The Monstrous and the Beautiful:
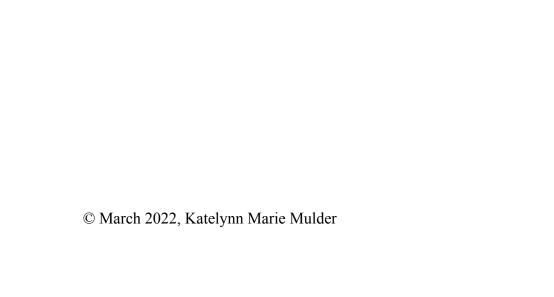
Medieval Misogyny in *The Lord of the Rings*

by

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To my Mom and Dad, thank you both for always encouraging my love for reading and writing. I wouldn't be here, writing this thesis or pursuing an English degree, without the two of you.

Abstract

      This thesis offers an analysis of the examples of medieval misogyny present in Tolkien's female characters from *The Lord of the Rings*, while providing three routes that can be used to reclaim these female characters for a modern audience. Tolkien's work as a medievalist, and the lasting influence medieval misogyny had on the misogyny prevalent during the time period in which Tolkien wrote his series, undoubtedly influenced how he wrote his female characters. Whether idealized or demonized, the women in Tolkien's world are often forced into a passive role, or at least a role outside of the view of the male-dominated narrative. In a world so beautifully developed and detailed, there is a surprising lack of female characters altogether. This thesis shows the ways medieval misogyny attempts to constrain the women of Middle-earth and remove them from the narrative of history.

      The definition of medieval misogyny that I will be using for this thesis comes from Howard Bloch's *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*. Bloch defines misogyny "as a speech act in which woman is the subject of the sentence and the predicate a more general term; or, alternatively, as the use of the substantive *woman* or *women* with a capital W" (5). In other words, medieval misogyny seeks to relegate individual women to a category of women, where generalizations about everyone of one gender can be made and believed to hold true with no exceptions. I will be specifically examining the Christian influences that dominated medieval misogyny present in Tolkien's work, which include the creation of two categories for women: those who are beautiful and perfect wives like Mary, and those who are sinful and dangerous women who buck the natural order of the world like Eve.

      After establishing the female characters who fit into this dichotomy in chapter one and chapter two, I will be examining the existence, or more accurately the absence, of the Entwives in chapter three and how this group of female characters could be read in such a way that they escape the bounds of misogyny Tolkien attempts to confine them in. In chapter four, I propose three different routes modern day readers can take in reclaiming Tolkien's female characters: strictly sticking to the literary canon of *The Lord of the Rings* but reading into the various narrative gaps Tolkien left for certain female characters; accepting the film series as the canon for each female character; or creating more female characters or adapting the backstories or actions for existing female characters through the use of fanfiction.

Keywords: Misogyny, Medieval Misogyny, Tolkien, Female Characters

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Introduction

My Godfather has a tradition of giving me a new book every Christmas. He started this when I wasn't even a year old, gifting me the first book in C.S. Lewis's Narnia series. Each book in its front cover has a letter from him documenting what happened that year in our lives and his hopes for me in the following year. He eventually gave me each book in a complete collection for the Narnia series till I was six years old, and then started giving me other books that were his personal favorites. One particularly memorable year was after my final year of middle school when he gave me the complete collection of *The Lord of the Rings*. This series is his favorite of all time, and while I personally prefer *The Hobbit*, I can't deny that reading *The Lord of the Rings* was a part of my adolescence.

It did not make me fall in love with the fantasy genre. I had already been solidly in love with it by the time I stumbled across *The Hobbit* in fifth grade, but it had been a part of my childhood that I fondly remember. My father would watch the movie adaptations with me all of the time. While my siblings would beg and pester him to watch Disney films, I would beg to watch the battle of Helm's Deep with him again and again. My love for the series grew less fervent as I inevitably read other works of literature, but eventually I did get around to rereading the series later on in my life.

When I reread the series as an adult I eventually came to the question: where are all the women? I knew there were women characters in Tolkien's works, yet when I came up with a comprehensive list it felt oddly short: Galadriel, Arwen, Goldberry, Éowyn, Shelob, Lobelia, and, if we count characters only named and not given any direct introduction in the main series, Lúthien. In my personal favorite, *The Hobbit*, there was not a single female character. Not even a female monster like Shelob makes an appearance. I decided to take a closer look at the few

female characters in the series and I reached an even more puzzling conclusion: the female characters were barely involved in the main story.

This may seem like a bold claim to make, as doubtless some of the female characters (in particular Éowyn and Galadriel) do make contributions to Frodo's quest to destroy the one ring. However, it was odd to me that there was a distinct lack of women who were consistently involved throughout the books, and the framing of any women's contributions throughout seemed to me surprisingly misogynistic. Furthermore, there is a noted scarcity of female characters when compared to the number of male characters. The Fellowship is entirely made up of men, the Council of Elrond is all men as well; with the exception of Éowyn (who has to dress up as a man in secret) all of the fighters are men, and for the most part the recurring female characters like Éowyn, Galadriel, and in particular Arwen had much smaller, or more background, roles than what I seemed to recall from when I read the series as a child. The books certainly didn't pass the Bechdel test, and neither did their film adaptations. Alison Bechdel, in her comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For*, had three criteria for judging whether or not a film was worth watching. First, the film needs to have two women. Then, these women must talk to each other on screen. Finally, the two women must talk to one another about something other than a man (Bechdel 22-23). The female characters in *The Lord of the Rings* don't only talk about the men in their lives, but rather the books and movies fail to pass the Bechdel test because none of the women are ever in the same place, let alone talking to one another. Reading the appendices and short stories in *The Silmarillion* didn't provide me what I was looking for either. In essence, I felt like Tolkien's world had gaps where women should be but weren't.

Early feminist criticism which focused on the images of women in literature is important to consider when examining how Tolkien portrayed his female characters. "Images-of-women

criticism judges a work (novel, film, music video, song) according to whether it provides 'positive images' of women," meaning critics of literature using this school of thought are trying to see what sort of image a work is creating for their female characters (Parker 152). If a work "portrays good women, then according to images of women criticism it is a good film, song, or novel," and if it "does not portray good women, then it is not so good a work" (Parker 152). However, the problem with this approach is that "it tends to imply that women characters must be good 'role models,' which seems to confine literature to a narrow, predictable range of possibilities… In feminist writing, as in most writing, characters can come in all kinds-good, bad, or too unrealistic to be either good or bad" (Parker 152). In striving against the old representations of women as weak and passive it is not any better to only represent women as perfect and virtuous individuals. Focusing and placing such emphasis on how "energetic" or "skillful" female characters are in a work setting puts these women in danger of seeming like an "antifeminist, defensive overcompensations that mock the supposed weakness of real women outside of movies" (Parker 153). Thus, for this thesis I will be approaching Tolkien's creative work at the angle of looking for complex and realistic representations of women. Idealization does not create feminist female characters. Great works can have female characters who would be poor role models, and terribly misogynistic works can feature female characters who would appear to be great role models. What is important is that the female character is not just all one thing or all another. She's not all good or all bad. She is human, and multidimensional. She is complex, and thus closer to what real women actually are. Ultimately, the image a work creates about women should be judged on how realistic that image is to women during the time period that the work was created, or perhaps in Tolkien's case inspired by.

So then, what sorts of women existed in medieval English literature? Around the same time I decided to reread the series, I also stumbled across a new appreciation and love for Medieval literature. The first significant piece of medieval literature I read during the winter semester of my freshman year was *Piers Plowman*, followed by parts of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and different pieces of sermons and ballads from the time. Since then I have also read parts of *The Book of Margery Kempe* and Julian of Norwich's *Shewings*, *Pearl*, and *Gawain and the Green Knight* along with legends of different Virgin Martyrs originating from medieval England. English women in the medieval era faced misogyny in every aspect of their daily lives yet some still managed to leave remnants of their voice throughout oral and written narratives. When reading many of these canonical medieval works it's quite possible to look past these limitations and see female characters who manage to escape their male author's intentions. Furthermore, several of these texts were by female authors and thus provide a unique insight into what a woman's life was like from a woman's perspective. In other words, there are female characters existing in medieval literature who escape the misogyny rampant during their time period. Tolkien himself was a scholar of medieval literature, even becoming a professor at Oxford on the subject. As Tolkien was a medievalist, I grew curious if he drew inspiration from the texts that he worked on during his professional life and thus if his creative work followed similar patterns. This curiosity led me to want to investigate how Tolkien's work as a medievalist influenced how he wrote his few medieval female characters. How could an author with a source material riddled with a variety of female figures and voices so completely avoid having any major female characters?

Many of Tolkien's characters were based on people he knew, experiences he had, or ideas he wanted to represent in his work. This is especially true of his female characters. For instance,

Lobelia in one of Tolkien's letters is credited to being inspired by "one elderly lady" in Tolkien's life (Tolkien, *Letters* 229). Goldberry is meant by Tolkien to be a representation of "the actual seasonal changes in such lands" (Tolkien, *Letters* 272). Furthermore, Tolkien credits his distinction between the Ents and Entwives as being due to his perception of the differences in which men and women treated the environment around them. Tolkien also believed strongly in accidental representations or symbolism he may have unconsciously given his female characters at first. With Galadriel, he acknowledges in a letter to Father Robert Murray, who had proposed that Galadriel was a comparison to the Virgin Mary, that "*The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision" (Tolkien, *Letters* 172). These examples indicate that Tolkien did have specific intentions in mind, or at least recognized certain influences in his life, for the female characters in his works.

One question then is how important is authorial intent here, or perhaps even how important is Tolkien's own recognition of what his characters may or may not have come to represent during the revision process? I propose that it is crucially important to understand what views Tolkien himself held in regard to his female characters as medieval misogyny is still relevant to misogyny in the 20th century, and to misogyny today. As Bloch states: "I shall refer not only to the canonical antifeminists of the Middle Ages, but to their spiritual heirs-the philosophers, novelists, medical specialists, social scientists, and critics of the nineteenth century, whose own particular brand of Romantic and naturalistic misogyny carries a large charge of unexamined attitudes from the medieval, and even the patristic, past" (Bloch 7). Misogyny today, and more important for this thesis the misogyny present during Tolkien's time, at the very least

still echoes the same sentiments found in medieval misogyny. So does Tolkien's representations of women then mean that he is a misogynist?

Perhaps the most well known piece of evidence used to argue that Tolkien was misogynistic, or at the very least held outdated views on women even for his time period, is the letter he sent to his son Michael in March of 1941 titled "On the subject of marriage and relations between the sexes." In this letter he explains to his son that he believed that "in this fallen world the 'friendship' that should be possible between all human beings, is virtually impossible between man and woman" (Tolkien, *Letters* 48). Tolkien then goes on to describe the "servient, helpmeet instinct" that all "women" have (Tolkien, *Letters* 49). Tolkien even makes it clear his view of woman in academia is certainly not a favorable one:

> Every teacher knows that. How quickly an intelligent woman can be taught, grasp his ideas, see his point - and how (with rare exception) they can go no further, when they leave his hand, or when they cease to take a *personal* interest in *him*. But this is their natural avenue to love. Before the young woman knows where she is … she may actually 'fall in love.' Which for her, an unspoiled natural young woman, means that she wants to become the mother of the young man's children, even if that desire is by no means clear to her or explicit. (Tolkien, *Letters* 49-50)

The entire letter has statements discussing women in this manner. This clearly indicates that Tolkien, at least in 1941, felt comfortable discussing women in such a manner as this with his son in what he believed to be a private letter; which is indicative that at least in private he was comfortable discussing and enforcing misogynistic stereotypes regarding what a woman's supposed natural role in the world was. In particular, he seems to believe that a woman's ultimate goal is to be a wife and a mother, and as such all other things will naturally come secondary to

those first goals. He believes some women can be smart, but only few women can be smart without a man's careful help and coaching.

This letter also indicates some possible explanations as to why Tolkien seemed to believe that women were this way. The argument he makes most often to support his various claims about the nature that all women have is from his own perspective as an affluent Christian Englishman. He argues that as "this is a fallen world," men and women are always going to experience "the dislocation of sex-instinct" as "the devil is endlessly ingenious, and sex is his favorite subject" (Tolkien, *Letters* 48). The word "helpmeet" and the emphasis that it is simply an instinct that all women have also echo Christian misogynistic views. However, an interesting fact of this letter is the inclusion of a quote from Chaucer when Tolkien is discussing how a young man and woman could never be friends: "Allas! That ever love wassinne[1]" (Tolkien, *Letters* 48). Tolkien also discusses the idea of "romantic chivalric tradition" found in "our Western culture" (Tolkien, *Letters* 48). I believe all of these justifications Tolkien uses for his claims regarding the nature of women evidently come from his understanding of Christiantiy, medieval literature, and history.

Another perspective that I find worth mentioning, as it is a more nuanced take on Tolkien's misogynistic tendencies, argues that Tolkien's view on women, in particular on women in academia, changed over the course of his lifetime. In particular, in about 1960 Tolkien started a story that, while unfinished, was called *Indis i-Kiryamo*, *The Mariner's Wife*, and *Aldarion and Erendis* (three different names for the same story), where "male and female stereotypes are far more subtly expressed" (Doughan 19). In particular the female character Erendis is portrayed as "unnecessarily stubborn" but is in the right during the tale for being upset with her husband Aldarion who had been running off to recklessly pursue adventures (Doughan 19). Erendis even

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[1] This middle English line can be roughly translated to: Alas! That ever love was sin!

has "an extraordinary address to her daughter" that included "sentiments that are difficult to distinguish from the feminism of the 1970s and 1980s, accusing men of exploiting things, animals and people for their own ends and reacting violently 'when they become aware suddenly, that there are other wills in the world beside their own'" (Doughan 19). Unfortunately, Tolkien abandoned this story before he could complete it.

Although there is the potential for Tolkien to have changed and adapted his representations of women in his later unfinished works, for this thesis I will be concentrating solely on the characters named in *The Lord of the Rings* and examining Tolkien during the period of his life when he wrote these books. I made this decision so that I could focus on the attitudes Tolkien had regarding women, and the different influences at this moment in his life that existed, while he wrote the female characters in *The Lord of the Rings*. This means I will be looking specifically at what Tolkien's views towards women were from 1937 to 1949. As the letter he wrote to his son was from 1941, I think it is a safe conclusion to make that Tolkien's misogynistic views on women, present in that letter to his son, was an influence in how he wrote his female characters in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Another important indicator of Tolkien's values during the production of *The Lord of the Rings* is his presence in the Inklings. This elite, male-only group of scholars and writers included other famous fantasy authors such as C.S. Lewis, and in an earlier era Lewis Carroll. The Inklings was made up of men that were mostly alumni of, or teaching at, Oxford, and acted as a sort of informal literary discussion and writing group. Attitudes of several of the men were, and still are, considered clearly misogynistic. In particular, C.S. Lewis believed that a man could not achieve a deep and true friendship with another man unless women were entirely excluded from it. He even said in his diary in 1922 that "A friend dead is to be mourned, a friend married is to

be guarded against, both equally lost" (Carpenter 164). Lewis was considered by Tolkien to be one of his closest friends, with the two exchanging rough drafts and manuscripts of their books throughout their life to be proofread and critiqued by one another.

Outside of the Inklings, this attitude regarding women was common at Oxford, where Tolkien was a student and later a professor, during the time when he was writing *The Lord of the Rings*. In 1911, Tolkien began to attend Oxford. In 1915, after completing his studies, Tolkien then enlisted as a second lieutenant. The first World War drew away many of the students and even some of the professors at Oxford, and "Oxford temporarily became a less overwhelmingly male place" (Doughan 17). While women could study there from as early as the 1870s, they could not claim the degrees that they had studied for and so could not graduate. As of 1920, female students were allowed to become full members of Oxford. However, "Oxford almost immediately repented of its boldness, fearing an exodus of men to Cambridge, and a quota was placed on women students" (Doughan 17). The prevailing attitude regarding women that Tolkien was surrounded by in both his friends and his career was that women were inferior to men, and that it was simply in their nature to be mothers above all else. In this context, it makes sense that Tolkien, as he wrote *The Hobbit* and then *The Lord of the Rings,* would be influenced by this in such a way that it would be reflected in his few female characters.

These aspects of Tolkien's views on women have been analyzed by countless scholars before me, however there are few scholars that I have found who analyzed how the medieval texts he worked on directly contributed to how he wrote his female characters. In this thesis, I propose that his very field of study, medieval English literature, heavily influenced how he wrote his female characters. His books undoubtedly have a medieval setting, and Tolkien himself, in a

letter to Milton Waldman in 1950, credited the series to his own desire for England to have legends of the past similar to what he felt other countries held:

> I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought, and found (an ingredient) in legends of other lands. There was Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian, and Finnish (which greatly affected me); but nothing English, save impoverished chap-book stuff. Of course there was and is all the Arthurian world, but powerful as it is, it is imperfectly naturalized, associated with the soil of Britain but not with English; and does not replace what I felt to be missing (Tolkien, *Letters* 144).

Tolkien explicitly hoped to have his story act as this myth and legend that he felt was lacking in his country's literary history. He "had a mind to make a body more or less connected legend… which I could dedicate simply... to England" (Tolkien, *Letters* 144). As such, it is not a far stretch to imagine that he would draw from what he felt was a lacking English collection of stories found in his field of medieval literature for inspiration for his own works.

An important note to make on this fact is what works of medieval literature Tolkien focused on during this period of his career. Of particular focus are two medieval English texts that I will be mentioning throughout the rest of this thesis due to their influence on Tolkien's writing. In 1925, before Tolkien even wrote or published *The Hobbit*, he published his own translation of *Gawain and the Green Knight*. In 1936, Tolkien published a scholarly essay titled "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" demonstrating that the year before he started working on *The Lord of the Rings* he was doing his own research and work on *Beowulf*. *Beowulf* in

particular is credited by many scholars, and even Tolkien himself, to be a significant influence and inspiration for *The Lord of the Rings*.

I propose here that the type of misogyny seen in *The Lord of the Rings* best fits with medieval misogyny as it is defined by Howard Bloch in his book *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romance*. Specifically, I will be considering misogyny "as a speech act in which woman is the subject of the sentence and the predicate a more general term; or, alternatively, as the use of the substantive *woman* or *women* with a capital W" (Bloch 5). So a statement such as "all women are ____" would be an example of what Bloch is discussing here. In this definition, both negative and positive statements would be counted as misogyny when applied to women as a whole. Idealization of women in Bloch's theory is just as misogynistic as demonization. In the case of medieval misogyny, the creation of a category to put women into was done in an effort to remove individual women from history, and this effort was largely successful with few exceptions. Whether women are put on an unreachable and unrealistic pedestal after the fashion of the Virgin Mary or put in the gutter with the likes of Eve, misogyny often originated or was connected to Christianity during this time period. Medieval misogyny can be found in practically any text from this time, but it particularly becomes apparent when reading texts discussing morality.

In the first chapter, I will be examining the idealized female characters, or the ones put on a pedestal, and how they match or fail to match this definition of medieval misogyny. In the second chapter I will move on to the female characters who are demonized or framed to be bad in the text, the ones put in the gutter, according to what would have been seen in such a situation in medieval England. This chapter will include any female character who are looked down upon or criticized during the narrative, including Éowyn when she appears as a male warrior and is

injured killing the Nazgûl. The analysis regarding her brief fall from the pedestal to the gutter will be analyzed here, while her other scenes that place her on a pedestal will be found in chapter one, alongside the other women characters who are portrayed to be in the wrong in a distinctly female way by the text.

My third chapter will shift away from Bloch's more strict definition to focus on the Ents and the Entwives. The Entwives are neither on the pedestal nor the gutter, but rather seem to sit in the inbetween of these two categories. In this middle ground we get to know the tale of a group of independent women who achieved much but for doing so disappeared. In this chapter I will analyze the fate of the Entwives, the all male society of the Ents, and the story of the Entwives as told by the male Ent Treebeard. This analysis will be focused on understanding what Tolkien could be trying to say about these women in regards to feminism and/or misogyny.

In my final chapter I will introduce the idea that there is a way to reclaim these characters that allows us to enjoy them without the misogynistic undertones and ideas in the novel. I'll detail the changes the director made (with Arwen and Éowyn in particular) and why giving women a voice and showing them in action was a crucial change for the series that allowed the movies to be a better interpretation of the story for a modern audience. I'll also investigate the use of fanfiction in reclaiming or creating voices and backstories for these female characters.

The ultimate goal of this thesis is to explore what inspired the way Tolkien portrayed women in the fantasy series that would later become the definitive work in the genre for decades. *The Lord of the Rings* is his most influential work, and its scarcity, and view, of female characters has had lasting impacts on the genre. Countless authors have taken inspiration from the ideas, races, and even narrative structures from *The Lord of the Rings* when producing their own fantasy novels. By investigating the roots of medieval misogyny that I believe exist in the genre I

hope to not only point out what I believe to be an enduring problem due to the legacy of *The Lord of the Rings* but to also offer ways to authors to avoid falling into the same patterns out of convenience.

Chapter 1: On the Pedestal

Idealizing women can be just as misogynistic as simply labeling women as sinful and lustful dangers to good men. The placing of a woman on a pedestal, an image of unreachable perfection that no real individual can hope to achieve, is just as destructive as the depiction of a woman as the source of all that is evil or wrong with society. The inability of a real person to live up to the idea of perfection that they, or another person, holds in regard to their gender can result in feelings of inadequacy, failure, anger, or depression over something that could never be achieved in the first place. Idealization often leads to the objectification of women, where they are only abstractly understood by both men and themselves. In medieval misogyny, the idealization of women was one of two possibilities as to how women were treated as a category.

Perhaps the female character who is most idealized in *The Lord of the Rings*, and who is also the most powerful female character, is Galadriel. She is an elven queen, and one of the few female characters who plays an active role in the plot of *The Lord of the Rings*. She gives refuge and gifts to the Fellowship of the Ring, and sends a Great Eagle to bring Gandalf to Lothlorien after he is separated from the rest of the Fellowship. Later, she sends messages to Aragorn and the Rangers of the North. Through these scenes we learn that she holds one of the elven rings of power, rings made using Sauron's instruction that grants its users some unspecified magical power and inhuman strength. However, we never see Galadriel use her ring. In fact, we never see Galadriel use any of her powers. Yet, it is made clear to the reader just how powerful she is, as she describes what would happen if Frodo gave her the Ring.

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! (Tolkien, *LOTR* 366)

This darker side to Galadriel, the image of a queen of despair, is only seen when she is tempted

with the ring. Still, comparisons to the evil Morgan le Fay from *Sir Gawain and the Green*

Knight, a medieval text translated by Tolkien to modern English, can be made. Morgan le Fay is

the unseen orchestrator of the entire scheme surrounding the Green Knight and his challenge to

King Arthur's court. Her ultimate goal was to test Arthur's knights and to frighten Guinevere,

Arthur's wife, to death (Armitage 2008). Susan Carter argues that these two women are similar

in that neither have neatly defined power or abilities, and that both for the most part remain

absent from their respective texts. It is this absence Carter proposes that marks them and their

power as feminine, and that this hiding of a woman's power is actually a literary trope: the lady

of the lacuna. Galadriel's power, much like Morgan's, "gestures to an agency that is

disconcerting in a woman, so it is not fully explicated on the page" (Carter 79). Carter even

proposes that Morgan was "a model whom I believe influences Galadriel's enigmatic agency," in

that the removal of seeing Morgan's power in action is a key characteristic of hers that Tolkien

transferred to Galadriel (71). However, while Galadriel's magic does have the potential to take a

dark turn and comparisons to Morgan can be made, she does refuse to take the Ring and to

become a figure of power, instead remaining "a salvation" for the men that she interacts with

(Carter 83). This resolutely cements Galadriel's status as a perfect individual. Not only is she

beautiful and powerful, although she can only be powerful while absent from the narrative focus

of the text, but she can resist falling into temptation. She is the redeemer of women, echoing the

image of Mary and rejecting the image of Eve who failed to resist temptation.

The ties between Christianity and medieval misogyny cannot be understated. While "the church fathers" considered women to be "the source of evil" due to Eve, they also labeled them as "a mediator and even more, the symbol of the union of the soul with Christ, a source of redemption" (Bloch 68). In other words, a source of salvation. This redemption is due to Mary, oftentimes portrayed as "the redeemer of Eve who liberates her from the malediction of the fall" (Bloch 67). The ultimate comparison or goal for a woman in the medieval ages is to be said to be like the Virgin Mary. Still, even when idealized, a female character could not hope to entirely live up to this comparison. No woman in real life could simultaneously be a virgin, wife, and mother all at once, or a flawless religious figure while still being human and tainted with original sin. This then trapped the everyday woman between the two categories, the good and the bad representations of women.

With Galadriel, Tolkien acknowledges in a letter to Father Robert Murray, who had proposed that Galadriel was a comparison to the Virgin Mary, that "*The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision" (Tolkien, *Letters* 172). This is not a denial of Murray's labeling of Galadriel to be a representation or reference to the Virgin Mary, but it is not an overt confirmation either. However, Tolkien later references this letter again in a letter to Deborah Webster on what personal details of his life he considers important to understanding *The Lord of the Rings*:

> Or more important, I am a Christian (which can be deduced from my stories), and in fact a Roman Catholic. The latter 'fact' perhaps cannot be deduced; though one critic (by letter) asserted that the invocations of Elbereth, and the character of Galadriel as directly described (or through the words of Gimli and Sam) were clearly related to Catholic

devotion to Mary…. (That is: far greater things may colour the mind in dealing with the

lesser things of a fairy-story). (Tolkien, *Letters* 288)

These lines clearly demonstrate that Tolkien credits his religious beliefs as being an influence on

his work, and in particular that he is not opposed to the comparison of Galadriel to the Virgin

Mary. The idealization and comparison to Mary is said by Bloch to play a part in the polarization

of "the definition of the feminine to such an extent that woman (not women) are pushed to the

margins, excluded from the middle, in other words, isolated from history" (Bloch 90).

Interestingly enough, Galadriel herself seems to recognize this issue of being isolated, or

forgotten, by history. She admits to Frodo that "if you succeed, then our power is diminished,

and Lothlorien will fade, and the tides of Time will sweep it away" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 365).

Furthermore, when she denies the Ring, she states that she "will diminish, and go into the West,

and remain Galadriel" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 366). In this context, the act of going into the West by an

elf means for an elf to set sail west, and return from where they came long ago. Ultimately, this

means the elves are removing themselves entirely from the affairs of men and plan to never

return. This is the fate of Galadriel, and many of the Elves, in *The Lord of the Rings.*

Another aspect of Tolkien's descriptions of Galadriel that fall into the realm of medieval

misogyny is his "estheticization of the feminine" (Bloch 65). Estheticization is the focus on the

physically beautiful and pleasing aspects of something, or in this case someone. Galadriel first

appears with her husband, the pair being labeled as both "grave and beautiful… clad wholly in

white; and the hair of the lady was of deep gold" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 354). She is oftentimes

described as being "tall and white and fair," with the fact that she is wearing or associated with

the pure color white often emphasized throughout the text (Tolkien, *LOTR* 361). Even when not

physically present, she seems to be remembered by the Fellowship first for her great beauty.

When parted from her, Gimli remarked that "I have looked upon that which was fairest… henceforward I will call nothing fair, unless it be her gift" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 378). Gimli's obsession with her appearance continues for the rest of the narrative and can be seen whenever he describes her. When Éomer speaks ill of the "Lady in the Golden Wood," Gimli warns him "you speak evil of that which is fair beyond the reach of your thought, and only little wit can excuse you" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 432). Gimli has only been in Galadriel's presence three times at this point, only directly talking to her twice, and yet he idealizes her beauty to the point where it could endanger the quest as his tone risks offending the very people he needs help from.

The emphasis placed on her physical description, and the characters' later remarks throughout the series on her great beauty, is similar to Bloch's argument that medieval Christians were focused on the fact that "woman is conceived as ornament" (Bloch 40). Women, according to Bloch, were "associated with artifice and decoration" in medieval England and encouraged to follow "the dress code" in "the early Christian community" where women must look proper while they worship (Bloch 40). Men could pray with bare heads, while women "are enjoined to be veiled" (Bloch 40). The emphasis for women to dress overall as an "external sign of modesty" that stands against "the draping of the flesh with 'dress and ornament,'" which was considered "the equivalent of seduction," was distinctly targeted at the female members of the church (Bloch 40-41). Male modesty was not as emphasized, with the focus remaining primarily on women's modesty. This focus on a woman's modest type of beauty is a characteristic of Galadriel that Carter also notes separates her from Morgan. Morgan is an old hag, whose "force proves to be pettily malevolent," while Galadriel is a fair woman who serves to assist our heroes in their quest (Carter 83). Specifically, Carter focuses on how "their clothing signals" their roles in their story "in line with medieval convention" (83). Morgan is "lavishly clad in silk" that is a "chalky

white" that "seems less white than Galadriel's" which makes sense in the context that Morgan is less morally pure than Galadriel (Carter 83-84). However, Bloch in his theory makes it clear that artificial beauty achieved through the use of clothing and makeup is sinful, as "to decorate oneself is to be guilty" of seduction, or is even going against God's intentions for one's natural body (Bloch 41). Morgan readily decorates herself, enjoying her station in the Green Knight's court. However, it is natural beauty that is to be prized, and Galadriel is described as having plenty of it. She is said to be "very tall," and both "grave and beautiful" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 354). Her hair is "of deep gold" and there was "no sign of age" between her or her husband (Tolkien, *LOTR* 354). Her beauty is natural, and her clothing is simply a reflection of her station as a Lady.

Ultimately, this estheticization of the idealized female in *The Lord of the Rings* can be seen in all of the women characters that Tolkien places on a pedestal or looks upon favorably. Goldberry, Éowyn, and Arwen are also described and remembered first by their great beauty. This is done to such an extent that it is only when Éowyn gets rid of her own beauty and diminishes the quality of her appearance that she can pass for a man. Arwen in particular seems to be the most similar in her description to Galadriel, an occurrence which is most likely in part due to the fact that Galadriel is actually Arwen's grandmother. Arwen is described to be "a lady fair to look upon" with "her white arms and clear face were flawless and smooth." In her eyes is described to be the "light of the stars," and she is remarked to look particularly "queenly" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 227). Éowyn, like Galadriel, has her "white" clothing emphasized, and is described to be "very fair" with "long hair… like a river of gold." She is also described to be "slender and tall," and Aragorn in particular "thought her fair, fair and cold, like a morning of the pale spring that is not yet come to womanhood" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 515). Goldberry too is called a "fair lady" by Frodo, with "long yellow hair" that "rippled down her shoulders," and she had a

"slender grace" to her movements (Tolkien, *LOTR* 123). The repetitive use of the descriptors fair, slender, long hair, and white for the clothing or skin, which seems to be used to imply the character's purity, in different female characters indicates that there is a pattern of consistent idealization occurring with Tolkien's female characters.

This idealizing of these female characters does differ significantly from how the male characters are introduced. Elrond is described to be "ageless, neither old or young, though in it was written the memory of many things both glad and sorrowful" with "hair… dark as the shadows of twilight, and upon it was set a circlet of silver; his eyes were grey as a clear evening, and in them was a light like the light of stars" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 227). He is also described as "venerable he seemed as a king crowned with many winters, and yet hale as a tried warrior in the fullness of his strength" and "mighty among both Elves and Men" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 227). His wisdom and strength as a warrior and leader are emphasized in his descriptions, and he is often compared to forces of nature like stars or the evening sky. Tom Bombadill, the husband of Goldberry, is first described to have a "deep glad voice" and to be "too large and heavy for a hobbit, if not quite tall enough for one of the Big People, though he made noise enough for one, stumping along with great yellow boots on his thick legs, and charging through grass and rushes like a cow going down to drink" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 119). His "eyes were blue and bright, and his face was red as a ripe apple, but creased into a hundred wrinkles of laughter" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 119). These descriptions for Tom are nothing like the descriptions for his wife, they tend to focus on a realistic depiction of an older man who lives out in the woods and is happy in the life he has created for himself. Even Éomer, Éowyn's brother, is described as "a tall man, taller than all the rest; from his helm as a crest a white horsetail flowed" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 432). It is also noted that he has "clear bright eyes" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 432). Compared to Éowyn's long description, his

appearance is barely given to the reader. In general, the male characters have a pattern of being described once, and then their appearance is no longer a focus for them. Their appearance is also often made to depict something deeper about them. Éomer is described to be a talented horse rider, Elrond a brilliant king and old warrior, and Tom Bombadill a man who is confident working and being at home in nature. These character descriptions for these three male characters show that the level of estheticization seen in the female character's descriptions is in fact unique to the female characters in Tolkien's works.

Every idealized female character's introduction and later reference in *The Lord of the Rings* is framed by their great natural beauty, falling in line with Bloch's idea of estheticization in medieval misogyny. In particular, the use of the word fair to describe each one proves that the word is not only used when describing female elves, rejecting the idea proposed by some scholars that Galadriel's and Arwen's descriptions and focus on their appearance are primarily due to them being elves. This neat ordering of the good females as being naturally good-looking is deeply characteristic of medieval misogyny, and it seems significant that the breaking of this pattern, however briefly, by Éowyn changing her appearance is viewed and framed negatively in the text.

Éowyn was indeed once a man when *The Lord of the Rings* was still a rough draft. And in another draft she is meant to die in her battle with the Nazgûl. In the final version however, Éowyn kills the Nazgûl, but only after "Tolkien transforms her into a man" (Fredrick and McBride 35). Only once she reveals her identity to the Nazgûl, does she return to being viewed as a woman by Merry, the hobbit and sole point of view given to the reader for this part of the battle. Merry once again brings the focus immediately to Éowyn's feminine traits, describing her "bright hair" that "gleamed pale gold upon her shoulders" and "her eyes" that were "as grey as

the sea" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 841). Her appearance quickly gives way to her perceived frailty, with Merry having "pity filled his heart" at the sight of her, and he remarks how "she should not die, so fair, so desperate" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 841). This emphasized pity for a warrior in danger is only given to Tolkien's sole idealized female warrior.

Fredrick and McBride attribute this pity to the fact that Éowyn is a woman. They argue that "Tolkien's depictions of females in combat suggest women simply are not suited for the task of warfare" and that Tolkien seems to be stating with these female characters that "both their natures and their thought processes prevent them from fighting effectively" (Fredrick and McBride 36). Éowyn's character arc ends with her renouncing her role as a warrior when she decides to marry Faramir, stating that "I will be a shieldmaiden no longer, nor vie with the great Riders, nor take joy only in the songs of slaying" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 965). Instead, she takes on the role of a healer, a role that places her back in the domestic, and private, sphere that focuses on taking care of others.

It is not only Éowyn herself who renounces her actions. Aragorn describes her act of riding into battle to be indicative of her having a "malady" of some sort (Tolkien, *LOTR* 866). Furthermore, Faramir declares that Éowyn is "healed" after she renounces being a shieldmaiden and decides to marry him (Tolkien, *LOTR* 965). Fredrick and McBride propose that this is because "for Tolkien, the phrase "female warrior" is a conjunction of irreconcilable opposites; he can imagine one or the other, female or warrior, but not both simultaneously" (Fredrick and McBride 36).The male characters charged response to Éowyn's actions that placed herself in a traditionally male warrior illustrate how Tolkien's society, where elves, hobbits, and all sorts of fantastical creatures reside, still specifically holds a narrow view of what is and is not correct or proper actions for a woman to take.

This means that Éowyn can be a strong warrior, but only under the condition that she appears to be a man while she is and that she regrets the action after the fact. As a warrior, she steps off her pedestal briefly and her actions bring her pity at best and criticism from men like Aragorn at worst. Her brief act of power results in her being in the gutter for a time, with her actions being marked as dangerous, a disease that could be deadly not only for her but also for those around her. As Faramir "kissed her" and she decides she will allow him to take her to live as "the White Lady" amongst his people, he declares to the healers "here is the Lady Éowyn of Rohan, and now she is healed" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 965). It is only through her regret and declaration that she shall never be a warrior again, paired with her quick marriage, that she is able to reclaim her status on the pedestal. Only when she conforms to the expectations of the men around her is she respected instead of pitied.

Similarly, Galadriel can have strong magic that allows her to see glimpses of the future and be feared by men, but she cannot be seen to use her magic. Instead, her use of power is only hinted at when you see her, with her real shows of strength and influence having to happen off screen where the reader only learns through second-hand knowledge that she had done anything at all. She stays on the pedestal by being subservient to men in public and powerful in private. It is her husband Celeborn who first greets the Fellowship, and her husband who makes the decision to allow Gimli, the dwarf, to stay in Lothlórien. Galadriel can only ask her husband to allow him to stay, cautioning him that it would be "rash" to simply turn the dwarf and the rest of the Fellowship away, leaving it up to Celebron to eventually, after a "silence," decide he will "do what I can to aid you" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 356). In private she can exercise more authority, but in public it is still Lord Celebron who ultimately makes the decisions on important matters regarding the safety of Lothlórien. These two women are powerful, being able to even

accomplish things the male characters in The Fellowship can not, but it is how this power is framed in the text that confines them to the pedestal.

Much like Éowyn, Arwen's character arc is heavily influenced by how she conforms to male expectations. A plot line, although it is not given much direct attention throughout most of the text during the main narrative, throughout *The Lord of the Rings* is Arwen's relationship with Aragorn. Arwen is introduced to us as the daughter of the Lord of Rivendell, Elrond. Besides the estheticization in this scene where the traveling Hobbits and Aragorn dine with the elves, the only other thing noted regarding Arwen is that Frodo sees her talking to Aragorn. When entering Lothlórien, Aragorn reflects on his earlier meeting with Arwen as he is noticed to be "wrapped in some fair memory" by Frodo (Tolkien, *LOTR* 352). The next time Arwen is mentioned is when Aragorn receives a gift from her, and then after that she is shown during the scene where she marries Aragorn. Here it is shown how Arwen only matters to the extent that she matters to Aragorn and her father. She is defined by the men in her life, and through no action of her own is given a noble status and nice life as an elven maiden and later the status of Queen alongside her husband Aragorn.

Similar to Galadriel, but taken to an even further extreme, Arwen's duty to the main narrative is one done where the audience will not have a character directly narrate it to them, away from where the audience can effectively see her. She acts as a source of inspiration for Aragorn to fight in the battle against Sauron. Arwen, unlike Galadriel and Éowyn, is not even powerful enough to have a direct influence on the main narrative. Instead, she holds no bearing on the destruction of the Ring or the safety of the Fellowship outside of being something for Aragorn to fight for. Of these women on a pedestal, she is most similar to Goldberry in that

neither are given much time to talk to the Fellowship, or to even be acknowledged, in *The Lord of the Rings*.

An argument used to attempt to justify Arwen's marginalization in *The Lord of the Rings* is that the story was simply not focused on her and Aragorn's relationship and was instead meant to focus primarily on the Hobbits. This claim comes from a particular Tolkien comment:

> That is why I regard the role of Arwen and Aragorn as the most important of the appendices, it is part of the essential story, and it is only placed so, because it could not be worked into the main narrative without destroying its structure: which is planned to be 'hobbito-centric', that is primarily a study of the ennoblement (or sanctification) of the humble. (Tolkien, *Letters* 232)

However, when one then examines the appendix Tolkien is referring to here, Arwen still does not act as anything other than a woman deeply in love with a man. Her story revolves entirely around Aragorn even after his death, when "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" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 1063). She goes out, after saying "farewell" to her children, to leave Lorien for Minas Tirith where she resides "alone" until she dies at the end of the following year "at last when the mallorn-leaves were falling, but spring had not yet come" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 1063). Thus, Arwen's life, and even death, are focused entirely on her husband.

Besides Arwen, two other named women also appear in this appendix. Aragorn's mother, Gilraen, speaks only to warn Aragorn to not fall in love with an elf as he would likely never marry or create a lasting relationship with one. It is told to the reader that she is the one to take Aragorn to live among the elves with Elrond, and it is also mentioned that Aragorn was "heavy of heart" when she died (Tolkien, *LOTR* 1061). Galadriel also makes an appearance, but it is

only to clothe Aragorn in "silver and white, with a cloak of elven-grey and a bright gem on his brow" and for the reader to be informed that she has, by the time Arwen returns to Minas Tirith, "passed away" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 1060-1063). There is no explanation provided as to how or when exactly Galadriel died. It is also mentioned that Arwen has daughters with Aragorn, however they are never named. Out of all of her children it is her only son, "Eldarion," that is explicitly named in the text (Tolkien, *LOTR* 1063). Due to this, it is clear to the reader that Arwen's female heirs are considered lesser to their brother by the text.

All this appendix shows is that even when provided with a place to focus on Arwen or other female characters, Tolkien instead chose to only detail the male character Aragorn's life and accomplishments. It is his childhood that is the focus of the start of the appendix, and his love that is emphasized throughout. It is Arwen who must sacrifice her immortality to love him, and yet for the most part the focus on this issue of their relationship is only set between Elrond and Aragorn, as Elrond is sad to lose his daughter to a mortal death and so sets forth Aragorn a challenge he must complete before he is allowed to marry his daughter: "she shall not be the bride of any man less than the King of both Gondor and Arnor" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 1061). It is only after Aragorn dies that the focus of the narrative shifts to Arwen, and here we are only told what she does, and that is to leave her children to mourn by herself and then to die. She does speak to Aragorn as he lays dying where she makes it clear that she loves him, and while her choice to marry him and then watch him die pains her, she does hold true to it. Once her purpose for living (her husband) ends, she follows shortly after without accomplishing much else. In an appendix meant to focus on the both of them, very little new information is learned about Arwen. She remains an idealized beauty, "clad in a mantle of silver and blue, fair as the twilight in Elven-home; her dark hair strayed in a sudden wind, and her brows were bound with gems like

stars," that one of the heroes of this tale can fight for (Tolkien, *LOTR* 1058). She is Aragorn's beautiful wife, and essentially nothing else.

Another female character who Tolkien places on a pedestal is Goldberry, the wife of Tom Bombadil. Goldberry has an air of magic around her, similar to Galadriel, but her power is innately tied to the nature around her. This makes sense, as Tolkien credits his idea of her character to be a representation of "the actual seasonal changes in such lands" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 272). The feeling she evokes in those around her is comparable to the feeling the mortal race has when faced with an elf yet oddly different, with Frodo remarking how 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 the delight, but deeper and nearer to mortal heart; marvellous and yet strange" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 123). Here, it is made clear that she is something comparable to, but different from, elves. Her connection to nature is greater, and she even credits herself to be a "daughter of the River," and Tom Bombadil informs Frodo through song that he had found her there sitting in the "rushes" of the river years ago and uses the label "River-daughter" to describe her (Tolkien, *LOTR* 126). This makes her an entirely different creature from all but perhaps Tom Bombadil himself, with no clear label given to what she is besides a daughter of the river.

This has lead some critics, such as Ann McCauley Basso, to assert that she should be considered separate from the "two kinds of women" Tolkien creates in his works; specifically she should escape direct comparison or grouping with "Galadriel, Éowyn, and Arwen" who fall in the category of "noble women with elevated status" (Basso 137). Basso argues that this is because she is meant to be the connection between the "rustic" women of the Shire and the "noble" women found outside of it, stating that Goldberry is the "Eve" to Galadriel's "Mary" (Basso 137). With the Eve and Mary comparison, Basso argues that comparisons between

Goldberry and Tom Bombadil can be made with Eve and Adam before the fall. This comparison is reliant on the biblical story of Adam and Eve, with Basso claiming that they have many similarities to this "couple from Genesis" with the way they act as seemingly pure caretakers for a place of nature (Basso 144). Furthermore, like Adam and Eve, these two are the only ones who live in the forest. Basso also draws comparison between the meal made by Goldberry for the traveling Hobbits to the meal made by Eve for the angel Raphael (Basso 145). While these aspects of Goldberry should be taken into account, it is worth noting the emphasized idealization that occurs with Goldberry as well.

Goldberry is not the Eve remembered in medieval misogyny. She is not shown to fall into the gutter alongside Eve as Bloch, or I, would define it. She does not seem to be a source of sin or a temptation to the travelers to give into their worst desires. Basso only compares Goldberry to the Eve before the fall, failing to argue why Goldberry would have any similarity to the Eve most often seen in medieval misogyny. Instead, her brief appearance in the text is one of a woman who embodies the perfect housewife. Basso even acknowledges this, explaining how Goldberry "on one level… embodies domesticity and hospitality" (Basso 138). Her role in the narrative is to provide food and shelter to the traveling hobbits for a time after Tom Bombadil saves them from a magical tree that attempts to put the Hobbits to sleep and encase them in its bark. Basso even describes her actions as "quite typical of the 1950s homemaker," and with this part of her assessment I agree (Basso 138). Goldberry is not a temptation or danger to the men around her, but instead an excellent hostess.

The first words Tom Bombadil says to his wife when he gets back to her is "here's my pretty lady" which he then follows up by asking her "is the table laden" and then "is that enough for us" and "is the supper ready" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 124). Not only is Goldberry's beauty

emphasized but her role in the house is clearly to prepare supper and set the table. When the Hobbits discuss how Tom Bombadil saved them from the tree with him, Goldberry is notably absent as she had headed upstairs for bed, leaving the men to talk amongst themselves (Tolkien, *LOTR* 125). It is also noted on the next day by Tom that it is "Goldberry's washing day" and that it's also "her autumn cleaning" before once more telling the Hobbits stories and talking with them as she is absent (Tolkien, *LOTR* 129). The only other unique thing Goldberry is remarked to do during this time is to sing "many songs for them" at that evening's dinner (Tolkien, *LOTR* 132). After this, the Hobbits the next morning leave the couple's company and continue on their journey. It is clear here through the few descriptions of Goldberry and her actions that she is simply a housewife to Tom Bombadil, no matter how otherworldly she may seem at first glance. While Tom is off rescuing the Hobbits, she is at home cooking supper. After feeding and cleaning up after the Hobbit's for their brief stay at the couple's house Goldberry never appears again in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Basso not only identifies Goldberry as embodying this role of the homemaker, but she compares her to Tolkien's wife, Edith. Specifically, Basso focuses on how "her husband idealizes her as a great beauty, but on a more practical level she is cook and maid, appropriately retiring before the men begin serious conversation" (139). Tolkien himself largely had this view during the time he wrote this book concerning the role a wife should hold, and so did the Inklings at large as they made a point to exclude women from joining their ranks altogether. In Humphrey Carpenter's biography of Tolkien he describes how Tolkien "perceived that his need of male friendship was not entirely compatible with married life" and that "he thought that a man had a right to certain male pleasures, and should if necessary insist on them" (Carpenter 188). These male pleasures that Tolkien insisted upon were excluding women, in particular his wife, when

the Inklings would spend time with one another. Partridge notes how Carpenter argued in his biography of Tolkien that this exclusion of Edith from "his circle of male friends" resulted in "a substantial part of the difficulties in the relationship" (Partridge 181). This idea that Tolkien values men being able to discuss and spend time only with their male companions could potentially be seen and idealized in Goldberry leaving her husband and the Hobbits to tell stories and talk to one another throughout the Hobbit's stay at the couple's house while she does household chores away from the male company.

While not comparable to Mary in the same way that Galadriel is, Goldberry is still firmly put on the pedestal throughout her brief appearance in the main narrative of *The Lord of the Rings*. She embodies what a perfect wife should be according to medieval misogyny, remaining firmly in the domestic sphere and taking care of all the aspects of cleaning the house and being an attentive host to her guests. She perhaps only falls short of medieval expectations in the fact that she does not have any mentioned children with Tom, but it is possible that this is due to her being whatever undefined immortal being that she is. Besides failing at the role of motherhood, she remains perfect in every other ideal aspect of a wife.

Between Galadriel, Éowyn, Arwen, and Goldberry there are several key characteristics that demonstrate that these four women characters are idealized misogynistic representations that fit within the pedestal analogy of Bloch's definition of medieval misogyny. The extreme and repeated estheticization throughout each of these women's appearances in the text; their lack of ability to be both a woman and a powerful force to reckon with at the same time; their absence from the reader's view as they act; and their reliance or subservience, at least public subservience, to the male characters in their life all highlight how, even while these characters

may be treated with respect and are valued in the story, they are still clearly misogynistic

representations of what a perfect woman, as perceived by a man, should be.

Chapter 2: In the Gutter

The opposite from idealizing a character is demonizing them. In *The Lord of the Rings*, there is only one female character consistently relegated to the gutter: Shelob. There are other female characters whose actions are criticized, like Éowyn and Lobelia. However, only Shelob is consistently regarded with fear and disgust. The way in which she is made out to be a monster is based specifically on her gender. By having Shelob support the stereotype that a woman is more likely to give into physical temptations, and simultaneously having her break the stereotypes of the proper way a woman should appear and behave, Shelob's monstrosity is dependent on her identity as a female monster.

Shelob is a giant spider that lurks in Mordor. She enters the narrative when she attacks Sam and Frodo as they travel through Mordor so they can destroy the ring at Mount Doom where it was forged. She is said to be "an evil thing in spider form" who "only desired death for all others, mind and body, and for herself a glut of life" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 723). Although she is not explicitly working for Sauron, she exists in a mutually beneficial relationship with him. He lets her live and watch over a part of his land as she was "a more sure watch upon that ancient path into his land than any other that his skill could have devised," while she is able to feed on his orcs and prisoners as "his cat" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 724). And yet, she is defeated by only a hobbit, and not even by Frodo who has access to the ring but by regular Sam Gamgee. He manages this feat using a gift given to him by Galadriel, the Phial of Galadriel, that, when he invokes her name, shines with a bright light that is a "dreadful infection" which maims the spider and allows Sam to chase her off (Tolkien, *LOTR* 730). In one short interaction, the female monster, who was said to be the most sure watch Sauron could have, is defeated by a male hero with no combat training.

Furthermore, Shelob is a descendant of a Maia, a sort of primordial spirit that holds great power. Specifically, she is extended from Ungoliant, a female Maia. Examples of Maiar[2] in the text include Gandalf and Sauron. Descendants of Maia such as Lúthien, a female elf mentioned in a song in *The Lord of the Rings* and whose descendants include Galadriel and Arwen, also typically have great power. However, Shelob is the only direct descendant of a Maia who directly appears in the story. If we examine Lúthien's tale in *The Silmarillion* and her actions as told in legend, it is clear that she was viewed as more intelligent, beautiful, and respected than other elves of her time. In sharp contrast, Shelob lacks the intelligence you would expect when examining Maia or their descendants. She is instead portrayed as a creature ruled entirely by her desire to eat and kill.

Fredrick and McBride propose that this lack of intelligence in the female Shelob is significant. Comparing Shelob directly to the other individual in *The Lord of the Rings* with Maia blood that lives in Mordor, Sauron, it is clear that where Sauron can "retain rational thought, and therefore can plot, scheme, and lay plans to overthrow the good" while Shelob can not (Fredrick and McBride 34). Instead Shelob is "wholly preoccupied with their own lusts; they operate on pure pleasure principle" (Fredrick and McBride 34). This is the very thing that allows Sam to defeat her, as "her defeat by Sam stems from her preoccupation with her own pleasure, which causes her to lose track of her surroundings" (Fredrick and McBride 34). And this pleasure that becomes her downfall is a pattern among giant spiders with Maia blood in Tolkien's history of Middle Earth. Ungoliant, another giant female spider who was the source of Maia inheritance that eventually created Shelob, similarly acts on her desires without giving them any deeper thought. In fact, Ungoliant is so consumed by her search for instant pleasure that the "*Silmarillion* hints that she may have ultimately been consumed by her own desire and devoured

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[2] Maiar is the plural form of Maia.

herself" (Fredrick and McBride 33). Meanwhile, the male Maiar Melkor is more like Sauron

with a noted cunning intelligence. McBride and Fredrick argue that this characteristic of Shelob

and Ungoliant is due to them being female.

> Ungoliant's and Shelob's irrationality necessitate their female gender. Their self
>
> preoccupation, internalization of their surroundings, and inability to rationalize and build
>
> a network of supporters mark them as feminine. In contrast, Melkor's and Sauron's
>
> abilities to think analytically through the long term qualifies them as male. In other
>
> words, making these characters male or female was not simply a choice on the part of
>
> Tolkien; he was compelled to give each one his or her corresponding gender to coincide
>
> with the qualities he desired each to possess. (Fredrick and McBride 34)

The examination here of these male and female characters clearly show that in at least the case

for the female antagonists in Tolkien's works their irrationality is their key characteristic and

their fatal flaw.

To a lesser extent, this irrationality can be seen in another female antagonistic character

who plays a much more minor role than Shelob: Lobelia Sacksville-Baggins. Lobelia is a distant

relative of Frodo and Bilbo. One who above all else wants to inherit Bag End, the hobbit hole

that Bilbo and later Frodo lived in. She is described to be irrationally jealous and rude towards

both Frodo and Bilbo. It is referenced that Lobelia had "acquired a good many" of Bilbo's silver

spoons through stealing them, and her manner in trying to get more than her fair share out of the

inheritance is deemed by Frodo to be "offensive" due to the "bad bargain-prices" that Lobelia

and her husband offered him (Tolkien, *LOTR* 37-38). Lobelia even has to be "escorted firmly off

the premises" when Frodo sees her searching the house for hidden treasure later that evening

(Tolkien, *LOTR* 39). Seeing that her goal is to inherit the place, it does not make sense for her character to be so antagonistic towards the two hobbits in control of that decision.

The other antagonists, both minor and major, who are male characters don't seem to lack this intelligence or situational awareness in quite the same way that these two female antagonists do. Otho, Lobelia's husband and certainly a hobbit who is not fond of Bilbo, is never overtly rude in the same manner that she is. He is not with her when she attempts to steal from Frodo, and he is also absent from the reference that she had already stolen from Bilbo in the past. Sauron, the neighbor to Shelob, surrounds himself with armies of subordinates and created the rings of power himself in such a manner that he tricked those who received them among the human kings to become nothing more than shades, servants that serve only him. Other male antagonists in the story such as Saruman and Grima Wormtongue are also characterized by their intelligence and cunning. Even Gollum, a hobbit whose mind has been broken by bearing the one ring for centuries to the extent that all he can concentrate on is finding it and taking it for himself once more, is still cunning enough in his tricks and attempts to get the ring back from Frodo. In fact, he is the one to lure Frodo and Sam to Shelob so that she may do his dirty work for him. This distinct lack of intelligence only found in the female antagonists indicates that, whether intentional or unintentional, medieval misogyny can be found in these two female characters.

Is it wrong to argue that Shelob should be intelligent at all, though? She is, above all else, just a giant spider. When Frodo looks into the eyes of Shelob, he describes them as "bestial and yet filled with purpose and with hideous delight" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 720). Is this the purpose of an animal, like perhaps a cat, as the text calls her, to simply hunt their prey, or is it something deeper? The audience is informed at one point in the narration that "little she knew of or cared for towers, or rings, or anything devised by mind or hand" and that this is because she simply

"only desired death for all others, mind and body, and for herself a glut of life" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 723). This reinforces the idea that Shelob is ignorant of the greater events going on around her, a mere passive agent that only cares about her next meal and not whether or not that meal was manipulated into coming into her lair for some higher purpose. However, one of her "lesser broods," giant spiders that lurk throughout the world stalking and eating travelers, does appear in *The Hobbit* (Tolkien, *LOTR* 723). These male spiders are portrayed as being clearly more than simple animals.

On one part of their adventure Bilbo and the dwarves stumbled across a nest of giant spiders that manage to ambush the group while they are sleeping and capture all of the dwarves. All alone and with nothing but his sword and the ring he has just found, Bilbo resorts to using the ring to perform his own ambush on the spiders. However, when he puts on the ring he is then able to hear the spiders talk to one another. And it is not just one or two scattered words that they say, but complete sentences that build on one another to form a coherent conversation.

"It was a sharp struggle, but worth it," said one. "What nasty thick skins they have to be sure, but I'll wager there is good juice inside."

"Aye, they'll make fine eating, when they've hung a bit," said another.

"Don't hang 'em too long," said a third. "They're not as fat as they might be. Been feeding none too well of late, I should guess."

"Kill 'em, I say," hissed a fourth; kill em' now and hang em' dead for awhile."

"They're dead now, I'll warrant," said the first.

"That they are not. I saw one a-struggling just now. Just coming round again, I should say, after a bee-autiful sleep. I'll show you." (Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 145)

If her descendants, who are said by the narrative to be in particular lesser to her, are capable of speech, debating amongst themselves, and expressing preferences they have, then there is no reason to label Shelob as some mindless creature only acting on animal instinct. Instead, it is more correct to say that Frodo and Sam simply did not put on the ring during their fight with her, and so were not capable of understanding or hearing what Shelob may have been saying. We must assume that giant spiders in *The Lord of the Rings* have at least a similar intelligence to the other races of creatures in this series if they can hold conversations and are strategically capable of plotting out how to best obtain their next meal. So, why then is Shelob portrayed as somehow lesser than her fellow male antagonists?

The lack of intelligence and foresight on Shelob's part may be an intentional move by Tolkien to further align her with Eve. The medieval focus on the Yahwist creation story where woman was created from man, according to Bloch, credited "woman" with being a "limit case of man" who "remains bound by the material, by flesh and lust" (Bloch 27). With the creation of Eve from Adam, "the phylogenetic argument concerning her subservient status" rests on "an ontological claim for the superiority of the mind over body, and this claim is analogous to the superiority of man over woman" (Bloch 29). In other words, medieval society based their belief that a woman, like Eve, was more likely to fall for mortal temptations and could not control herself in the way that a "rational" man could on the biblical creation story that cements the fact that man is made in the image of God while women are simply a replica of a part of man (Bloch 29). This emphasis on the rational nature of man, and the tendency of a woman to fall for the temptations of the flesh more easily, match the differences I have already noted between the monstrous Shelob whose only goals are to satisfy her short term desire to eat and her fellow male

antagonists like Sauron and Saruman who each generate and execute plans to amass multiple long term goals.

Shelob's lack of intelligence could also be due to the fact that according to feminist literary theory a female monster does not need to be intelligent, they just need to be active. Gubar, in her study of the female monster in Augustan Satire, proposes that "throughout male literary history, gorgons, sirens, mothers of death, and goddesses of night represent women who reject passivity and silence" (Gubar 393). An active woman, like Shelob, forces the reader to look at her and acknowledge her as a force of power. Compared to Galadriel's hidden actions done out of view of any of the male narrators, Arwen's near complete absence from the main narrative of the text, Goldberry's tendency to disappear from the view of the male hobbits except at meal times or when performing other wifely duties, and the way the text frames Éowyn's act as a symptom of a disease that must be corrected with marrying her off and ensuring she will never be a warrior again, Shelob's unflinching dedication to hunting and eating ensures that she rejects passivity when she is on the page. And for a woman to do so, Gubar argues, is an act that strikes anxiety in the male writer and makes this woman an effective monster for him to employ in his story. As such, all Tolkien had to do to make Shelob a successful source of frightening anxiety in his story was to have her reject passivity through her actions of trying to kill Frodo and Sam before they could complete their quest to destroy the ring. To do so, she doesn't need intelligence. Just the ability to take action.

Shelob's body is also specifically meant to be unnerving because it is a female body which does not make an effort to appear appealing to the male gaze. Gubar further argues that "the female monster surely sustains the alienation so many women feel from our bodies, ourselves," that "the pruning and preening, the mirror madness, the concern with odors and

aging, with hair too curly or too lank, with bodies too thin or thick: all these motifs in women's lives and literature imply our dread of being identified as female monsters" (Gubar 393). Sam describes Shelob as having a "short stalk-like neck" and a "swollen body, a vast bloated bag, swaying and sagging between her legs; its great bulk was black, blotched with livid marks, but the belly underneath was pale and luminous and gave forth a stench" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 725). This paired with her "great knobbed joints," "hairs that stuck out like steel spines," and "soft squelching body" paints a picture of a disgusting monster (Tolkien, *LOTR* 725). Or as Sam describes it "the most loathy shape that he had ever beheld, horrible beyond the horror of an evil dream" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 725). Why does a horrific description like this matter for a giant spider, though? Well, when examining how Shelob's male offspring are described there is a distinct difference in the approach taken. Bilbo in *The Hobbit* first gives the term "great spider" as a description, along with "giant spider" and the observation that it had "hairy legs" (Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 143-144). The spider's voices are described by him to be "think creaking and hissing" and he notes their "fat bodies" (Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 145-152). It is clear that the level of detail given to these descendants of Shelob is in no way comparable to the disgusting and revolting description given to Shelob herself. She lacks the detailed beauty given to every other female character. This noted lack of beauty in Shelob's female body is meant to be uniquely horrifying to the audience.

The aspects of Shelob that define her, her lack of rational intelligence in comparison to male antagonists, her active and confrontational nature, and her monstrous body, all come from misogynistic concepts regarding what role a woman should hold and her subservient nature to man. The fact that Tolkien leans on these concepts in order to make Shelob horrifying, and

doesn't resort to these concepts with any of the male antagonists, demonstrates that Shelob is

representative of medieval misogynistic representations of the demonized, or Eve-like, woman.

Chapter 3: The Narrative Absence of the Entwives

Perhaps the most interesting society in *The Lord of the Rings* is the Ents, an all-male group of sentient trees who reside in Fangorn forest. However, what makes this society interesting is that it is the source for the one group of female characters entirely independent from any male authority: the Entwives. However, the Entwives have long since vanished from their lands and the Ents can no longer find them. Due to this the Ents are slowly going extinct, one by one entering a deep slumber that results in them no longer being able to move or speak with the other Ents. This slow-moving society is reluctant to take action, instead preferring to simply enjoy their existence in nature. However, with the encouragement of Pippin and Merry paired with the slow but steady destruction of their forest by Saruman, the Ents, led by one of the oldest remaining Ents, Treebeard, march on Saruman's tower and trap him inside of it until Gandalf can come to confront him. Treebeard's view of the Entwives is a narrow and clearly biased one, and yet the Entwives' absence creates an intriguing narrative gap that allows the reader to attempt to reclaim these female characters.

In all of Tolkien's published works that take place in Middle Earth the Entwives are never shown. However, their story is told to us by Treebeard, who describes the Entwives to Pippin and Merry and explains how they vanished. The Ents in all of their long searches have never been able to find them, and Tolkien in one of his letters reveals that this is because "I think that in fact the Entwives had disappeared for good, being destroyed with their gardens in the War of the Last Alliance (Second Age 3429-3441) when Sauron pursued a scorched earth policy and burned their land" (Tolkien, *Letters* 179). Tolkien also describes how it is possible the Entwives could have "fled east, or even have become enslaved: tyrants even in such tales must have an economic and agricultural background to their soldiers and metal-workers" (Tolkien, *Letters* 179). Through

these descriptions it is evident that Tolkien did not imagine the Entwives had a happy fate.

However, through Treebeards' tales about the Entwives before they disappeared we get a glance

at an interesting group of female characters who were entirely independent from the males of

their species. There are no other examples of a group of women, or even individual women, in

The Lord of the Rings who are entirely independent from the men of their race or society, which

makes this specific aspect of the Entwives entirely unique to them.

The description that Treebeard gives to the hobbits on the Ents and the Entwives show

the two groups thought of and approached the world in completely different ways from one

another:

> But our hearts did not go on growing in the same way: the Ents gave their love to things
>
> they met in the world, and the Entwives gave their thought to other things, for the Ents
>
> loved the great trees, and the wild woods, and the slopes of 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 feet of the forests; and they saw
>
> the sloe in the thicket, and the wild apple and the cherry blossoming in the spring, and the
>
> green herbs in the waterlands in the summer, and the seeding grasses in the autumn fields.
>
> (Tolkien, *LOTR* 475-476)

These descriptions by Treebeard illustrate how the Ents and Entwives differed in what they

valued in nature with no exception for individuals, at least none indicated by Treebeard. The

Entwives "did not desire to speak with these things; but they wished them to hear and obey what

was said to them" while the Ents simply wanted to appreciate nature as it existed naturally

(Tolkien, *LOTR* 476). The Entwives are characterized as controlling, as Treebeard explains how

they "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)" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 476). The tone in this moment also indicates

that Treebeard looks down on this controlling nature, that he sees from a flawed perspective

based on the Entwive's own self-interest and not on a sense of true peace or order. Treebeard also

describes how the living arrangements differed between the Ents and the Entwives, with the

Entwives having "made gardens to live in" while the "Ents went on wandering, and we only

came to the gardens now and again" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 476). This difference in views between the

two genders seems total, there is not a single exception made by Treebeard, the Elven songs

about the Ents search, or even Tolkien himself. Tolkien's intentional differences between the

Ents and the Entwives was meant to depict "the difference of the 'male' and 'female' attitude to

wild things, the difference between unpossessive love and gardening" (Tolkien, *Letters* 212).

This clear division along gender lines that Tolkien intended is visible as Treebeard describes the

two groups valuing completely different things: the Entwives wanting to control the plants while

the Ents simply wanting to observe.

An important detail to note is that while the Ents remained in the forests for the most part,

and conversed with the elves, the Entwives interacted with "Men" who "learned the crafts of the

Entwives and honored them greatly" while the Ents "were only a legend to them" (Tolkien,

LOTR 476). Tolkien, in a letter to Naomi Mitchison, even recognizes that the Entwives "survived

only in the 'agriculture' transmitted to Men (and to Hobbits)" (Tolkien, *Letters* 179). Not only

were the female Entwives living entirely independent lives from the male Ents, but they were

also the source of significant agricultural knowledge and skills that they passed down to other

races. However, like Galadriel, these Entwives can only be powerful and influential outside of

the sight of any of our male protagonists. The Entwives can't tell their own story, only a male

Ent can.

There is little scholarly focus on the Ents and the Entwives, and I have yet to find a

source that specifically examines why Tolkien chose to personify these trees in how they behave

and interact with their surroundings along strict gender lines. In general, scholars seem to

examine the Ents and Entwives through an environmental lens or through a historical one:

examining the possible mythical inspirations behind the creation of the Ents. Jane Chance in her

book *Lord of the Rings: The Mythology of Power* only briefly touches on the differences between

the portrayal of the male Ents and the female Entwives. She believes that "these Ents incarnate

the idea of growth that stultifies because its intelligence cannot tolerate female difference"

(Chance 61). Specifically, studying the power dynamics in Ent society, she concludes "power, so

Tolkien insists, must be shared with those individuals who are different, in gender, nature,

history, and temperament" (Chance 62). This argument that Tolkien was trying to show the

reader that individuals of both genders must hold power becomes muddled when considering the

consequence Tolkien gives the Entwives for seizing their own power and creating the society

they wanted: death or enslavement.

Another element in the study of the Ents and the Entwives is the song that elves created

based on the Ents search for the Entwives. The song is structured on an Ent speaker debating

with an Entwife speaker on whose way of life is better. The Ent starts, describing his everyday

existence and finishing his portions with the demand to "come back to me, and say my land is

fair" or that the Entwife should "say my land is best" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 477). The Entwife's

portions of the song come after each Ent portion, and shows her reply that she "will not come" to

the Ent because she loves her land and believes that it is "because my land is fair" and "because

my land is best" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 477). Olsen points out here in the Elvish song that while Tolkien may have initially followed gender stereotypes based off of Treebeard's description of the conflict, where "he associates with the female the desire to domesticate and with the male a less intrusive appreciation," that the descriptions of the Entwives in the song instead depict how "the Entish and Entwifely perspectives runs exactly counter to the traditional gender concepts that characterize the feminine as the passive principle and the masculine as the active" (Olsen 42). This conclusion that Olsen reaches is due to the Entwife using more active verbs to describe her actions, while the Ents stick to passive verbs and phrases. This interesting contradiction that Tolkien creates with by associating domesticity and action with the Entwives and the Ents with passivity and the wilderness shows that traditional gender roles are blurred here.

Furthermore, in contradiction to Treebeard's almost smug statement that "yet here we are, while all the gardens of the Entwives are wasted," this Elvish singer neither sides with the Ents or with the Entwives as to what way of life was better (Tolkien, *LOTR* 476). While Treebeard's bias towards the Ents is obvious, with him even remarking that while the song is "fair enough" that "the Ents could say more on their side," this third party singer who wrote the song represents the two groups as equals (Tolkien, *LOTR* 478). While we primarily get Treebeard's recounting of the Entwives and their disappearance, with the song sandwiched in between Treebeard's opinions on it, this song does provide a less biased view of the Entwives. How then did Tolkien want the Entwives and the Ents to achieve based off of his vision to see them as commentary on how men and women approach nature?

The words used to describe the Entwives' tendency to control nature tend to be more negative. They are described as controlling, with emphasis placed on the fact that "they did not desire to speak with these things; but they wished them to hear and obey what was said to them"

(Tolkien, *LOTR* 476). This makes the Entwives sound not only controlling, but also stubborn and demanding that things be done just how they want it. This is further reinforced when Treebeard says "by which they meant that things should remain where they had set them" in response to his statement that the Entwives desired order (Tolkien, *LOTR* 476). Furthermore, while we do get to meet several individual Ents, the Entwives largely remain a category with only one mention of an individual by Treebeard: Fimbrethil. However, Fimbrethil is not characterized to us as an individual, Treebeard treats her as a sort of representative example of what an Entwife was. We learn nothing about who Fimbrethil was but rather that she was an Entwife, and that the last time Treeveard saw her her appearance had differed from his own. In both Treebeard's narrative and Elvish song, this treatment of the female Entwives is as a group or category. The reader is provided with several examples of Ents choosing slightly different paths in life. For example, Treebeard decides to take direct action against Saruman while Skinbark chose to retreat into the mountains to escape the orcs, or Leaflock who had become "sleepy, almost tree-ish" and remained entirely out of the conflict with Saruman (Tolkien, *LOTR* 474). Surely Entwives must have acted differently from one another? However, their absence from the story robs us of the opportunity to accept this as fact. History, which the Ents and the Elves control, treat the Entwives as one group, following the tendency in medieval misogyny for women to be reduced to a category rather than individuals.

However, unlike what one can see in the female characters discussed in the two previous chapters, the Entwives are not aestheticized in the same way. Is this due to simply using human beauty standards? Does Treebeard, a male Ent, approach describing the female Entwives in a manner characteristic of aestheticization? There is not a lot of evidence to support this, as Treebeard seems more focused on what differed between the Ent and Entwife outlook on life

rather than their physical attributes.Treebeard does however note that there was a physical change in their appearance once they started to work. Treebeard states that "very fair she was still in my eyes, when I had last seen her, though little like the Entmaiden of old" as Fimbrethil and the other "Entwives were bent and browned by their labor; their hair parched by the sun to the hue of ripe corn and their cheeks red like apples" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 476). This distinct change in their physical appearance is evidently, at least to Treebeard, a consequence of the Entwives choosing to work and labor instead of simply enjoying life. And while Treebeard does not himself focus on whether or not this is a negative or positive change, he does note that it happens.

This noted consequence to the physical appearance of the Entwives after they started working the land paired with Tolkien's consequence of death or enslavement for the Entwives seems to indicate that there are natural consequences for women who go off on their own, even if said women are tree-people. While neither clearly idolized or demonized in the text, the Entwives seem to be a cautionary tale of what happens to women who strive for independence. However, unlike the other female characters who are clearly categorized according to Howard Bloch's theory of medieval misogyny, the Entwives hold a silent narrative power in their absence. To an extent, they are similar to Galadriel in that they can perform traditionally masculine acts of power but only where the reader does not see them. Unlike Galadriel though, we can use this absence to create a different narrative for the Entwives. The reader is given several clues to their fate after their disappearance. The Ents in their search find that the fields where the Entwives once lived are destroyed and on fire, hinting that the Entwives may be similarly destroyed. This is the fate that Tolkien ascribes to them: slavery or complete destruction. However, this decree by the author is not in the text, and is only later mentioned in

one of his letters on the topic. For most readers, this ultimate conclusion to the Entwives is not common knowledge. Instead, the readers also get to consider the evidence that humans living near the Entwives settlement saw the Entwives, or at least members of the group, leaving after the destruction. Specifically, "some said that they had seen them walking away west, and some said east, and others south" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 476). This other side of the evidence allows the reader to look beyond the ascribed fate of the Entwives– to be killed for daring to live away from men in order to create better lives for themselves–and instead allows us to imagine that they are still out there living self-sufficiently.

The narrative space created by the lack of a definitive fate for the Entwives allows the Entwives to escape the fate the author intended for them. In the next chapter, I will continue to point out ways these misogynistically represented female characters in *The Lord of the Rings* can be reclaimed by readers. In the instance of the Entwives, they simply managed to escape their author's intentions through the fact that their exact fate is left for the reader to contemplate, leaving readers to reach the just as likely conclusion that the Entwives simply left after their fields and orchards were destroyed to live in a more peaceful area.

An interesting aspect of Treebeard's perception of the Entwives is how his last words to the Hobbits Merry and Pippin entreats them to keep an eye out for the Entwives and to inform Treebeard if they ever show up again. Treebeard specifically implores them that "if you hear news up in your pleasant land, in the Shire, send me word" and then specifies that he means "word or sight of the Entwives" and then asks them to "come yourselves if you can" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 586). As the Ents remain at Saruman's tower to keep him trapped, they still hope for the Entwives to be out there. This longing to be one day reunited with the women who differ so drastically from them speaks to a longing of the Ents to be reunited with the Entwives, to one

day be able to understand them well enough that the two can live alongside one another as equals.

Chapter 4: Reclaiming Female Characters

"To engage with Tolkien's women, it seems, their narrative must be substantially rewritten." (Viars and Coker 39)

With a series as old and well known as *The Lord of the Rings*, there has been a multitude of attempts to reimagine Tolkien's characters and world over the years. The three main ways that readers can attempt to reclaim female characters that I will discuss in this chapter are through reading against the author for instances where his female characters may escape his intentions, looking to the films instead of the books as the new canon for the female characters, or letting the modern-day audience take the characters into their own hands and create fanworks based on Tolkien's female characters. Each of these ways of reclaiming, or inventing, a female character from the otherwise primarily misogynistic representation of women in Tolkien's works have their own strengths and weaknesses. Yet, these three different approaches all offer the same thing in the end: a way for the modern day female audience to see someone like themselves existing and thriving in Tolkien's world.

Women in Action

Historically women as individuals have been actively removed from history, in particular medieval English history. One way to treat Tolkien's works is how historical works are treated: reading in between the lines of the usually biased narrator in an attempt to unearth the actual details of what happened. Paul Strohm, in regards to the Peasants Revolt of 1381, explains how "a narrator who wishes to discredit a group of actors must first, in however grudging or distorted a fashion, represent their actions or words" (Strohm 33-34). Once their actions and words have been recorded, they are open to their own independent interpretation. Thus, this inclusion of the group's actions creates an "inadvertent area of implication in which a coherent and admirable

motivation may be discerned" (Strohm 33-34). For example, Treebeard tells the reader the

Entwives actions and way of life. Even though Treebeard is obviously biased towards the Ent's

way of life, by briefly recounting the Entwive's lives he leaves them open to the modern-day

reader's interpretations who in one reading can view these women as an independent,

resourceful, and resilient group.

Similarly, Éowyn's actions are seen, and recounted to the reader, by Merry. While

Éowyn's ultimate fate is to be resigned to the role of a woman on the pedestal, she is an example

of how a woman in medieval English literature could attempt to escape misogyny: by being

observed to take action. Medieval misogyny was so effective by removing women from action

and restricting them from the public sphere to the private and domestic sphere. In doing so, she

loses her individuality and instead is largely left to be nothing but part of a conceptualized figure,

an idea, in history and literature from this time period. An example of this from *The Lord of the*

Rings is Galadriel, a powerful woman who only can use her power off screen where the readers

don't witness it and who remains subservient to her husband in public. Thus, to escape this fate,

the easiest route to being viewed as an individual would be seen by others to take action, to do

something.

While Éowyn appears to be a man as she fights the Nazgûl, at one point her helmet does

fall off. She is identified as being a woman by Merry in this moment, and while the male

viewpoint of Merry here treats the sight of a woman in battle with pity, it is still the only moment

within *The Lord of the Rings* where a woman is identified as being simultaneously a warrior and

a woman. Specifically, we are given a description of Éowyn when she takes on her feminine

traits once more that indicates this recognition as being a woman in the field of action by Merry:

Then Merry heard of all sounds in that hour the strangest. It seemed that Dernhelm

laughed, and the clear voice was like the ring of steel. 'But no living man am I! You look

upon a woman. Éowyn I am, Éomund's daughter. You stand between me and my lord and

kin. Begone, if you be not deathless! For living or dark undead, I will smite you, if you

touch him.' … A little to the left facing them stood she whom he called Dernhelm. But

the helm of her secrecy had fallen from her, and her bright hair, released from its bonds,

gleamed with pale gold upon her shoulders. Her eyes grey as the sea were hard and fell,

and yet tears were on her cheek. A sword was in her hand, and she raised her shield

against the horror of her enemy's eyes. (Tolkien, *LOTR* 841)

In this moment it is clear that not only is Éowyn forcing her enemy, the Nazgûl, to see her as

both a female and a warrior but she is also forcing her male allies who were content to leave her

behind to do the same. The Nazgûl, when faced with Éowyn, could make "no answer" to her

bold challenge, instead remaining "silent, as if in sudden doubt" that it would win this fight

(Tolkien, *LOTR* 841). Having closed his eyes in fear at the great creature before him, Merry now

found the strength to continue fighting as "amazement for a moment conquered Merry's fear"

and the "slow-kindled courage of his race awoke" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 841). Even with her ultimate

fate to be "healing" as she marries and becomes a healer rather than a warrior, in this moment

Éowyn is seen in action, and her being in action holds a palpable power in the text (Tolkien,

LOTR 965). She is both a woman in this moment and an active and effective warrior who steps

up and did what no one else here seemed capable of.

The evidence of a single female character cross-dressing in order to join the men and

fight against the forces of Sauron, allows the modern-day reader to imagine the possibility that

other women could have done the same. Éowyn could have successfully hidden her gender. It is

only her choosing to reveal who she is that makes those with her realize she is a woman. Similar to the narrative gap that Tolkien creates with not confirming in text the fate of the Entwives, this example of a woman in battle leaves a narrative space where the readers can imagine that Éowyn is not an outlier, and there are other women like her in this very battle risking their lives and honor to attempt to make a difference. While the way the text treats her after this is clearly misogynistic as it forces Éowyn to go back to the domestic sphere, the existence of this narrative gap allows the reader to imagine that there are other women warriors out there not sequestered to the same fate. In this way, Éowyn ultimately escapes her author's intentions for her.

Reimagining Female Roles in the Films

In *The Lord of the Rings* movies, Peter Jackson greatly expanded the roles several key female characters held. Some minor changes were made with Galadriel, who in the films is more directly involved in aiding the Fellowship of the Ring as she "summons Elvish auxiliaries to the aid of Rohan in The Two Towers" (Viars and Coker 39). Arwen is the female character subjected to the most changes when she was adapted for the big screen. It is "Arwen, rather than the Elvish warrior Glorfindel, who rescues Frodo from the Ringwraiths in Fellowship of the Ring" and who in "initial drafts of the scripts also placed Arwen with the auxiliary Elvish forces at the Battle of Helm's Deep, before fan outcry necessitated her return offstage" (Viars and Coker 39). Furthermore, Arwen's role as Aragorn's love interest is more fleshed out in the films with the appendix story "The Tale of Arwen and Aragorn" being a source for "flashback scenes" of the two's ongoing romance that take place in the second and third films (Viars and Coker 39). The movies gave Arwen a voice, and the chance to be a fully fledged character instead of only being a set piece whose role was to inspire Aragorn to continue to fight. She goes from a passive force to one in the action whose choices, like Éowyn's, makes a difference to the success or failure of

the Fellowship. Similarly, Galadriel is also seen in action in the films, when she is seen to be ordering troops to help in the Battle of Helm's Deep.

However, the films did not give all of Tolkien's female character's the reworking that they needed. Goldberry is entirely removed from the story, and Rosie Cotton remains "the idealized 'girl back home,'" only appearing at the beginning of the film series and the end (Viars and Coker 39). The Entwives only make the Director's Cut version of *The Two Towers*, and even then it's only a reference to them. Treebeard sings a part of the Elvish song in the book that was written about the Ent's search for the Entwives, specifically singing "come back to me, and say my land is best" (Jackson, *Two Towers* 59:56). This is a significant reduction of the Entwive's already brief presence in *The Lord of the Rings*, as their names are not even specifically mentioned in any version of the films. The removal of the Entwives and of Goldberry removes the narrative gaps as well that these women create that would allow the audience to imagine alternative fates, or abilities, for these female characters.

Éowyn, however, has her role expanded in the films significantly. She is seen by Aragorn in *The Two Towers* to be practicing with a sword, with him even telling her "you have some skill with the blade" (Jackson, *Two Towers* 1:34:54). To which she replies "women in this country learned long ago. Those without swords can still die upon them" (Jackson, *Two Towers* 1:35:07). And when asked what she fears, she turns and looks him in the eye saying "a cage" (Jackson, *Two Towers* 1:35:23). Aragorn reminds her that she is the daughter of a king, and says "I do not think that will be your fate" in response to her admitted fear before leaving (Jackson, *Two Towers* 1:35:55). In another scene, Éowyn brings Aragorn some stew she made, which Aragorn comically finds disgusting but pretends not to, and the two discuss how being a descendant of Numenor has granted him a longer than average life (Jackson, *Two Towers* 1:49:45). Later, there

is a scene where her father charges her to lead their people to Helm's Deep saying "you must do this, for me" (Jackson, *Two Towers* 1:56:31). We then see her leading them into the safety of Helm's Deep, with one woman even thanking her (Jackson, *Two Towers* 2:02:05). Éowyn then welcomes her father back, who sees her distress, as her eyes well with tears, at the small number of men who return and the fact that Aragorn "fell" according to Gimli (Jackson, *Two Towers* 2:03:50). After he returns, when the women and children are meant to be sent to the caves of Helm's Deep to be kept safe, she approaches him enraged that she too has been ordered to be sent away with the other women before eventually storming off (Jackson, *Two Towers* 2:38:30). This additional scene with Éowyn allows the audience to once again see her desire to fight for her people in their time of need.

In the film version of *The Return of the King* Éowyn also has an expanded role. She gets Merry ready for battle, and defends him when her father and brother say she should not encourage him to fight, saying "he has as much cause to go to war as you" (Jackson, *ROTK* 1:18:08). In the film, Éowyn also confronts Aragorn when he leaves the night before the battle, to which Aragorn is shown to leave her crying as he turns away from the idea of being in love with her saying "I cannot give you what you seek" (Jackson, *ROTK* 1:23:24). In the movies she stands firm as she confesses her feelings to Aragorn. However, in the books, she falls to her knees and begs him to let her come with him on his quest saying, "I beg thee" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 785). The stark difference in the way her one-sided love for Aragorn is handled shows that the film Éowyn would not kneel and beg for him to accept her love, instead she stays standing and while visibly upset seems to accept that her feelings are not mutual. This lack of begging in this scene shows that Éowyn in the films refuses to act as anything but a potential equal to Aragorn.

Her father, similar to the book, planned to leave her behind as they rode out to battle. However, in the films he says "take up my seat in the golden hall" and declares that she will lead their people now if the battle goes poorly (Jackson, *ROTK* 1:25:55). In the books, this conversation is learned by Merry to have occurred already, and not directly seen by the audience, as he is informed by the King that "you shall abide here, and if your will, serve the Lady Éowyn, who will govern the folk in my stead" (Tolkien, *LOTR* 801). The significance of this minor difference between the film and the book versions is that Éowyn is shown to the audience to be put in charge and given an authoritative role in the films, while in the books it is only referred to. In the film she's an active participant in the conversation, while in the books this scene is simply absent. Thus, this scene expands her role in the films as the audience sees how exactly that conversation went and further reinforces the fact that Éowyn clearly has the desire to help defend her people, not guide them in her father's stead.

Furthermore, when the host of riders go out, and the King stops Merry from joining them, she rides over and pulls him onto her own horse saying "ride with me," to which Merry replies with a look of excitement "my lady" (Jackson, *ROTK* 1:29:52). It is clear here that Merry recognizes Éowyn for who she is in this moment, and through his complicit silence to the others, does not try to stop her from going to war. In the books however, he states that "I do not know your name" to the disguised Éowyn when she offers to let him ride with her, even using the pronoun "he" in regards to the disguised Éowyn, and is given the name "Dernhelm" to call her (Tolkien, *LOTR* 804). This, when taken into consideration the shock and pity Merry feels in the books regarding Éowyn fighting, is a significant difference in how her character's choice to fight is handled in the film.

Her role in the actual battle is also expanded upon. Standing on the front lines of the battle with Merry, the audience can see how Éowyn is visibly afraid as she waits to charge into the battle (Jackson, *ROTK* 2:02:10). She even tells Merry, "whatever happens, stay with me. I'll look after you" (Jackson, *ROTK* 2:02:23). She is human at this moment, frightened at the probable death facing her and Merry but resolute in her choice now that she is faced with the realities of it. At different parts of the fight the focus is brought back to this pair as they make their way through the battlefield. In particular, during the Oliphaunts charge, Éowyn has Merry steer the horse so she can wield two blades to swing at the feet of the towering beasts (Jackson, *ROTK* 2:10:15). However, Éowyn's speech when she confronts the Nazgûl in the films is greatly reduced. First, she calls out to the Nazgûl and announces herself, saying "I will kill you if you touch him" to the creature regarding its desire to allow its beast to eat her injured father (Jackson, *ROTK* 2:13:01). After killing the Nazgûl's flying beast, she only says "I am no man," to the Nazgûl during their fight on the ground before removing her helmet and killing him (Jackson, *ROTK* 2:15:34). Although her speech is almost entirely removed, she is still ultimately the one to kill the Nazgûl and announce herself as a woman and a warrior while doing so. Furthermore, in the films we do gain a scene where her dying father, Theoden, recognizes Éowyn as being the one who saved his life in that moment, even if his injuries are fatal, with his last word being her name (Jackson, *ROTK* 2:19:34). This is perhaps the ultimate recognition Éowyn could receive: the king, her father, recognizing that his daughter was the one who saved him and killed the Nazgûl. He sees her, and thus the audience does, as both his daughter and simultaneously a strong, and victorious, female warrior.

Furthermore, the films remove Tolkien's scenes with Aragorn and the unconscious Éowyn, where he labels her act of going into battle a symptom of a disease that had plagued her

long before she decided to fight. Éowyn is next seen, seemingly recovered now from her fight, standing with Faramir when Aragorn is crowned king (Jackson, *ROTK* 2:58:49). Faramir never announces that she is healed when she agrees to marry him, and Éowyn in the films never declares that she is a healer now and not a warrior. The choice to remove these scenes entirely allow the focus to remain on Éowyn as both a woman and a warrior, with her film version seemingly facing no consequences, or changes in her behavior, due to her choosing to fight as a woman. The expanded moments given to her role in battle, the scenes that were shown which were implied to have happened in the books, modifying scenes from the book slightly to give her character more focus and development, and the removal of the gendered handling of her decision to fight after the fact, allows Éowyn to firmly remain as a strong and active female warrior in the audience's eyes.

In *The Hobbit* films, Peter Jackson and his co-authors Phillipa Boyens and Fran Walsh "created a new female character—the Elf Tauriel" who is a female "warrior caught in a love triangle between Legolas and the Dwarf Kili" (Viars and Coker 39). Her reception by the audience was mixed at best, as "new fans wanted more powerful women while traditional fans were torn because of disobedience to the source text" (Viars and Coker 39). However, "without Tauriel, as well as the inclusion of Galadriel, there would be no women at all in those films," as there are no female characters in *The Hobbit*. The addition of Tauriel, who is also clearly identified as a warrior and a woman at the same time, in my opinion, is much needed for these films even if it is a complete diversion from the source material. After all, *The Hobbit* is framed from the perspective of Bilbo rewriting his own adventures later in his life, and given "the historical treatment of women in records," why should Bilbo remember to write of Tauriel's involvement when she does not directly affect his experience in his adventure (Viars and Coker

40). Limited as her role in the films were, her inclusion in them gave *The Hobbit* films a female character where there was none in the books. This creation of a new female character in the films allows the audience to wonder if Bilbo simply, in his flawed narrative, forgot to mention other women as well, allowing the audience to repopulate their imagined world with women, correcting their complete absence in the book. The creation of an entirely new character independent from the source material also raises the question of "why shouldn't other women writers rescue the narratives of women from Jackson, or from Tolkien?" (Viars and Coker 40). After all, while the films give some of the female characters more complex and fulfilling characterization, it fails to correct the misogynistic representations of others and removes some female characters entirely.

<div align="center">**Reclaiming Female Characters with Fanfiction**</div>

When hoping to give more depth or backstory to the female characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, fanfiction is a route that is worth considering. McCormack argues that "the simplest strategy available to a writer attempting to make up for the lack of women in *The Lord of the Rings* is to create female characters and write stories about them," as "there is no textual evidence against the existence of these women—and since women are so often erased from history or placed in the margins—the fanfiction writer is arguably reinscribing a history that has somehow been lost in translation or transmission" (McCormack 311-312). Fanfiction is not only a way to examine how a fandom is responding to the work of the writer, but perhaps the strongest tool female readers have in reclaiming and reimagining the female characters in *The Lord of the Rings*. Furthermore, within the fandom itself, there has been a lengthy and well documented history of fanworks attempting to give more depth to Tolkien's female characters.

There are even claims out there that Tolkien himself wrote fanfiction, that the "indebtedness of Tolkien's fiction to medieval language and literature" is comparable to that of a writer who engages in writing fanfiction, or that Tolkien's retelling of his own mythology and characters in *The Silmarillion* was comparable to fanfiction (Abrahamson 62). I would not go as far as to say Tolkien wrote fanfiction of medieval literature, as his world and characters seem inspired by medieval literature rather than mimicry of it. There is an important distinction I find between fanfiction and works inspired by other works in that fanfiction utilizes the characters and world already created by an author, and sometimes even the exact narrative arcs. Meanwhile, authors who take inspiration from outside sources create new worlds, languages, histories, and characters instead of borrowing exact copies of concepts. For the rest of this section, I will be defining fanfiction as the fictional works created by fans of a work or series that features the characters or settings from said series.

The history of fanworks attempting to add more depth to Tolkien's story is a long one, with published works evidencing that Tolkien fans were re-imagining his works and world as early as 1959 (Hunnewell 5). The early fanwork was more focused on attempting to complete the then incomplete mythology of *The Lord of the Rings*, with a few poems being written as well. In the following years, a group of science fiction writers would publish the first "fanzine" (fan magazine) called *Nazgûl's Bane* in 1961, that was host to a group of British writers who focused on attempting to answer the scientific questions of Tolkien's world: "the drowning of Beleriand, the creation of the orcs, the evolution of the elves, the chemical composition of hithlain, or the make-up of the morgul-blade was all open to some scientific explanation" (Hunnewell 1). While much of the early fanfiction of Tolkien's works centered around world-building, there was a focus on his female characters as well.

Perhaps the most important contributor to the early fanfiction of the Tolkien fandom was Marion Zimmer Bradley, who published in 1962 "Men, Halflings, and Hero Worship" in Astra's Tower, and also wrote two Tolkien "pastiches," work inspired by the work of another author, and a "crossover story with Aragorn entering her own created world of Darkover" (Hunnewell 1). Bradley even published in 1962 a single issue of her own Tolkien fanzine, that she named *Andúril*. The work "Men, Halflings, and Hero Worship" was a critical look at Éowyn's one-sided love with Aragorn. Bradley argued that Éowyn's love "was a form of hero worship and a desire to be Aragorn (or at least be like Aragorn: noble and wise, a warrior and a healer, an exotic foreigner raised by elves and gifted with preternaturally long life) rather than a true romantic inclination" (Viars and Coker 36). The existence of this work showed that female fans of Tolkien's works were already focused on giving more analysis and depth to the female characters before *The Silmarillion*, the next book Tolkien would publish in *The Lord of the Rings* universe, was even published.

Where the early fandom only had the books, and some interactions with Tolkien through letters, to work from, the contemporary fandom has the films. Viars and Coker explain how "much of the contemporary fandom is directly inspired by the films, but the character of Lothiriel is restricted to the original books, thus again creating hybrid texts with mixed canons" (Viars and Coker 36). This means that the adaptations made to the film that gave female characters like Arwen and Galadriel more on screen time and character development are usually the canon in contemporary fanfiction. Another interesting effect the films had on fanfiction is that the first film led to an increase in OC's, or original characters, that were "women warriors as counterparts, love interests, or replacements for the nine male heroes" (Viars and Coker 40). This

in part could be due to the fact that Éowyn in the films is never resigned to simply being a healer, as well as an indication of a growing desire among Tolkien fans for more characters like her.

The reception of such original characters, much like the reception of the creation of Tauriel in *The Hobbit* films, is mixed. In particular, with the creation of new characters came new ones that were often labeled as Mary Sues. This is a type of character that acts as a "projection," where they are not "simply a substitute for the author, though the character does allow the author to enjoy vicariously adventures in a world which gives her pleasure," but instead she "holds a place open in the story for the author—and presumably for the reader" (Pflieger 1999). Creating a Mary Sue is a way for the reader to create a character within the text that they, and potentially their audience, can see themselves in and relate to. These characters are typically female, as many of the works of fiction to which they are added lack the type of female character that modern-day readers can relate to.

The Mary Sue character is oftentimes ridiculed for being seemingly perfect. In fanfiction "Mary Sue is more: more charming, more belligerent, more understanding, more beautiful, more graceful, more eccentric, more spiritual, more klutzy" and her appearance often reflects this as well as "she has better hair, better clothes, better weapons, better brains, better sex, and better karma than anyone else" (Pflieger 1999). This type of character when injected into an already fully realized story and world will stand out, "even next to the strong and interesting heroines of twentieth-century media and fiction" (Pflieger 1999). Due to this act of being more, of being someone who is seemingly without flaw or whose victories come easy to her, Mary Sue is "one of the most loathed types of character as they are frequently viewed as a 'wish fulfillment' for the fan author, a transparent way for them to create an idealized persona whose stories can take over the source text" (Viars and Coker 40). This over-idealization has some similarities to the

over-idealization seen in such characters like Galadriel or Arwen, but differs in that it makes Mary Sue the center of the story, the character in action. Where Arwen and Galadriel can be beautiful and powerful women, they can only be such when they are in private, and out of narrative view of the male character's perspective. Mary Sue in complete contrast forces the reader to pay attention to her, to look at her and see her as both female and a force to be reckoned with.

Still, the effect of such a widespread negative view of Mary Sues has led to readers over-critiquing any original character that is a woman. These "presumed Mary Sues" experience "such vitriol" that in effect writers are discouraged from "even attempting to write OCs" (Viars and Coker 41). There are some critics who disagree with the harsh rejection of Mary Sues, and who "view it as a form of internalized misogyny" as they ask the reader to consider "while such stories are often hardly commendable, do they necessarily earn by their very existence the level of hatred aimed at them?" (Viars and Coker 41). The first major, and possibly damning, setback a female original character may face is "the accusation of being a Mary Sue" (Viars and Coker 41). This labeling of being a Mary Sue is still today a prevalent challenge for female characters in the fanfiction writing community.

While certainly not the best way to attempt to reclaim the space where female characters should, but don't, exist in *The Lord of the Rings*, the Mary Sue character does accomplish the act of forcing the reader to simultaneously acknowledge her gender as a woman and the power she will hold in the story. The over-idealization of such characters is something that should be avoided, as such an act echoes misogynistic idealizations of the women already present in the text. However, the harsh rejection of Mary Sues that allows other female original characters who are not Mary Sues, like Tauriel, to be specifically targeted for criticism is a reflection of an

internalized misogynistic tendency to reject any original character who is a woman and powerful simultaneously. The creation of original characters allows readers to look at the narrative gaps Tolkien left in his world, and imagine women existing and thriving in that space.

To some extent, creating original characters is not necessarily the only option left to fanfiction writers as there already exists a small number of female characters, whose existence the reader knows of in Tolkien's world, but whose story and voice is completely lost to the reader. This means in some instances that original characters don't have to be used to flesh out Tolkien's world from a woman's perspective. Character's like Rosie, Goldberry, and the Entwives, who are either given the same misogynistic representations in the films as they received in the books or removed from the narrative entirely, can be rewritten and reclaimed by fanfiction writers. Others like Lúthien and Lothiriel who do not feature in the main series other than their names being mentioned, but are in some of the stories in *The Silmarillion*, can also be rewritten by fanfiction writers to give more depth to or entirely rewrite their backstories. These characters who already exist in Tolkien's canon may be similarly accused, if re-written, of being a Mary Sue. However, the continued creation of original female characters and the rewriting of existing female characters indicate that female readers still want a character that they can see themselves in, and that this sort of fanfiction is a valid method at achieving such a character where there is none.

Ultimately, reclaiming female characters for the modern-day female audience can be done through any of these three approaches. While only examining the books, certain female characters can be read against the grain as the narrative gaps their presence, or lack of presence, creates allows the reader to imagine other strong female characters existing alongside them. Only

considering the films as the modern-day canon allows a viewer to see several key female characters' roles expanded upon from what their book counterparts have. And using fanfiction allows a writer to create female characters that fill the narrative gaps that already exist in the text. All three of these methods can be used separately, or in tandem with one another, in order for the modern audience to reclaim the female characters in *The Lord of the Rings* and see them as more than just their medieval misogynistic representations.

Afterword

The representation of women in *The Lord of the Rings* is problematic. It is reflective of the misogynistic attitudes and opinions about what role women should, or should not, hold in society that populated medieval English literature centuries ago. Tolkien's work does not merely reflect the reality found in such literature, and such everyday life, but it enforces the ideas and actively punishes its female characters, like Éowyn, when they break outside of the role their author intended for them. This makes identifying ways in which modern-day readers can approach the text, or reimagine it, critical to deconstructing the assumptions throughout the fantasy genre on how female characters are written or treated by their respective texts.

In this thesis, I have endeavored first to point out the similarities Tolkien's women hold in comparison to other women in medieval literature according to Howard Bloch's theory of medieval misogyny. The consistent ways that Tolkien's named female characters slot into either the role of the idealized medieval woman, closely aligned with the idea of the Virgin Mary, or the frightening demonized version, closely aligned with the image of Eve, are indicative of a consistent and misogynistic pattern in how Tolkien treated his female characters. Second, I have attempted to indicate ways that the absence or lack of female characters where one would expect them to be as purposeful and carrying potentiality. With the creation of the films and fanfiction, Tolkien's female characters have been reimagined to be more like true characters, instead of simply an idealized or demonized woman. Furthermore, there are already existing narrative gaps in Tolkien's work that allows the modern day audience, producer, or writer to imagine or, in instances like Tauriel, create female characters that could have already plausibly existed in Tolkien's world. Tolkien characters can be, and have been through the films and a variety of

fanfiction, reimagined to better suit a modern-day audience without losing the extensive world that has made Tolkien's work a lasting figure in fantasy.

It is undeniable that Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* had a lasting effect on the genre, and in many ways defined it. Writers today in the genre "of fantasy are either imitating him or else desperately trying to escape his influence" (James 2012). Even today, Tolkien's "hold over readers has been extraordinary: as is well known, and to the annoyance of literary critics, three major surveys of public opinion in Great Britain around the turn of the millennium placed him as the 'author of the century' or his book as the most popular work of English fiction, beating Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* into second place" (James 2012). Tolkien is a household name, and chances are if someone did not read his books they have watched the film adaptations of them. The term "literature," and a place in the literary canon, has been denied to the fantasy genre, at least in serious literary criticism. As Bechtel puts it, the fact "that fantasy has been dismissed or excluded from the canon of Western literature is a commonplace of the critical work on the genre" (Bechtel 139). This is due to fantasy being viewed as a less serious genre and thus having less to say about the real world. Thus, "there is a relatively firm distinction between the probable novelistic kinds and various others, particularly formulaic genres such as thrillers, westerns, and fantasy" (Fowler 109). However, in recent years this has been slowly changing. As fantasy attempts to enter the literary canon, and in many ways is slowly being accepted as a genre capable of producing works of great literature such as *The Lord of the Rings*, it is important to continue to address the lingering effect Tolkien has had on the genre whether good or bad.

In a fantasy world where the author is fully in control of what they create, why continue to reinforce and perpetuate the medieval misogyny that was the source of many of the same ideas and stereotypes found in modern day misogyny? Tolkien's perpetuation of this misogyny, paired

with the influence his series has had on the fantasy genre, has resulted in misogyny being rampant throughout much of the modern day fantasy genre. *The Song of Ice and Fire* series, perhaps the most popular fantasy series today, while having more female characters and putting some of these characters in active roles in the narrative, echoes the estheticization of female characters found in *The Lord of the Rings*. As fantasy begins to enter the literary canon, it is important to first address the issue in the genre of perpetuating medieval misogyny, and then we can begin to attempt to fix it. In this thesis I hope to have accurately provided the modern-day reader with several examples as to where this misogyny exists in *The Lord of the Rings*, and provided them with a way to read the books, or enjoy the movies, that allows them to reclaim the female characters in it. For the writers out there, I hope this thesis will allow them to look at how Tolkien wrote his female characters in such a way that they are constrained by the limitations of medieval misogyny so that they can avoid making the same mistakes when writing their female characters.

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