Merry and Pippin that "'Our sorrow was very great'" (II, p. 79), and on their final parting, he reminds them to send word if they hear any news of the Entwives in the Shire.

Stimpson's essential problem in her interpretation of the Entwives' story is that she, like so many critics, falls into the trap of misinterpreting Tolkien's attitude towards women. She ignores the author's sources and intentions, and offers the superficial opinion that "Behind the moral structure of The Lord of the Rings is a regressive emotional pattern. For Tolkien is irritatingly, blandly, traditionally masculine."²⁸

With this preconceived attitude it is not surprising that her reaction to Treebeard's recitation is both emotional and negative, to such an extent that, in a perhaps unconscious

²⁷Treebeard's comment "'Many men learned the crafts of the Entwives and honoured them greatly; but we were only a legend to them, a secret in the heart of the forest. Yet here we still are, while the gardens of the Entwives are wasted: Men call them the Brown Lands now'" (II, p. 79) is a statement of fact, not a piece of moralizing.

²⁸Stimpson, p. 18.

attempt to bolster her opinion, she perceives hostile overtones in the Ent's story. I suspect that she resents hearing only the masculine viewpoint, and feels that the attitude of the female (apparently her own) should also be represented. It is worth noting that her discussion of the women in The Lord of the Rings contains not a single quotation from the text, perhaps an indication that, pressed for narrative evidence to back up her opinion, she would have difficulty finding any.

Treebeard is wise enough to realize that the estrangement was caused by both sexes: "'perhaps we shall find somewhere a land where we can live together and both be content. But it is foreboded that that will only be when we have both lost all that we now have'" (II, p. 80).

In this case, the difference in desires of the two sexes and the freedom accorded each individual creates a widening gap that eventually becomes unbreachable and leads to tragic consequences. With the disappearance of the Entwines, the race of giant tree-herders is doomed to eventual extinction. A realistic compromise involving concessions from both Ents and Entwines would have been more beneficial to the people as a whole, despite the loss of perfect freedom for individuals.

VI. Humans

Non-human societies in the trilogy allow a freedom to both sexes that is limited only by laws that are enforced by recognized authorities and applicable to all. The human societies of Middle-earth, however, are less generous and enlightened than those of the Valar, Elves, Dwarves, Hobbits and Ents.

Numenor, belonging to history, nevertheless has a direct effect on the action of The Lord of the Rings. However, to keep his material within workable bounds, Tolkien refers to Numenor only incidentally or indirectly in the narrative, and gives most of his information in the appendices. The reader does not get more than a tantalizing outline even from that source, a fact that Tolkien, acting as an editor rather than an author, explains thus: "The legends, histories and lore to be found in the sources are very extensive. Only selections from them, in most places much abridged, are here presented. Their principal purpose is to illustrate the War of the Ring and its origins, and to fill up some of the gaps in the main story. The ancient legends of the First Age, in which Bilbo's chief interest lay, are very briefly referred to, since they concern the ancestry of Elrond and the Numenorean kings and chieftains" (III, p. 313). In capsuling the history of a civilization that lasted three thousand two hundred eighty-seven years

(from SA 32 to SA 3319), Tolkien concentrates on the rulers of Númenor, tracing the development and degeneration of the society through its leaders and representatives.

Of the island's twenty-four rulers, three were Ruling Queens. Númenor, of all the human realms established in Tolkien's world, is unique in that it became "a law of the royal house that the eldest child of the King, whether man or woman, should receive the sceptre" (III, p. 316). However, this law was not inherent in Númenorean society. It was introduced upon the death of the sixth King, Tar-Aldarion, in SA 1075. According to Robert Foster, the King "had tragic relations with his father, Tar-Meneldur, and with his wife, perhaps related to the fact that he left no male heirs."²⁹ In this case, necessity may have been the mother of innovation, but the recognition of equal ability regardless of sex is appropriate to a people described as "wise" and enriched with "knowledge and many gifts" (III, p. 315) by the Eldar. It is possible that the elvish example of non-discrimination influenced the attitude of the Númenoreans.

After Tar-Ancalimë, daughter of Tar-Aldarion, came two other Ruling Queens and fourteen Kings. During the reign

²⁹ Foster, p. 3. Since there is nothing in the appendices to indicate the nature of Tar-Aldarion's relations with his father, his wife or anyone else, Foster must have obtained this information from Dick Poltz (cited as RP), who founded the Tolkien Society of America and received a number of letters from Tolkien.

of Tar-Minastir, eleventh king and son of the second Ruling Queen, Tar-Telperiën, the Númenoreans began to grow greedy for wealth, power and the immortality of the Elves. This development was reflected in the corruption of the later monarchs, including, presumably, Tar-Vanimeldë, the third Ruling Queen.

In the proper line of succession, the twenty-fourth sovereign should have been a woman, Miriel, daughter of Ar-Inziladûn who "repented of the ways of the Kings and changed his name to Tar-Palantir 'the Farsighted'" (III, p. 315). Whether Miriel, as the fourth Ruling Queen, would have continued in the path her father had chosen cannot be determined. Her throne was seized by her cousin, Ar-Pharazôn the Golden, who had been leader of a rebellion during the reign of his uncle. Tolkien does not tell us the fate of the unfortunate Miriel, and, despite the fact that she was the legitimate heiress, there was apparently no effective movement on her behalf, perhaps an indication of how far the Númenoreans had degenerated.³⁰ Whether the whole-hearted allegiance to Ar-Pharazôn was based on the contrasting personal qualities of the usurper and his cousin, or on sexual prejudice, is not mentioned.

³⁰ Gracia Elwood in Good News from Tolkien's Middle-Earth (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970) comments "perhaps if this principle of the eldest child inheriting the throne regardless of sex had been followed earlier the line would never have decayed" (p. 132).

It is noteworthy that the line of Númenorean kings preserved in Middle-earth is descended from the elder child of the fourth king Tar-Elendil, a woman named Silmariën. "Her son was Valandil, first of the Lords of Adúnië in the west of the land, renowned for their friendship with the Eldar. From him were descended Amandil, the last lord, and his son, Elendil the Tall" (III, p. 316), leader of the Númenorean Exiles and ancestor of Aragorn. The throne went to Silmariën's younger brother Tar-Meneldur (grandfather of Tar-Ancalime), but Númenoreans who lived after 1075 would have considered her claims superior to his.

It is not unreasonable to assume that Tolkien, in creating the history of Númenor, was using individual cases from both sexes to show the merits and demerits of its people. The overthrow of an apparently weak but legitimate female ruler by a strong male usurper who eventually destroys Númenor is balanced by the continuation of the Númenoreans in Middle-earth through the female line. The recognition by Númenoreans that women should not be excluded from political power because of their sex is unique in Tolkien's human societies. However much the later generations decayed from their former wisdom, the comparatively early removal of social barriers that impeded sexual equality must stand to their credit.

The Númenorean kingdoms in exile, Arnor and Gondor, were "ever troubled by war" (III, p. 330) after their establishment in Middle-earth. This fact explains why the women who fled with the Faithful from the wreck of Numenor and their female descendants are so seldom mentioned throughout the history of the Third Age. Prevented from becoming warriors, they perforce had to remain in the background.

The Northern kingdom of Arnor was divided into three separate kingdoms, Arthedain, Cardolan and Rhudaur, nearly a thousand years after its founding. Arthedain alone preserves the line of Isildur, and all three kingdoms are eventually destroyed. Because of the constant warfare, "the Dunedain passed into the shadows and became a secret and wandering people, and their deeds and labours were seldom sung or recorded" (III, p. 323).

Despite their constant insecurity (caused by the enmity of Sauron and the fewness of their numbers), the men had an active, definite purpose in life: "adversity preserved their hardiness, and many or all of the male Dunedain became Rangers, who protected the innocent men and Hobbits of Eriador and were implacable foes of Sauron and his servants."³¹

³¹Foster, p. 63.

The women of the Dúnedain were respected as individuals, and exerted what power they could through the regard of the men for their intelligence and prudence. Ivorwen, the wife of Dírhael and mother of Gilraen, is the force behind the marriage of her daughter to Arathorn:

To this marriage Dírhael was opposed; for Gilraen was young and had not reached the age at which the women of the Dúnedain were accustomed to marry.

"Moreover," he said, "Arathorn is a stern man of full age, and will be chieftain sooner than men looked for; yet my heart forebodes that he will be shortlived."

But Ivorwen, his wife, who was also foresighted, answered: "The more need of haste! The days are darkening before the storm, and great things are to come. If these two wed now, hope may be born for our people; but if they delay, it will not come while this age lasts."

(III, pp. 337-38)

Gilraen is widowed young and left with the enormous responsibility of caring for her two-year-old son, last member of Isildur's house and leader of their people. She is a perceptive and courageous woman, respected not only by her son and the Dúnedain, but by Elrond and his household as well. After Aragorn goes into the wild, she re-establishes her independence and returns to the north to live alone.

However, no matter how strong and courageous they might be, and no matter how much the men respect them, the women of the northern Dúnedain have a limited function in their society. The profession of Ranger being the exclusive preserve of the male, one must conclude that the only roles open to the female descendants of the Númenoreans, were those of wife and mother, roles that would be especially difficult in view of the dangerous and nomadic lives of the men.

The role of mother would of course be all-important to the wife of the chieftain. She would be expected above everything else to preserve the line of Isildur by giving birth to a male heir. This role was open to only one woman in a generation. As a vicarious satisfaction, it had to serve as a substitute for the frustration of any woman interested in fighting against evil.³²

Gondor's wars were usually open conflicts rather than the guerilla-like activities of the Rangers. As in Rohan, the women of Gondor were not allowed to participate in the actual fighting. During the War of the Ring, the women, children and old men of Minas Tirith were sent away from the city: "'It is a sad necessity'" (III, p. 36). As in the North-kingdom, the women of Gondor must gain what power they can through their influence on men.

Politically speaking, the people of Gondor do not have the enlightenment of their island ancestors. Women have no place within the power structure. Unlike the Ruling Queens, they cannot operate with full equality beside the men. When Arvedui of the North-kingdom asserts his right to the throne, he bases his claim partly on the fact that he is married to Fíriel, the only surviving child of King Ondoher. The Council of Gondor replies: "'In Gondor this heritage is

³²The issue of female leadership never arose because the male line of descent was unbroken.

reckoned through the sons only; and we have not heard that the law is otherwise in Arnor" (III, p. 330). Arvedui cites the old Númenorean law of descent to the eldest child, whether man or woman, adding "It is true that the law has not been observed in the lands of exile ever troubled by war;³³ but such was the law of our people, to which we now refer, seeing that the sons of Ondoher died childless." To this Gondor made no answer" (III, p. 330). Instead, the crown goes to one of Fíriel's distant cousins, a man who, besides having the advantage of belonging to the "right" sex, is also a great warrior, a fact that appeals to the hard-pressed Gondorians, and a role that no woman is given an opportunity to fill.³⁴

Although the women of Gondor are not permitted any real power because of their sex, a woman is the cause of great political strife which ultimately leads to civil war. This occurs when Valacar, the heir to the throne, marries Vidumavi, a Northern woman belonging to a tribe of "lesser Men" (III, p. 326). This marriage eventually creates dissatisfaction and rebellion: "it was a thing unheard of

³³This statement implies one of the basic premises upon which Arnor and Gondor justify their barring of women from political power. The leader of a war-stricken country must be strong. Women are not strong. Therefore, they must not be allowed to lead.

³⁴Fíriel herself presses no claims; Arvedui does so in her name.

before that the heir to the crown, or any son of the King, should wed one of lesser and alien race The queen had been a fair and noble lady, but short-lived according to the fate of lesser Men, and the Dúnedain feared that her descendants would prove the same and fall from the majesty of the Kings of Men. Also they were unwilling to accept as lord her son, who though he was now called Eldacar, had been born in an alien country and was named in his youth Vinitharya, a name of his mother's people" (III, p. 326).³⁵

Finduilas, daughter of Adrahil of Dol Amroth, wife of Denethor II and mother of Boromir and Faramir, is another woman who is considered only in relation to the men in her life; it is through her influence on Denethor and Faramir that she is important. She is described as being "a lady of great beauty and gentle heart" (III, p. 336), and after her death "Denethor became more grim and silent than before, and would sit alone in his tower deep in thought" (III, p. 336). The implication is that, if she had not died, Denethor's less gloomy thoughts would not have driven him to look into the palantír, an act which led to his eventual self-destruction.

To Faramir, Finduilas is "but a memory of loveliness in far days and of his first grief; and her robe seemed to him raiment fitting for the beauty and sadness of Éowyn"

³⁵ This is more a case of racial prejudice than sexual discrimination.

(III, p. 240). Unlike his father, the memory of Finduilas does not drive Faramir to bitterness. He acknowledges and accepts the grief of her death, but does not let it destroy him.

Gondor's inherent attitude of male superiority is best summed up by two very different men. When Prince Imrahil sees Éowyn's apparently lifeless body, he is "amazed. 'Surely, here is a woman?' he said. 'Have even the women of the Rohirrim come to war in our need?'" (III, p. 120). Despite the urgency of the situation, that even the war-like Rohirrim should have female soldiers is, to Imrahil, incredible. The idea of recruiting from among the women of Gondor never enters anyone's mind.

The other man is the herb-master of the House of Healing. A few women, including Ioreth, have been "permitted to remain in Minas Tirith, since they were skilled in healing or in the services of the healers" (III, pp. 131-32). Ioreth, garrulous but sincerely anxious to help, recalls the old saying "The hands of the king are the hands of a healer" (III, p. 136), a piece of insight enthusiastically endorsed by Gandalf.³⁶ However, the herb-master, although he has more formal education than Ioreth in old knowledge and traditions, has less respect for them. He knows the

³⁶ It is significant that the wisest and most thoughtful males of the trilogy, such as Gandalf, Aragorn, Elrond, Celeborn, Faramir and eventually Frodo, are always willing to give women credit for intelligence, courage and strength when they deserve it.

seriousness of Paramir's condition, but is more intent upon displaying his wisdom than giving Aragorn the information he wants. The herb-master decries both ancient lore and old wives, its transmitters: - "'athelas' has no virtue that we know of Unless, of course, you give heed to the rhymes of old days which women such as our good Ioreth still repeat without understanding'" (III, p. 141). After reciting the verse about athelas, he concludes "It is but a doggerel, I fear, garbled in the memory of old wives. Its meaning I leave to your judgement, if indeed it has any'" (III, p. 141).

The society represented by the herb-master has no use or respect for old women as teachers who can provide links to the past.³⁷ Indeed, Gondor values women only in the traditional roles of wife and mother, causing much feminine potential to go undeveloped and depriving the entire society of a vast resource.

The conception of Rohan's society may well be based, at least in part, on the Old English Society depicted in Beowulf.³⁸

³⁷ Boromir also decries old women and their folk tales, and Celeborn disapproves: "'do not despise the lore that has come down from distant years; for oft it may chance that old wives keep in memory word of things that once were needful for the wise to know'" (I, p. 390).

³⁸ "Beowulf" gives us vital information about Old English social life and about Old English politics And this England of roughly the eighth century A.D., as reflected in social patterns ascribed to sixth-century Geats and Danes and Swedes, is rigidly feudal, highly civilized and highly violent" Introduction to Beowulf, trans. Burton Raffel (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1963), p. x and p. xi.

On this point, Tolkien comments: "This linguistic procedure [the 'translation' of Rohirric into ancient English] does not imply that the Rohirrim closely resembled the ancient English otherwise, in culture or art, or weapons or modes of warfare, except in a general way due to their circumstances: a simpler and more primitive people living in contact with a higher and more venerable culture, and occupying lands that had once been part of its domain" (III, p. 414). In two respects at least the Rohirrim resemble the Geats and Danes of Beowulf: their high regard for war and the warrior par excellence, and, related to their interest in war, the role and status of women.

Rohan's preoccupation with war emerges in all aspects of their culture. For example, all able-bodied men of each lord's household are trained in the martial arts; strength, courage and other fighting qualities are highly esteemed; to win honour and glory on the battlefield is the wish of every warrior; and their songs are largely concerned with war and slaughter. Faramir, in describing the people of Gondor, comments indirectly on their allies: "'For as the Rohirrim do, we now love war and valour as things good in themselves, both a sport and an end; and though we still hold that a warrior should have more skills and knowledge than only the craft of weapons and slaying, we esteem a warrior, nonetheless, above men of other crafts'" (II, p. 287).

The women of a society that holds such values are almost inevitably second-class citizens if they are not permitted to participate in the traditionally male-oriented activity of war. For although "many fair and valiant women" (along with "many lords and warriors") are mentioned in the songs that the Rohirrim brought out of the north (III, p. 345); and Faramir speaks of Rohan's "'tall men and fair women, valiant both alike, ... and strong'" (II, p. 287), at the end of the Third Age (more than five hundred years after the migration of Eorl and his people), the Rohirrim women are given little opportunity to demonstrate their valour or strength. They are restricted to such traditionally feminine activities as nursing and waiting on the men. Gandalf's explanation to Éomer of Éowyn's rebellion says much on this point: "'My friend ... 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 that he leaned on'" (III, p. 143). Even a woman's advice or counsel is apparently considered unimportant. After Gandalf heals Théoden, Éomer is summoned and the decision to join the war is made. Éowyn appears only to wait upon the men at the table, and apparently no one even explains the situation to her, and her thoughts on the subject are evidently unimportant.

With the approach of war, the Rohirrim women, children and old men are sent to Dunharrow.³⁹ Eowyn is apparently the only one at the Hold passionately interested in war for its own sake, and she can only experience it second-hand, through Aragorn's tale of Saruman's defeat. The rest of the refugees keep away from the Grey Company, an unwelcome reminder of the evil times that have befallen them.

The repressive attitude of Rohan is also evident in its political structure. As in Arnor and Gondor, the throne is open to males only. The cases of Theoden and his father Thengel are excellent examples. Thengel is the third child but only son of Fengel, and Theoden is the second child but only son (III, p. 350). The closest any woman ever gets to the throne of Rohan is through proxy, and it happens on only two occasions. In the first instance, King Helm and his two sons are killed in war, and Frealaf, son of Helm's sister Hild, became king (III, p. 349). The second occasion is when Théoden dies without heirs and Éomer, son of his youngest sister Théodwyn, assumes the throne.

Tolkien offers no definite reason for the discrimination experienced by the women of Númenor, Arnor, Gondor and Rohan. One possible answer is that human beings, as a species, tend to be less wise, less enlightened and less advanced than

³⁹ Despite the urgency of the situation, apparently no one even considers a female draft or request for female volunteers.

non-humans. For example, while Elves and Dwarves may be hostile towards each other, neither Elves nor Dwarves fight among themselves.⁴⁰ Human beings, on the other hand, do not hesitate to war against each other. Even such a comparatively advanced civilization as Gondor has internal and external dissensions.

To a great extent the conflicts are caused by the failure to recognize the individual's right to freedom of choice, and struggles for power and domination result. Therefore, it is not surprising to find human social groups trying to impose restrictive patterns, not only on other peoples, but on some of their own members. To this end, Númenor, Arnor, Gondor and Rohan develop social structures that stunt the potential of women by limiting their role choice.

It may be inferred that Tolkien is in favour of social equality between the sexes from his idealized portrayals of Elf and Hobbit societies. In Rivendell, Lorien and the Shire, everyone accepts the established authority as legitimate, everyone is treated as an individual, and consequently everyone behaves responsibly and considerately. By the time of the War of the Ring, the Hobbits have come to believe "that peace and plenty was the rule in Middle-earth and the right of all sensible folk" (I, p. 14). That the women of

⁴⁰Gollum is, of course, the great exception. Lured by the Ring, he murders his friend Déagol.

these social groups are on the same level as the men is a contributing factor to their success and the author's approval.

The problem with the Ents' social structure (that is, before the loss of the Entwives) is that it extends total consideration for the individual, with no central authority. An intelligent combination of both is necessary for the society's ultimate success. With the failure to place both males and females under any restrictions, consideration for individuals extends too far, and the process reverses itself: neither sex ultimately shows any consideration for the other.

Human societies earn the author's disapproval and limit their potential by not treating women as individuals and by establishing social barriers based upon sexual differences. Gondor is unable to express (through Tolkien) a reasonable (or unreasonable) reply to Arvedui's citation of female inheritance in Númenor. We may infer that Gandalf (who is, as Stimpson points out in one of her rare lucid moments, "a totally reliable moral mouthpiece")⁴¹ disapproves of Rohan's tradition of keeping women confined to a few areas of activity (see his speech explaining Éowyn's actions to Éomer, III, p. 143). Tolkien implies that repression of women on a sexual basis and failure to treat them as intelligent individuals capable of dealing with responsibility

⁴¹Stimpson, p. 16

will ultimately result in a rebellion against authority (this is dramatically illustrated by Éowyn, who is discussed in the next chapter).

It is clearly desirable for human societies, in the first place, to give women credit for their knowledge and ability. For example, "old wives" should be acknowledged as educators to be respected, rather than regarded as ignorant and superstitious fools to be decried. In the second place, women should be allowed to choose their roles, just as men are free to do. Their choices should even extend to the issue of whether or not to fight in a war. While Tolkien's more civilized characters do not want to fight at all, they feel that, in a war, it is the duty of every able-bodied male to do so. Women are in a different position. They are the child-bearers, and some at least must remain to care for the children and maintain a home to which the surviving soldiers can return. This aspect of male-female relations is, of course, important to The Lord of the Rings. The woman and the home life she is connected with are inevitably idealized as things infinitely desirable yet perhaps impossible to regain:

But the bitter truth came home to him at last: at best their provision would take them to their goal; and when the task was done, there they would come to an end, alone, houseless, foodless in the midst of a terrible desert. There could be no return.

"So that was the job I felt I had to do when I started," thought Sam: "to help Mr. Frodo to the last step and then die with him? Well, if that is the job I must do it. But I would dearly like to see Bywater again, and Rosie Cotton and her brothers, and the Gaffer and Marigold and all."

(III, p. 211)

However, Tolkien has no objection to female soldiers provided they have the ability and no conflicting responsibilities. Lúthien and Galadriel, two of his favourite Elves, are both warriors. Moreover, as indicated in the next chapter, Éowyn's efforts to actively participate in the war are frustrated by Aragorn not because he is afflicted by a sense of male superiority, but because she is hampered by a responsibility that she wishes to disregard. Tolkien does not use the occasion to make a statement on the evils of a situation where women fight; rather, he points out that because of circumstances, this particular woman is not free to fight.

Tolkien's belief that women should have the same freedoms and the same restrictions as men is not, perhaps, perceptible to many readers of The Lord of the Rings. The most noticeable objection to my theory is the question of why no woman is present on the quest and only one, briefly, on the battlefield. The answer, as I indicated in Chapter I, is that Tolkien was working within the quest and war story genres, whose traditions are uninterested in and unsympathetic to women, their wants, and their frustrations. According to the quest-war story, a woman is in the way, creates unnecessary and unwelcome problems, and deflects interest from the hero. Therefore, she must either be left behind or collected by the hero when his task is completed. Within these traditions, Tolkien's advocacy of social equality

between the sexes and the desirability of treating women like individuals is an innovation that is best illustrated by Éowyn, the character discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III -- Éowyn

Mythological and literary sources and traditions are highly visible in the portrait of Éowyn. The female warrior is prominent in the Celtic, Scandinavian and German cultures. For example, the three Morrighans were war-goddesses known throughout the Celtic world. Boudicea invoked the war-goddess Andraste before going into battle, and such Amazonian teachers as Scáthach ("The Shadowy One"), who taught Cu Chulainn, were important in Celtic myth.¹ As J.A. MacCulloch puts it, "There were war-gods among the Irish, but these goddesses may be more primitive, and we have to remember that women went to battle in Ireland."²

The Valkyries of the Scandinavians and Teutons "may be reflexions of actual female warriors such as were known in Germanic custom These were ... 'shield-maids'"³ Female warriors were also known in Scandinavia. It is interesting to note, however, that even the Valkyries were

¹Proinsias MacCana, Celtic Mythology (London: Hamly Publishing Group Ltd., 1970), p. 86. The Morrighans, called Morrighan ("Phantom Queen"), Baddhbh ("Crow, Raven") and Nemhain ("Frenzy"), were actually three aspects of the same goddess.

²John Arnott MacCulloch, The Celtic and Scandinavian Religions (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1948), p. 43.

³John Arnott MacCulloch, Eddic, The Mythology of All Races, Volume II (New York: Cooper Square Publishers Inc., 1964), p. 256.

dominated by men. They were subject to Odin's commands, and, when not riding to war, they were reduced to waiting on the heroes in Valhalla. When Odin punishes Brunhild for disobeying his orders, he condemns her to marriage, and consequently subservience to a man.⁴

Another literary influence on Éowyn is found in Middle English romances, such as The Squire of Low Degree and Amis and Amiloun. Tolkien takes the figure of the Wooing Princess/Forth-Putting Lady⁵ from these works and incorporates it into his creation. This aspect of Éowyn's personality is seen most clearly in her relationship with Aragorn.

The influence of Edmund Spenser is also noticeable in the depiction of Éowyn. She bears a strong resemblance to Britomartis. Britomartis, like Éowyn, is trained in the use of arms and longs for military honour and glory. However, Britomartis does not have to face the opposition that frustrates Éowyn:

I haue beene trained vp in warlike stowre,
To tossen spere and shield, and to affrap
The warlike ryder to his most mishap;
Sithence I loathed haue my life to lead,
As ladies wont, in pleasures wonton lap,
To finger the fine needle and nyce thread;
M^e leuer were with point of foemans speare be dead.

⁴See "The Lay of Fáfnir" and "The Lay of Sigrdífa" in The Elder Edda, and Richard Wagner's Die Walküre.

⁵For a discussion of the Wooing Princess and the Forth-Putting Lady in Middle English romances, see Adelaide Evans Harris' The Heroine of the Middle English Romances (1928; rpt. Polcroft, Pa.: Polcroft Press, 1969), pp. 28-33.

All my delight on deedes of armes is set,
 To hunt out perils and aduentures hard;
 By sea, by land, where so they may be met,
 Onely for honour and for high regard,
 Without respect of riches or reward.
 For such intent into these parts I came,
 Withouten compasse, or withouten card,
 Far from my native soyle, that is by name
 The greater Britaine, here to seek for prayse and fame.⁶

Although the two women are similar in their preferences and ambitions, Eowyn eventually achieves both martial glory and marital happiness. Britomartis also becomes famous as a warrior, but, although engaged to Artegall, never gets to the altar with him.

The fact that Tolkien mentions Éowyn in his first description of Meduseld indicates that she is to be an important character in the trilogy. As the king's niece and, one can assume, his only remaining female relative,⁷ Éowyn has definite but limited responsibilities. Her duties resemble those of Welthow, Hrothgar's wife. Éowyn waits upon the king and his guests, proffers the stirrup cup, presumably presides over the other women of the court, and is in charge of the housekeeping. Circumstances have forced her to assume still another traditionally feminine activity: that of nursing and caring for her aged uncle, who has fallen

⁶The Faerie Queene. III, ii, 6-7.

⁷Eomer and Eowyn are the only children of Théodwyn, Théoden's youngest sister. Théoden himself is the only son of five children; his wife and one child, a son, are dead (III, pp. 350-51). The facts that, judging by her duties, Éowyn is the highest-ranking woman of the court, and that she and Eomer are the last of the House of Eorl, lead me to assume that all of Théoden's sisters are dead, and they had no surviving children.

under the malign influence of Gríma Wormtongue, Saruman's agent. When Gandalf heals Théoden, he removes the necessity of Éowyn's nursing. She thinks that she is now free to do other things more agreeable to her restless and independent nature, but this does not prove to be the case.

It is interesting to consider Éowyn's actions and intentions after her uncle's recovery. In fact, there is no indication that she had not planned to go with Théoden, Éomer, Gandalf and the rest to fight against Saruman in Isengard.⁸ It is not unreasonable to suppose that such was her intention. She was raised in a warrior society, taught to "'ride and wield blade'"⁹ (III, p. 58), and it is quite evident to all the Rohirrim that she does not fear "'either pain or death'" (III, p. 58). Moreover, she has definite martial ambitions.

If such is her intention, however, she has no opportunity to fulfill it. Someone must stay behind to "'guide ... and govern'" (II, p. 123) the women, children and old men while the warriors ride to battle, and Éowyn is selected.

⁸ However, if she plans to go, it seems fairly certain that no other woman does.

⁹ Whether these activities are taught to all Rohirrim girls, are a concession to her rank, or the results of her personal wishes, we are not told.

"Behold! I go forth, and it seems like to be my last riding," said Théoden. "I have no child. Théodred my son is slain. I name Éomer my sister-son to be my heir. If neither of us return, then choose a new lord as you will. But to someone I must now entrust my people that I leave behind, to rule them in my place. Which of you will stay?"

No man spoke.

"Is there none whom you would name? In whom do the people trust?"

"In the House of Eorl," answered Māma.

"But Éomer I cannot spare, nor would he stay," said the king; "and he is the last of that House."

"I said not Éomer," answered Māma. "And he is not the last. There is Éowyn, daughter of Éomund, his sister. She is fearless and high-hearted. All love her. Let her be as lord to the Eorlingas, while we are gone."

"It shall be so," said Théoden. "Let the heralds announce to the folk that the Lady Éowyn will lead them."

(II, pp. 127-28)

The choice of Éowyn and Théoden's acceptance of her as a substitute indicate that she is considered worthy of bearing such a heavy responsibility. The decision is based both on her descent and the trust and obligation traditionally associated with the royal house, and personal qualities of courage and decisiveness. Moreover, Théoden may have had another motive for installing her as leader in his absence. Éomer, as the heir, must accompany Théoden in case the king is killed. Éowyn is under no such obligation, and Théoden may be taking this opportunity to keep his niece at home, as far from the danger as possible, and thus ensuring, as far as he is able, the life of one of his relatives.¹⁰

¹⁰ Théoden's attitude towards women in general and Éowyn in particular is hard to define. Although he loves Éowyn and cherished his wife and youngest sister, he seems to

In any case, if Eowyn cherished any martial ambitions after Theoden's restoration to health, she is effectively thwarted. She is given no choice in the matter, it is simply assumed that she will carry out her obvious duty. She conceals the frustration that, as it later becomes clear, she feels, and accepts the new responsibility in place of the old one.

When Eowyn is first introduced we are given relatively little information about her. As is the case with many of Tolkien's characters, we slowly build up an impression of her through her own words and actions, and the remarks of others concerning her. We eventually learn, mostly through a discussion between Gandalf, Aragorn and Eomer that takes place in the Houses of Healing, of her tumultuous emotions before the recovery of Theoden. Gandalf explains that she had been frustrated by the narrow scope of activities open to her because of her sex; worried by Theoden's decline; angry and contemptuous of the apparent decay of warrior-like activity that was both a symptom and symbol of Theoden's illness; resentful of the silent, ignoble role that she is forced to play; and threatened, both in a personal and familial sense, by the presence of

... hold the usual Rohirrim attitude of male superiority, although not to an obnoxious extent. He tells his people "choose a new lord" (emphasis mine) and initially wishes to place one of his soldiers in charge of those that do not go to war. Moreover, it is Hama, not Theoden, who remembers that Eomer is not the last of the House of Eorl and suggests Eowyn as a leader.

Wormtongue. Even after Théoden's recovery, the reactivation of the court and the exile of Wormtongue, she must continue to deal with the frustration and impatience she feels because of the restrictions her society places on women and the obnoxious duties imposed on her, and her disappointment at still not being allowed to do as she wishes.

Complicating these emotions is the effect that Aragorn has on her and the problem that he unwittingly presents. His power over her is immediate and compelling: "And she now was suddenly aware of him: tall heir of kings, wise with many winters, greycloaked, hiding a power that yet she felt" (II, p. 119). She is attracted by his strength, a quality that, she feels, has been lacking in the men of her own family.¹¹ Moreover, she is affected by his air of mystery, and the charm that, in the words of Legolas, makes "'all those who come to know him come to love him after their own fashion'", even, he adds, "'the cold maiden of the Rohirrim'" (III, p. 150).

Her sudden surge of emotion prompts Éowyn into unwitting indiscretions that reveal her infatuation to Aragorn. He becomes aware of her feelings when she offers him the stirrup cup; and when she says farewell, ostensibly to the king, but really to the mysterious stranger. After

¹¹Paul H. Kocher, Master of Middle-Earth: The Fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), p. 153.

he returns from Isengard and tells her that he does not mean to ride with the Rohirrim, she succumbs to wishful thinking and hopes that he has ridden out of his way especially to see her and bring her the glad news of Saruman's defeat. When he finally tells her his destination, her agitation reveals her feelings about Aragorn, of which only he had been aware, to everyone else: "her eyes were ever upon Aragorn, and the others saw that she was in great torment of mind" (III, p. 57). However, by this point Éowyn is beyond discretion, and her love and anxiety lead to the climactic interview with Aragorn later that night.

In considering the interview, the characters, attitudes and mental states of the two participants must be taken into account. Aragorn's thoughts are running in a direction quite different from Éowyn's, and her infatuation for him, which he perceived from the beginning but neither wanted nor encouraged, leaves him in a difficult position. With the final confrontation with Sauron and the ultimate defeat or victory now in sight, he is considering the possibility of regaining his kingdom. With the throne, he would also win the hand of Arwen, Elrond's daughter, whom he had loved since he was twenty. To find that his hostess, niece of a king, sister of a friend, first lady of an allied kingdom and a worthwhile person in her own right, cherishes a strong personal affection for him that cannot be returned, complicates matters immensely.

On the other hand, Éowyn is being ruled by her feelings and is willing to subordinate all intellectual, moral and social considerations to her emotions. Having failed at dinner to persuade Aragorn to ride with the Rohirrim, she questions his resolve once more at the outset of the conversation. He reiterates his determination to seek the Paths of the Dead, and implies, as delicately as possible, his affection for another woman: "'I do not choose paths of peril, Éowyn. Were I to go where my heart dwells, far to the North I would now be wandering in the fair valley of Rivendell'" (III, p. 57). Whether she understands his hint is doubtful, but being unable to deter him from going, as she sees it, to certain death, she decides to go with him and, if necessary, to die with him.

At this point, Éowyn's love for Aragorn and her manner of dealing with it should be considered. At dinner, when she falls into the error of thinking that he has come specifically to see her, she smiles and says "'Then it was kindly done, lord, to ride so many miles out of your way to bring tidings to Éowyn, and to speak with her in her exile'" (III, p. 56). This is neither polite conventionality, nor, at the other extreme, flirtatiousness. She is making a shy, inexperienced but genuine effort to attract him. This is also evident in her manner and conversation. She is typically polite but reserved with strangers, as shown by her dealings with Merry, and she does not often speak her

mind even to Théoden or Éomer. However, in her conversation with Aragorn she uses the familiar "thee",¹² and she reveals more of her thoughts and feelings to him than to anyone else save Faramir. Moreover, her emotion is so strong that it becomes evident, not only to Théoden and Éomer, but to Merry and the Grey Company as well. A feeling that breaks down the habitual reserve of a woman described several times as "proud", "stern" and even "cold" must be powerful indeed.

When Aragorn rejects her pleas and hints at his love for someone else, Eowyn interprets his words as a sexual rejection. Having failed to move him as the person she is, she has two choices: she can exert all her powers of attraction and try to hold him from the Paths of the Dead in that way; or she can go to the opposite extreme and "become" a man. It is not in Eowyn's character to adopt the first alternative, and it is not in Aragorn's character to respond to it if she did. By choosing the second method and riding with him as an equal, another warrior, she can at least share the "man's world" that he inhabits. This course of action may or may not give her an opportunity to impress him as a woman; it will, however, enable her to impress him as a person, by demonstrating her courage and hardiness. There is perhaps a certain amount of sexual jealousy involved: she intends to be with him, something

¹²Kocher, p. 156.

that the other woman (if any) either cannot or will not do. However, there is no scheming or conniving on her part: she is much too straightforward a person.

In making her decision to go with Aragorn, Eowyn displays much physical bravery but no moral courage. The ability to meet pain and death unflinchingly is hers to a great degree. In this instance, however, she seems to lack the capacity to do her obvious duty, however distasteful she finds it.

Predictably, this is the stance Aragorn takes in rejecting her request to accompany him. Eowyn's passionate reply evades the issue entirely: "'Too often have I heard of duty,' she cried. 'But am I not of the House of Eorl, a shield-maiden and not a dry nurse? I have waited on faltering feet long enough. Since they falter no longer, it seems, may I not now spend my life as I will?'" (III, p. 57). In other words, she rejects the call of present duty because she has fulfilled her past obligations. She feels that she has paid her debt of responsibility to her family and people, and demands the privilege of doing as she pleases.

Aragorn points out that "'Few may do that with honour'", (III, p. 57), and reminds her that her situation is not unique. In this case at least there is no prejudice against her sex; any man in her position would be expected to fulfill his duty, just as she is. Having taken on a

traditionally masculine responsibility, she must show, so to speak, a "man's" resolution, and carry it out: "'But as for you, lady: did you not accept the charge to govern the people until their lord's return? If you had not been chosen, then some marshal or captain would have been set in the same place, and he could not ride away from his charge, were he weary of it or not" (III, p. 57).

Eowyn, being "bred among men of war" (III, p. 237), knows the necessity of military discipline and duty as well as Aragorn does himself. She does not deny the truth of his words; rather, she evades the issue once again: "'Shall I always be chosen?' she said bitterly. "'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?'" (III, p. 57).

Eowyn, throughout this entire scene, is pitting her personal desires against her clear duty. Obviously, she would rather ride to battle with Aragorn against Sauron. Action would give her restless spirit the release it longs for, particularly after enduring years of frustration induced by sexually-based social restrictions and irritating duties. She would have a chance to gain honour in battle, an achievement much admired in her society, and shine in an activity that she has been taught to value. She would be released from the tension of waiting at Dunharrow for either victory or defeat; and she would be freed of responsibilities

which, however necessary, are essentially boring. Moreover, she has the additional motivation of being with the man she loves.

Aragorn, a sensitive and perceptive man who knows the people and society of Rohan, can guess at her frustration and is aware of her feelings towards himself. He does his best to make things easier for her by reminding her that bravery is still bravery, even if it is not demonstrated in battle, and no songs are sung in the fighters' praise.¹³ Eowyn, however, is too overwrought with frustration and anxiety to be rational, and deliberately misinterprets his words, taking them as a sexual insult. In fact, he does not doubt her ability to fight as well as a man, but her ability does not enter into the basic problem.

¹³The necessity of going on with a difficult task with little or no hope of reward or praise is a lesson that must be learned by Frodo as well as Eowyn. At the sight of the Wraith-king and his army, Frodo momentarily gives way to despair: "I am too late. All is lost. I tarried on the way. All is lost. Even if my errand is performed, no one will ever know. There will be no one I can tell. It will be in vain." Overcome with weakness he wept.

.....
Frodo raised his head, and then stood up. Despair had not left him, but the weakness had passed. He even smiled grimly, feeling now as clearly as a moment before he had felt the opposite, that what he had to do, he had to do, if he could, and that whether Faramir or Aragorn or Elrond or Galadriel or Gandalf or anyone else ever knew about it was beside the purpose" (II, p. 316, p. 317). This is only one of several parallels between the individual stories of Eowyn and Frodo.

The remainder of the conversation clarifies the extent of Eowyn's frustration resulting from the social restrictions which prevent her from taking part in the activity which her people esteem and from achieving the honour and great deeds which they admire. Aragorn's question "'And yet you counselled me not to adventure on the road that I had chosen, because it was perilous?'" (III, p. 58) is an attempt to make her see the illogicality of her position: how can she wish to face danger and win victories, and yet try to dissuade him from doing so? Her reply "'I would not see a thing that is high and excellent cast away needlessly'" (III, p. 58) makes as clear as is modestly possible her love and anxiety for him.

Aragorn makes his final declaration: "'You have no errand to the South'" (III, p. 58), meaning, "no errand consistent with your duty to your people". Eowyn, almost at the end of her emotional tether, replies, once more, with illogicality: "Neither have the others that go with thee. They go only because they would not be parted from thee -- because they love thee'" (III, p. 58).¹⁴ This statement expresses her state of mind in terms that no one, least of all Aragorn, who is in love himself, could misunderstand.

¹⁴ Eowyn is more refined and sophisticated a creation than are many Wooing Princesses or Forth-Putting Ladies, but the literary influence on her behaviour in this episode is clear enough.

On the other hand, her assertion that the Dúnedain, Elladan, Elrohir, Legolas and Gimli have no business in the South is totally incorrect. The Grey Company rode from the North specifically to follow Aragorn to war by whatever path he chose. Legolas and Gimli, as representatives of their races and responsible citizens of Middle-earth, are obligated to go to war. It is their duty to fight Sauron, and their personal feelings do not enter into the situation, just as it is Éowyn's duty to stay, and her feelings ought to be subordinated to her responsibility. Éowyn's emotions are too strong to allow her to perceive the truth of the matter.

The next morning Éowyn has sufficiently recovered her self-control to go through the formal ceremony of offering the stirrup cup. She cannot resist, however, making a final, futile effort to dissuade Aragorn from his purpose. When she again asks to accompany him, he replies "'I will not, lady, For that I could not grant without leave of the king and your brother'" (III, p. 58). Aragorn is not implying that Éowyn's decision must be endorsed by men because she "only" a woman. Rather, he is referring to the fact that Éowyn is a subject of Théoden, and her two closest relatives might reasonably expect to be consulted about such a drastic decision. Moreover, Aragorn still has her duty on his mind: there is no one to replace her. Finally, to permit her to accompany them would place an unfair strain on everyone, not least upon Éowyn and himself. It says much for

the power of her feelings that one "so stern and proud" (III, p. 58) should weep in public and fall upon her knees, pleading "'I beg thee!'", when she knows that her request is impossible and for what reasons it is refused.

I have devoted a great deal of time and space to the discussion of this encounter between Eowyn and Aragorn because a correct interpretation is vital to an understanding of Eowyn's feelings, actions, role and position. At a first and casual glance, many readers tend to view Aragorn's stance as insufferably unfair, and admire Eowyn for rejecting his superior attitude and asserting her right and ability to fight as well as any man.

This interpretation is offered by Gerard O'Connor in his article "Why The Lord of the Rings Should Not be Popular Culture".¹⁵ O'Connor's interesting but wrong-headed paper holds that young people should repudiate The Lord of the Rings for, among other reasons, "its institutional male chauvinism".¹⁶ Discussing Eowyn, he notes:

Arwen, Rose, and Goldberry all accept their unliberated position in their men's world. Lady Eowyn, however, does not. Left in charge of the kingdom by Theoden when he and all the other able-bodied men ride off to war, Eowyn is bitter and frustrated. When Aragorn rides through Dunharrow on his way to the Paths of the Dead, she pleads with him to let her join his company Aragorn dutifully reminds Eowyn of her duty, but she

¹⁵ Gerard O'Connor, "Why Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings Should Not Be Popular Culture", Extrapolation, 13 (1972), 48-55.

¹⁶ O'Connor, p. 49.

rebels When he reiterates his party-line sexual politics, she denounces it for what it is and then declares her independence Later, in the battle with the Captain of the Nazguls [sic], Eowyn, disguised as a male, proves her point: she is as brave as any of the men, and she can fight as savagely as they. It would appear that women's lib had a heroine in Eowyn and a believer in Tolkien.¹⁷

However, continues O'Connor, Eowyn's defiant frame of mind does not long survive; she falls victim to authorial manipulation, "sees the error of her liberated ways"¹⁸ and "renounces her sinful past."¹⁹ Ultimately, she is used "to reassert the doctrine of male supremacy."²⁰

As I have tried to indicate, O'Connor's interpretation of the Eowyn-Aragorn encounter is totally incorrect. Tolkien does not use her to demonstrate the superiority of the male. Her function within the narrative is something quite different. Eowyn is one of Tolkien's most carefully-studied characters, and she is used for a more complex purpose than O'Connor believes.²¹

¹⁷O'Connor, pp. 50-51.

¹⁸O'Connor, p. 51.

¹⁹O'Connor, p. 51.

²⁰O'Connor, p. 51.

²¹Vera Chapman, Secretary and Founder of the British Tolkien Society, feels that Eowyn is a sop to Tolkien's daughter Priscilla: "So you get the character of Eowyn, who, although his daughter (Priscilla) doesn't bear it out, was Tolkien's asking himself what's in it for the girls, and then writing in a female character for his teenage daughter." Quoted by Daniel Grotta-Kurska in J.R.R. Tolkien: Architect of Middle Earth (Philadelphia: Running Press, 1976), p. 102. Ms. Chapman is yet another one of those who believes that Tolkien is not interested in his females.

Although she is certain that Aragorn has gone to his death, Éowyn regains some of her self-control after his departure and continues, as he had advised her, in her role as leader. She governs with firmness and efficiency, keeping the harassed and bewildered people in order, organizing the camp and even remembering to find a tent and armour for Merry. Yet when Théoden and his Riders return the next day, she is still powerfully affected by his feelings. Even Merry, who has never seen her before, discerns that beneath her calm exterior is a storm of emotion: "it seemed to Merry that her voice belied her, and he would have thought that she had been weeping, if that could be believed of one so stern of face" (III, p. 68). Théoden, knowing her better, sees more clearly the cause of her sorrow: "'comfort you seem to need in your grief for this guest'" (III, p. 71).

With the departure of the Rohirrim, Théoden reaffirms Éowyn's rule over those left behind, and says farewell. However, Éowyn's feelings have overcome her rationality and sense of responsibility, and she makes a reckless, desperate decision. What provision she makes to fill her post we never know, but she disguises herself as a Rider, "one without hope who goes in search of death" (III, p. 76), and joins the king's company.

Ironically, it is only by deserting her obligation to her own people that she can effectively serve the world community by striking one of the decisive blows of the War of

the Ring. Eowyn and Merry are the only two of Rohan's host who face the Lord of the Nazgul when Theoden falls. Working together, they destroy the Ringwraith, and thus fulfill Glorfindel's prophecy, spoken nearly a thousand years before: "'Far off yet is his doom, and not by the hand of man will he fall'" (III, p. 332). Through his defeat, Eowyn becomes one of the most honoured warriors of the Pelennor Fields. She has successfully demonstrated that she is at least the equal of any man in courage and fighting ability, and has won the glory and honour she sought, achieving an illustrious name in both Rohan and Gondor.

In this episode, although she has taken on an active, traditionally masculine role in becoming a warrior, Eowyn unknowingly assumes a passive feminine role traditional to fairy tales, legends and romances. She acts as an inspiration to at least two other fighters: Merry and Eomer. Merry is totally unnerved by fear of the Ringwraith lord until Eowyn reveals her identity: "Pity filled his heart and great wonder, and suddenly the slow-kindled courage of his race awoke She should not die, so fair, so desperate! At least she should not die alone, unaided" (III, p. 116). The sight of her apparently lifeless body has a similar if rather more violent effect on her brother. He is momentarily stunned with the shock of the discovery, and then charges into action:

"Éowyn, Éowyn!" he cried at last. "Éowyn, how come you here? What madness or devilry is this? Death, death, death! Death take us all!"

Then without taking counsel or waiting for the approach of the men of the City, he spurred headlong back to the front of the great host, and blew a horn, and cried aloud for the onset. Over the field rang his clear voice calling: "Death! Ride, ride to ruin and the world's ending!"

(III, p. 119)

In the Houses of Healing, the discussion between Gandalf, Aragorn and Éomer reveals to the reader (if he or she has not already perceived them) the causes of Éowyn's unhappiness and rebellion. In mentioning, as one of the causes, her love for himself, Aragorn makes a statement which becomes prophetic:

"And yet, Éomer, I say to you that she loves you more truly than me; for you she loves and knows; but in me she loves only a shadow and a thought: a hope of glory and great deeds, and lands far from the fields of Rohan.²²

"I have, maybe, the power to heal her body, and to recall her from the dark valley. But to what she will awake: hope, or forgetfulness, or despair, I do not know. And if to despair, then she will die, unless other healing comes which I cannot bring. Alas! for her deeds have set her among the queens of great renown."

(III, pp. 143-44)

The imagery of Aragorn's treatment evokes the contrasting sensations of warmth and cold. In healing a woman "white as a lily, cold as frost and hard as graven stone" (III, p. 144), he kisses her brow and laves her cold arm with steaming water made potent by athelas. Tolkien is

²²The desire to escape from the restrictions of home is often experienced by the Wooing Princess/Forth-Putting Lady figure. See Harris, p. 28.

careful to show that Éowyn's revival is a symbolic rebirth, an awakening from a cold, fixed, death-like state into a new, different warmer life:

as the sweet influence of the herb stole about the chamber it seemed to those who stood by that a keen wind blew through the window, and it bore no scent, but was an air wholly fresh and clean and young as if it had not before been breathed by any living thing and came new-made from snowy mountains high beneath a dome of stars, or from shores of silver far away washed by seas of foam.

"Awake, Eowyn, Lady of Rohan!" said Aragorn again, and he took her right hand in his and felt it warm with life returning. "Awake! The shadow is gone and all darkness is washed clean!" (III, p. 144)

Éowyn's attitude, however, has not changed. She rejoices that Éomer is still alive and that Theoden has found a death honourable beyond all her previous hopes; asks after Merry, and, typically, insists that he be made "a knight of the Riddermark, for he is valiant!" (III, p. 144). However, when Gandalf exclaims "Great gladness it is to see you wake again to health and hope, so valiant a lady!", she replies "'To health? It may be so. At least while there is an empty saddle of some fallen Rider that I can fill, and there are deeds to do. But to hope? I do not know'" (III, p. 145). Her physical rebirth is not supplemented by a spiritual rebirth. As he had foreseen, Aragorn has healed her body; it is up to another man to precipitate her mental and emotional change.

Therefore, Éowyn's sudden change of mind and heart after her recovery in the Houses of Healing should not be

regarded as Tolkien's ingrained complex of male superiority suddenly rising to the surface, or a hasty, rather clumsy effort to tie off loose ends and provide for one of a series of marriages in imitation of Shakespeare's comedies. Rather, it is a logical conclusion to the story of a character who develops, matures and "finds herself".

Her death wish unresolved, Eowyn finds that the achievement of great deeds and the glory, fame and honour that accompany them have not brought her peace. She remains aggressive, restless and unhappy: "I am in great unrest, and I cannot lie longer in sloth" (III, p. 236). She wishes for an immediate return to the active life of war that she knew so briefly: "I shall sicken anew, if there is naught that I can do. Are there no tidings of war? Is there no deed to do?" (III, pp. 236-37).

It is only after she meets Faramir that she begins, slowly and hesitantly, to question herself and her desires:

"I would have you command this Warden, and bid him let me go," she said; but though her words were still proud, her heart faltered, and for the first time she doubted herself. She guessed that this tall man, both stern and gentle, might think her merely wayward, like a child that has not the firmness of mind to go on with a dull task to the end.

.....
 "But I do not desire healing," she said. "I wish to ride to war, like my brother Eomer, or better like Théoden the king, for he died and has both honour and peace."

"It is too late, lady, to follow the Captains, even if you had the strength," said Faramir. "But death in battle may come to us all yet, willing or unwilling. You will be better prepared to face it in your own manner, if while there is still time you do as the

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Healer commanded. You and I, we must endure with patience the hours of waiting."

She did not answer, but as he looked at her it seemed to him that something in her softened, as though a bitter frost were yielding at the first faint presage of Spring. A tear sprang in her eye, and fell down her cheek, like a glistening rain-drop. Her proud head drooped a little. Then quietly, more as if speaking to herself than to him: "But the healers would have me lie abed seven days yet," she said. "And my window does not look eastward." Her voice was now that of a maiden young and sad.

(III, p. 238)

This is an extremely interesting situation. It is parallel to the circumstances of the interview between Eowyn and Aragorn at Dunharrow. Faramir is recommending exactly the same thing to her as Aragorn had; that is, go on with a dreary task and do not try to join the warriors, and, if the end comes, be prepared to die in defence of your dwellings, even though no song will ever be sung in your praise.

Eowyn's reaction to Faramir's words is extremely important in terms of her character development. She yields to the obvious sense of his advice, and does not reject the comfort that he tries to offer as she had rejected Aragorn's attempts at consolation. Tolkien's description of her at this point is surely meant to recall Aragorn's impression of her as a "a white flower standing straight and proud, shapely as a lily, and yet ... hard, as if wrought by elf-wrights out of steel. Or ... maybe, a frost ... had turned its sap to ice, and so it stood, bitter-sweet, still fair to see, but stricken, soon to fall and die?" (III, pp. 142-43). She

has been "frozen" in a negative mental and emotional state, and her meeting with Paramir is the beginning of a new frame of mind.

The change in Eowyn does not occur all at once. Her effect upon Paramir is immediate: he is first "filled with pity" (III, p. 238) and then requests her company in whatever days are left to them: "'For you and I have both passed under the wings of the Shadow, and the same hand drew us back'" (III, p. 239).²³ She courteously but firmly rebuffs him: "'Alas, not me, lord! ... Shadow lies on me still. Look not to me for healing! I am a shieldmaiden and my hand is ungentle!'" (III, p. 239).

Despite this denial, however, she spends her days with him, and they both regain their health and strength. They are together when the news of Sauron's overthrow reaches the city. Eowyn's mind is still dominated by thoughts of Aragorn: "'Must he not now be come thither? It is seven days since he rode away'" (III, p. 240), but she recognizes that a climax is approaching: "'I stand upon some dreadful brink, and it is utterly dark in the abyss before my feet, but whether there is any light behind me I cannot tell. For I cannot turn yet. I wait for some stroke of doom'" (III, p. 240).

²³Paramir has a number of advantages over Eowyn in this scene, and is thus clearer-sighted and readier to respond to her than she is to him. He is twelve years older than she is, has never had to endure social restrictions, and, most importantly, has no unrequited love affair to forget.

She does not perceive the light and defeat the abyss until several days after the victory of the West. The passage is worth looking at in its entirety:

"Then if you will have it so, lady," he said: "you do not go, because only your brother called for you, and to look on the Lord Aragorn, Elendil's heir, in his triumph would now bring you no joy. Or because I do not go, and you desire still to be near me. And maybe for both these reasons, and you yourself cannot choose between them. Eowyn, do you not love me, or will you not?"

"I wished to be loved by another," she answered. "But I desire no man's pity."

"That I know," he said. "You desired to have the love of the Lord Aragorn. Because he was high and puissant, and you wished to have renown and glory and to be lifted far above the mean things that crawl on the earth. And as a great captain may to a young soldier he seemed to you admirable. For so he is, a lord among men, the greatest that now is. But when he gave you only understanding and pity, then you desired to have nothing, unless a brave death in battle. Look at me, Eowyn!"

And Eowyn looked at Faramir long and steadily; and Faramir said: "Do not scorn the pity that is the gift of a gentle heart, Eowyn! But I do not offer you my pity. For you are a lady high and valiant and have won yourself renown that shall not be forgotten; and you are a lady beautiful, I deem, beyond even the words of the Elven-tongue to tell. And I love you. Once I pitied your sorrow. But now, were you sorrowless, without fear or any lack, were you the blissful Queen of Gondor, still I would love you. Eowyn, do you not love me?"

Then the heart of Eowyn changed, or else at last she understood it. And suddenly her winter passed, and the sun shone on her.

"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.

Then Faramir laughed merrily. "That is well," he said; "for I am not a king. Yet I will wed with the White Lady of Rohan, if it be her will. And if she will, then let us cross the River and in happier days let us dwell in Ithilien and there make a garden. All things will grow with joy there, if the White Lady comes."

"Then must I leave my own people, man of Gondor?" she said. "And would you have your proud folk say of you: 'There goes a lord who tamed a wild shieldmaiden of the North! Was there no woman of the race of Numenor to choose?'"

"I would," said Faramir.

(III, pp. 242-43)

This, then, is Éowyn's epiphany, the end of her identity crisis, and her achievement of self-understanding. She has completed her positive progress on the road to maturation, and Tolkien has carefully shown us each stage of her development.

When she is first introduced, she is an "unbalanced" character in that she admires only the so-called "masculine" qualities of courage, hardiness, leadership and fighting ability, at the expense of the so-called "feminine" qualities of gentleness, tenderness and love. This attitude is understandable when her upbringing and environment are considered.

Due to the social restrictions placed on her because of her sex, and the situation at the court (that is, the influence of Wormtongue and her uncle's illness), she has been forced to become a nurse to a man whose malady is apparently hopeless, a passive and traditionally feminine role that she despises. When war erupts, Théoden's restoration frees her from the responsibility of nursing, but she is immediately forced to assume another passive, although traditionally masculine role, in leading the people who do not go to war. Her rebellion is, in part, a wish to

fulfill her potential as she sees it. She is successful in the active "masculine" role of victorious warrior, and gains honour and glory. But only after a physical and spiritual rebirth does she attain peace and happiness by taking on an active feminine role: that of healer and creator. This is the role that Faramir offers her at their first meeting, but she initially rejects it, remembering her despised occupation of helpless nursing, and still ignorant of her own nature (that is, in shadow). By becoming Faramir's wife and accepting an active feminine role, Éowyn fulfills her true potential.²⁴ Her feminine capacity for creation is a symbol of regeneration, made actual by the resettlement and restoration of Ithilien, a process initiated by her and Faramir. Doris Myers' derogatory description of Éowyn's story as "this rather pallid version of The Taming of the Shrew"²⁵ only scratches the surface of the truth. Éowyn is not a "shrew", nor is she "tamed", a word that implies a suppression of the individual. Rather, it is the story of a

²⁴ Frodo, like Éowyn, also goes through a process of growth and change. Although, being a Hobbit, he is never as aggressive as she is, he initially regrets that Gollum was not killed, and wounds an orc in Moria. Yet by the end of the trilogy, he too comes to realize the value of peace and non-violence, a policy that he insists on, as far as possible, during the scouring of the Shire.

²⁵ Doris T. Myers, "Brave New World: The Status of Women According to Tolkien, Lewis and Williams," Cimarron Review, 17 (1971), p. 15.

woman who, like Kate, is initially rebellious and unhappy but, through growth and the development of self-knowledge, gains peace and happiness.²⁶

Because Rohan is a repressive society that severely limits women in their role choice simply because of their sex, its structure and traditions create and maintain an attitude that involves a lack of consideration for half of its members. Eowyn is an excellent example of a woman who is restricted by convention and violently rebels against the legitimate authority in consequence. Tolkien uses Eowyn to express the frustration of women who inhabit all Middle-earth's repressive human societies, and to illustrate the consequences of that repression.

The fact that Eowyn is the only character in the trilogy who defies authority, abandons her trust and yet escapes punishment or even reprimand, implies that Tolkien, while not necessarily approving of her actions, considers the anger and frustration induced by her hampered condition to be

²⁶Tolkien's phraseology and dialogue is occasionally unfortunate. For example, Eowyn's question "And would you have your proud folk say to you: 'There goes a lord who tamed a wild shieldmaiden of the North! Was there no woman of the race of Numenor to choose?'" might set some teeth on edge. I am certain that Eowyn is speaking in jest, but it would not be astonishing to learn that her statement has been interpreted very differently by any number of people. Tolkien believes in his female characters, but is not always at ease in writing about them. However, this is a fault that can be found in the works of many a writer, both male and female.

mitigating circumstances. Tired of being treated as a servant who lacks both intelligence and an emotional life, Éowyn demands freedom, independence and the right to make her own decisions. Tolkien, while perhaps deploring the fact that she deserts her responsibility to her people, can nevertheless sympathize with her and understand her actions.

Éowyn also stands in the role of the quest hero(ine).²⁷

"Psychologically all heroes ... represent man's search for the self."²⁸ In achieving her quest, in "finding herself", she is a representative of all the other women of Rohan, repressed and frustrated by the restrictions of their male-dominated society. She has felt their desires and resentments, and her victories, over the Nazgûl on the Pelennor Fields and self-ignorance on the walls of Minas Tirith, are their victories. Since the "second solemn task of the hero" ... is to return ... to us, transfigured, and teach the lesson he has learned of life renewed",²⁹ it is appropriate that Éowyn should return temporarily to Rohan to bury Théoden (a symbol of her old life as well as the old

²⁷One may say that, since Éowyn is the questor herself, Aragorn is both her inspiration and her quest object: a neat reversal of traditional roles.

²⁸David Adams Leeming, Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero (Toronto: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1973).

²⁹Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949; rpt. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973).

order) and, hopefully, initiate the process of breaking Rohan's sexual barriers, giving the people a more sympathetic and expansive view of feminine roles, and encouraging society as a whole to treat women as individuals who deserve respect and consideration.

Within the narrative structure of Tolkien's tale, Éowyn has a number of functions. She acts as Theoden's nurse and as the chief female of his household, and her role and duties help to establish ties between Rohan and literary tradition. She also serves to get Merry from Dunharrow to Minas Tirith; and provides an unusual conqueror of the Nazgûl, a love-interest-conflict for Aragorn, and an eventual wife for Faramir. In this last role she also carries out the thematic triumph of fertility over wasteland.

However, Éowyn is no mere "fillup for the plot".³⁰ She serves as an important character study in growth and maturation, a personality that is effectively "reborn" and discovers herself and her place in the world, and with it, happiness and peace. Finally, she also serves as a representative of the Rohirrim women oppressed by unjust social restrictions based upon sex. In her triumph, the women of Rohan may have hope for a better future.

³⁰Catharine R. Stimpson, J.R.R. Tolkien, Columbia Essays on Modern Writers, No. 41 (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969).

CHAPTER IV -- Arwen

Arwen is the most problematical female figure in The Lord of the Rings. She is one of the most ignored characters in the trilogy, dismissed as a non-entity, "a beautiful legend in whom Aragorn believes but we hardly do, because we see her briefly only once, never hear her talk, never watch her act"¹ until the end of the story, where she is brought in as a deus ex machina to resolve the question of whom Aragorn is to marry and make queen of most of Middle-earth. Moreover, children to inherit the throne are obviously necessary: after all the trouble everyone has been to in order to re-establish the Númenorean kingdoms in exile, it would be unthinkable to allow the line to die out after one generation.

As Paul Kocher has pointed out, Tolkien himself has, heavily and unwittingly, contributed to the devaluation and misunderstanding of Arwen.² She appears only once in Volume I, not at all in Volume II, and "Unless the reader is very alert to the few obscure references to Arwen scattered here and there ..., he can easily wake up somewhere in Volume III

¹Paul H. Kocher, Master of Middle-Earth: The Fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), p. 153.

²Kocher, pp. 131-32.

with a shock of total surprise at Aragorn's approaching marriage to the lady."³ Tolkien chooses to put most (and the best part) of the information on her in "The Tale of Aragorn and Arwen", located in the appendices.

However, several points should be made in Tolkien's defence. Arwen's role is that of quest object. Like so many fairy tale princesses in a similar position, she tends to be a character who is passive and static almost by necessity: the audience's attention must not be deflected from the hero. Women who spend all their time imprisoned in ogres' castles or waiting in their fathers' houses are usually condemned to be both bored and boring. It is much more interesting, for both the artist and the audience, to follow the activities and adventures of the hero, who seeks her, before he achieves the quest and settles down, with the heroine, in dull domesticity. Moreover, Tolkien himself felt that the love story was sufficiently obvious in the text:

there's surely enough given in flashes for the attentive reader to see, even without the Appendix (of Aragorn and Arwen) the whole tale as one aspect of the love story of this pair, and the achievement of a high, noble and romantic love. There's Eowyn's love for Aragorn -- a sort of calf-love, as well as the true romance. You get the scene in Rivendell, with Aragorn suddenly revealed in princely dignity to Frodo, standing by Arwen. There's Aragorn's vision, after he has plighted his troth to Arwen and left her; and what were his thoughts after receiving the furlled standard, or when he unfurled it after achieving the paths of the dead.⁴

³Kocher, pp. 131-32.

⁴Quoted by Daphne Castell, "The Realms of Tolkien," New Worlds, 50 (Nov. 1966), 150-51.

However, not everyone agrees. The reader who misses the few hints offered of Arwen's role also misses an important aspect of Aragorn's character, actions and motivations. Tolkien's obscurity can also leave, unexplained and unexplainable (until the denouement), references that can give rise to certain problems. For example, when Aragorn tells Galadriel that she "'long held in keeping the only treasure'" (I, p. 391) that he desires, readers who have not caught Tolkien's previous references to Arwen are likely to be puzzled. As far as they are aware, Aragorn's only desire is to regain the throne of Gondor, and Galadriel has nothing to do with either Gondor or its throne. Again, when Aragorn tells Éowyn that, if he had his choice, he would now be in Rivendell, she may or may not understand that he is referring to another woman, and the reader may be in the same position.

Given the narrative structure of The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien would have had difficulty in treating the Arwen-Aragorn story as completely as some would like. To go back to their first meeting would enlarge the temporal scope of the trilogy by sixty-eight years, and The Lord of the Rings is already one of the longer works in English as it stands.

Still, more details of the relationship could have been offered. What, Tolkien rhetorically asked, were Aragorn's thoughts when he received the standard, and later when he displayed it? Well, what were they? Without a clear statement, it is easy for the person who is reading

the trilogy for the first time to miss the significance of this and other incidents. A certain effect is gained by initially establishing an air of mystery around Aragorn. However, by the beginning of the third volume, the reader has come to know him fairly well, and Tolkien does Aragorn, Arwen and their relationship a dis-service by not using an opportunity such as that presented by the standard to clarify and elaborate on the situation. While "The Tale of Aragorn and Arwen" would have been difficult to present as an intact narrative unit within the text of The Lord of the Rings, more references to the love story would have improved that facet of the trilogy, and added to Aragorn and Arwen as characters.

Given Arwen as she is, not as she might have been, she is important not so much as a character in her own right, but in her relationships with other people and to the book as a whole. Arwen "explains" many of the actions, motives and feelings of Elrond and Aragorn. She also serves to illustrate and express basic structural devices and thematic concerns of The Lord of the Rings.

Arwen's connection with Elrond is deep and close, intensified by the fact that her mother Celebrian left Middle-earth more than five hundred years before after being wounded by orcs. The father-daughter relationship is strengthened under such tragic and stressful circumstances. There is no reason to suppose that Elrond, his foresight

notwithstanding, ever considered the idea that his daughter would choose love and death with a mortal over the love and immortality offered by her family. Even after Arwen and Aragorn have met, Elrond believes (and hopes) that she will reject her suitor: "But as for Arwen the Fair, Lady of Imladris and of Lórien, Evenstar of her people, she is of lineage greater than yours, and she has lived in the world already so long that to her you are but as a yearling shoot beside a young birth of many summers. She is too far above you. And so, I think, it may well seem to her" (III, p. 340).

Arwen has been criticized for being necessarily passive in her role as Aragorn's quest object. Those commentators who would have her fling herself on a horse and gallop off to war fail to realize that, structurally, it would be unnecessary, indeed damaging, for her to do any such thing. For her to carry out such a function would cheapen and detract from Eowyn's achievement.⁵

⁵ Arwen as a warrior is unlikely but not impossible. Her family has been actively involved in wars throughout Middle-earth's history, and both Lúthien and Galadriel were soldiers. In fact, it is much more to the point to ask why Elrond, Glorfindel and other Elves at Rivendell with military experience were not more actively involved in the War of the Ring. Elrond did not even make any effort to aid the Shire, which seems to be carrying the traditional elvish policy of aloofness to extremes.

It is important to note that Arwen's decision to marry Aragorn is entirely her own, made without pressure by either interested party. Kocher points out that all free and intelligent people in Middle-earth must make their own choices. Moreover, the Elves have traditionally credited individuals of both sexes with the right and ability to make decisions and abide by the consequences (see Chapter III). It is a difficult decision, momentous in its meaning and implications. As Elrond tells Aragorn, her choice must "bring one of us, you or me, to a bitter parting beyond the end of the world" (III, p. 340). Elrond's condition is not interference; rather, it is a measure of his affection for his daughter. Moreover, given Aragorn's life style before the War of the Ring and the destiny he must fulfill, it would have been impossible for him to have a satisfactory marriage with anyone .

The couple's first meeting produces "love at first sight". Their power over each other is unwavering and unchallenged: meeting for the second time twenty-nine years after their first encounter, they are engaged but must wait for another thirty-nine years with only occasional meetings and an uncertain future before them. Despite Arwen's prediction, it is by no means certain that Aragorn will achieve mastery of the two kingdoms. A claim to the throne of Gondor would inevitably create an uproar in that country (particularly under a Steward like Denethor); the North

kingdom would have to be re-established; and Sauron would have to be challenged and defeated. Moreover, Aragorn might well be killed before he gets near his goal.

Despite the obstacles that stand in the way of their future happiness, Arwen believes that the outcome of the struggle between Sauron and his opponents will be favourable to her and Aragorn: "'Dark is the Shadow, and yet my heart rejoices; for you, Estel, shall be among the great whose valour will destroy it'" (III, p. 341). Throughout the War of the Ring, her gifts to Aragorn and the messages that accompany them are a constant refrain of hope and encouragement. She makes the standard for him "in hope" (III, p. 342), and sends it with the message "'Either our hope cometh, or all hope's end'" (III, p. 48). Her gift of the green stone, "'a token of hope'" (I, p. 391), is significant: green is a colour of hope.⁶ It should be noted that, during moments of great emotion, she calls him by his childhood name of Estel ("Hope"). Arwen's constant hope is one of the keynotes of her relationship with Aragorn, and his desire to succeed is encouraged by her belief: "'I cannot foresee [the successful outcome of the war], and how it may come to pass is hidden from me. Yet with your hope I will hope'" (III, p. 341).

⁶ Ad de Vries, Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery (Amsterdam and London: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1974), p. 227. In Dante's Purgatorio, VIII, the green wings and robes of the angels indicate hope.

His attitude towards other people and towards life is influenced by her belief in their future happiness. For example, during their search for Merry and Pippin he encourages Legolas and Gimli not to give up hope, an attitude that is fundamental to The Lord of the Rings.

The love between Arwen and Aragorn is based on a system of values described in Castiglione's The Book of the Courtier:

there can be no beauty without goodness. Thus, a wicked soul rarely inhabits a beautiful body, and for that reason outward beauty is a true sign of inner goodness. And this grace is impressed upon the body in varying degree as an index of the soul, by which it is outwardly known, as with trees in which the beauty of the blossoms is a token of the excellence of the fruit. The same is true of the human body, as we see from the physiognomists, who often discover in the face the character and sometimes the thoughts of men

.....
Hence, the ugly are also wicked, for the most part, and the beautiful are good; and we may say that beauty is the pleasant, cheerful, charming, and desirable face of the good, and that ugliness is the dark, disagreeable, unpleasant and sorry face of evil.⁷

This philosophy is endemic to Tolkien's works:

to us evil and ugliness seem indissolubly allied. We find it difficult to conceive of evil and beauty together. The fear of the beautiful fay that ran through the elder ages almost eludes our grasp. Even more alarming: goodness is itself bereft of its proper beauty. In Faerie one can indeed conceive of an ogre who possesses a castle hideous as a nightmare (for the evil of the ogre wills it so), but one cannot conceive of a house built with a good purpose -- an inn, a hostel for travellers, the hall of a virtuous and noble king -- that is yet sickeningly ugly

⁷Baldassare Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, trans. Charles S. Singleton (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor books, 1959), p. 342, p. 343.

This, however, is the modern and special (or accidental) "escapist" aspect of fairy stories which they share with romances and other stories out of or about the past.

("On Fairy-Stories". Tree and Leaf, p. 57)

Virtually all of Tolkien's "good" characters are, if not dazzlingly beautiful, at least pleasant, attractive or appealing physically. As C.S. Lewis puts it, "The imagined beings have their insides on the outside; they are visible souls."⁸ Thus, the immediate attraction between Arwen and Aragorn is aroused by the personalities visible in their physical beings.

The single fact that their love remains unconsummated for sixty-eight years inspires certain readers to new heights of disbelief, an objection to the trilogy that Kocher refutes. He notes that "things are rather awkward for Aragorn in the House of Elrond. He is still on probation, as it were, under the ban of Arwen's father against pressing his suit with her so long as he remains a homeless wanderer unable to offer her the rank she merits by birth and worth."⁹ He points out that

⁸C.S. Lewis, "The Dethronement of Power," TC, p. 15. Conversely, Tolkien's "bad" characters are hideously ugly, or, at least, decidedly unattractive. The closest example of what Marcia Lieberman (in "'Some Day My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale", College English, 34, No. 3 (Dec. 1972), 383-95) calls a "crossed pattern" (that is, the combinations of ugly and good, or beautiful but wicked) is found in the lumpish but helpful (although rather amoral) Woses. The fact that Sauron was, before the destruction of Númenor, physically attractive, is also a "cross patterned" case. After the destruction of his physical body, his appearance became "black and hideous" (III, p. 317), reflecting his true nature.

⁹Kocher, p. 137.

both Arwen and Aragorn have good reasons for agreeing to Elrond's conditions. Arwen is deeply devoted to her family, and marrying Aragorn means giving up her immortality and becoming separated from them, perhaps forever. On Aragorn's side there is the gratitude and affection that he feels towards Elrond, and his characteristic respect for authority and order.¹⁰ Under these circumstances, "It is unthinkable that he would urge Arwen to run off with him into the woods without her father's consent, or perhaps even with it. To ask Arwen to marry him under the best of conditions is to ask her to receive eventual old age and death, 'the choice of Lúthien' as she herself calls it, an intolerable gift for any sensitive man to bestow on the woman he loves. The one thing he cannot do in that position is to press his suit hard upon her."¹¹

The anonymous author of the review "Ring of Romanticism" is unimpressed by Kocher's argument: "[Aragorn's] unswerving fidelity to Arwen is never explored [by Kocher] in terms of any impossible clash between the passions of two natures, her elfhood and hismanhood, and imagination is left to boggle at their wedding night. The whole epic is rather sex shy. We can accept that elves, among their glittering ethereal joys, may let a century pass without getting around.

¹⁰Kocher, 137-38.

¹¹Kocher, p. 138.

to this minor one. But, thankfully as we opt for a fast in preference to yet another surfeit, it remains true that enough is as good as a feast, and men are men.¹²

Men may be men, but Aragorn is not, as Tolkien takes care to point out on numerous occasions, an ordinary man, either in heredity or character. The fact that his family was originally elvish, and that his life span runs to more than two hundred years, perhaps entitles him to share in the Elves' "glittering ethereal joys" and thus be less concerned with the sexual problems in which lesser mortals, with a life expectancy rather less than half of Aragorn's, must be interested.

Given the personalities of Arwen and Aragorn, and the facts that Tolkien has chosen to make a part of Middle-earth, the situation as it stands can be (but need not be) a strain on the reader's credibility.¹³ The difficulty is that Tolkien does not say enough about the love story, either through the thoughts, speeches and actions of the principals, or through authorial comment. The failure of Tolkien to explore the relationship more thoroughly is a weak point in his subcreation. By not offering any comment on it (the "enough" that would, to some readers, be as good as a feast), he

¹² "Ring of Romanticism", Times Literary Supplement, June 8, 1973, p. 630.

¹³ My personal opinion is in this instance of no particular value, since the basic issue is one of individual reader reaction. Nonetheless, for what it is worth, I never found the situation at all unlikely, but accepted it as part of a tradition and quite understandable in its context.

possibly endangered the reader's sympathy and identification with both characters. Tolkien's own defence to the charge that there is "not enough romance" in The Lord of the Rings was the comment: "There's a time and a place for everything Love is the background of history -- not least, when least attended to. In the time of a great war and high adventure, love and the carrying on with the race, and so on, are in the background. They're not referred to the whole time, but they're there."¹⁴

Arwen is both a source and a symbol of conflict and reconciliation. Her dilemma of being forced to choose between her elvish father and her human lover exemplifies the conflict between the mortal world and Faerie found throughout Tolkien's world: "if elves are true, and really exist independently of our tales about them, then this also is true: elves are not primarily concerned with us, nor we with them. Our fates are sundered, and our paths seldom meet. Even upon the borders of Faerie, we encounter them only at some chance crossing of the ways" ("On Fairy-Stories", Tree and Leaf, p. 16). No compromise is possible, and her choice is inevitably a source of tension between Elrond and Aragorn:

When Elrond learned the choice of his daughter, he was silent, though his heart was grieved and found the doom long feared none the easier to endure. But when Aragorn came again to Rivendell he called him to him, and he said:

¹⁴Castell, p. 150.

"My son, years come when hope will fade, and beyond them little is clear to me. And now a shadow lies between us. Maybe, it has been appointed so, that by my loss the kingship of Men may be restored. Therefore, though I love you, I say to you: Arwen Undomiel shall not diminish her life's grace for less cause. She shall not be the bride of any Man less than the King of both Gondor and Arnor."

(III, p. 342)

Arwen as a reconciler appears in several aspects. Her dealings with Frodo offer him healing and reconciliation. Her white star-gem gives the Hobbit whatever temporary alleviation from the memory of his ordeal is possible in Middle-earth. By giving up her immortality and offering Frodo her place in the elven ship, she enables him to achieve the rest and peace that are possible only in the Undying Lands: "If your hurts grieve you still and the memory of your burden is heavy, then you may pass into the West, until all your wounds and weariness are healed" (III, pp. 252-53).

Arwen also acts as a force for reconciliation in her wedding with Aragorn, when everyone unites in happiness to celebrate the marriage and the new beginning that it offers. An example of the new harmony is seen in the resolving of the quarrel between Eomer and Gimli. Discussing their earlier disagreement about Galadriel, Eomer denies that she is the fairest lady that lives,¹⁵ adding

¹⁵This is not a beauty contest. According to Middle-earth's value system, what Eomer and Gimli are arguing about is the beauty of the women's personalities as shown in their physical appearance. Gimli, a member of the old order that is doomed to fade and disappear, prefers Galadriel; while Eomer, a representative of the new human forces that will replace both Elves and Dwarves, finds Arwen, who has become human, more beautiful.

"But first I will plead this excuse," said Éomer. "Had I seen her in other company, I would have said all that you could wish. But now I will put Queen Arwen Evenstar first, and I am ready to do battle on my own part with any who deny me. Shall I call for my sword?"

Then Gimli bowed low. "Nay, you are excused for my part, lord," he said. "You have chosen the Evening; but my love is given to the Morning. And my heart forebodes that soon it will pass away for ever."

(III, p. 253)

Arwen's title "Evenstar" indicates that the "evening" for the Elves has arrived. Her transition from Elf to human marks the new supremacy of humans in the Fourth Age, and the Elves now have no place in Middle-earth.

By marrying Aragorn, Arwen ensures the beginning of a new age and brief period of glory for humans, represented by the splendour of Minas Tirith and the Reunited Kingdom. But complete and lasting happiness is not possible in Middle-earth: "The Third Age ended thus in victory and hope, and yet grievous among the sorrows of that age was the parting of Elrond and Arwen, for they were sundered by the Sea and by a doom beyond the end of the world" (III, p. 343). Although Arwen and Aragorn live "for six score years in great glory and bliss" (III, p. 343), their happiness is transitory. At Aragorn's death Arwen finally understands what it is to be human:

And for all her wisdom and lineage she could not forbear to plead with him to stay yet for a while. She was not yet weary of her days, and thus she tasted the bitterness of the mortality that she had taken upon her.

"Lady Undómiel," said Aragorn, "the hour is indeed hard, yet it was made even in that day when we met under the white birches in the garden of Elrond where

none now walk. And on the hill of Cerin Amroth when we forsook both the Shadow and the Twilight this doom we accepted

"I speak no comfort to you, for there is no comfort for such pain within the circles of the world. The uttermost choice is before you: to repent and go to the Havens and bear away into the West the memory of our days together that shall there be evergreen but never more than memory; or else to abide the Doom of men."

"Nay, dear lord," she said, "that choice is long over. There is now no ship that would bear me hence, and I must indeed abide the Doom of Men, whether I will or I nill: the loss and the silence. But I say to you, King of the Numenoreans, not till now have I understood the tale of your people and their fall. As wicked fools I scorned them, but I pity them at last. For if this is indeed, as the Eldar say, the gift of the One to Men, it is bitter to receive."

.....
But Arwen went forth from the House, and the light of her eyes was quenched, and it seemed to her people that she had become cold and grey as nightfall in winter, that comes without a star.

(III, pp. 343-44)

After the evening comes the night.

Arwen, therefore, is more important than most critics believe. As a personality she may be "inexpressibly lovely, precious and empty", but she is important for her effect on others, and as a symbol. Without an appreciation of her significance, the reader cannot completely understand Aragorn's motives and actions, or his relationships with Elrond, Galadriel and Eowyn. The reader must see her influence on his life in order to see him. ¹⁶ Within the scope of the trilogy, a realization of Arwen's role and function (which, due to Tolkien's limited depiction, unfortunately comes to some readers only with the benefit

¹⁶Kocher, p. 132.

of hindsight, and to others not at all) illuminates Tolkien's characterizations and thematic concerns. Through her story, Tolkien portrays the value of beauty, the necessity of choice, and the inevitability of death.

Tolkien also uses Arwen to illustrate his belief that women should be treated as individuals, and to depict a society that does so. Because Elrond respects her right and ability to make her own decision (that is, treats her with consideration), she responds with consideration and agrees to his condition. Arwen is not put into Eowyn's position and forced to rebel against the established authority in order to win independence and the right to live her own life. The difference in the two women's situations is used by Tolkien to contrast the societies of Rivendell and Rohan. Because she is used for all these purposes and in all these ways, a comprehension of Arwen is necessary, not only to an understanding of Tolkien's treatment of women in The Lord of the Rings, but to an understanding of the work as a whole.

CHAPTER V -- Galadriel

Even so stern a critic as Gerard O'Connor grudgingly admits that Galadriel plays an important part in The Lord of the Rings.¹ In fact Galadriel serves more functions and plays more roles than perhaps any other character in the trilogy. She is of vital significance to the work.

The Norse and Celtic mythologies both contribute indirectly to the status of Galadriel. As noted above,² the Scandinavian goddesses were endowed with definite personalities by poets and story-tellers, and were placed on a level equal to that of the male deities. Celtic goddesses tended to be even more important than the gods.³ In the strength of her

¹Gerard O'Connor, "Why Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings Should Not be Popular Culture," Extrapolation, 13 (1972), p. 49. However, after conceding this point, O'Connor says no more about Galadriel, preferring to concentrate on Arwen, Rose and Eowyn, who are "not important".

²Chapter I, pp. 12-13.

³"It is possible that in the earlier life of the Celts, goddesses held a more important place than gods, possibly because the arts of civilization were mostly in the hands of women, who would naturally have female deities to watch over their activities." John Arnott MacCulloch, The Celtic and Scandinavian Religions (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1948), p. 30. Douglass Parker, one of Tolkien's more intelligent critics, notes that the Elves are strongly Celtic in several respects. See "Hwaet We Holbytla ...", Hudson Review, 9 (Winter 1956-57), p. 606.

character, her former career as a warrior⁴ and her pre-eminence over her husband, Galadriel recalls the quasi-historical Maeve. Tolkien's character, however, is considerably more civilized than the Celtic goddess.

Galadriel's considerable power is based upon what she is, both as a person and as an Elf. She receives Nenyä, the Ring of Adamant~~um~~ one of the Three, because she is judged worthy of keeping and using it. It is the only one of the Three that does not change hands at some point in its history.⁵ By keeping the ring, Galadriel must assume the responsibility of "'understanding, making, and healing, to preserve all things unstained'" (I, p. 282), the functions for which the Three were created.

Galadriel's power enables her to create Lórien: "'I sang of leaves, of leaves of gold, and leaves of gold there grew/ Of wind I sang, a wind there came and in the branches blew'" (I, p. 388).⁶ Her power is felt over the entire country:

⁴Galadriel is described as "the last survivor of the princes and queens who led the revolting Noldor to exile in Middle-earth" (*Road*, p. 60). Evidently she took an active part in the War of the Great Jewels.

⁵The other two Rings, Vilya and Narya, were originally held by Gil-galad and Círdan. They were handed on to Elrond and Gandalf, respectively.

⁶This feat is a more powerful version of "the gift of the Elf-minstrels, who can make the things of which they sing appear before the eyes of those that listen" (III, p. 338). It is also the most powerful manifestation of artistic talent and ability in the entire trilogy.

"You feel the power of the Lady of the Galadhrim" (I, p. 365). She is able to sustain and defend her country against Sauron himself:

"I know what it was that you last saw," she said; "for that is also in my mind. Do not be afraid! But do not think that only by singing amid the trees, nor even by the slender arrows of elven-bows, is this land of Lórien maintained and defended against its enemy. I say to you, Prodo, that even as I speak to you, I perceive the Dark Lord and know his mind, or all his mind that concerns the Elves. And he gropes over to see me and my thought. But still the door is closed!"

(I, p. 380)

Part of Galadriel's effectiveness in wielding her power stems from the fact that she is under no onus to bear and raise children. She gave birth to Celebrian in the First Age, when children were required to replace the Elves killed in the War of the Great Jewels. With the intervention of the Valar and the defeat of Morgoth, the threat of Elvish extinction is removed. Thus Galadriel is free to turn her attention to other matters, including the creation and maintenance of Lórien. It is interesting to note Aragorn's final words to her before he leaves Lórien with the Fellowship: "'For the gifts that you have given me I thank you ... O Lady of Lórien of whom were sprung Celebrian and Arwen Evenstar. What praise could I say more?'" (I, p. 391). This is a tribute to her in the regenerative role of mother, and to her as a person: the "quality" of her daughter and grand-daughter indicates what kind of a person she is.

Galadriel's wisdom is based on the past and the knowledge that she has gained from it. She has been exiled from Eldamar because she defied the Valar to go, with Feanor and her brother Finrod, to Middle-earth in order to regain the silmarils from Morgoth. "But it was impossible for one of the High-Elves to overcome the yearning for the Sea; and the longing to pass over it again to the land of their former bliss. She was now burdened with this desire" (Road, p. 60). From her personal experience, she is able to warn Legolas against the lure of the Sea. Moreover, it is Galadriel who first realizes the threat that Sauron poses to Middle-earth, and the necessity of unifying the chief Eldar and the wizards into an organized force. To this end she forms the White Council.

By rejecting the Ring, Galadriel repudiates a power different from that which she already has. If she had taken the Ring, she would have achieved power based on her becoming a beautiful idol:

"And now at last it comes. You will give me the Ring freely! 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! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!"

She lifted up her hand and from the ring that she wore there issued a great light that illumined her alone and left all else dark. She stood before Frodo seeming now tall beyond measurement, and beautiful beyond enduring, terrible and worshipful.

(I, p. 381)

In refusing the Ring, she chooses to remain what she is and keep the power that she has because of what she is; that is, it is as a person, not an object, that she has power: "'I pass the test,' she said. 'I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel'" (I, p. 381). She knows that an acceptance of the Ring would lead to the corruption of everything that she wishes to create and preserve:

"I wish you'd take this Ring. You'd put things to rights. You'd stop them digging up the gaffer and turning him adrift. You'd make some folk pay for their dirty work."

"I would," she said. "That is how it would begin. But it would not stop with that, alas!"
(I, p. 382)

Galadriel's greatest power lies in her emotional hold over people. She makes a strong impression, whether negative or positive, upon everyone who comes in contact with her. When Boromir expresses doubt about her purposes, Aragorn immediately rebukes him. Legolas and Gimli react in a similar fashion when they first encounter Éomer, who also disparages her. Frodo and Sam long to see her before their departure, and they invoke her several times on their journey to Mordor: when they confront Shelob (II, pp. 329-30); and when they need light and water (III, p. 195).⁷ Her emotional impact

⁷The last episode (the desire for light and water) is particularly intriguing in terms of Galadriel's power. Sam's longing is expressed as a wish: "'If only the Lady could see us or hear us, I'd say to her: 'Your Ladyship, all we want is light and water....'" (III, p. 195). When he gets both, he has no doubt about the ultimate source of his wish-fulfillment. "'If ever I see the Lady again I will tell her!' he cried. 'Light and now water!'" (III, p. 198). There is also the instance of his farewell to Frodo in ...

on Gimli is so powerful that it changes his whole life. His meeting with her brings about friendship with Legolas and a different attitude towards material wealth. Gimli's love for Galadriel eventually leads him to a fate different from the usual lot of Dwarves:

We have heard tell that Legolas took Gimli Glóin's son with him because of their great friendship, greater than any that has been between Elf and Dwarf. If this is true, then it is strange indeed: that a Dwarf should be willing to leave Middle-earth for any love, or that the Eldar should receive him, or that the Lords of the West should permit it. But it is said that Gimli went also out of desire to see again the beauty of Galadriel; and it may be that she, being mighty among the Eldar, obtained this grace for him.

(III, p. 362)

Galadriel also possesses the powers that are apparently common to all Elves, or at least the Eldar. There is some indication that Elves are able to "read" or interpret the minds and thoughts of others. For example, Elrond quickly detects Aragorn's love for Arwen (III, p. 340); and Arwen, "when Aragorn was abroad, from afar ... watched over him in thought" (III, p. 342). Using this ability, Galadriel

... Shelob's cave: "'And if the Lady could hear me and give me one wish I would wish to come back and find you again'" (II, p. 342). Sam does not "come back", but he does find Frodo again, alive. With the fulfillment of these three wishes, Sam seems to be convinced that Galadriel can grant some desires.

subjects each member of the Company to a test in order to determine his loyalty to the Quest.⁸

Elves also have the power of foresight. When Frodo first awakens in Rivendell, Gandalf thinks "to what he will come in the end not even Elrond can foretell" (I, p. 235). Glorfindel correctly prophesies that the Lord of the Nazgûl will not be vanquished by a man (III, p. 332). Galadriel makes several predictions: she foretells Aragorn's ruling name of Elessar; and the messages that she sends to him and Legolas through Gandalf are prophesies which eventually become true.

Galadriel's relationship with her husband is extremely interesting. When the Fellowship first arrives in Lórien, it is Celeborn who greets each by name and appears to be the central authority. Yet it soon becomes evident that Galadriel has more knowledge, more insight, and more power. When Gandalf does not appear, Celeborn speculates that there was a change of plan, but Galadriel knows that this was not the case.

⁸Galadriel's interpretative ability seems to be selective or inconsistent. She can see Sauron's mind, but cannot read Gandalf's unless he is in Lórien (I, p. 370) although the wizard is admitted by everyone, including himself, to be the less powerful of the two. She evidently has no trouble understanding the thoughts of the Company (this might be one reason that she has their blindfolds removed) and is able to detect Boromir's mental waverings. There is a hint of masculine arrogance in Boromir's later remarks about her. He resents being tested at all (more especially so because he knows that he has failed, or will fail) and the fact that the tester is a woman probably makes the whole episode more galling.

Celeborn, hearing of the Balrog, regrets his welcome to Gimli and posits that Gandalf's wisdom had deserted him. Galadriel immediately contradicts him:

"He would be rash indeed that said that thing," said Galadriel gravely. "Needless were none of the deeds of Gandalf in life. Those that followed him knew not his mind and cannot report his full purpose. But however it may be with the guide, the followers are blameless. Do not repent of your welcome to the Dwarf. If our folk had been exiled long and far from Lothlorien, who of the Galadhrim, even Celeborn the Wise, would pass nigh and would not wish to look upon their ancient home, though it had become an abode of dragons?"

(I, p. 371)

Even while giving him the title of "Wise", Galadriel shows herself to be more thoughtful and more tactful than Celeborn. She is the memorable half of the couple, and the real authority of Lorien. As the creator of the country, it is her task to rule, maintain and defend it. In this respect, Celeborn is more of a consort figure than a ruler in his own right. When Legolas tells Haldir that Aragorn is a member of the Company, Haldir replies "'The name of Aragorn son of Arathorn is known in Lorien ... and he has the favour of the Lady. All then is well'" (I, p. 358).

It is Galadriel who administers the test of fidelity; who has the Mirror, "'the magic of Galadriel'" (I, p. 377), that no one else can command; who supplies the Fellowship with cloaks and gifts; who sends Gwaihir to rescue Gandalf after the wizard's return from death; who has the power to destroy Dol Guldur. It is Galadriel who creates the country

that she and Celeborn rule, and their subjects call themselves "Galadhrim", a word taken from the same root as her name.⁹

Moreover, beyond the borders of Lórien, it is Galadriel who is known by reputation by those who have never seen her or her country. Eomer, Wormtongue, Faramir, Boromir and Treebeard all have some knowledge of her, however inaccurate or unclear. Treebeard is the only one of the five who knows of Celeborn, and he is clearly more interested in and more impressed by Galadriel. It is Galadriel to whom everyone responds, not Celeborn: Sam does not mention Celeborn to Faramir, but is enthusiastic about Galadriel:

"But I wish I could make a song about her. Beautiful she is, sir! Lovely! Sometimes like a great tree in flower, sometimes like a white daffadowndilly, small and slender like. Hard as di'monds, soft as moonlight. Warm as sunlight, cold as frost in the stars. Proud and far-off as a snow-mountain, and as merry as any lass I ever saw with daisies in her hair But perhaps 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"

(II, p. 288)

In the words of another husband who is completely overshadowed by his wife, Celeborn is a "cypher in his own house".¹⁰ He cannot be ignorant of the situation, and consequently, one would expect the marital relationship to

⁹"Galadhrim" means "tree-people" (I, p. 355). According to Robert Foster (p. 106), Galadriel means "lady of light" or "tree-lady".*

¹⁰James Barrie, Peter Pan (1911; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 226. The disgruntled husband is Mr. Darling.

be anything but cordial. According to the image established such figures as Nimue, Angelica, Barbara Allen, and, more recently, Daisy Faye, Faye Greener and Mrs. Macomber, Galadriel should be an emasculating bitch-goddess who uses her sexual power to trap, enslave and devour men, and then rejects them with scorn. According to this pattern, Celeborn should be resentful, whining and totally under his wife's control.¹¹

In fact, Tolkien creates a completely unexpected representation of a strong wife-weak husband arrangement in the Galadriel-Celeborn interaction. Both are fully aware of the roles they must play in the marriage and in the social and power structure. Their relationship works because it is based on mutual understanding and self-knowledge. Celeborn, far from resenting his wife, loves her deeply, saying to Aragorn at their last parting: "Kinsman, farewell! May your doom be other than mine, and your treasure remain with you to the end!" (III, p. 260). After her departure, Celeborn soon loses all delight in Lorien, removing to

¹¹ The powerful bitch-goddess/weak male victim tradition is common throughout literature. It appears in such diverse forms as the Aphrodite-Anchises myth and the ballads dealing with the wife who is rejected by the Devil on the grounds that she would make Hell utterly intolerable. The bitch-goddess is particularly popular in contemporary American literature (where she is often lurking under the title "Mom").

Rivendell and eventually leaving Middle-earth.¹² Galadriel treats Celeborn with respect rather than scorn. She recognizes his power and wisdom,¹³ tells the Company that the gifts are from both her and Celeborn (none of the Fellowship seems to remember this, referring to the "gift(s) of the Lady" several times) and offers him consolation for his loss of her: "'let not your heart be sad, though night must follow noon; and already our evening draweth nigh'" (I, p. 390). Her pre-eminence does not rankle Celeborn, and Galadriel does not gloat over him. By accepting the facts of the situation and respecting each other as individuals, Galadriel and Celeborn achieve harmony in both their private and public lives.

In her relationship with the members of the Company, Galadriel has a number of roles. Some are obvious: she acts as a mother figure; and her role as temptress, if unconventional, is immediately apparent. Her other roles are less evident.

¹²The obvious question is, why does Celeborn not accompany Galadriel when she embarks for Eldamar? Tolkien does not offer any explicit answer, but the most reasonable solution seems to be that at least one of the Elf leaders must remain to carry out the responsibilities that is due to the Elves that do not leave Middle-earth immediately. Since Elrond must leave with his King, and Thranduil is comparatively isolated in Mirkwood, the duty falls upon Celeborn.

¹³On this point, I tend to agree with Robert Foster, who remarks "Although Celeborn was an Elven-lord of great fame and was called Celeborn the Wise, in Loth he does not seem especially bright" (p. 45).

Recognizing her wisdom and knowledge, Frodo asks her for advice. Like other Elves with power and authority, Galadriel refuses to give it, saying "'I am not a counsellor'" (I, p. 378). However, she advises the members of the Fellowship indirectly. By apparently offering them a choice between the Quest and what each of them desires, and by giving Frodo and Sam the opportunity to look into her Mirror, Galadriel opens up possibilities and suggests different types of action. She insists, however, that they make their own choices.

Like the other women of The Lord of the Rings, Galadriel also fulfills the traditionally feminine role of inspiration for knights and warriors. In Shelob's cave, it is the memory of Galadriel and her gift that gives Frodo and Sam energy and courage. She is also an inspiration to Gimli:

She looked upon Gimli, who sat glowering and sad, and she smiled. And the Dwarf, hearing the names given in his own ancient tongue, looked up and met her eyes; 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. He rose clumsily and bowed in dwarf fashion, saying: "Yet more fair is the living land of Lórien, and the Lady Galadriel is above all the jewels that lie beneath the earth!"

(I, p. 371)

By inspiring Gimli to love her, Galadriel prepares him to love Legolas, an affection that is reciprocated. The relationship that Galadriel helps to establish between the Elf and the Dwarf ends the long feud between the two races. Thus she also acts as a force for reconciliation and peace.

Finally, through her gift to Sam, Galadriel is a regenerative agent. With the benefit of her blessing and the dirt from her orchard, the Shire becomes richer and more fruitful than it had been before Saruman's take-over. Since her gift to Sam also contains the nut of a mallorn tree, the experience of the entire population of the Shire is increased. The mallorn, part of "the heart of Elvendom" (I, p. 367) brings the Hobbits into contact with the older culture that soon disappears from Middle-earth.

Structurally, Galadriel has several functions. She is the mother of Celebrian, thus providing a wife for Elrond.¹⁴ By creating Lórien, she provides a place for the betrothal of Arwen and Aragorn, a resting place for the Company, and a community of Elves that contrasts strongly with Rivendell. Her prophecies provide structural completeness and narrative connection when they are fulfilled. By using her to establish affection between Legolas and Gimli, Tolkien is able to add a new dimension to the characters of the Elf and Dwarf. Galadriel is also responsible for much of the "behind the scenes" action. She sends a message to the Dunedain telling them to join Aragorn, and instigates the rescue of Gandalf by Gwaihir. Her gifts of the star-glass and the cloak brooches

¹⁴The role of Celebrian's father is, incidentally, Celeborn's only absolutely necessary narrative function. Otherwise, he serves only to develop a facet of Galadriel's character, through their marital relationship.

save the lives of the four Hobbits. Later, she gives the Shire special status and prosperity through the orchard dirt and the mallorn.

Thematically, Galadriel is representative of the trilogy's positive forces. She is the light that defends Lórien against the Shadow. As Haldir tells Frodo: "'In this high place you may see the two powers that are opposed one to another, and ever they strive now in thought, but whereas the light perceives the very heart of the darkness, its own secret has not been discovered. Not yet'" (I, p. 366). Her phial provides a "'light when all other lights go out'" (II, p. 329) in Shelob's cave.

Galadriel is also a force of creativity, preservation and regeneration who works against destruction. To this end she creates Lórien to stand against Sauron's stronghold of Dol Guldur. At the end of the War of the Ring, the Elves take Dol Guldur, "and Galadriel threw down its walls and laid bare its pits, and the forest [of Mirkwood] was cleansed" (III, p. 375). As a representative of love and peace against resentment, hatred and war, she heals the Elf-Dwarf feud. This act stands in contrast to the dissensions caused by Sauron and Saruman among their followers. Finally, as an Elf, Galadriel symbolizes the fading and disappearance of the old order and the passing of the Third Age. She accepts this role when she rejects the Ring.

Her rejection of the Ring also serves as a particular structural and thematic comparison. "As Tolkien writes his tale, he makes it one of the main objects of the providential order to test each of the major characters by putting the Ring within easy grasp if he will but reach out to seize it, or keep it, for himself."¹⁵ Galadriel refuses it because she wishes to remain herself: by accepting the power that the Ring offers, she would have become a Dark Queen, in place of the Dark Lord. Elrond, Gandalf and Aragorn all have similar opportunities, and react as Galadriel does. Faramir repudiates the Ring because, having told Frodo that he would not take it, he regards his word as binding. To break it would be a betrayal of self.

Significantly, Saruman (the "Man of Skill" and one of the Wise), Denethor and Boromir all fail the test. They all have ostensibly generous motives. Saruman tells Gandalf that, in joining Sauron, "'We can bide our time, we can keep our thoughts in our hearts, deploring maybe evils done by the way, but approving the high and ultimate purpose: Knowledge, Rule, Order; all the things that we have so far striven in vain to accomplish ...'" (I, pp. 272-73). Denethor and Boromir both long for the Ring in order to defend Gondor and its people, for which they are responsible.

¹⁵Paul Kocher, Master of Middle-earth: The Fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), p. 50.

But, as Boromir inadvertently makes clear, the real lure is personal power:

"The Ring would give me power of Command. How I would drive the hosts of Mordor, and all men would flock to my banner!"

Boromir strode up and down, speaking ever more loudly. Almost he seemed to have forgotten Frodo, while his talk dwelt on walls and weapons, and the mustering of men; and he drew plans for great alliances and glorious victories to be; and he cast down Mordor, and became himself a mighty king, benevolent and wise.

(I, p. 414)

Saruman, who is not strong enough to resist the lure of power, hates those members of the White Council who rejected the Ring, and judges them by the standards he applies to himself, knowing that they, not Sauron, were his rivals:

"And as for the Lady here, I do not trust her: she always hated me, and schemed for your Gandalf's part. I do not doubt that she has brought you this way to have the pleasure of gloating over my poverty."

.....

"I did not spend long study on these matters for naught. You have doomed yourselves, and you know it. And it will afford me some comfort as I wander to think that you pulled down your own house when you destroyed mine. And now, what ship will bear you back across so wide a sea?" he mocked. "It will be a grey ship, and full of ghosts."

(III, pp. 261-62)

Boromir suspects Galadriel of deceit and treachery, and in the end practices them himself. As lords and representatives of Gondor, a country which traditionally considers women unfit to rule, Denethor and Boromir both fail a test of strength, wisdom and leadership. Galadriel is also a ruler, and, for her, the temptation is particularly difficult to resist because the Ring would enable her to preserve Lorien and the power of the Elves, which otherwise must either be destroyed

by Sauron, or else fade and disappear from Middle-earth. Because they both succumb to the lure of personal power, Boromir and Denethor do not live into the Fourth Age.

Of the trilogy's three "senior" Elves -- Galadriel, Celeborn and Elrond -- Galadriel is the most carefully drawn and fully depicted. We "hear" more than we "see" about the latter two. Both Celeborn and Elrond are said to be wise and able to give good counsel, but little evidence of their ability in this field is given to the reader. On the other hand, Galadriel's wisdom and knowledge is shown through her test of the Fellowship and the use of her Mirror. Again, we are told that Elrond healed Frodo, but we do not "see" him doing so. The curative effect of Lorien, Galadriel's creation, upon the Company is discussed in some detail (I, pp. 374, 404-405). Moreover, her "healing" of the Elf-Dwarf feud is directly shown to the reader, and becomes an important thread in the trilogy.

Galadriel is intrinsic to the structure of Middle-earth because of her place in its history. Of all the characters in The Lord of the Rings, only she, Celeborn and Elrond were alive in the First Age, and of the three, she is the most prominent. Moreover, Galadriel is the only one of the three who has known the Undying Lands. Her experience, both in Eldamar and Middle-earth, gives her a knowledge that is unique. Galadriel is important as a living part of the past. Her place in history is indicated by Frodo's vision

of her: "she seemed to him, as by men of later days Elves still at times are seen: present and yet remote, a living vision of that which has already been left behind by the flowing streams of Time" (I, p. 389).

As a person who has seen and been part of Middle-earth's history almost from the beginning, Galadriel is used both to educate the Company and to reinforce the background and structure of Tolkien's subcreation. It is she, not Celeborn, who tells the Fellowship about the history of the White Council. Moreover, it is through her gift of the star-glass that Frodo and Sam discover the connection between the past and the present, and learn about the "story" that they are in:

"Beren now, he never thought he was going to get that Silmaril from the Iron Crown in Thangorodim, and yet he did, and that was a worse place and a blacker danger than ours. But that's a long tale, of course, and goes on past the happiness and into grief and beyond it -- and the Silmaril went on and came to Earendil. And why, sir, I never thought of that before! We've got -- you've got some of the light of it in that star-glass that the Lady gave you! Why, to think of it, we're in the same tale still! It's going on. Don't the great tales never end?"

"No, they never end as tales," said Frodo. "But the people in them come, and go when their part's ended. Our part will end later -- or sooner."

(II, p. 321)¹⁶

¹⁶ By acting as a source of knowledge for those younger than herself, Galadriel is playing the part of the old wives so despised by Boromir, for which Celeborn rebukes him (I, p. 390).

Galadriel, not Celeborn or Elrond, is the strong power for good that, in a sense, takes Gandalf's place after the wizard's fall in Moria. This fact has to do, again, with her position in history. Galadriel, even more than Gandalf (who only came to Middle-earth in TA 1000), is a part of Middle-earth, and her commitment is, in some ways, stronger and more personal. Gandalf has no permanent home and no possessions save what he takes with him on his journey. His task is to unite Sauron's opponents, and he is impartially concerned with all of Middle-earth's peoples: "the rule of no realm is mine, neither of Gondor nor any other, great or small. But all worthy things that are in peril as the world now stands, those are my care. And for my part, I shall not wholly fail of my task though Gondor should perish, if anything passes through this night that can still grow fair or bear fruit or flower again in days to come. For I also am a steward" (III, pp. 30-31).

Galadriel, however, having created Lórien, has a more personal "investment" in Middle-earth. Galadriel's rejection of the Ring is thus more detailed and more carefully shown than any similar rejection, because she has the most to lose: "Do you not see now wherefore your coming is to us as the footstep of Doom? For if you fail, then we are laid bare to the Enemy. Yet if you succeed, then our power is diminished, and Lothlórien will fade, and the tides of Time will sweep it away. We must depart into the West, or dwindle to the rustic

folk to dell and cave, slowly to forget and to be forgotten" (I, p. 380). Gandalf has no such personal stake. Galadriel is committed to the destruction of Sauron, but longs to preserve Lórien, two mutually exclusive goals. In repudiating the Ring, she is rejecting both the demands of self and of kind,¹⁷ and knowingly sacrificing the works of the Elves in Middle-earth: "The love of the Elves for their land and their works is deeper than the deeps of the Sea, and their regret is undying and cannot ever wholly be assuaged. Yet they will cast all away rather than submit to Sauron: for they know him now" (I, p. 380).

For these reasons the rejection of the Ring means much to her, and it weighs heavily with the Valar when they lift the ban on her return to Eldamar: she is allowed to cross the Sea "in reward for all that she had done to oppose [Sauron], but above all for her rejection of the king when it came within her power ..." (Road, p. 60).

Galadriel, like Arwen, is used by Tolkien to illustrate a society which regards women as individuals who are in no way inferior to men and deserve to be treated with respect and consideration. In Arwen's case, rebellion against authority is unnecessary because she is allowed to make her own decisions and abide by the consequences. It is because of her undoubted right to make her own choices that the

¹⁷Rose A. Zimbardo, "Moral Vision in The Lord of the Rings," TC, p. 106.

Númenorean line of kings is re-established. Similarly, Galadriel is not bound by social restrictions based upon sex, and the result, as in Arwen's case, is positive. Because her choices are open, she is free to become a lawful authority, create Lórien and work for the eventual triumph of Sauron's enemies that is the result of the War of the Ring. She is treated with consideration as an individual, and therefore her authority is benevolent. Lórien and Rivendell are both seen as idealized communities partly because they allow equality to both sexes, and in this respect Tolkien draws a strong contrast between the elven societies and the flawed human societies of Gondor and Rohan through the use of Éowyn, Arwen and Galadriel.

CHAPTER VI -- Women and Nature in The Lord of the Rings

The four principal women of The Lord of the Rings are all closely associated with nature. The most obvious example of the relationship is Goldberry, but Galadriel, Eowyn and Arwen are also strongly connected with nature. The difference is that Goldberry represents the basic detachment of nature from Middle-earth's intelligent inhabitants, while the other three are used to illustrate specific events or situations in which people and nature affect each other. Goldberry appears at the beginning of the trilogy and is an expression of nature's timeless cyclical activity. At the end of the trilogy, the Fourth Age begins. The connection between nature and the other three women illustrates the social changes that occur in Middle-earth when the Third Age ends.

The Tom Bombadil - Goldberry episode (I, chapters 6-8) owes its existence to a request by Tolkien's daughter Priscilla: "Another family contribution to the story was the character of Tom Bombadil, who was originally a jointed wooden doll that belonged to Priscilla. She demanded that Tom be written in somewhere, and he was."¹ No clues are offered as to whether or not Goldberry was the result of a similar circumstance. It is likely that she was entirely a product of Tolkien's imagination.

¹ Daniel Grotta-Kurska, J.R.R. Tolkien: Architect of Middle Earth, (Philadelphia: Running Press, 1961), p. 101.

Tom, a nature spirit, is referred to as the "Master of wood, water and hill" (I, p. 135). Goldberry is not as powerful as Tom because she is younger, and represents only one facet of nature, rather than a totality. She is a water spirit, closely associated with rivers and pools. She is the daughter of the River and the River-woman; she lives in her mother's house in a deep pool in the Withywindle before her marriage; she is fond of water lilies and wears shoes that resemble fishes' mail; and all the songs sung by or about her concern water and water images. Also, authorial comments about her are usually water similes. Examples include "her gown rustled softly like the wind in the flowering borders of a river" (I, p. 134) and "the sound of her footsteps was like a stream falling gently away downhill over cool stones in the quiet of night" (I, p. 136).

Goldberry's powers, like Tom's, are connected with nature:

As they looked out of the window there came falling gently as if it was flowing down the rain out of the sky, the clear voice of Goldberry singing up above them. They could hear few words, but it seemed plain to them that the song was a rain-song, as sweet as showers on dry hills, that told the tale of a river from a spring in the highlands, to the Sea far below. The hobbits listened with delight; and Frodo was glad in his heart, and blessed the kindly weather, because it delayed them from departing. The thought of going had been heavy upon him from the moment he awoke; but he guessed now that they would not go further that day. (I, p. 140)

Whether or not Goldberry's "rain-song" caused the shower is difficult to determine. Tom says "This is Goldberry's

washing day ... and her autumn-cleaning'" (I, p. 140), but does not elaborate. Tom's statement indicates that the occurrence of the washing day was pre-arranged (as in "This being Monday, it is washing day"), but it is possible that she is simply taking advantage of a natural occurrence.² Her after-dinner songs are also water-songs, although in that case sung only for pleasure and entertainment.

Since water is a creative, cleansing and reactivating agent, Goldberry also represents revitalization, rebirth and new life. Her regenerative aspect, associated with spring, is indicated in the description of her voice, the first thing the Hobbits perceive of her: "another clear voice, as young and as ancient as Spring, like the song of a glad water flowing down into the night from a bright morning in the hills, came falling like silver to meet them" (I, p. 133). In his song, Frodo personifies her as "'spring-time and summer-time, and spring again after'" (I, p. 135).

Like water, Goldberry is quiet and confined during the winter months, but, like spring, potentially active:

"I had an errand there; gathering water-lilies
green leaves and lilies white to please my pretty lady,
the last ere the year's end to keep them from the winter,
to flower by her pretty feet till the snows are melted.
Each year at the summer's end I go to find them for her,
in a wide pool, deep and clear, far down Withywindle;
there they open first in spring and there they linger latest.
By that pool long ago I found the River-daughter,
fair young Goldberry sitting in the rushes.
Sweet was her singing then, and her heart was beating!

²Tom's comment "'I am no weather-master ... nor is aught that goes on two legs'" (I, p. 145) should also be considered.

And that proved well for you -- for now I shall no longer go down deep again along the forest-water, not while the year is old. Nor shall I be passing Old Man Willow's house this side of spring-time, not till the merry spring, when the River-daughter dances down the withy-path to bathe in the water."

(I, p. 137.)

The agelessness and continuity of the seasonal cycle of nature is thus reflected in the actions and attributes of Goldberry. In this way she contributes to the impression of timelessness which Tolkien emphasizes in the episode.³

Despite her association with nature, Goldberry (whatever her race) has a "human" touch. She creates an effect as a person as well as a water-spirit. She fulfills several roles that are also assumed by other women in the trilogy. As a wife, her relationship with Tom is not particularly detailed in The Lord of the Rings; Tolkien adds more information in the poem "The Adventures of Tom Bombadil". She makes the first move in the romance by attracting Tom's attention:

- There his beard dangled long down into the water: up came Goldberry, the River-woman's daughter; pulled Tom's hanging hair. In he went a-wallowing under the water-lilies, bubbling and a-swallowing.

"Hey, Tom Bombadil! Whither are you going?" said fair Goldberry. "Bubbles you are blowing, frightening the finny fish and the brown water-rat startling the dabchicks, and drowning your feather-hat!"

³Tolkien creates a sense of timelessness in these chapters in other ways: "Whether the morning and evening of one day or of many days had passed Frodo could not tell" (I, p. 142); "The hobbits under the spell of Tom's words may have missed one meal or many, but when the food was before them it seemed at least a week since they had eaten" (I, p. 143).

"You bring it back again, there's a pretty maiden!"
said Tom Bombadil. "I do not care for wading.
Go down! Sleep again where the pools are shady
far below willow-roots, little water-lady!"
(*"The Adventures of Tom Bombadil"*,
ll. 11-22)

Goldberry's action is an indication of role choice. The conclusion to the courtship seems a little abrupt, but she evidently has no objections.

Like Galadriel, Arwen and Eowyn, Goldberry also plays the traditional feminine role of inspiration to males. Goldberry does not inspire the Hobbits to martial activity, but to delight:

The hobbits looked at her in wonder; and she looked at each of them and smiled. "Fair lady Goldberry!" said Frodo at last, feeling his heart moved with a joy that he did not understand. He stood as he had at times stood enchanted by fair elven-voices; but the spell that was now laid upon him was different; less keen and lofty was the delight, but deeper and nearer to mortal heart; marvellous and yet not strange. "Fair lady Goldberry!" he said again. "Now the joy that was hidden in the songs we heard is made plain to me."

(I, p. 134)

Goldberry also inspires poetic creativity; Frodo spontaneously makes a tribute in verse to her:

"O slender as a willow wand! O clearer than clear water!
O reed by the living pool! Fair river-daughter!
O spring-time and summer-time, and spring again after!
O wind on the waterfall, and the leaves' laughter!"

(I, p. 135)

It is noticeable, however, that while depicting her in these roles, Tolkien is careful to keep her association with nature, particularly water, firmly in the reader's mind. It is while she is in the water that she first attracts Tom's

notice. Frodo's poem employs nature images. Moreover, the few mythological and literary sources that are evoked by her depiction are those of nature and water spirits. She owes something to the naiads, the water spirits of classical mythology, although she lacks their characteristic lasciviousness. The water spirits found in the traditions and folk-tales of Germanic tribes also make a contribution to her character and powers, but a small one, since they were malevolent towards humans. In this respect, Goldberry seems to owe more to the healing or medicinal powers of the sacred wells found in Scandinavian and Germanic tradition,⁴ since she offers comfort to the Hobbits after their journey through the Old Forest.

Because Tom and Goldberry are so closely associated with nature, their story is detached from the rest of The Lord of the Rings: Tom is mentioned only on two occasions after the Hobbits leave him, and Goldberry not at all.⁵ In Middle-earth, nature can, on certain occasions, be either kind (as are Tom

⁴See John Arnott MacCulloch, The Celtic and Scandinavian Religions (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1948), p. 132.

⁵At the Council of Elrond (I, pp. 278-79) and on the return of the Hobbits to the Shire (III, p. 275). At the Council Gandalf comments on Tom's isolation from the rest of Middle-earth and its inhabitants by explaining that Tom does not understand the true power or significance of the Ring, and therefore has no interest in it.

and Goldberry) or cruel (as is the mountain Caradhras).⁶ It is, however, a largely detached force, separate from, although affected by, the activities of "those that go on two legs" (I, p. 302). In a time and situation that require the commitment to the quest and war described by Aragorn to Eomer at their first meeting as "the doom of choice" (II, p. 36), Goldberry and Tom must remain in the background of events. They are too involved with nature to play a large part in the narrative. Tom in fact insists on his and Goldberry's detachment from the rest of Middle-earth: "Tom's country ends here: he will not pass the borders. /Tom has his house to mind, and Goldberry is waiting!" (I, p. 139). Therefore, despite their power and essential benevolence, Tom and Goldberry play only a small part in the War of the Ring. Since they are limited by their involvement with nature, the interlude in the Old Forest remains a distinct but separate episode in the trilogy.

However, Tolkien, instead of using Tom to merely satisfy his daughter's request, adds to and embellishes the episode by creating Goldberry. Although secondary to her husband in power, she has a definite influence on the Hobbits

⁶It is interesting to note that the Fellowship's unsuccessful attempt to climb Caradhras is modelled on Tolkien's youthful failure to climb one of the Alps. Similarly, the Ents' attack on Saruman in Isengard developed from a request by his son Michael for a story in which trees revenged their destruction by machine-loving humans. See Grotta-Kurska, p. 25 and p. 101.

and the story. Her relationship with Tom gives an added dimension to the narrative, and her association with water and the seasons contributes to the total effect of the episode.

Galadriel, Éowyn and Arwen are also connected with nature, but in a different way: Tolkien uses them to show the relation between people and nature, and how each can be affected by the other.

In The Lord of the Rings Tolkien depicts the end of the Third Age and the disappearance of an old and familiar world. "To Tolkien both Sarehole [a village community on which the Shire was modelled] and the Shire had been 'tucked away from all the centers of disturbance,' and had come 'to be regarded as divinely protected, though people didn't realize it at the time. That's how England used to be, isn't it?' But, according to Tolkien, 'behind all this hobbit stuff lay a sense of insecurity. I always knew it would go away, and it did.'"⁷ The primary changes that take place are the emigration of the Elves, a peak in Hobbit prosperity after suffering near-destruction, and the establishment of human dominance.

Nature reflects Middle-earth's social changes, and the physical transformations that occur in Lorien, the Shire, Ithilien, Arnor and Gondor at the beginning of the Fourth Age

⁷Grotta-Kurska, p. 21.

are affected by the actions of Galadriel, Eowyn and Arwen. While Goldberry is used to illustrate nature's detachment from people, the other three women are used to show that nature and people influence each other.

The Third Age encompasses "the fading years of the Eldar" (III, p. 365). The Fourth Age is destined to be dominated by humans, and the Elves no longer have a place in Middle-earth, unless, as Galadriel foresaw, they are content to decay into an ignorant and rustic people. When "the Days of the Rings" (III, p. 309) are over, the departure of Galadriel and Elrond is the beginning of the Elves' final disappearance from Middle-earth. Galadriel accepts the inevitability of leaving when she refuses the Ring.

As the oldest and most powerful female Elf and the principal figure of feminine creativity in the trilogy, Galadriel's return to the Undying Lands symbolically points to Middle-earth's loss of the Elves and their works. Lothlórien soon becomes deserted, an illustration of the concept that the prosperity of a country or a people depends upon the ruler's health and actions. Galadriel, as the creator, maintainer and authority of Lórien, is, in the words of James Frazer, the "dynamical centre"⁸ of the country. Without her, Lórien does

⁸ James George Frazer, The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion, abridged edition (1922; rpt. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1971), p. 221.

not continue: when Galadriel leaves, the other inhabitants soon follow. Similarly, Celeborn, the weaker half of the relationship, is reduced by his loss of her, and quits Lorien only a few years after she does.⁹

It is partly due to Galadriel that the Shire is revitalized after the death of Saruman and the expulsion of his agents. Her gift to Sam is from one creative individual to another; the dirt which she gives him goes from her orchard to the garden-like Shire. The year after the Hobbits' return, 1420 (in the Shire reckoning), is a peak in prosperity for their country. Tolkien strongly implies that the exceptional fruitfulness of that year is due to the influence of Galadriel's gift:

Altogether 1420 in the Shire was a marvellous year. Not only was there wonderful sunshine and delicious rain, in due times and perfect measure, but there seemed something more: an air of richness and growth, and a gleam of a beauty beyond that of mortal summers that flicker and pass upon this Middle-earth. All the children born or begotten in that year, and there were many, were fair to see and strong, and most of them had a rich golden hair that had before been rare among hobbits. The fruit was so plentiful that young hobbits very nearly bathed in strawberries and cream And no one was ill, and everyone was pleased, except those who had to mow the grass.

(III, p. 309)

Although Galadriel herself must leave Middle-earth and know that Lorien will become a lifeless country, she

⁹Since Galadriel does not deteriorate physically, neither does her country. Rather, because she leaves it, her subjects do also.

ensures that the Shire, which nearly became a wasteland, recovers and flourishes. Moreover, the mallorn tree, part of Sam's gift, becomes "the wonder of the neighbourhood. In after years, as it grew in grace and beauty, it was known far and wide and people would come long journeys to see it: the only mallorn west of the Mountains and east of the Sea, and one of the finest in the world" (III, p. 303). The mallorn not only confers a particular distinction upon the Shire, but ensures that a part of Lórien, Galadriel's creation, will continue as a living and appreciated part of Middle-earth.¹⁰

The Fourth Age is "the Dominion of Men" (III, p. 249), and Tolkien indicates that they will outlast and eventually overwhelm other cultures.¹¹ Because of the inescapable fact

¹⁰The Shire's prosperity is only temporary, however, and the Hobbit culture eventually disappears. In The Hobbit, Tolkien, acting as a historian, has to describe what Hobbits are: "I suppose hobbits need some description nowadays, since they have become rare and shy They are (or were) a little people" (The Hobbit, p. 2). He links the prosperity of Hobbits with pastoral peace, placing both in the distant past: "one morning long ago in the quiet of the world, when there was less noise and more green, and the hobbits were still numerous and prosperous" (The Hobbit, p. 3). The Dwarves seem to die out eventually, indicated symbolically by Gimli's departure with Legolas for the Undying lands (an action that is a parallel in reverse to Arwen's "conversion", since Gimli is gaining immortality, not giving it up) and the notation of Durin VII and last in the geneological table (III, p. 361). As for the Ents, Tolkien seems to hold out no hope for the re-discovery of the Entwives of Middle-earth.

¹¹See, for example, the conversations between Legolas and Gimli (III, p. 149) and Treebeard and Gandalf (III, p. 258-59).

that mortals must die, women are especially important to Middle-earth's human communities: in the way of nature, children must replace their parents. In exploring the changes that take place in human social groups, Tolkien makes use of the motif mentioned above: the belief that a country's prosperity is linked with and affected by its ruler. In The Lord of the Rings the human rulers involved are all male, but women are nevertheless important to the relationships that exist between the countries and their leaders.

In portraying the human realms of Middle-earth, Tolkien depicts a world order that is upset and requires righting. Arnor is a lost kingdom that has almost disappeared from memory. Gondor has no king and is ruled by a Steward who is crippled by pride and a growing insanity. The country has fallen into internal decay and its borders are insecure, reflecting the state of its leader. Rohan's king is weakened by age and the efforts of Wormtongue and Saruman. Theoden's kingdom is consequently devitalized and unsure of its leadership. Before these countries can become prosperous and secure again, order must be restored, either by healing the ruler or by replacing him with someone who is able to fill the role properly.

Gandalf restores Theoden to health, but this is, at best, a temporary solution. The old king must eventually be replaced by Éomer (who, it is worth noting, is Theoden's

sister's son). Éowyn is unable to resolve the disorder in her own country: that must be left to her brother and his wife Lothíriel. Instead, she marries Faramir, and they begin the restoration of Ithilien and establish a new dynasty.¹² Legolas and other Elves temporarily settle in Ithilien before leaving for the Undying Lands (III, pp. 360-62), but they are ruled by Faramir and Éowyn, another indication of human pre-eminence in the Fourth Age.

Arwen is the character who connects the fading Elves and the rising humans. She is the "Evenstar" who symbolizes the "twilight" of the Elves. When she becomes human, the Elves' "star" in Middle-earth "sets".

Inspired by his love for Arwen, Aragorn achieves the throne of Gondor. After Denethor's death and Sauron's defeat, the way is open for him, as the true king, to restore both Gondor and Arnor to their former glory. However, Aragorn knows that, without Arwen, his victory will be incomplete and ultimately fruitless:

And Gandalf said: "This is your realm, and the heart of the greater realm that shall be. The Third Age of the world is ended, and the new age is begun; and it is your task to order its beginning and to preserve what may be preserved. For though much has been saved, much must now pass away; and the power of the Three Rings also is ended. And all the lands that you see, and those that lie round about them, shall be dwellings of Men. For the time comes of the Dominion of Men, and the Elder Kindred shall fade or depart."

.....

¹²The establishment of a dynasty is suggested by a reference to "Barahir, grandson of the Steward Faramir" (I, p. 24).

"But I shall die," said Aragorn. "For I am a mortal man, and ... I too shall grow old. And who then shall govern Gondor and those who look to this City as to their queen, if my desire be not granted? The Tree in the Court of the Fountain is still withered and barren. When shall I see a sign that it will ever be otherwise?"

(III, p. 249)

Marriage with Arwen is necessary in order for Aragorn to complete his personal quest and the task of ruling that comes with the quest's conclusion. Without her Aragorn would be an incomplete and unfulfilled person, and unable to devote all his energy and ability to the task of ruling. It is, in part, due to Arwen that the first years of the Fourth Age are full of the success and well-being which develops, after years of decay and degeneration, in Minas Tirith:

In his King Elessar's time the City was made more fair than it had ever been, even in the days of its first glory; and it was filled with trees and fountains, and its gates were wrought of mithril and steel, and its streets were paved with white marble; and the Folk of the Wood rejoiced to come there; and all was healed and made good, and the houses were filled with men and women and the laughter of children, and no window was blind nor any courtyard empty; and after the ending of the Third Age of the world into the new age it preserved the memory and the glory of the years that were gone.

(III, p. 246; emphasis mine)

Nature is basically detached from the activities of Middle-earth's intelligent inhabitants, yet those activities affect and are affected by nature. Tolkien uses Goldberry, Galadriel, Eowyn and Arwen to show both contradictory aspects of the issue. Goldberry is not involved in the quest or the War of the Ring because she is committed to nature. She

thus remains separate from the rest of Middle-earth. She carries out nature's continuous cycle in her role as a water spirit, and is not affected by the issue that involved the rest of the world.

Galadriel, Eowyn and Arwen all play a part in the events that lead to the end of the Third Age, and Tolkien uses them to depict the changes that take place at the beginning of the Fourth Age. The actions of Galadriel, Eowyn and Arwen symbolically indicate the destinies of the people which they represent: the departure of the Elves and the ascendancy of humans. Tolkien increases their narrative function by not confining the influence of each to the race or country to which she belongs: Galadriel is connected, in different ways, to both Elves and Hobbits; Eowyn is associated with Rohan and Gondor; and Arwen lives as an Elf and a human.

Nature reflects the developments in Middle-earth's communities: Lórien is deserted, the Shire temporarily flourishes, and in Ithilien, Arnor and Gondor the process of decay is reversed and the countries are revitalized. Because Galadriel, Eowyn and Arwen are symbolically (and, to some extent, literally) responsible for the transformations that occur, nature also reflects the results of their actions. The behaviour of Galadriel, Eowyn and Arwen and the physical alterations that take place thus shows the interaction of people and nature, which Tolkien contrasts with Goldberry's detachment and isolation from Middle-earth's concerns.

CHAPTER VII -- Shelob

The least agreeable female in The Lord of the Rings is also one of its most terrifying monsters. The conviction of the Shelob episode is the result of Tolkien's life-long fear of spiders (as a boy in Africa, he was stung by a tarantula).¹ However, Shelob is not merely a device to instill the maximum possible amount of horror, excitement and repulsion in the reader. In addition to this obvious purpose, she has several other functions.

Shelob reinforces Tolkien's development of Middle-earth's history. She is established in the distant past, isolated in her lair and yet a part of ancient fact and legend:

There agelong she had dwelt, an evil thing in spider-form, even such as once of old lived in the Land of the Elves in the West that is now under the Sea, such as Beren fought in the Mountains of Terror in Doriath, and so came to Lúthien upon the green sward amid the hemlocks in the moonlight long ago. How Shelob came there, flying from ruin, no tale tells, for out of the Dark Years few tales have come. But still she was there, who was there before Sauron, and before the first stone of Barad-dur

(II, p. 332)

Having shown an ancient power for good in Galadriel, Tolkien creates her antithesis in Shelob, who has also created and been a part of Middle-earth's history since the

¹Daniel Grotta-Kurska, J.R.R. Tolkien: Architect of Middle-Earth (Philadelphia: Kunning Press, 1976), p. 15.

First Age. Shelob is an example of the power for evil and death that is also present in Middle-earth: "But other potencies there are in Middle-earth, powers of night, and they are old and strong. And She that walked in the darkness had heard the Elves cry that cry far back in the deeps of time, and she had not heeded it, and it did not daunt her now" (II, p. 229). Tolkien increases Shelob's historical status by making her the ancestress of the Mirkwood spiders encountered by Thorin and Company in The Hobbit (and incidently creating another link between the two works). By balancing Galadriel and Shelob against each other, Tolkien illuminates and adds to both the historical and moral structure of Middle-earth.

Besides his fear of spiders, Tolkien based Shelob on two mythological-literary figures: the devouring mother, and the Queen or Goddess of the Underworld. The destructive aspect of Shelob is obvious. She is interested only in life (that is, food) for herself, and death for all else. Her obsession takes the form of cannibalism:

she served none but herself, drinking the blood of
Elves and Men, bloated and grown fat with endless
brooding on her feasts, weaving webs of shadow, for
all living things were her food, and her vomit
darkness. Far and wide her lesser broods, bastards
of the miserable mates, her own offspring that she
slew, spread from glen to glen, from the Eshel Duath
to the eastern hills, to Dol Guldur and the fastnesses
of Mirkwood Little she knew or cared for towers,
or rings, or anything devised by mind or hand, who
only desired death for all others, mind and body, and
for herself a glut of life, alone, swollen till the
mountains could no longer hold her up and the darkness
could not contain her.

(II, pp. 332-33)

Shelob bears some resemblance to Grendel's mother. In this respect, Beowulf has a literary influence on The Lord of the Rings that has been modified by Tolkien, yet is definitely present. Shelob and Grendel's mother both live in a deep, nearly inaccessible cave or cave-like place; both are greedy for food and devour whatever live meat is available; and since their flesh is too hard and thick to be pierced with ordinary swords, it requires a special weapon to defeat each of them. Both are the agents of their own destruction: Grendel's mother "supplies" Beowulf with the magic sword that has been hanging on the wall; Shelob impales herself on the elven-blade Sting: "Shelob, with the force of her own cruel will, with strength greater than any warrior's hand, thrust herself upon a bitter spike" (II, p. 338). The motives of the two female monsters in attacking their victims are also somewhat similar, although the maternal aspect of Grendel's mother is emphasized:

Her mother's sad heart,
And her greed, drove her from her den on the dangerous
Pathway of revenge.²

(II. 1276-78)²

Shelob is attracted to the Hobbits by hunger and malice: they are horrified by her eyes, "filled with purpose and with hideous delight, gloating over their prey trapped beyond all hope of escape" (II, p. 330). When Frodo and Sam

² Beowulf, trans. Burton Raffel (New York and Toronto: New American Library, 1963), p. 63.

unexpectedly elude her, she also becomes motivated by revenge: "Never yet had any fly escaped from Shelob's webs, and the greater now was her rage and hunger" (II, p. 333).

By establishing a connotative connection between Grendel's mother and Shelob, Tolkien invites comparison between Beowulf and the two Hobbits; the heroic resistance, the refusal to give up and the nobility of motive in acting for the good of others. (In fact Beowulf's motives are less pure than those of Frodo and Sam. Beowulf is strongly influenced by the fame and glory he will receive if he destroys the monster. Esteem from others is a secondary consideration for the Hobbits, rather than part of their basis for action.) The motif of heroic rashness, so prominent in Beowulf, is also evoked by Frodo's first rout of Shelob and his flight through the pass. Therefore, the association between Grendel's mother and Shelob is intended to elaborate on the episode as a whole, and to produce responses in the reader similar to those experienced while reading the Anglo-Saxon poem.

As Queen of the Underworld, the depiction of Shelob is perhaps most influenced by the Norse Hel. Hel is "stern of looks, and even hideous",³ the daughter of Loki and the ogress

³Brian Branston, Gods of the North (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1955), p. 96.

Angrboda.⁴ Her domain, to which she was exiled by Odin, is the "prison of monsters",⁵ and she has "absolute power over all who are once sent into her charge"⁶ (the old and diseased), and is loath to give up her subjects.⁷

Shelob, "last child of Ungoliant" (II, p. 332), was driven into Cirith Ungol by some disaster that fell upon her original home. Her domain is the home of a monster, and she has absolute power over those who are Sauron's prisoners or become her victims by accident. Her power is confirmed by the orcs, who call her "ladyship" and refuse to rescue a fellow worker from her. As Hel jealously keeps her subjects under domination, so Shelob devours her victims and drags them into the ultimate darkness of her maw.

Like Hel, Shelob is also a goddess figure: "years before, Gollum had beheld her, ... and in past days he had bowed and worshipped her, and the darkness of her evil will walked through all the ways of his weariness beside him, cutting him off from light and from regret."⁸ And he had

⁴Branston, p. 96.

⁵Branston, p. 97.

⁶Branston, p. 96.

⁷Branston, p. 124.

⁸This statement confirms to the fourth of Randel Helms' "internal laws of Middle-earth: ... Will and states of mind, both evil and good, can have objective reality and physical energy", another indication of Shelob's power. See Chapter 5 of Helms' Tolkien's World for a discussion of the "internal laws."

promised to bring her food" (II, pp. 332-33). This is the only mention of "worship" in The Lord of the Rings, usually missed by critics eager to expound upon the work's religious philosophy (or lack of it). The point is that Gollum, by worshipping her, has totally committed himself to Shelob and the evil that she represents. With this in mind, the reader can perceive more depth and meaning in the scene where Gollum sees Frodo and Sam asleep on the stairs of Cirith Ungol: "A spasm of pain seemed to twist him, and he turned away, peering back up towards the pass, shaking his head, as if engaged in some interior debate" (II, p. 324). This is a significant moment in Gollum's career: there seems to be a possibility of forsaking his ways and rejecting his bargain with Shelob.

Discussing this episode, Tolkien said "It seems that Gollum is about to repent, and that Sam waking up suddenly like that, and naturally feeling full of righteous resentment, has spoilt the chance. But there wasn't the chance for Gollum. He'd been evil for too long. There's a point of no return in these things, and Gollum had passed it."⁹ The worship of Shelob is a sign of his total abandonment to evil, and Gollum cannot reform. Here, Tolkien uses Shelob to explore further and to develop Gollum's complex character.

Shelob's lair is a testing ground for Frodo and Sam, an opportunity to display their heroism in combat, as well as by endurance. Like Gandalf and Aragorn, Frodo and Sam must

⁹Quoted by Daphne Castell, "The Realms of Tolkien," New Worlds, 50 (Nov. 1966), 152.

face and conquer an underground terror. Shelob, like her structural parallels the Balrog and the King of the Dead, is a "reminder" or representative of Sauron, the ultimate evil in Middle-earth. Neither Gandalf, Aragorn, Frodo or Sam can defeat Sauron working as an individual. However, each overcomes a creature that is in some way connected or associated with Sauron, and the destruction of the Dark Lord himself is eventually achieved by a combined effort.

Unlike Gandalf and Aragorn, however, Frodo and Sam cannot defeat Shelob without help. The aid that Tolkien provides for them comes from two women, a decisive argument against those who contend that the women in The Lord of the Rings play no important part.

The power of the feminine is notable in the Shelob episode. Besides Shelob, Galadriel, who as a creator and preserver of beauty is Shelob's direct opposite, is also present in Sam's mind. In fact, there is a strong indication that the "light in his mind" (II, pp. 328-29) that becomes the vision of Galadriel, is sent by Galadriel herself: "Far off, as in a little picture drawn by elven-fingers, he saw the Lady Galadriel standing on the grass in Lórien, and gifts were in her hands. 'And you, Ring-bearer,' he heard her say, remote but clear, 'for you I have prepared this' (II, p. 329; emphasis mine). Galadriel and the light that she is associated with, are also represented by her gift of the star-glass. It is the thought of her and the invocation of her name that inspires both Hobbits to greater courage.

Sam's appeal to Galadriel causes him to recall the prayer to Elbereth. Responding through the phial (which is filled with the light of Earendil's star, set in the sky by Elbereth and used by her to help those in danger), Elbereth causes it to blaze up suddenly, and Shelob, unable to bear the light, is routed. Frodo and Sam having been in mortal peril from a female, it is significant that they owe their victory and survival to two females. The episode is an illustration of the unification and interdependence that is necessary in order to fulfill the Quest and defeat Sauron.

The Shelob incident has attracted critical attention. Not surprisingly, women writers have been most incensed with Tolkien's depiction of the giant spider. Mary Ellman's amusing but ultimately unprofitable article declares Shelob to be "An hallucination, a psychedelic image of the pregnant woman who puts hobbits in her stomach. Frodo is on his way there, already stung by a tenderizer, when Sam Gamgee wielding Sting, the elven blade, saves him"¹⁰ Catharine Stimpson, evidently annoyed, denounces Tolkien's attitude of male superiority, and cites Shelob as an example to make her point:

suggestive of Tolkien's subtle contempt and hostility toward women is the atavistic tale of Shelob, the terrible, poisonous spider Lurking in the mountain fastnesses of Mordor, Shelob, who has the moral worth and grace of Sin on guard at the Gates of Hell in Milton's Paradise Lost, personifies profoundly

¹⁰Mary Ellman, "Growing Up Hobbitic," New American Review, No. 2 (1968), p. 223.

malicious death. A jubilant, exultant Tolkien tells how Sam forces Shelob, who has wounded Frodo, to impale herself, somewhere in the region of the womb, on his knife. The scene, which has a narrative energy far greater than its function, oozes a distasteful, vengeful quality as the small, but brave, male figure really gets the enormous, stenching bitch-castrator.¹¹

Stimpson is so ready to take offence that she (as usual) distorts the episode and so misses its point. It is far more likely that Tolkien's "jubilant" and "exultant" tone (terms that are open to argument) is the result of his distaste for spiders (a readily understandable feeling) rather than his "contempt and hostility toward women".¹² Stimpson either ignores or is ignorant of the episode's literary precedents and its structural and thematic purposes. Far from showing a negative attitude towards women (and if that were the purpose of the incident, it can hardly be considered subtle), the confrontation with Shelob and the intervention of Galadriel and Elbereth shows the power of the female, both for good and evil. The survival of the male protagonists and the completion of the Quest ultimately depends on the actions of Shelob, Galadriel and Elbereth.

¹¹ Catharine R. Stimpson, J.R.R. Tolkien, Columbia Essays on Modern Writers, No. 41 (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 19.

¹² In making Shelob a female, Tolkien was probably influenced by "common" knowledge of the Black Widow Spider's unamiable predatory habits, and hoped to associate the two in the reader's mind. Stimpson would do better to lay the charge of prejudice at nature's door, rather than Tolkien's.

Although Shelob herself disappears at the end of The Two Towers, the effect of her brief appearance makes itself felt throughout the rest of The Lord of the Rings. Part of Middle-earth's history is shaped and influenced by her attack. Because Sam thinks she has killed Frodo, he takes the Ring temporarily, marking another stage in his development and inadvertently assuring himself of a place in the Undying Lands. Moreover, Shelob's sting is one of the wounds that causes Frodo to leave Middle-earth.

Shelob, far from being one of "the insect villains of too many poor science-fiction movies",¹³ is important both structurally and thematically to The Lord of the Rings. Tolkien uses her to establish and create Middle-earth history, and, as a contrast to Galadriel, to illustrate Middle-earth's moral dichotomy of good and evil. Her literary associations, her connection with Gollum and her confrontation with Frodo and Sam are used to illuminate the characters and actions of the three Hobbits. Perhaps most interestingly, the Shelob episode is used by Tolkien to demonstrate the power of Galadriel and Elbereth, and thus create a victory of good over evil through the knowledge and ability of the two women.

¹³Hugh T. Keenan, "The Appeal of The Lord of the Rings: A Struggle for Life," TC, p. 72. That Shelob almost inevitably recalls the giant insects of such films as Them!, The Black Scorpion, The Deadly Mantis, The Fly, Attack of the Crab Monsters and (especially) Tarantula and The Spider is hardly Tolkien's fault: all these films were made in the 1950's, after The Lord of the Rings was completed.

CHAPTER VIII -- Women in Tolkien's Other Fictional Works

Having examined literary influences on the portrayal of women in The Lord of the Rings, investigated the positions of women in Middle-earth's societies, and studied individual females in detail, we can now look at women in Tolkien's other fictional works.

According to Tolkien, complete happiness is impossible in the mortal world, and death is the great human theme: "If you really come down to any really large story that interests people and holds their attention for a considerable time, it is practically always a human story, and it is practically always about one thing all the time: death. The inevitability of death. Simone de Bouvier /sic/ once said that there is no such thing as a 'natural' death. Nothing that ever happens to man is ever natural. And his presence calls the whole world into question. All men must die, but for every man his death is an accident, and even if he knows it [to be] ... an unjustifiable violation."¹

Closely associated with the central theme of death is the human longing for Faërie and its immortality: "there is the oldest and deepest desire [that fairy-stories fulfill],

¹Daniel Grotta-Kurska, J.R.R. Tolkien: Architect of Middle Earth (Philadelphia: Running Press, 1976), p. 100. Tolkien goes on to say "You may agree with those words [de Bouvier's] or not, but those are the keyspring of The Lord of the Rings."

the Great Escape: the Escape from Death" ("On Fairy-Stories," Tree and Leaf, p. 59).² The impossibility of complete happiness in the "real" world and the desire to escape from it into Faerie is a recurring motif in Tolkien's fiction. However, he makes it clear that mortals have little in common with the inhabitants of Faerie, and the two works cannot be successfully combined for more than a moment in time: "Most good fairy-stories are about the aventures of men in the Perilous Realm or upon its shadowy marches. Naturally so; for if elves are true, and really exist independently of our tales about them, then this also is certainly true: elves are not primarily concerned with us, nor we with them. Our fates are sundered, and our paths seldom meet. Even upon the borders of Faerie we encounter them only at some change crossing of the ways" ("On Fairy-Stories", Tree and Leaf, p. 16). Those that temporarily escape and become acquainted with Faerie receive the gift of artistic vision, which they attempt to communicate to others.

The longing for the joy and immortality of Faerie and the artistic ability which that country can confer on humans are part of the central theme of death. These concerns appear, with variations, throughout Tolkien's shorter works.

²Tree and Leaf (London: Unwin Books, 1974). The desire to escape death and achieve immortality is the cause of Numenor's downfall in The Lord of the Rings.

In his poetry and shorter prose, Tolkien's depiction of women varies with the functions for which they are designed and the genre in which they appear. They also serve to illustrate, both directly and indirectly, the themes of the individual works.

In "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son", "Leaf by Niggle" and "Farmer Giles of Ham", women act as representatives of the society of which the protagonist is a member. In these three works they tend to be part of a generalized background, with little or no individualization. In "Smith of Wootton Major", certain poems in The Adventures of Tom Bombadil and "The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun", women are more strongly characterized and have varying degrees of influence on other characters and on the plots. With increased individualization comes increased importance, both structurally and thematically. However, before considering these six works, something should be said of The Hobbit, which almost has no women at all.

The Hobbit³ of the title is Bilbo Baggins, Frodo's elder cousin and re-discoverer of the Ring which has been concealed for centuries. Bilbo's story belongs to the genre of the quest, and this is one good reason for the scarcity of women. David Miller notes that "Neither Bilbo nor Frodo

³The Hobbit (London: Unwin Books, 1974).

so much thinks of a Hobbitess [sic]",⁴ but misses the implications of his statement. In quest literature, the hero must be free of responsibilities and restrictive authorities in order to pursue his object. If the hero is a child, he is generally an orphan; if an adult, he is a bachelor or, if married, his wife (and children, if any) is (are) so insignificant that she (they) present(s) no obstacle to his departure.

Moreover, when Tolkien wrote The Hobbit for his own children,⁵ he had not yet formulated (or at least articulated) his theory that "If fairy-story as a kind [and, by implication, any other kind of story] is worth reading at all it is worthy to be written for and read by adults." ("On Fairy-Stories", Tree and Leaf, p. 43). His attitude is

⁴David M. Miller, "The Moral Universe of J.R.R. Tolkien," TP, p. 59.

⁵This is the traditional story, but Grotta-Kurska quotes an interview in which Tolkien rejected it: "That's all sob stuff. No, of course, I didn't [write it for my children]. If you're a youngish man and you don't want to be made fun of, you say you're writing for children. At any rate, children are your immediate audience and you write or tell them stories for which they are mildly grateful: long, rambling stories at bedtime The Hobbit was written in what I should now regard as bad style, as if one were talking to children. There's nothing my children loathed more. They taught me a lesson. Anything that in any way marked out The Hobbit as for children instead of just people, they disliked -- instinctively. I did too, now that I think about it. All this 'I won't tell you any more, you think about it' stuff. Oh no, they loathe it; it's awful." See Grotto-Kurska, p. 79.

echoed by C.S. Lewis: "It is usual to speak in a playfully apologetic tone about one's adult enjoyment of what are called 'children's books'. I think the convention a silly one. No book is worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally (and often far more) worth reading at the age of fifty -- except, of course, books of information. The only imaginative works we ought to grow out of are those which it would have been better not to have read at all."⁶

Keeping in mind the fact that he was writing specifically for his three sons (Priscilla Tolkien had not been born when Bilbo's story was first begun), Tolkien may have deliberately excluded romantic involvement from his story, noting the little boy's usual lack of interest in such proceedings.⁷

⁶C.S. Lewis, "On Stories" in Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories (London: Geoffrey Bles, Ltd., 1960), p. 15.

⁷Aubrey Menen was approached by an American film-producer who wished to make an animated feature of The Hobbit. "When the film-producer discussed this dragon with me he hesitantly suggested that it might, in our picture, be guarding a captured Princess. The producer thought it would add feminine interest, but he apologized for his lack of originality. I did not think he had any need to. After all, the author had already provided us with a Wizard with a Magic Wand, and a Ring which rendered its wearer Invisible. I could not imagine how he had come to overlook a Damsel in Distress." "Learning to Love the Hobbits," Diplomat, 18 (Oct. 1966), p. 33.

In "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son"⁸ women are kept entirely in the background. The time period (991) and the setting of the poem (a battlefield) exclude women from direct participation in the action. The poem focuses instead on Torhthelm and Tidwald, who have been sent by the Abbot of Ely to recover duke Beorhtnoth's body after the Battle of Maldon.

Like the woman in Beowulf (ll. 3150-54) who appears at the end to mourn the fallen hero, the English women represent their society, left leaderless and vulnerable to enemy attack. They are particularly helpless in that they are barred, by tradition and lack of experience, from taking part in the fight that affects all of them. Their role is complete passivity: they can only mourn what cannot be remedied. They are represented by Beorhtnoth's nameless sister, who loses both brother and son in the conflict.

Faerie is not directly concerned in the verse drama. The artist of the poem is Torhthelm, the son of a minstrel. He has a romantic outlook on life, and chants a conventional elegy for a fallen hero. To him, weeping women and a spectacular funeral are due homage to a dead leader, a tribute

⁸"The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son," first published in Essays and Studies of the English Association, New Series 6 (1953), 1-18. Reprinted in The Tolkien Reader (New York: Ballantine Books, 1974). References to "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son," "Farmer Giles of Ham" and The Adventures of Tom Bombadil are all from The Tolkien Reader.

to Beorhtnoth's enduring glory and fame. Tidwald's blunt speech brings the situation back into perspective:

Beorhtnoth we bear not Beowulf here;
no pyres for him, nor piling of mounds;
and the gold will be given to the good abbot.
(ll. 151-53)

To Tidwald, mourning women and the simple Christian rites are part of a grim reality, not the romantic dream of an artist.

In "Leaf by Niggle"⁹ and "Farmer Giles of Ham", Mrs. Parish and Agatha, Giles' wife, are also seen as society's representatives. In "Leaf", Faerie provides a vision of a great tree and surrounding countryside that Niggle tries to depict for others.¹⁰ Mrs. Parish has no patience with her neighbour's art, which she refers to as "'Niggle's Nonsense, or That Daubing'" (p. 89), seeing it (and him) as useless in the "practical" world. Having no experience of Faerie herself, she cannot understand Niggle's attempts to communicate his vision through his art. Her opinion reflects the viewpoint of society, expressed by Councillor Tompkins:

⁹"Leaf by Niggle" in Tree and Leaf (London: Unwin Books, 1974).

¹⁰The most explicit statement about the desire to escape death in this story is in the opening sentences: "There was once a little man named Niggle who had a long journey to make. He did not want to go; indeed the whole idea was distasteful to him; but he could not get out of it." Christian morality is implicit rather than explicit in this story, and if Niggle knows that life after death awaits him, he, in his human ignorance, prefers this world to the next.

"I think he was a silly little man ... Worthless, in fact; no use to Society at all" (p. 90). Neither Mrs. Parish nor Tompkins can appreciate Niggle's effort to be "useful" to Society by sharing his idea of Faerie.

Mrs. Parish is, in fact, quite right: Niggle cannot contend with the world. She is the indirect cause of his death, so that society, as represented by Mrs. Parish, defeats Niggle and forces him to start unprepared on his journey into the afterworld (which includes the world of his tree, and consequently a part of Faerie).

Niggle has no wife. As the artist, he is different (but not separate) from other members of society. In order to work effectively on all levels of the story's meaning, he must be free of ties and responsibilities. For the "ordinary" social person, however, a partner is necessary. For this reason, Parish, who joins and is reconciled to Niggle in the afterlife, waits for his wife instead of going to the mountains:

For a moment a shadow fell between Niggle and Parish, for Niggle knew that he did now want to go on, and (in a sense) ought to go on; but Parish did not want to go on, and was not yet ready to go.

"I must wait for my wife," said Parish to Niggle. "She'd be lonely. I rather gathered that they would send her after me, some time or other, when she was ready, and when I had got things ready for her. The house is finished now, as well as we could make it; but I should like to show it to her. She'll be able to make it better, I expect; more homely. I hope she'll like this country, too."

(p. 89)

Parish learns about Faerie by living in the world of Niggle's picture, a course of action open to Mrs. Parish. Tolkien uses two representatives of society to show that reconciliation between this world and Faerie is not possible until the obstacle of death is removed.

"Farmer Giles of Ham"¹¹ deals with "The Rise and Wonderful Adventures of Farmer Giles, Lord of Tame, Count of Worminghall and King of the Little Kingdom" (p. 5). His experiences include an encounter with a giant and the defeat of the wealthy Chrysophylax Dives, a dragon "of ancient and imperial lineage" who is "cunning, inquisitive, greedy, well-armoured, but not overbold ... and mortally hungry" (p. 25). Through luck, accident and audacity, Giles eventually displaces King Augustus Bonifacius and establishes himself as a ruler over a great part of pre-Arthurian Britain (so Tolkien tells us). "Farmer Giles" is a satire on both Faerie, as seen in the giant and the dragon, and the human world, of which Agatha is the major female representative.

Agatha, like Mrs. Parish, belongs to the practical world which requires sensible decisions, not artistic visions. When Garm gives warning of the giant, her advice to Giles is simple: drown the dog if you do not believe him, or take his recommendation to "be bold and quick" (p. 14) if you do.

¹¹"Farmer Giles of Ham" (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1950). Reprinted in The Tolkien Reader.

Agatha is a slight elaboration of the other women of Ham. Chrysophylax, evidently familiar with stereotyped ideas of feminine behaviour and desires, suggests "'A bag of gold for everybody, and diamonds for the ladies?'" (p. 46) when trying to bargain for his release. Not content with this offer, the village society demands all the dragon's wealth.

Tolkien found Giles' grey mare interesting enough to give her a distinct personality, use her as a mouthpiece for observations on the people around her and make several authorial comments about her. More sensible than Giles, she keeps him on the ground facing Chrysophylax when the situation seems to demand a fight. It is entirely due to her pretence of lameness that Giles is in a strategic position behind the train of knights during their second confrontation with the dragon. Perhaps most importantly in a comic story, Tolkien uses her for humour, as when he informs the reader that "The mare was indignant, and she foreswore her allegiance to the house of Augustus Bonifacius" (p. 56).

In "Smith of Wootton Major"¹² women are also used to represent society, but there are several examples of individualization, and the importance of feminine roles in the family and community is given some emphasis.

¹²"Smith of Wootton Major" (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1973).

"Smith" deals with a village boy who is given a magic star that becomes the "passport" for his journeys into Faerie (spelled Faery in this story). Smith, like Niggle, becomes an artist because of his familiarity with that country. Society is portrayed in the children present, with the young Smith, at the Feast of Good Children. They are depicted as "types", including the miller's daughter, the cooper's son, and the draper's daughter, as well as Smith-son himself. Another representative of society at the Feast is Nell, who becomes slightly individualized by inspiring Smith to an act of kindness and generosity, and later by marrying him.

Women provide a sense of continuity in the story. Smith inherits the star from his mother's father, and passes it on to his wife's sister's grandson.¹³ Smith's own family is continued by his daughter. A sense of continuity is also established through feminine knowledge and wisdom: Tim's father, Nokes of Townsend, is "'quite different'" (p. 48) from Nokes the Cook because the former had "'a wise mother'" (p. 48). The Flower given to Smith by the Queen of Faery is a symbol of immortality and thus continuity. It is an immortal gift, not a gift of immortality: "The flower did

¹³Why are no girls given the star? No definite answer is possible, but the most reasonable conjecture is that "Smith", as Paul Kocher points out in Master of Middle-Earth (p. 203), is a rather autobiographical work, and Tolkien may have felt more comfortable working with a male protagonist under such circumstances.

not wither nor grow dim; and they kept it as a secret and a treasure. The smith made a little casket with a key for it, and there it lay and was handed down for many generations in his kin; and those who inherited the key would at times open the casket and look long at the Living Flower, till the casket closed again: the time of its shutting was not theirs to choose" (p. 35).

The Queen of Faery is the most important woman in "Smith". As the "fairy Queen", the doll placed on the children's cake by the all-too-adult Nokes, she retains a hold on the villagers' minds. The King, posing as Alf (Elf) the apprentice and later Master Cook, temporarily becomes a part of the human world, and the villagers become, in a limited sense, familiar with him, although they are unable to detect any aspect of Faery in him. The Queen is remote from them, and it is through the debased memory of her present in the doll, that they know anything of Faery. It is she that affects Smith's imagination, and his desire to see her starts him on his quest for Faery.¹⁴

The Queen is not subordinate to the King. Their powers are equal but different. For example, it is the Queen's permission, not the King's, that Smith should have requested

¹⁴The King-Queen relationship in "Smith" is reminiscent in this aspect of the Celeborn-Galadriel relationship in The Lord of the Rings. In that work, it is Galadriel who is remembered (again, usually in a distorted form) by the non-Elvish inhabitants of Middle-earth.

before crossing the Inner Mountains to reach the Vale of Evermorn. She is the closest thing to a female artist in the entire story: in her dance with Smith, she creates in him "the swiftness and the power and the joy to accompany her" (p. 33). Her power is that of light and truth. After their first meeting, Smith's star shines brightly, and his shadow, as his son later realizes, tells the truth: he is a giant.

Both the King and Queen fulfill wishes, but with different motives. The King grants Nokes' wish in justice, while the Queen, moved by mercy and compassion, does not reprimand Smith for trespassing, and allows him to see her as a Queen, as well as an apparently "ordinary" woman of Faery.¹⁵

Of Tolkien's shorter works, "Smith" deals most extensively and explicitly with the mortal desire for Faery. Smith's life in the human world is happy, but his experiences in Faery add to his stature as a human being (so that he becomes a "giant"). With his artistry, Smith adds to the joy of life of others: "But some things, when he had time,

¹⁵The separation of justice and mercy is a tradition with precedents both in Christian theology and in literature. Spenser, for example, used Britomartis to represent Mercy, and engaged her to Artegall, the knight of Justice. The Queen's ability to grant wishes also recalls Galadriel. Tolkien implies that she granted Sam's wish for light and water (III, pp. 195, 196 and 198). For a discussion of this aspect of Galadriel's power, see Chapter V, p. 120 and note 7.

he made for delight He sang when he was making things of this sort; and when Smith began to sing those nearby stopped their own work and came to the smithy to listen" (p. 21).

Yet Smith's successful combination of the human world and Faery is only temporary. It is the Queen who grants his greatest wish and enables him to fulfill his quest: "Better a little doll, maybe, than no memory of Faery at all. For some the only glimpse. For some the awaking. Ever since that day you have desired in your heart to see me, and I have granted your wish. But I can give you no more" (p. 38). In achieving his object, he exiles himself from Faery.

Both the Queen and King comfort Smith for his loss of Faery. On his last visit, when he meets the Queen for the second time, "she stooped and laid her hand on his head, and a great stillness came upon him; and he seemed to be both in the World and in Faery, and also outside them and surveying them, so that he was at once in bereavement, and in ownership, and in peace" (p. 38). When Smith gives up the star, he asks to know the name of its inheritor, and the King, at the Queen's request, allows him to choose. Having received artistic vision (or "recovery", as Tolkien terms it in "On Fairy-Stories") and achieved "escape" from the World, the Queen and King give Smith "consolation" for the loss of Faery.

As Randel Helms points out, "Princess Mee" (in The Adventures of Tom Bombadil)¹⁶ is a satire on the popular human (and Hobbit) conception of Elves.¹⁷ Mee represents a life that is free of responsibility and the fear of death, and can therefore be devoted to moonlit dancing. With her gossamer kerchief, braid of stars, moth-web coat and belt sewn with diamond dew, she recalls the fairies of A Midsummer Night's Dream, rather than the Elves of The Lord of the Rings. In "On Fairy-Stories" Tolkien vigorously rejects the image of the elf or fairy as represented by Mee, and elaborates on the subject in the trilogy: "This old word [Elves] ... has been diminished, and to many it may now suggest fancies either pretty or silly, as unlike to the Quendi of old as are butterflies to the swift falcon They were a race high and beautiful, the older Children of the world, and among them the Eldar were as kings ... " (III, pp. 415-16).

However, the "Hobbit" writer of "Princess Mee" was evidently unaware of the facts about Elves. Mee is not an exceptionally silly Elf, according to the poem: her companions are no more sensible than she is, for no other Elf realizes

¹⁶The Adventures of Tom Bombadil (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963). Reprinted in The Tolkien Reader.

¹⁷Helms' interpretation (pp. 137-38) seems more likely than Kocher's (pp. 219-20; he sees it as a variation on the Narcissus myth) or Stimpson's (p. 42; according to her, the poem is a feeble and coy exercise in complexity, depicting the trauma of the divided self).

that "Shee" is Mee's reflection in the pool. In this poem, Tolkien uses a woman only because the traditional image of the frail non-human dancer in unlikely garments tends to be female.

"Shadow Bride" is a mysterious little poem that does readily lend itself to interpretation. Here, the woman is a rather startling variation of the fay who enthralls hapless and unsuspecting mortals. Instead of casting a spell, she is necessary to a victim's release: she inadvertently frees a man who is held motionless by magic. The loss of her shadow to him condemns the woman to a life underground. Like the man she disenchanted, she becomes oblivious to time and natural changes, except for one night of the year (presumably Midsummer's Eve).¹⁸ However, several questions remain unanswered. Does the man dwell underground with the woman, and they are both released for the annual dance? Or does the theft of her shadow enable him to return to the human world, and he is enchanted only for Midsummer's Eve? In any event, the potential danger that Faerie offers to human beings, a point not always mentioned by Tolkien, is emphasized in this poem.

¹⁸ Kocher notes that the story has similarities to the Persephone myth (p. 220). It is interesting to note that the spell which originally holds the man is similar to that imposed on Theseus, who was imprisoned in the underworld for attempting to abduct Persephone.

There is a thematic similarity between "Smith of Wootton Major" and "The Last Ship". Smith can visit Faery and benefit from his experiences there, but he cannot remain there permanently, and eventually surrenders the star, his "passport" to that country. In "The Last Ship", Firiël evidently knows and has visited, or been visited by, the Elves: she recognizes the ship that is taking the Elves to the Undying Lands, and its occupants address her by name.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Firiël, like Smith, must remain in the human world, a fate indicated by her name "mortal woman". Like "Smith", "The Last Ship" is a statement of the human wish to attain immortality and permanent happiness in the supernatural realm, and the impossibility of doing so, told from the feminine point of view.

"The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun"²⁰ is a tale of a struggle for a man's soul, the forces contending for it being represented by two women. Itroun marries Aotrou for love, and their happiness is almost perfect, marred only by their lack of children. Discontented because his joy is incomplete, Aotrou seeks the help of a supernatural woman

¹⁹If Firiël's familiarity with Faerie is interpreted as an artistic ability or gift, she can be seen as the artist who must, due to the demands of the "real" world (that continually interrupted Niggle), give up her art and become "socially useful".

²⁰"The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun", Welsh Review, 4, No. 4 (Dec. 1945), 254-66.

who resembles, not Galadriel, Arwen or the Queen of Faery, but one of Macbeth's witches. She sells him a potion, which he treacherously gives to his wife,²¹ and Itroun gives birth to twins. However, the witch demands as her price Aotrou's love, which would mean his total commitment to evil through the sin of demonology.

Aotrou is saved from this fate by his love of Itroun, who, now that she has become a mother, he values as much as she deserves. (Tolkien has the witch appear extremely attractive, in order that Aotrou's motives are not open to suspicion.) Despite the witch's threat of death within three days' time, he rejects her and entrusts himself to God.

However, "It pleases God ... to let the witch's lethal spell work on his body, though not on his soul. He has saved his soul; mercy will go so far. But he has sinned severely, and justice must have its due. To allow him to live on to enjoy life with the children he has begotten by the aid of black magic would be to reward sin."²² Dying, Aotrou finally shows genuine concern for his wife. However, he does not seem to realize that it is his discontent with the formerly barren Itroun that causes his death and, eventually, Itroun's.

²¹The fact that Aotrou gives the potion to Itroun reflects the assumption, only recently disproved, that a couple's childlessness is always and inevitably the woman's fault.

²²Kocher, p. 177.

By dying of grief for her husband, she demonstrates the love that he did not show until it was too late.

Tolkien emphasizes that, in not valuing Itroun for herself, Aotrou is being blind, ungrateful and foolish. He is too concerned with the material world to appreciate properly his wife's love:

though wife he wooed and wed with ring,
who love to board and bed did bring,
his pride was empty, vain his hoar,
without an heir to land and sword.
Thus pondering oft at night awake
his darkened mind would visions make
of lonely age and death; his tomb
unkept, while strangers in his room
with other names and other shields
were masters of his halls and fields.
Thus counsel cold he took at last;
his hope from light to darkness passed.

(ll. 15-26)

Despite his devaluation of her, however, it is his wife and the sudden love that she inspires in him that saves Aotrou. His soul is redeemed by a female representative of and agent for good, just as it had been threatened by a female agent of evil. Tolkien thus affirms that the ultimate power of which human beings are capable is that of love, the dominating emotion in Itroun.

Aotrou's salvation through his love for Itroun reflects a motif that appears throughout medieval thought and literature: "Man reaches God through women As reflections of God, as symbols of virtue and love, they draw out the good that is in man; as loving and compassionate beings, they bring the straying man back with their criticism, and help expiate

his sins with their prayers. All women, not just the Virgin, can be intermediaries between God and man through love, moving man with their beauty and God with their prayers."²³

The barren Itroun is the representative of the imperfect human world where total happiness cannot exist. However, the necessity of each person creating the best possible life is emphasized, as in Tolkien's other short works. In "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son" Tidwald knows that, despite loss and death, life continues. Smith and Firiell cannot keep Faery and must learn to live without it. Itroun herself accepts her childlessness, providing an example that her husband does not follow.

The witch is the fay who can be either beautiful or hideous, but is always destructive to mortals. In Christian terms, she is clearly evil, because, as a pagan, she is automatically allied with, or a servant of, the Devil.

Tolkien says much less about the necessity and desirability of social equality between the sexes in his shorter works, partly because there is little narrative scope or "room" to deal with matters that are not directly involved with his central theme. The only women who can be said to be socially restricted because of their sex are the women in "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son". Since the

²³ Joan M. Ferrante, Woman as Image in Medieval Literature, from the Twelfth Century to Dante (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 131.

poem is intended to be, in some sense, a reflection or depiction of an actual historical culture, repression of women is inevitable. Moreover, the women are completely in the background of the poem, and the author concentrates on other aspects of the situation. Otherwise, the women in the shorter works are treated as individuals and valued as such (although not, in Itroun's case, as much as she deserves).

As representatives of society, the women of Tolkien's short works function only as part of a generalized background. However, even such a slightly individualized character as Mrs. Parish has some influence on the work in which she appears. In "Smith of Wootton Major" and "The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun" women are extremely important, filling a number of different roles and serving a variety of purposes, while in several poems in The Adventures of Tom Bombadil, women are the central figures.

Women are also important in illustrating Tolkien's central theme of death and the human longing for Faerie and immortality. In "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son" the references to mourning women keep the reader aware of the reality of death that Torhthelm tries to escape through romantic visions. As society's representative, Mrs. Parish cannot, in this life, appreciate Niggle's artistic vision of Faerie. Agatha is a representative of the human world as Chrysophylax is of Faerie, and both are satirized

by Tolkien. The Queen and what she means are those aspects of Faery that Smith desires most to see, but while she grants his wish she cannot give him immortality. Princess Mee belongs to the popular concept of Faerie, representing an endless life so carefree that one can spend all one's time dancing by a pool in the moonlight. "Shadow Bride" deals with a supernatural escape from human death. Firiel, like Smith, knows temporary joy in Faerie that must eventually be relinquished. Aotrou succumbs to the danger of magic and Faerie, and tries to achieve immortality through children. Itroun, on the other hand, is reconciled to the fact that happiness in this world cannot be complete, and accepts the inevitability of death in the most overtly Christian of Tolkien's works. However simple or facile Tolkien's use of females in his shorter works may appear on the surface, when examined in terms of plot, tone, structure or theme, the author's ingenuity and the complexity of his art begin to emerge.

CHAPTER IX -- Conclusion

Far from being unimportant fillups like Roland's unfortunate fiancée Alde in The Song of Roland, who is dragged in only as a peripheral interest,¹ the women in The Lord of the Rings are integral both to the narrative and the thematic organization of the trilogy. Without Éowyn, the War of the Ring would have been different. Without Arwen, Aragorn's character and life story would have to be rewritten. And with Galadriel, the history of Middle-earth would have been changed. They are no mere literary devices.

As Tolkien's tale was created within the genres of quest and war story, and heavily influenced by the traditions of "the Northern thing", The Lord of the Rings was affected by the conventions attached to its sources. By drawing on mythological, literary and historical sources in his depiction of women, Tolkien solidified and, at the same time, explained certain facets of Middle-earth through association. In the quest tales and war stories, women are always part of the hero's background, an intrinsic part of what he is fighting for, and to what he hopes to return. They are a part of the life for which the hero must risk everything in order to save it: "I should like to save the Shire, if I could -- though there have been times when I thought the inhabitants too

¹See C.S. Lewis' comment, quoted on page 21.

stupid and dull for words, and have felt that an earthquake or an invasion of dragons might be good for them. But I don't feel like that now. I feel that as long as the Shire lies behind, safe and comfortable, I shall find wandering more bearable: I shall know that somewhere there is a firm foothold, even if my feet cannot stand there again" (I, p. 71).

Eowyn, who is reminiscent of Brunhild and Britomartis, strengthens the reader's impression of the Scandinavian, Teutonic and Anglo-Saxon influences present in the depiction of the Rohirrim. Moreover, Eowyn's position in her society indicates to the reader that Rohan, like Hrothgar's court in Beowulf, socially restricts women on the basis of sex. Arwen is the fairy tale princess who must be won by the hero who has many obstacles to overcome before making her his bride. When Aragorn succeeds in doing this, we recognize him as the disadvantaged prince who, against all odds, gets both the girl and the kingdom. The fact that Galadriel is the ruler of Lorien tells the reader what kind of people Elves are in comparison to humans. Goldberry's association with water and naiads of classical mythology indicates the detachment of nature. The connection with nature and regeneration of Galadriel, Eowyn and Arwen, speaks to any reader familiar with the works of Jessie Weston and James Frazer of the sympathetic relationship between ruler and country. And Shelob is the confirmation of the sudden death that can overtake even the hero in spite of courage and perseverance.

A surprising aspect of Tolkien's achievement is that, not only does he use the anti-feminine traditions to his advantage in an associational manner and thus enrich his story, he also goes far beyond the boundaries of his sources and allows his women an extensive involvement in, and a powerful influence on, The Lord of the Rings.

Women are important to the structure of the work. They are responsible for much of the vital "behind the scenes" action: Arwen sews and sends the banner that enables Aragorn to make his entrance into the Battle of the Pelennor Fields as dramatic as it is (a moment that Tolkien surely considered to be a eucatastrophe: "the sudden joyous 'turn'");² Galadriel sends Gwaihir for Gandalf after his return from the dead; Eowyn leads the Rohirrim citizens to Dunharrow, leaving Theoden free to march against Saruman.

The women also provide structural parallels to the narrative. The rest stops at the home of Tom and Goldberry, at the home of Elrond and his daughter Arwen, and at the home of Celeborn and Galadriel are narrative devices that allows a "breather" after journeys of extreme danger. Eowyn's development is in some ways parallel to the maturation of Frodo (see Chapter III, notes 13 and 24). Most obviously, there are the three marriages of Arwen and Aragorn, Eowyn and Faramir, and

²Tolkien creates and defines this term in "On Fairy-Stories", Tree and Leaf, p. 60.

Rose and Sam.³ These unions are parallels in that they point to the eventual fates of their respective races in the Fourth Age (significantly, there are no Elf, Dwarf or Ent marriages, for these are three cultures that will disappear).

In order to create a believable (though necessarily incomplete) portrait of a world or a society, it is essential to say something about both sexes. The roles and positions of women in any environment in some way illuminate the reader's perception of that people or social group. This is true even when the women are few (as in the case of the Dwarves) or present only in memory (as in the case of the Ents).

Moreover, the individual portraits of such women as Lúthien, Lobelia and Ioreth also create more awareness of the societies that they are a part of, and offer a clearer and more complete view of Elves, Hobbits and humans in general. Because they are present, a vital and different dimension is added to the depiction of each society.

Women are also important in symbolically representing Tolkien's themes. Galadriel is the power of light that can stand against the darkness. Through the power of imagination, she can understand evil, and thus knows how to fight it. Arwen is the highest ideal of romantic love that inspires

³ Another structural parallel on the marriage motif is found in the story of Lúthien and Beren, which foreshadows the events of Arwen and Aragorn's marriage.

heroism, and the Evenstar of the Elves who symbolically points to their disappearance from Middle-earth. As a human, her story shows the inevitability of loss and death. Eowyn is a study in maturation who learns that the moral courage to understand one's self must supplement physical courage.

Goldberry represents the joy of nature that is good for its own sake in its timelessness and continuity. Shelob is fear, death and destruction, and her defeat is a triumph of courage and love.

In depicting individual personalities, Tolkien uses women to comment on another character's feeling, motives and actions. The different reactions of Denethor and Faramir to Finduilas and the effect her death has on them give more insight into each man. More prominently, Aragorn's love for Arwen is one of the most important factors in understanding him. His long struggle to win her in marriage is essential in mythological terms: "the ... princess or virgin ... is only won at great risk by the right (that is by the properly matured) hero. It is the quest for the eternal feminine, for the true, higher nature of man."⁴ The Eowyn-Aragorn relationship works both ways: Eowyn is used to clarify Aragorn's character and comment upon his relationship with Arwen, and Aragorn is used to partially "explain" Eowyn's

⁴ Julius E. Heuscher, A Psychiatric Study of Myths and Fairy Tales: Their Origin, Meaning and Usefulness (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1974), p. 64.

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feelings and actions. And Gollum's worship of Shelob is a significant comment on his total commitment to evil and the impossibility of his repentance.

The women in Tolkien's shorter works are, in some ways, smaller editions, so to speak, of the women of The Lord of the Rings, serving the same narrative purposes. The women mentioned in "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son" are part of the poem's atmospheric background. Mrs. Parish, Agatha, Nan and Itroun present the marital aspects of their husbands and serve as representatives of ordinary society. The Faery Queen, Princess Mee and the witch that tempts Aotrou are powers that are beyond the human world. All these women illustrate the dichotomy of Tolkien's central theme: the inevitability of unhappiness and death in the mortal world, and the longing for the perfection and immortality of Faërie that can be glimpsed and shared through imagination and art, but never permanently held by human beings.

In his fictional works Tolkien indicates that men and women ought to be treated as equal, subject only to a lawful society and a code of consideration for other people. Ideally, freedom of choice in what to do with one's life ought to be open to all, and neither men nor women restricted by social barriers based upon sex. His message in The Lord of the Rings is clear: if women are allowed to assume responsibility and make their own decisions, the results are positive.

Lúthien establishes a tradition of heroism that is carried on by her descendants; Galadriel creates Lothlórien and organizes the White Council; Arwen decides to marry Aragorn and restore the Númenorean line of kings in Middle-earth; Rose marries Sam, becomes first lady of the Shire and helps begin, through her children, new families. Eowyn is not allowed to make her own choices, and the result is frustration, unhappiness and rebellion against the authority that does not treat her (or any woman) with consideration. Once she gains her independence, she can make a new and productive life, and create a tradition of independence that can serve as an example and inspiration to other Rohirrim women.

Tolkien rejects the repression of women that is so prominent a feature of mythology and literature belonging to "the Northern thing" and the quest and war story genres. Instead of falling in with the policy put forth in, for example, The Song of Roland, Beowulf and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, he does not regard women as objects to be kept in the domestic background or handed around as prizes for valour, but as people who can and should be allowed to make their own decisions, and carry out their actions based upon them. This fact marks a division between Tolkien and his sources that contributes immeasurably to the strength, power and humanity of his fictional works.

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