

Tolkien's Women:  
The Medieval Modern in *The Lord of the Rings*

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by

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A thesis presented for the B.A. degree

with Honors in

The Department of English

University of Michigan

Winter 2014







For my cohort, for the support and for the laughter





## Acknowledgements

My thanks go, first and foremost, to my advisor Andrea Zemgulys. She took a risk agreeing to work with a student she had never met on a book she had no academic experience in, and in doing so she gave me the opportunity of my undergraduate career. Andrea knew exactly when to provide her input and when it was best to prod and encourage me and then step out of the way; yet she was always there if I needed her, and every book that she recommended opened up a significant new argument that changed my thesis for the better. The independence and guidance she gave me has resulted in a project I am so, so proud of, and so grateful to her for. I feel so lucky to have had an advisor who could make me laugh while telling me how badly my thesis needed work, who didn't judge me when I came to her sleep-deprived or couldn't express myself, and who shared my passion through her willingness to join and guide me on this ride. Her constant encouragement kept me going.

I also owe a distinct debt of gratitude to Gillian White, who led my cohort during the fall semester. Gillian has a distinct aptitude for providing tough love, and asking exactly the right questions, then sitting back and letting you discover the answers. My thesis began as a broad attempt to prove a general claim about Tolkien and women, and has become something much richer and more rewarding thanks to her guidance. Gillian's incisive comments made me feel confident entering the second semester, which was an immense gift.

Catherine Sanok, Jennifer Wenzel, and Hilary Wolkan are also much deserving of thanks. Professor Sanok lent me her knowledge and her books when I came to her asking for advice on lyric poems and anchoresses without knowing exactly what I wanted to do with them. The advice that she gave me in her office hours has been in every draft since. Though I didn't get to work



with Jennifer as closely as others, her constant support and check-ins to keep me on task have been very appreciated. And Hilary not only welcomed the opportunity to read my thesis, she insisted on doing it twice, with incisive and useful comments both times. I appreciate all of your help so much.

I would like to thank the family and friends that supported me throughout this process – there are too many to name individually, but their interest and offers of help all mean a great deal. I also need to give a special thank you to my thesis cohort, specifically those who were always on hand to offer me support, or the opportunity to de-stress, or who listened patiently as I geeked out over all things related to Middle-earth: Andy, Eleanor, Emma, Jacqueline, Pierre, and Zilli. You made this experience more than rewarding, and you made it fun.

Finally, I owe a debt to both Peter Jackson and J.R.R. Tolkien for this thesis. The former, for creating the movies that introduced me to Middle-earth as a fifth-grader; the latter, for everything that has gone into these pages. Professor Tolkien created a work that I never tired of, regardless of how many sleepless nights I spent surrounded by scribbled notes and visions of hobbits. I feel lucky to have been able to work with a book that I am so passionate about and find so inspiring, and to know so much more about the man behind it than I did a year ago.

Thank you.



### Abstract

The women of *The Lord of the Rings* may appear, at first glance, to play only a background role in the text's narrative structure. However, their significance extends far beyond merely affecting the plot. There is a clear alignment between Tolkien's real-life views and the qualities represented by his women characters, whom he draws attention to by depicting as powerful and wise. What, then, does he hope to showcase by setting these women apart as distinct, both within his world and that of Middle-earth?

By his own admission, Tolkien was greatly influenced by the arts and crafts movement of the late 19th-century, which sought to provide a greater cultural emphasis on all forms of artistry and nature, and a reduced emphasis on mechanized industry. Although this movement ended at the beginning of the 20th-century, branches of it continued, arguing that the correct sense of artistry and spirituality could be found by looking back to medieval England, and that these qualities could be used to help heal the modern ravaged and industrialized country. I posit that Tolkien drew attention to his female characters to link them with his use of this movement, in order to exemplify the idealized qualities that he feels can repair a nation.

There are three powerful, ageless women in *Rings*: Arwen the Elf princess, Goldberry the river-sprite, and Galadriel the Lady of the Golden Wood. Each of them represents a different facet that Tolkien idealized as a part of his use of the medievalized movements, and each of them inspire and positively influence the main male characters in a way that helps them rid Middle-earth of evil. Arwen, who stays at home while her husband claims his right as king, spends her time weaving a tapestry, evoking frequent comparisons to her ancestor Lúthien, an Elf who expressed her unusual power through song and dance. Through these two, Tolkien exemplifies the healing power in arts and crafts, as well as the significance in looking back and taking lessons and cues from history. Goldberry expands upon this power; she represents all things artful and pure in nature, and displays the purity and wholesomeness in both protecting nature and allowing it to influence one's daily life. In Galadriel, Tolkien chooses to focus on the spiritual aspect of medievalized ideals, drawing distinct comparisons to medieval anchorite hermits and their emphasis on confronting temptation.

There are still two significant females left in *Rings*, though neither fit exactly with the others: Shelob the spider and Éowyn the human shieldmaiden. Tolkien uses these two to exemplify the same principles as Arwen, Goldberry, and Galadriel, but in different ways. In Shelob, a gluttonous and evil monster, he displays how one can lose their humanity if the arts, nature, and religion are ignored; in Éowyn, he showcases how a "modern day" woman can apply his medievalized qualities to a nation at war. Viewed as a collective, the females of *Rings* are meant to represent how Tolkien's interpretations of medieval principles can be used to heal England in the wake of the World Wars.



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Short Titles

*Letters*: Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher

Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981. Print.

*Rings*: Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. Print.



## INTRODUCTION

“I propose to speak about fairy-stories, though I am aware that this is a rash adventure.”<sup>1</sup> So begins J.R.R. Tolkien’s 1939 essay “On Fairy-Stories,” in which he asserts the importance of fairy tales in modern culture. Critically reading Tolkien’s crowning work, *The Lord of the Rings*, is no less of a rash adventure: though he was prone to handwriting answers pages long in response to questions readers would write in and ask, he was noticeably cagey regarding any actual literary analysis of his works, responding to a student’s queries on hobbits in a 1938 letter by asking, “Would not that be rather unfair to the research students? To save them the trouble [of analysis] is to rob them of any excuse for existing.”<sup>2</sup> Caginess became outright refusal when *Rings* earned a second edition printing; in his foreword, Tolkien warned that “as for any inner meaning or ‘message’, it has in the intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical.”<sup>3</sup>

Attempting to prove Tolkien wrong about his own intentions is, perhaps, too much of a rash adventure for any critic. However, while he remained steadfast until his death that there is no hidden meaning to the journey of the Ring, he admitted that he was, as all writers are, influenced by contemporary events.<sup>4</sup> No doubt the message behind “Fairy-Stories,” that the lessons to be gleaned from fairy tales are perhaps more important for adults than children, was also very much in Tolkien’s mind when writing *Rings*. *Rings* does, in fact, fit entirely his description of such a story: “[Stories about] *Faërie* contain many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the

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<sup>1</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” *The Tolkien Reader*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1966, 33, Print.

<sup>2</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981, 30, Print.

<sup>3</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004, xxiii, Print.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted.”<sup>5</sup> His definition is purposefully broad. All that a fairy tale needs to be classified as such is to “enchant” the reader to the story. If, then, *Rings* is a fairy tale, Tolkien himself acknowledges through his essay that, despite his protests, there is an inherent application and meaning for his novels in modern culture: in the case of *Rings*, an England ravaged by the World Wars.

That application is to demonstrate the importance and power of arts and crafts, nature, and religion in a war-torn nation, and it is represented by three of *Rings*' female characters: Arwen the Elven princess of Rivendell, Goldberry the river sprite, and Galadriel the Elf-queen. It is clear, at least within *Rings*' narrative, that these three are meant to draw the reader's attention as timeless characters who also exhibit the greatest displays of power; I will use “timeless” to refer to a sense of immortal agelessness, as well as an historical aura that compels other characters, and therefore the reader, to reflect back to earlier times upon encountering these women. More specifically, they hearken back to the ideal glory days of the past where peace and purity reigned in the earlier ages of Middle-earth, echoing Tolkien's own obsessive nostalgia for a medieval past.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Tolkien gives each of them reserves of magical power that elevates them above their companions and counterparts. (As will be thoroughly explained in a later section, the character Arwen is viewed as one with her ancestor Lúthien, who fits these descriptions more immediately.) Only the Maiar, Middle-earth's angels – Gandalf, Tom

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<sup>5</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 38.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Snyder, *The Making of Middle-earth: A New Look Inside the World of J.R.R. Tolkien*, New York: Sterling, 2013, 33, Print.

Bombadil, Saruman, and Sauron – exhibit more power, and all are viewed by the characters and Tolkien himself as quite literally God-like (or, in Sauron and Saruman’s cases, Satanic) figures.<sup>7</sup>

The reason that Tolkien meant to draw attention to these women and their timelessness is perhaps best explained by the trend of medieval modernism, which swept England at the same time that *Rings* was written. Historian Michael T. Saler describes the movement:

...[it] Reiterated conceptions of art and society found in the writings of... nineteenth-century romantic medievalists. These writers contrasted the modern industrial world to the spiritual, communal, and harmonious world that supposedly existed in ages preceding the Renaissance. They looked back nostalgically to a time when art was simply ‘right-making,’ when common items no less than paintings and statues were created with devotion and valued as expressions of the divine spirit, when the everyday was emblematic of a universal order, when all was a divine creation.<sup>8</sup>

I propose that Tolkien looked around himself, saw a war-torn nation, and decided to “make right.” As an Old English historian, a fantasy writer, and a former soldier with a noted hatred of industrialism and war, he was in the perfect position to use both this movement and his own personal beliefs. Writing was, to him, a way of healing himself and making sense of the world around him.<sup>9</sup> Arwen, Goldberry, and Galadriel are the representations of this medieval modern in *Rings*, each representing a different facet of an idealized past that Tolkien believed was important to revive in order to correct England.

Medieval modernism is also key to understanding why Tolkien chose to use women as the representatives of his beliefs, though it is important here to note that the following statements are not meant to accurately represent the life of English women, but rather how they were

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<sup>7</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 191-192.

J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999, Print.

<sup>8</sup> Michael T. Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 18, Print.

<sup>9</sup> John Garth, *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-earth*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003, Print.

envisioned and idealized by Tolkien. Written almost exclusively during a period of war, *Rings* for the most part – the exception to this rule, Éowyn, will be discussed at length in her own chapter – aligns with convention: men are the soldiers fighting bravely for their country, and women remain behind, busying themselves with matters of peaceful importance on the home front. As an advocate of peace, Tolkien saw women as fulfilling a role that men simply could not, spiritually revitalizing English culture as religious and artistic figures. However, when World War II dominated the landscape, the jobs of women became increasingly combat-related as they began filling the roles of industrial workers, producing wartime armaments and supplies.<sup>10</sup>

With modern-day women no longer able to represent this idealized spirit of peacetime, Tolkien turned to the medieval, where females remained focused on things such as arts and crafts, and religion, even in times of war. Medieval women were wartime figures corrective of war, not occupied by battle but by wholesomeness and cultural healing. Thus, Tolkien makes the women in *Rings* historical and timeless, and gives them a unique strength with which to respond to the destructions of war. It should be noted here, as well, that Tolkien placing a more peaceful emphasis on women is not meant to imply that he did not believe that women were capable of or should be involved actively in wartime. Rather, he felt that *nobody* should be involved in war, and that women, historically represented as figures removed from battle, were the best way to exemplify his view.

This explains, then, why Arwen, Goldberry, and Galadriel, despite being key figures within the world of Middle-earth, do not play crucial roles within the narrative itself; all of them remain behind while other groups push forward and actively engage the enemy. We might ask:

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<sup>10</sup> Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, Print.

what would make these women stand out to anybody but Tolkien? He solved this potential problem by making his depiction of women distinct within the expectations of the time period. As he wrote the majority of *Rings* in-between the World Wars, women were still predominantly caretakers or unpaid semi-professionals; societal roles were still defined by conservative opinions and practices.<sup>11</sup> By marking Arwen, Goldberry, Galadriel, and Éowyn as powerful and wise, in many cases more so than *Rings*' men, Tolkien distinguishes them from his average modern English woman. Furthermore, his depictions of women differed in power and prominence from all of his own previous work and those of his contemporaries, specifically his close writing friends C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams, whom historians Candice Fredrick and Sam McBride describe as sexist and “perhaps gynophobic (fearing women), or possibly even misogynist (hating women),” respectively.<sup>12</sup> Tolkien, meanwhile, though not a feminist by any means, was still relatively progressive and open-minded, even taking cues, as will be discussed in the Éowyn chapter, from the suffrage movement.

From this point, we can locate the three distinct elements (which I will also refer to as pillars), as represented by the three distinct female characters, of the medieval modern that Tolkien hopes to bring to light and illuminate for his readers through fairy story: the importance of arts and crafts, of nature, and of a medievalized concept of religion. In Chapter 1, I will begin by analyzing Arwen and her predecessor Lúthien. Arwen is only present in a handful of passages, but she makes her mark, staying behind in Rivendell to weave her betrothed Aragorn a tapestry that, Tolkien suggests, turns the tide of the war. As was implied by Michael T. Saler earlier in this

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain 1939-1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, Print.

<sup>12</sup> Candice Fredrick and Sam McBride, *Women Among the Inklings: Gender, C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001, 33, 35, Print.

introduction, the arts and crafts movement of the late 19th-century was a fundamental aspect of medieval modernism and a significant influence for Tolkien. This influence is visualized in Arwen, a singer and weaver, who accentuates the importance of stories (an echo of Tolkien's "On Fairy-Stories") and the role of the storyteller during wartime. Her ancestor Lúthien and Lúthien's beloved Beren, whose stories are detailed in *The Silmarillion*, a text that Tolkien intended his audience to read before *Rings*, is meant to be a direct parallel to Arwen and Aragorn in *Rings*. Lúthien, also intensely powerful, uses the power of her songs to get her happy ending, and her story is invoked by both Arwen and Aragorn throughout *Rings*, Tolkien's call to understand and appreciate the story of the past. I will also, in the first chapter, introduce the comparison method of Shelob the spider, who I will continue to revisit throughout the second and third chapters. Distinctly represented as a timeless and powerful female character just like the rest, Shelob exists in the story as a female monster and grotesquerie, used as an example of the perversions of his pillars and how they can be used incorrectly.

In Chapter 2, I will dissect the character of Goldberry, the river-daughter. First appearing in a poem pre-dating *Rings* as a river sprite seduced by the spirit of the Oxfordshire countryside, Goldberry represents Tolkien's sense of nationality by specifically embodying the Thames river, the lifeblood of England. Not only does Goldberry never acknowledge the darkness that threatens to encompass Middle-earth, she does not fear it, instead expressing her gaiety and power through song and tending the hearth.

Chapter 3 will examine the figure of Lady Galadriel as Tolkien's concept of idealized medieval religion. Although religion was incredibly important to soldiers and those at home during the World Wars, the modern Roman Catholic church, of which Tolkien was a staunch



member, was much diluted from the strength and some of the values that it possessed in medieval England. This is not meant, on my part, to imply that Tolkien desired a return of the church's full strength, i.e. burning heretics, but rather to emphasize the strong link between Galadriel and medieval anchoress nuns, and to show how anchoritic acknowledgement of temptation and sin informs the character.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I will discuss the character of Éowyn as Tolkien's method of applying his pillars to a more "modern-day" woman. Though Éowyn, a shieldmaiden of Rohan, is neither timeless nor magically powerful, she is the most significant female in *Rings*; she disguises herself as a man and rides to war, where she slays the enemy commander and, it is implied, enables the forces of good to win. Though the medievalized lessons set down by Arwen, Goldberry, and Galadriel are not a direct fit to Tolkien's modern day, here he adapts them to a nation at war, placing increased importance on particular pillars and acknowledging others' insignificance until after the threat of the enemy has vanished.

It should be noted that none of the "pillar figures" are human – Galadriel and Arwen are elves, while Goldberry is altogether undefined but is generally considered within the text some form of greater spirit – yet they are used to represent and discuss issues directly relating to humanity. It is important, in this instance, to appreciate the significance that Tolkien placed on nonhuman creatures as representatives of humanity. Frodo and Sam, who could be considered the main characters, are, for example, hobbits, yet they embody Tolkien's key ideals of finding bravery within oneself: "They are made *small*... partly to exhibit the pettiness of man... and mostly to show up, in creatures of very small physical power, the amazing and unexpected

heroism of ordinary men ‘at a pinch’.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, in keeping with Tolkien’s ideology, I treat elves and sprites not as nonhuman entities but as vessels through which the “amazing and unexpected” qualities of ordinary human beings can be displayed. I also wish to note that various capitalizations of the races throughout this thesis – i.e. Elf and elven – are not errors, but rather deferential to how Tolkien himself capitalizes throughout his work.

In his female characters, Tolkien saw no less than a hope for the future of his country. I do not mean to tout him as a feminist, or to engage with his real-world views of women; that argument has very little place in the following pages and has, indeed, been carried on by others.<sup>14</sup> His fascination with the medieval modern as a larger movement, however, has not been touched upon by the critical field. Tolkien saw his female characters as representatives of something significant; a simpler time and gentler qualities. One need only look at the scenes that take place in Minas Tirith’s Houses of Healing to see this. Tolkien makes sure to indicate that healing is a distinctly feminine quality before Gandalf states that “the hands of the king are the hands of a healer, and so shall the rightful king be known.”<sup>15</sup> Aragorn is that king, though he refuses to take his title until Middle-earth sees peace. By healing the wounded, he makes his first real declaration of kingship. It would be possible to read this scene solely as Aragorn fulfilling those kingly duties; a good king should, after all, heal his friends. However, through the reading that I suggest, Aragorn is no longer just a king but a man appreciating the significant power of the feminine and in his own acts of femininity, an understanding that has powerful impact throughout the rest of the book and with its place in the real world. New meanings in the text

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<sup>13</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 158.

<sup>14</sup> Brenda Partridge, “No Sex, Please – We’re Hobbits: The Construction of Sexuality in *The Lord of the Rings*,” *J.R.R. Tolkien: This Far Land*, ed. Robert Giddings, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Press, 1983, Print.

<sup>15</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 862.

become evident through placing an emphasis on the medieval, the influences of the arts and crafts movement and, most of all, the strength of women.

## I. ARWEN AND LÚTHIEN – THE FIGURES OF ART

The character of Arwen is one of *Rings*' greatest conundrums. The descendant of Lúthien, an Elf who defied her father's wishes to rescue her imprisoned lover Beren from the villainous Morgoth, Arwen spends the entire narrative in Rivendell obeying her father's wishes and waiting for her betrothed to come home. Aside from their bloodlines, she and Lúthien appear at first glance to be two distinct and unrelated women, yet Tolkien clearly intends for his readers to make a comparison between the two: upon entering Rivendell, Frodo glimpses Arwen, "in whom it was said that the likeness of Lúthien had come on earth again."<sup>16</sup> And, though the full story of Arwen and Aragorn is only told in *Rings*' appendices, the background material that Tolkien's publishers forced him to cut, it is a near-identical retelling of the tale of Lúthien and Beren. In fact, Aragorn is singing the lay of Lúthien as he comes across Arwen dancing in the forest, like Lúthien was doing when Beren first saw her, and mistakes Arwen for a resurrected Lúthien of the present-day. Furthermore, Arwen's father Elrond, like Lúthien's father Thingol, defers when Aragorn asks for her hand, stating that he, like Beren, must prove himself before the two can marry.<sup>17</sup>

Rather than defy her father's wishes and join her lover in his journey as Lúthien did, however, Arwen obeys and is summarily removed from the narrative. As such, many see Arwen as "Lúthien-lite," a weakened and diluted version of her powerful ancestor.<sup>18</sup> It is important, though, to note exactly what Arwen does while remaining in Rivendell: she weaves a tapestry proclaiming Aragorn's rite as king, her own interpretation of Lúthien's artistry. (As will be

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 227.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 1057-1063.

<sup>18</sup> Faye Ringel, "Women Fantasists: In the Shadow of the Ring," *J.R.R. Tolkien and His Literary Resonances: Views of Middle-earth*, ed. George Clark and Daniel Timmons, Greenwood, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000, 159-171, Print.

discussed later, all of Lúthien's power derived from her artistic ability: singing, storytelling, dancing, and weaving.) It is exactly this that Tolkien hopes to emphasize through these two characters: the power and potency of the arts. Arwen is not as present in the story as her predecessor, but her artistic skills are no less potent; her banner makes a statement so strong that it convinces the army of the Dead of Aragorn's heritage even though "it was black, and if there was any device upon it, it was hidden in darkness."<sup>19</sup> Its powers are even greater when visible:

A great standard broke, and the wind displayed it as she turned towards the Harlond... the stars flamed in the sunlight, for they were wrought of gems by Arwen daughter of Elrond; and the crown was bright in the morning, for it was wrought of mithril and gold... and the mirth of the Rohirrim was a torrent of laughter and a flashing of swords, and the joy and wonder of the City was a music of trumpets and a ringing of bells. But the hosts of Mordor were seized with bewilderment... and a black dread fell on them, knowing that the tides of fate had turned against them and their doom was at hand.<sup>20</sup>

The mere unfurling of Arwen's banner is enough to strike hope into two allied armies and foretell the doom of the enemy. Tolkien's language similarly plays up themes of artistry, describing the celebration of Gondor as a "music of trumpets and a ringing of bells" and depicting the Rohirrim's increased slaughter (he explains, earlier in the battle narrative, that Rohirrim sing as they kill).<sup>21</sup> Lúthien may have rescued and healed Beren with her art, but Arwen changes the course of a battle and, ultimately, the fate of Middle-earth.

This may seem a drastic overemphasizing of the power of artistry, which is exactly Tolkien's intent, though to his mind it is not an overemphasis at all. Instead, he is heightening the ideals of the 19th-century English arts and crafts movement, which pushed for a return to the ideals of the Middle Ages, a greater emphasis on craftsmanship, and a reduced focus on

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<sup>19</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 789.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 847-848.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 838.

industry.<sup>22</sup> It is well established that Tolkien was heavily influenced by the movement – in a 1960 letter he admits that pieces of *Rings* “owe more to William Morris,” the leader of the fad, than anything else – so it stands to reason that the arts would be well-represented as a part of his looking back to medieval ideals.<sup>23</sup> Morris, too, was unafraid of making massive claims regarding craftsmanship, saying in his speech “Art and its Producers” that:

[In] work so [artfully] done there is and must be the interchange of interest in the occupations of life; the knowledge of human necessities & the consciousness of human good-will is a part of all such work, and the world is linked together by it. The peace of the arts springs from its roots, and flourishes even in the midst of war and trouble and confusion.<sup>24</sup>

The power of arts, then, is to Morris and the movement as a whole no less a thing than a force which can bring about peace and withstand war. Tolkien introduces his own version of these claims to his readers in the form of Arwen and Lúthien.

It is, perhaps, not surprising that many scholars do not agree with this interpretation of art’s significance. Although it is Arwen’s craftsmanship that heralds that the tide of the battle has turned, it does not, some argue, change the fact that she is trapped in a passive role during the trilogy, thereby negating any emphasis Tolkien may be placing on her role. Tolkien critic Melanie Rawls, in her article “Arwen, Shadow Bride,” for example, asserts that “nowhere is it accounted that [Arwen] does things: she does not even sing and dance as did Luthien [sic], nor act as her father’s counselor as did Idril Celebrindal.”<sup>25</sup> Rawls continues to assert Arwen’s passivity by citing the conclusion of her tale in *Rings*’ appendix, where Aragorn dies and she is left to wander Middle-earth alone, until “she laid herself to rest upon Cerin Amroth; and there is

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<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Cumming, *The Arts and Crafts Movement*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991, Print.

<sup>23</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 303.

<sup>24</sup> William Morris, “Art and its Producers,” *Art and its Producers and The Arts & Crafts of Today: Two Addresses Delivered Before the National Association for the Advancement of Art*, London: Longmans, 1901, 5, Print.

<sup>25</sup> Melanie Rawls, “Arwen, Shadow Bride,” *Mythlore*, 12.1, (1985): 24-25, 37, Print.

her green grave, until the world is changed, and all the days of her life are utterly forgotten by the men that come after, and elanor and niphredil bloom no more east of the Sea.”<sup>26</sup> Why, then, does Tolkien use Arwen as his artistic creator without even giving her enough presence to be remembered posthumously? One important fact that Rawls overlooks is Arwen’s complete agency and satisfaction regarding her fate: Tolkien describes how Arwen “said farewell to Eldarion [her son] and her daughters, and to all whom she had loved.”<sup>27</sup> There is undeniable emphasis on her solitude, but it is a solitude that Arwen inflicts upon herself by choice, as she still has living kin and does not need to be forgotten. So why does Arwen choose this fate?

Arwen’s death is ultimately crafted to fit her role as storyteller and her continuation of Lúthien’s light, which has consistently served the purpose of shedding the darkness in Middle-earth and healing the free peoples. It is to this end that she gives up her place on the ships to Valinor, Middle-earth’s heaven, to Frodo, instead choosing “the choice of Lúthien, and as she so have I chosen, both the sweet and the bitter... If your hurts grieve you still and the memory of your burden is heavy, then you may pass into the West, until all of your wound and weariness are healed.”<sup>28</sup> (Also of note: Arwen sings a song of Valinor as Frodo approaches and so causes the Tree of Gondor to blossom, disproving Rawls’ claim that Arwen “does not even sing like Lúthien.”) Arwen is content to give up her immortality to reward bravery and valor, but the key term in her gift-giving is “memory.” She similarly gives up a part of herself to reward another just before Aragorn’s death, when she cries one of his Elvish names, Estel, meaning “hope.” Her cry is the last thing he hears before he passes and “a great beauty was revealed in him, so that all who came there looked on him in wonder... And long there he lay, an image of the splendour of

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<sup>26</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 1063.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 974-975.

the Kings of Men in glory undimmed before the breaking of the world.”<sup>29</sup> Once again, Arwen, relinquishing something of herself (in this case, the life of her husband) ensures that a positive memory remains behind to sustain the hopes of others.

The analogy between Arwen and Middle-earth to an author and their work could not be clearer. Tolkien coined the term “eucatastrophe” in his essay “On Fairy-Stories”: “The *eucatastrophic* tale is the true form of fairy-tale, and its highest function... [eucatastrophe is] the good catastrophe... it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.”<sup>30</sup> It is quite clear that he intends for Arwen to fulfill this eucatastrophic role at the end of *Rings*. Additionally, using Tolkien’s ever-present light imagery, which can be found above in the phrase “glory undimmed,” medievalist Reno E. Lauro states that “it is painfully obvious at this point that Tolkien’s view of human creativity is not simply art for art’s sake but a call to confront and transform.”<sup>31</sup> Arwen has confronted and transformed Middle-earth in her own way, through the inspiration of her banner and sacrificing parts of herself for others. At the end of *Rings*, partly due to Arwen’s handiwork, evil has been defeated. Tolkien, in one of his first letters discussing a sequel to *The Hobbit*, wrote that “I am afraid that snag [the story being too dark] appears in everything; though actually the presence (if only on the borders) of the terrible is, I believe, what gives this imagined world its verisimilitude. A safe fairy-land is untrue to all

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 1063.

<sup>30</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 85-86.

<sup>31</sup> Reno E. Lauro, “Of Spiders and Light: Hope, Action and Medieval Aesthetics in the Horrors of Shelob’s Lair,” *The Mirror Crack’d: Fear and Horror in JRR Tolkien’s Major Works*, ed. Lynn Forest-Hill, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008, 69, Print.



worlds.”<sup>32</sup> To remember the story, people must also remember the evil. For the story to continue, darkness would have to return.

Arwen, then, fulfills her most selfless and significant act as a storyteller at the end of her life. Although her demise serves no practical narrative function, it was crucial from Tolkien’s real-world perspective as creator. Without her presence as Middle-earth’s story-creator, there will be no new tales and no new troubles; without her memory, there will be no figurative reincarnations of Arwen to pick up the story, the purpose that Arwen fulfilled as a new Lúthien. This is not to be mistaken as Tolkien’s endorsement of creativity’s absence; without it, good would never have triumphed. Rather, as Arwen says to Frodo, this is Middle-earth’s chance for “wound and weariness [to be] healed.” In her death, Arwen secures that peace and proves that arts can shape the world, and, when used by the right people in the right way, change a nation’s destiny. And as an author and creator himself, Tolkien is advocating for the real-world application that *Rings* and, on a larger scale, the arts and crafts movement can have on England.

Though not physically present in *Rings*, Arwen’s ancestor Lúthien provides no less of a crucial figure to the Middle-earth of her time, one who primarily serves to illustrate everything the arts encompass while continuing to elaborate upon and represent their importance. Most significantly, the characters of the “current-day” Middle-earth consistently look back on her. Lúthien is, in fact, introduced to readers of *Rings* in the form of a historical story, when the hobbits beg Aragorn for a tale at the foot of Weathertop. Aragorn humors them, chanting Beren and Lúthien’s legend “in the mode that is called *ann-thennath* among the Elves, but it is hard to render in our Common Speech, and this is but a rough echo of it.”<sup>33</sup> This is not simply the only

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<sup>32</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 24.

<sup>33</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 193.

mention of a strict verse form in the novel, it carries the implication that Aragorn's translation, which boasts a near-perfect rhyme and rhythm scheme, is but a shadow of Lúthien's true tale. To accentuate the power that the story holds, Tolkien describes Aragorn as he speaks: "His eyes shone, and his voice was rich and deep. Above him was a black starry sky. Suddenly a pale light appeared over the crown of Weathertop behind him. The waxing moon was climbing slowly above the hill that overshadowed them, and the stars above the hill-top faded. The story ended."<sup>34</sup> Tolkien very distinctly denotes the ending of the tale after describing its effects on the scenery. It is clear that, though she herself is long gone, Lúthien's connection to the arts still holds sway over nature, bending everything, even events of the present day, to her doing. The right story told in the right way, then – according to Tolkien – holds an innate, undetermined, and lasting power, something that can be as simple as bringing about moonrise or as extraordinary as vanquishing evil.

This power also fits comfortably within the arts and crafts movement. William Morris stated in his speech "The Lesser Arts," "I do not think that any man but one of the highest genius, could do anything in these days without much study of ancient art... if we do not study the ancient work directly and learn to understand it, we shall find ourselves influenced by the feeble work all round us... Let us therefore study it wisely, be taught by it, kindled by it."<sup>35</sup>

Tolkien, fascinated with history in its own right, syncs Middle-earth's past with Morris' influence, displaying a shared belief that learning from and telling the tales of the past are just as crucial to art as any other form, and showcasing that belief through Lúthien's powers.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 194.

<sup>35</sup> William Morris, "The Lesser Arts," *Hopes and Fears for Art*, Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1897, 19-20, Print.

It is these extraordinary powers of art that Tolkien calls upon in Lúthien's tale, "Of Beren and Lúthien," in *The Silmarillion*. "Of Beren and Lúthien" is, in fact, a retelling of Tolkien's original poem "The Lay of Leithian," a story that never made it through initial drafting but is referred to as the original lore.<sup>36</sup> Though *The Silmarillion* is a separate work from *Rings*, it is also, in a way, inseparable; Tolkien wanted to publish it before both *Rings* and *The Hobbit* and considered it a true prequel, something that an audience should read before either of the other two novels in order to have necessary background knowledge of Middle-earth.<sup>37</sup> And its significance extends beyond mere publication order: though Tolkien frequently proclaimed himself "a hobbit at heart," the only instance in which he ever identified himself as one of his own characters is in the instance of Beren and Lúthien; Lúthien was inspired by his wife, Edith Bratt, with Tolkien taking the role of Beren.<sup>38</sup> The relation was so strong that, upon Edith's death, Tolkien had "Lúthien" engraved on her tombstone. His own reads "Beren."<sup>39</sup> The events of Lúthien's life as depicted in the *Silmarillion*, then, while appearing at first peripheral to *Rings*, are in fact deeply intertwined with the Ring narrative and Tolkien's own personal outlook.

"Leithian" was, from its beginning, constructed as an ode to the power of the arts. While *Rings* was written in the Oxfordshire countryside during World War II, the tale of Beren and Lúthien was conceived as Tolkien lay in a sickbed on the warfront of World War I. Tolkien critic Janet Brennan Croft notes in her book *War and the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien* that placing oneself in the context of a larger narrative was a critical survival tool of English soldiers. "Letters written by Other Ranks show an unexpectedly broad range of literary allusion... At its simplest level,

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<sup>36</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lays of Beleriand*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, New York: Del Rey, 1985, 183-374, Print.

<sup>37</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 38.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 420.

<sup>39</sup> Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977, Print.

literature was a consolation and a reassurance. Many soldiers drew great comfort from comparing themselves to Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.<sup>40</sup> Tolkien used the tale of Beren and Lúthien to comfort himself and Edith, placing himself back home in the saving graces of his loving wife. Similarly, the characters in *Rings* are acutely aware of their place in a larger literary narrative. The entire trilogy is revealed to be a copy of Frodo's identically-titled memoir at the end, and as Sam remarks on the stairs of Cirith Ungol:

Beren now, he never thought he was going to get that Silmaril from the Iron Crown in Thangorodrim, and yet he did, and that was a worse place and a blacker danger than ours. But that's a long tale, of course, and goes on past the happiness and into grief and beyond it – and the Silmaril went on and came to Eärendil. And why, sir, I never thought of that before! We've got – you've got some of the light of it in that star-glass that the Lady gave you! Why, to think of it, we're in the same tale still! It's going on.<sup>41</sup>

Sam distinctly recognizes, using the phial of Galadriel, that he and Frodo are still living out the tale begun by Beren and Lúthien, and that, like their predecessors, there is hope of passing through darkness and danger into a future happiness. Similarly, the love story of Aragorn and Arwen is a direct parallel to that of Beren and Lúthien to the point that the lovers are direct bloodline descendants, and the fate of their predecessors is used to highlight a possible happy end. Modern day characters, in both real-life England and Middle-earth, successfully utilize stories of the past to help them get through their trials and tribulations, displaying Tolkien's distinct connection to the arts and crafts movement as a way to use the characters of *Rings* to exemplify individuals' potential to heal England.

Though the tale of Beren and Lúthien holds great significance and importance in the story lines and themes that play out in *Rings*, it is Lúthien herself whom Tolkien uses to represent the

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<sup>40</sup> Croft, *War and the Works*, 45.

<sup>41</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 712.

power of arts and storytelling. Most notably, Lúthien is given complete agency in her story. It is she who serves as the love-object of the hopelessly lovestruck Beren; it is she who rescues her love from the clutches of the enemy; it is she who ultimately revives Beren from death.

Meanwhile, the power of song, through which Lúthien finds her agency, is present all throughout her lay. Lúthien's father Thingol, in response to Beren's request for her hand in marriage, says that the price for his daughter is that of a Silmaril, a mythic gem held in the darkest, most powerful fortress of Sauron, intending to set Beren on an impossible task. Beren, though, gladly takes up the quest. Here two things of note occur: Lúthien stops singing and does not sing again until Beren's return to safety, and Sauron begins his own song, "[chanting] a song of wizardry,/ Of piercing, opening, of treachery,/Revealing, uncovering, betraying."<sup>42</sup> Tolkien uses the transfer of song to represent the transfer of power and the hopelessness of Beren's task, just as he presents the true nature of Sauron's power by directly quoting the poem "The Lay of Leithian," introducing it as a song within a story. The link between storytelling and reality is thus solidified in a new way, by reinforcing song as power. When one side loses agency, they lose the ability to sing; when another is represented as the strongest force in the land, his song is actually taken from a pre-existing lyric from our world, augmenting and strengthening Sauron's might. This clearly demonstrates the power of the song and, again, the way that art reaches between media and art forms, influencing each other even if they do not exist in the same realm.

The power of song continues to be present and amplified in both versions of Lúthien's tale ("Leithian" and *Silmarillion*); she is initially described as Beren first sees her, dancing and singing, so that "he fell into an enchantment... Keen, heart-piercing was her song as the song of

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<sup>42</sup> Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 171.

the lark that rises from the gates of night and pours its voice among the dying stars, seeing the sun behind the walls of the world; and the song of Lúthien released the bonds of winter, and the frozen waters spoke, and flowers sprang from the cold earth where her feet had passed.”<sup>43</sup>

Tolkien critic Julian Tim Morton Eilmann highlights the importance of this scene in his essay on Tolkien’s use of song, stating that it is crucial to understand that Lúthien’s art creates reality. In fact, Eilman states that Tolkien’s “poetry immediately influences and clearly changes reality.”<sup>44</sup> Of note is the fact that in neither version of the tale does Tolkien give lyrics to Lúthien’s songs. What is truly important, he emphasizes, is the relation between art and reality, not the content or skill of the piece of art itself. To Tolkien, creating stories and songs that portray an ideal world can bring forth literal change and, therefore, the importance of the arts in whatever form they appear must be recognized, abstracted or no.

Tolkien’s emphasis is on arts and storytelling as a whole, but power has thus far been represented through Lúthien solely as song. This expands to include other art forms as the narrative continues. When Beren is captured by Sauron and imprisoned in his dungeons, Lúthien attempts to escape the clutches of her father and rescue him, but is betrayed by one of her kinsmen. Thingol locks her in a high tower to prevent her running away again, but Lúthien devises a new way out: “It is told in the Lay of Leithian how she escaped from the house in Hírilorn; for she put forth her arts of enchantment, and caused her hair to grow to great length, and of it she wove a dark robe that wrapped her beauty like a shadow, and it was laden with a spell of sleep.”<sup>45</sup> She then dangles the remainder of her hair down to the ground, knocking the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 165.

<sup>44</sup> Julian Tim Morton Eilmann, “I Am the Song: Music, Poetry, and the Transcendent in J.R.R. Tolkien’s Middle-earth,” *Light Beyond All Shadow: Religious Experience in Tolkien’s Work*, ed. Paul E. Kerry and Sandra Miesel, Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011, 108, Print.

<sup>45</sup> Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 172.

guards unconscious and allowing her to escape. Again, Tolkien draws attention to the original lay and the fact that “Of Beren and Lúthien” is a retelling of a story, but here he also directly references the classic real-world fairy tale of Rapunzel.

Tolkien’s deliberate invocation of the Rapunzel tale is meant not only to clearly solidify the importance of storytelling in Middle-earth but also demonstrate that his fantasy stories had real-life applications, amplifying the ideals of the arts and crafts movement – after all, if there is a shared lore, there are likely other shared qualities between our world and Lúthien’s. In the original story “Rapunzel,” written by the Brothers Grimm, the prince first notices Rapunzel because he “heard a voice so lovely that he stopped to listen”; they eventually meet when she lets her long hair down and allows him to climb up.<sup>46</sup> When the witch learns of this, she banishes Rapunzel and pushes the prince off of the tower onto thorn bushes, rendering him blind. “The prince wandered around in misery for many years and finally reached the wilderness where Rapunzel was... the prince heard a voice that sounded familiar to him, so he followed it... [Rapunzel] threw her arms around him and wept. Two of those tears dropped into the prince’s eyes, and suddenly he could see as before, with clear eyes.”<sup>47</sup> The invocation of tower and hair imagery as linked with the captured maiden is perhaps the most obvious reference to Rapunzel that Tolkien uses, though various references are sprinkled throughout the work, including the fact that Lúthien revives Beren after his death at the end of their tale by singing of her profound sorrow; and Beren, after seeing his love for the first time, “wander[s] [the woods] in mind [groping] as one that is stricken with sudden blindness.”<sup>48</sup> Tolkien’s purpose in this direct

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<sup>46</sup> Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, “Rapunzel,” *The Annotated Brothers Grimm*, ed. Maria Tatar, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012, 58, Print.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* 62.

<sup>48</sup> Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 165.

allusion is, as mentioned previously, to draw a firm comparison between our world and that of Middle-earth, and to present the power of arts in a different medium than song. Lúthien draws not only on the story of Rapunzel to escape her imprisonment, but also on her skills as a weaver, placing significance in other forms of crafts, as well.

For Tolkien, it is not enough to merely identify his pillars of an idealized England. Just as every hero in literature exemplifies and heightens their virtues against a villain, so too does Tolkien introduce a character that represents the antithesis of his other claims and warns readers of the fate that may befall those who ignore his advice: the spider Shelob. She may seem out-of-place amongst *Rings'* other women; after all, Shelob is the only female who is not remotely human. This is undoubtedly part of Tolkien's point. So far is Shelob removed from the positive qualities of society that she is a creature, unable to exist save through the entrapment and destruction of others. The question may arise as to whether or not Shelob, as a spider, can be held to the same standards as humans. It is important to note that Tolkien takes great care to distinguish her as not just a spider but an "evil thing in spider-form," and that she is the corrupt descendant of the angelic Maiar, powerful beings in the lore of Middle-earth.<sup>49</sup>

In any case, she matches the distinction of being one of Tolkien's timeless females. Before her official introduction in *The Two Towers*, Gollum refers to her exclusively as capitalized-S "She," a clear move by Tolkien to configure her amongst other prominent and respected figures of her sex. And to make Shelob appear timeless, in keeping with the other women, Tolkien places so much emphasis on her history that he stops the narrative just as Shelob begins chasing Frodo and Sam through her lair, in order to inform the reader that "there agelong

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<sup>49</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 723.



had she dwelt... even such as once of old had lived in the Land of Elves in the West that is now under the Sea, such as Beren fought in the Mountains of Terror in Doriath, and so came to Lúthien upon the green sward amid the hemlocks in the moonlight long ago... none could rival her, Shelob the Great, last child of Ungoliant to trouble the unhappy world.”<sup>50</sup> As a timeless and powerful female, it would be remiss to ignore Shelob and the meaning that Tolkien imbues her with.

A direct comparison between Shelob, Arwen, and Lúthien may appear difficult to make. The two Elf women, after all, possess both hands to weave and voices to sing; Shelob has neither. She does, though, align with Arwen’s use of weaving as an art form in her use of webs; Tolkien explicitly describes Shelob’s webs as “spun” and “densely woven,” linking the two arts and providing an example of exactly how arts should not be used.<sup>51</sup> Arwen uses her artistry to inspire the forces of good and heal a nation. The purpose of Shelob’s webs, meanwhile, is only to trap and devour. (In the Goldberry section, I will argue that Shelob’s webs are “industrial reproductions,” something that may seem at odds with classifying them as an art form here. However, according to the arts and crafts movement – more specifically, John Ruskin’s *On the Nature of Gothic Architecture* – reproduced art is looked down upon and considered “lesser,” but it is still, at its basest levels, art.<sup>52</sup>)

It is important to note, as well, that the songs sung by Arwen and Lúthien have only served to illuminate positive qualities like courage and hope within the characters listening, cluing them in to their better selves. The one instance in which the reader actually sees Shelob

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 723.

<sup>51</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 722.

<sup>52</sup> John Ruskin, *On the Nature of Gothic Architecture: And Herein of the True Functions of the Workman in Art*, London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1854, Print.

weaving her webs in *Rings* occurs when Sam rushes in on her wrapping Frodo up to drag him back to her lair. Though nothing is made of Frodo himself at the moment, after the battle Sam approaches his master only to find “no stir of life... nor feel the faintest flutter of his heart.”<sup>53</sup> Tolkien also makes note that Frodo can “hear no voice,” an oblique reference, perhaps, to his established precedent of the reviving power of song. Shelob’s webs, then, are used to mask and obscure life, the exact opposite of Tolkien’s idea of what art can accomplish. Shelob is ultimately too focused on her weaving to notice Sam’s presence, a lack of preparation that ultimately leads to her defeat. Art, then, should be made for others, not just for oneself, and should emphasize rather than hide life.

As established with Lúthien, the other function of songs and stories in Tolkien’s works and the real-world arts movement is to inform characters and readers of Middle-earth’s history. The story of Beren and Lúthien is mentioned several times in the Shelob’s lair chapters, mainly to remind the reader and Sam of the phial of Galadriel’s origin. By using this knowledge, Sam realizes its power and, directly inspired by “the music of the Elves,” cries the incantation that lights the phial and dispels Shelob. Where this knowledge-through-song serves Sam well, a lack of historical knowledge only hurts Shelob, whose flight from her original home “no tale tells, for out of the Dark Years few tales have come.”<sup>54</sup> Though this absence of Shelob’s history does not play out – there is not a situation, for example, where she would have defeated Sam had her origin story been known – Tolkien does imply that this lack of tales is reflected in all manners of her life, as she “knew [little] of or cared for towers, or rings, or anything devised by mind or hand,” i.e. the story being told around her in the present moment. Rather than focus on such

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<sup>53</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 730.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 723.

things, she instead diverts her attention to gluttony and feeding her own needs which, as explained earlier, proves costly. Shelob, then, is Tolkien's indicator that the arts should be for others, not the artist – reinforcing the idea behind Arwen's controversial death – and that using stories as a form of cultural awareness is crucial to a full understanding of the world. Tolkien saw his own work quite similarly; almost all of the works he completed with the intent to publish were written for his children.<sup>55</sup>

Throughout all of Lúthien and Beren's tale, all major occurrences are caused by someone singing a song or weaving a tale. The same could, in fact, be said of Arwen's story in the time of the Ring: the entire premise of *Rings* rests on Bilbo winning the Ring from Gollum in a game of riddles in *The Hobbit*, a distinctly creative endeavor. Though Lúthien uses a plethora of art forms to bring happiness to herself and her loved ones and Arwen uses only a select handful to bring peace and order to the world, Tolkien uses both to display the inherent power of the arts. In a time of war and industrialization, it was crucial to place importance on those things of gentler power, as exemplified by Shelob, who finds her downfall in using her weaving for purely selfish purposes and caring nothing for the arts as they exist around her. All of this plays into Tolkien's affection for the arts and crafts movement, and the belief that hearkening back to older, non-industrialized ideals of craftsmanship could bring salvation to a country at war. Whether telling a fairy tale or a chapter from the annals of history; whether a wordless song or the ending of a great tale, Arwen and Lúthien display that arts have the power to change the world, and to reflect the possibility of a hopeful future.

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<sup>55</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*.

## II. GOLDBERRY – THE FIGURE OF NATURE

The origin of Tom Bombadil dates back before the conception of *Rings*, to a series of poems that Tolkien wrote and fittingly titled “The Adventures of Tom Bombadil.” Though their publication in 1962 comes well after that of *Rings*, Tolkien, in a letter to his publisher Stanley Unwin from December 16, 1937 – three days before beginning work on *Rings* – encloses “Adventures” as a possible follow-up to *The Hobbit*. In the correspondence, Tolkien asks, “Do you think Tom Bombadil, the spirit of the (vanishing) Oxford and Berkshire countryside, could be made into the hero of a story?”<sup>56</sup> Not only does this line quite significantly link Bombadil with the English nation, it establishes a relationship between Bombadil and nature that lasts even into the character’s inclusion in *Rings*. Tolkien made no effort to hide the fact that he wrote the Shire as an idealized version of his country; he even saw himself as a hobbit, internalizing their simple, plain-hearted nature and resistance to the new ways of the world, i.e. industry, chemistry, and engineering.<sup>57</sup> It made perfect sense, then, to place Tom Bombadil, the former spirit of the British countryside, as a guardian on the outskirts of the Shire, protecting and maintaining everything inherently English and natural about the land.

It is into this aspect of the narrative that Tolkien brought Goldberry, a figure just as strongly linked to England and nature, if not more so, than Bombadil. She is very present in the original “Adventures” as the River-woman’s daughter; when Bombadil disturbs the creatures of the river with his splashing and singing, Goldberry swims up and reprimands him, only to be quickly persuaded to “sleep again where the pools are shady” and return in peace to the river

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<sup>56</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 26.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 64, 88.

bottom.<sup>58</sup> Though Bombadil is sweet on her, recalling her when he is trapped by Barrow-wights, she has no further presence in the poem. Clearly, her character affected Tolkien in some larger way, because she returns in *Rings* as Bombadil's wife. Goldberry is, then, both significant to Tolkien and linked in his mind to England, not only in her relationship to "the spirit of the... countryside" but also her position as a guardian of Middle-earth's England-substitute.

If Bombadil is the countryside, then Goldberry, by extension, is England's lifeblood. It is no coincidence that Tolkien made her the River-daughter; the Thames has been a defining feature of English history since the land was first settled. A further link can be found in the dates of the hobbits' stay at Bombadil and Goldberry's home: September 27, their second night in the Old Forest, is the date that William the Conqueror, the first king of England, landed on the British Isles and began to seize control of the Thames Valley.<sup>59</sup> What's more, the figure of Goldberry is linked in several other ways to Britain. Her identifier as River-daughter, for example, uses the distinctly Welsh system of matrilineal heritage, and plays into river-fairy wife mythologies from traditional Welsh legend. Granted, these are links to Wales and not England, but Tolkien expanded several times, most notably in his speech "English and Welsh," upon the interrelatedness between the two nations, and the significance of Wales to England's development and history.<sup>60</sup>

Admittedly, these are some of the only distinct links that Goldberry shares with the medieval, making her connection to Tolkien's concept of the medieval modern a potentially tenuous one. This is because the "modern" that Tolkien fears has not yet come to pass in Middle-

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<sup>58</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, "The Adventures of Tom Bombadil," *The Tolkien Reader*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1966, 197, Print.

<sup>59</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 1091.

<sup>60</sup> Mark T. Hooker, *Tolkien and Welsh (Tolkien a Chymraeg): Essays on J.R.R. Tolkien's Use of Welsh in his Legendarium*, San Bernardino, CA: Llyfrawr, 2012, Print.

earth; like real-world England, though war and industry are a definite threat to the country that Tolkien loves, they have not yet ravaged the landscape. And, though the negative effects of industry are beginning to be seen in England, they have not yet reached catastrophic levels, providing less of a stark contrast with which to compare the modern day and Goldberry's medieval idealizations. It is, perhaps, more apt to view "medieval" in Goldberry's context not so much as a "looking back" but a modern-day ideal, i.e. rather than represent qualities of a "medieval" England, Goldberry depicts a modern England without the threat of destruction by industry. Understanding the presence and construction of a Goldberry-as-England relationship, we can now move on to exactly how Tolkien used this to depict idealized country and nature.

Goldberry is, foremost, a housewife, something which may not at first glance appear relevant among the other powerful women. The hobbits first encounter her in Bombadil's home, bidding them to enter and informing them of their safety "under the roof of Tom Bombadil." She converses with the hobbits for a brief moment before Bombadil himself enters and sets her to work on her duties, namely, preparing dinner for the men: "Here's my Goldberry clothed all in silver-green with flowers in her girdle! Is the table laden? I see yellow cream and honeycomb, and white bread, and butter; milk, cheese, and green herbs and ripe berries gathered. Is that enough for us? Is the supper ready?"<sup>61</sup> After dinner, Goldberry clears the table and retires to bed, allowing the men to talk. Tolkien critic Roger C. Schlobin, in his article "The Monsters Are Talismans and Transgressions," briefly discusses the fact that Tolkien ignores Morgan le Faye in many of his academic papers on medieval literature, justifying this with Tolkien's "general disinterest in female characters in *LR* and elsewhere... Goldberry entertains, but [she is a] homely

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 124.

rather than critical presence.”<sup>62</sup> Though this is accurate in regards to the novel as a whole, it is important to understand when reading the character that her homely presence is exactly what is critical about her. Tolkien felt identically about Goldberry as he did the English landscape, here describing his “autumn wanderlust”: “One of the not too long delayed delights we must promise ourselves, when it pleases God to release us and reunite us, is just such perambulation... where the scars of war, felled woods and bulldozed fields, are not too plain to see.”<sup>63</sup> Goldberry nourishes and cares for the weary travelers in an identical fashion, providing them with the joy and shelter that they need in order to rejuvenate themselves for the journey ahead.

It would be an understatement to represent Goldberry as matron alone; she is also, as is made abundantly clear, a protector. Ushering the hobbits into her home for the first time, she says, “Let us shut out the night! ... You are still afraid, perhaps, of mist and tree-shadows and deep water, and untame things. Fear nothing!”<sup>64</sup> Similarly, when bidding them goodnight, she wishes them peace “until the morning! Heed no nightly noises! For nothing passes door and window here save moonlight and starlight and the wind off the hill-top.”<sup>65</sup> (There is significance, perhaps, in Goldberry’s instruction to “heed no nightly noises” and the fact that Tolkien wrote much of *Rings* during the bombings of World War II.) Despite the fact that their lodgings are only referred to as “Tom Bombadil’s house,” it is Goldberry who assures them of their safety; when Bombadil talks about the Dark Lord the following evening, Frodo notices that “a shadow seemed to pass by the window... When they turned again, Goldberry stood in the door behind,

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<sup>62</sup> Roger C. Schlobin, “The Monsters Are Talismans and Transgressions: Tolkien and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *J.R.R. Tolkien and His Literary Resonances: Views of Middle-earth*, ed. George Clark and Daniel Timmons, Greenwood, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000, 79, Print.

<sup>63</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 94.

<sup>64</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 123.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* 125.

framed in light. She held a candle, shielding its flame from the draught with her hand; and the light flowed through it, like sunshine through a white shell.”<sup>66</sup> In this instance, it is Bombadil, the obviously-powerful masculine figure, who invokes the imagery of a shadow, while Goldberry is the one who dispels that darkness; this follows her depiction as someone who gives shelter, further solidifying her representation of rejuvenating safety.

It is near impossible to discuss Bombadil and Goldberry’s power and their role as protectors without mentioning their songs, which serve as a reminder of the idealized qualities that Tolkien highlights in Arwen and Lúthien. Though Bombadil is characterized by his songs – many of them are, in fact, directly lifted from the “Adventures” poems, just as “Of Beren and Lúthien” is taken from “The Lay of Leithian” – they are all, as Frodo realizes when meeting Goldberry, inspired by his lady; it is the joy derived from her beauty dispels evil.<sup>67</sup> The River-daughter herself only has one stanza to sing, which she recites as the hobbits approach her house in perfect accentual marker, an Anglo-Saxon prosody that provides yet another distinct link to her inherent Englishness and an invocation of past times:

Then another clear voice, as young and as ancient as Spring, like the song of a glad water flowing down into the night from a bright morning in the hills, came falling like silver to meet them: *Now let the song begin! Let us sing together/Of sun, stars, moon and mist, rain and cloudy weather,/Light on the budding leaf, dew on the feather,/Wind on the open hill, bells on the heather,/Reeds by the shady pool, lilies on the water:/Old Tom Bombadil and the River-daughter!*<sup>68</sup>

As Mary Quella Kelly notes in her article “The Poetry of Fantasy,” there is no artificiality in Goldberry’s song (aside from, perhaps, the end-rhyme of “water” and “daughter”); she remains “uncontrived and untainted,” something that is matched by the song’s subject matter, nature.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 131.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 123.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 122

<sup>69</sup> Kelly, “Poetry of Fantasy,” 181.



Her rhyme scheme is never broken, nor is her rhythm. Goldberry's voice itself is clear as river and morning, and she sings precisely of what she knows: light and water, something that she herself personifies as River-daughter. Though Bombadil's songs cover every subject matter from Old Man Willow to the color of his clothes, they are almost entirely superficial and meaningless; Goldberry's one refrain is limited, but focuses on that which Tolkien held above all else, the recognition and protection of nature.

The last appearance of Goldberry, too, is linked with nature's purity. As the hobbits are about to leave the Old Forest with Bombadil, they realize that they haven't said goodbye to Goldberry and so follow her singing to the top of a hill, where she shows them the surrounding landscape. Tolkien takes great pains in expressing every glint of the sun on a river, and each shade of green that the forests and meadows display. These, he indicates, are Goldberry's lands, and without her invitation they would not have opened themselves up to the hobbits. Their spirits rejuvenated by this sight, Frodo and his companions are now ready to continue on their way.

Echoing the feelings of Frodo and the hobbits in this moment, William Morris, the leader of the arts and crafts movement, used the imperative, "Follow nature," to instruct artists to place purity and simplicity above all.<sup>70</sup> Thus, while Goldberry is certainly intended to stand alone as her own pillar, she could also be read as a sub-section of Arwen and Lúthien's call to the arts. Along with the clear links regarding nature, the prominent figures of the arts and crafts movement like Morris spoke frequently and emphatically against the increasing industrialization of the United Kingdom. Tolkien very clearly agreed and saw nature and industrialization as diametric opposites; this is made abundantly clear when the Ents, cognizant trees, attack

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<sup>70</sup> William Morris, "The Art of the People," *Hopes and Fears for Art*, Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1897, 39, Print.

Saruman's stronghold at Isengard because he was cutting down the surrounding forest to fuel his machines.<sup>71</sup> By exhibiting Goldberry as a force of nature and country on her own, Tolkien is also backing up the tenets of the arts.

With Goldberry, though, Tolkien takes the movement a step farther. In his speech "The Arts and Crafts of Today," Morris called architecture "the foundation of all the arts... [the architect has to] fight with the traditional tendency of the epoch in their attempt to produce beauty, rather than marketable finery, to put artistic finish on their work rather than trade finish."<sup>72</sup> Notably, architecture is the one form of artistry that does not make its way into Arwen or Lúthien's narrative, nor does it appear with Goldberry, who lives in a simple cottage in the woods. However, while architecture is merely absent from the rest of the work, it is actively ignored where Goldberry is considered: though the woods and the river and even the pathway leading up to Tom Bombadil's home are described in great detail, the building itself is not. If Tolkien is such an avid believer in the arts and crafts movement, why would he so actively ignore one of its most prominent forms?

The answer is, of course, what he ignores architecture in favor of: nature. Morris laments the battles that every architect must wage between art and the industrialized market, therefore Tolkien removes the market, and the surrounding civilization. Goldberry is not concerned with pleasing others; when the Shire is attacked and nearly razed to the ground by Saruman's ruffians in *The Return of the King*, she and Bombadil stay put in the Old Forest, writing it off as none of their concern. Civilized art brings with it the negatives of civilization. Nature still allows an emphasis on the arts – singing, weaving, history – and preservation while removing the threat of

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<sup>71</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 485-7.

<sup>72</sup> William Morris, "The Arts and Crafts of Today," *Hopes and Fears for Art*, Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1897, 34, Print.

mechanization. Arwen and Lúthien demonstrated the importance and the power of arts and crafts, yet this idea is only brought to completion through Goldberry, who supplies the necessary other half: the emphasis on nature, traditional “technology,” and simpler times.

All of this, though it supports previously made points, may appear to lack any real significance towards Goldberry herself; she is a housewife and likes to sing about and appreciate nature. To put the question bluntly, what does this matter? Tolkien scholar Katherine Hesser, in Goldberry’s entry in the *Tolkien Encyclopedia*, aptly points out that “she is the only female character in *The Lord of the Rings* without a personal agenda... Goldberry provides a feminine figure who is pure, content, significant to the world around her, and wise.”<sup>73</sup> I posit that the significance to Goldberry’s place in the text is exactly because she is a simple character. All that she desires is the peace and happiness of those around her; to make her home in the Old Forest a sanctuary against encroaching evil. Hers is truly the last safe house; though Elrond in Rivendell, Galadriel in Lothlórien, and Faramir in Ithilien offer havens along the way, it is made explicitly clear in each one that they cannot hold off the Shadow for long. Tom Bombadil and Goldberry can, and it is toward that sanctuary and “the experience of joy in Frodo’s successful completion of the quest and the celebration that follows” that serves as *Rings*’ narrative thrust.<sup>74</sup> Though Tolkien has always idealized England, it is this notion – of Britain as an unchangeable sanctuary; a model of simplicity, tradition, and nature that can hold off the darkness; and which traveling soldiers strive to return to – that speaks to hopes which he and others often left silent. Perhaps above all else, Goldberry is the reminder that, no matter what troubling things one encounters, home and nature will and should always remain simple, unsullied, and welcoming.

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<sup>73</sup> Katherine Hesser, “Goldberry,” *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, ed. Michael D.C. Drout, New York: Routledge, 2006, 246, Print.

<sup>74</sup> Eugene L. Startzman, “Goldberry and Galadriel: The Quality of Joy,” *Mythlore*, 16.2, (1989): 12, Print.

It is only logical, when examining Goldberry and her representation of nation and nature, to consider her in comparison with Shelob, who, as mentioned earlier, bears distinct elements of anti-nationality and industrialization, which Tolkien perceives as a form of anti-nationality in and of itself. As with Shelob's relationship with Arwen and Lúthien, she is meant to represent the antithesis of Goldberry's positive qualities. Whereas Goldberry represents Tolkien's strong sense of country, he explicitly states that while Shelob exists on the borders of Mordor and Sauron is very aware of her, she has no allegiance to him, instead existing as her own sovereignty.

I believe that Tolkien represents these conflicting senses of nationality through two character traits. First, Shelob depicts the negative creep of industrialization, though she is in no way aligned with the machinations of Mordor. Not only does she exist in such close proximity to Sauron's machines without doing anything about them – as Tolkien makes clear throughout *Rings*, inactivity and allowing the enemy to advance unchecked makes one complicit in evil deeds – her webs can also be read as a mass-produced art form that only serve the purpose of feeding one's gluttony. Although John Ruskin is never directly mentioned by Tolkien in his personal correspondences or interviews, he was a great influence to William Morris and the arts and crafts movement itself, so it stands to reason that Tolkien would have been aware, at the very least, of Ruskin's work, which expresses very similar dismay over reproduced art: "Never encourage the manufacture of any article not absolutely necessary, in the production of which *Invention* has no share... Never encourage imitation or copying of any kind, except for the sake of preserving record of great works."<sup>75</sup> Judging from the many distasteful mentions of industry he makes in his letters, Tolkien felt much the same way. Therefore, though as a spider she is

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<sup>75</sup> Ruskin, *On the Nature*, 10.

presented as a creature of nature herself, Shelob in fact is an implicit figure of mechanization, to which Goldberry is opposed. The result of Shelob's reproductions? Frodo's blade Sting, a unique elven-blade forged ages ago by the finest sword-smiths, "shone through them like a scythe through grass," punctuating the point that artistry trumps industrialized reproductions.<sup>76</sup>

The second notion that displays Shelob's lack of nationality: the very fact that she has no allegiance to a nation is part of what seals her defeat. Though a contingent of Orcs from the tower of Cirith Ungol walk by to examine the spoils of Shelob's hunt shortly after Sam vanquishes her, they want nothing to do with her for fear that she will eat them, too. Since they were close enough to be aware of her presence in the area, it stands to reason that if Shelob had allied herself with Mordor, they could have come to her rescue.

It is, of course, difficult to personify one's idealizations of nature, especially when the land itself cannot rise up and sing a song of protection, but Tolkien does his best to convey through Goldberry his sense of national pride. She provides more than enough nourishment for the travelers, just as she shields them from the woes and darkness that threaten their safety. And in his use of Shelob as a foil of sorts, Tolkien displays his strong feelings towards England, both in his unflinching dedication to his country and his protests against industrialization. It is slightly problematic, given this, that Bombadil and Goldberry stand idly by during the events of the Scouring of the Shire, when Saruman and Gríma Wormtongue enslave the hobbits and turn the Shire into an industrialized wasteland. It is entirely possible that this absence is meant to represent the fragility of the English countryside; how nature is overwhelmed by industrialized destruction, and its perilous relationship with industry a critique on the World War. However, as

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<sup>76</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 722.

Goldberry and Bombadil are absent during the Scouring, and nothing can be proven by absence, this must remain speculation. For his part, Tolkien makes clear that though the spirits are always willing to help those in need, their power and, indeed, their interests do not extend beyond the boundaries of their land, the Old Forest. Thus, he assures us that no matter what tragedies man inflicts upon England, his ideal – a sense of a powerful country that provides, protects, and indicates the importance of nature – is timeless, waiting to be engaged with and appreciated once again.

### III. GALADRIEL – THE FIGURE OF RELIGION

Galadriel's placement in *Rings* as a symbol of idealized religion is perhaps the most obvious allegory in the text: Tolkien himself admits, in response to a reader comparing Galadriel to the Virgin Mary, that "I know exactly what you mean by the order of Grace; and of course by your references to Our Lady, upon which all my own small perception of beauty both in majesty and simplicity is founded."<sup>77</sup> He does, however, hedge upon an exact comparison, citing Galadriel's status as a repentant, a fact that will be examined later. Indeed, though Galadriel is not a match for Mary in every way, there are clear similarities between them. Father Michael W. Maher, S.J. lists several in his article "'A Land Without Stain'," including Mary's home in the "House of Gold" in the Loreto Litany and Lothlórien's colloquial name "the Golden Wood."<sup>78</sup> Additionally, Mary (or, an unnamed woman giving birth who is widely believed to be Mary) is described in Revelation 12:1-2 as "a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars."<sup>79</sup> As the Fellowship first enters Galadriel's kingdom of Lothlórien, Legolas breaks into song: "An Elven-maid there was of old,/A shining star by day:/ Her mantle white was hemmed with gold,/Her shoes of silver-grey./A star was bound upon her brows,/A light was on her hair/As sun upon the golden boughs/In Lórien the fair."<sup>80</sup> Similar to the ambivalence of Mary as an unnamed woman, Galadriel is the Lady of Lórien but is never directly mentioned by name in Legolas' verse. Though Tolkien takes some liberties, such as representing "the moon under [Mary's] feet" as "shoes of silver-grey," all of the descriptors are matched in some form. Also of importance is the fact that Legolas' song never breaks its rhythm

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<sup>77</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 172.

<sup>78</sup> Michael W. Maher, S.J., "'A Land Without Stain': Medieval Images of Mary and Their Use in the Characterization of Galadriel," *Tolkien the Medievalist*, ed. Jane Chance, London: Routledge, 2003, 227, Print.

<sup>79</sup> *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. Michael D. Coogan, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 2168, Print.

<sup>80</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 339.

or rhyme scheme, something that Tolkien had done previously in *Rings*. It is important for him, in this case, to represent purity in every aspect.

There are, of course, other Marian mirrors. It is significant that Christ's birth is pure and virgin, just as Galadriel is described as "clad wholly in white," white serving as a medieval symbol of purity; it should also be noted that using Mary as a descriptor of purity is, in general, reflective of medieval culture.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, the first mention of Galadriel in *Rings* comes as the Fellowship flees the horrors of Moria. We know, having just witnessed Gandalf's death at the hands of the Balrog and the might of the goblins, that there is an army's worth of cruel and wicked creatures living less than a day's march away from Lothlórien. Yet when Aragorn expresses hope that Galadriel will give them safe harbor, Legolas responds that "there is a secret power here that holds evil from the land."<sup>82</sup> Though Legolas' is only an indirect mention, we come to learn in the coming pages that the power is Galadriel herself, similar to how Mary protects the world through the magical power of the virgin birth. Galadriel, it is revealed, secludes herself away from the rest of Middle-earth in order to act as a gatekeeper against evil. With the previous religious comparisons in mind, this bears a distinct resemblance to the practices of medieval anchorite nuns, or anchoresses, illuminating Tolkien's intent to make Galadriel more than a mirror of the Virgin Mary or even an endorsement of standard Catholic doctrine. She symbolizes what ideal religion as a whole is to Tolkien, and that idealization fits almost perfectly within the guidelines that medieval anchoresses followed.

Anchorites, as described in the 13th-century *Ancrene Wisse (Guide for Anchoresses)*, lived the lives of secluded religious hermits in order to completely devote themselves to God and

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 354.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 338.



His works. Though they often had contact with outsiders in order to provide religious guidance or obtain necessities such as food, in theory they lived a life of total solitude, residing in a four-walled room called a cell built off of a main church, with one small window allowed in order to hear mass and interact with society as needed.<sup>83</sup> Tolkien allows Galadriel the entire realm of Lothlórien as a cell, but she, too, has given her life to devotion; she and her husband Celeborn chose the Golden Wood as their home for the sole purpose of protecting Middle-earth from Sauron's rampage, and they seclude themselves from the rest of the land until the Shadow is vanquished.<sup>84</sup>

As important as seclusion and devotion is to an anchoress, one of their guiding principles, and the one which Tolkien chooses to emphasize in *Rings*, is the importance of temptation: "Let no one of a high life think that she will not be tempted. The good who have climbed high are tempted more than the weak; and that is only right, for the higher the hill the more wind is on it... If there is any anchoress who feels no temptations, she should be very much afraid."<sup>85</sup> To the anchorites, temptation is crucial to a proper devotion to God because "you buy cheap what you do not much care for."<sup>86</sup> Indeed, *Rings* is not the only instance of Tolkien exploring its importance; he based a 1953 speech on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* on the significance of temptation in Gawain's journey and sense of religious understanding.<sup>87</sup> The key event, then, to understanding Galadriel's position as an anchoress-representative, is that of her ultimate temptation at the Mirror of Galadriel.

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<sup>83</sup> *Ancrene Wisse (Guide for Anchoresses)*, trans. Hugh White, London: Penguin Books, 1993, Print.

<sup>84</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, New York: Ballantine Books, 1980, 256-7, Print.

<sup>85</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, 86.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* 181.

<sup>87</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2006, 72-108, Print.

Religious scholar Fleming Rutledge aptly compares the Mirror scene to the temptation of Adam and Eve in *The Battle for Middle-Earth*.<sup>88</sup> However, the Biblical take on temptation is resoundingly negative: it leads to sin and worldwide, long-lasting catastrophe. Tolkien aims to move beyond such a black-and-white portrayal in his work, instead emphasizing the power and success in recognizing, confronting, and overcoming such impulses. In the Mirror scene, Tolkien places his full emphasis on Galadriel's imperfect humanity and her subsequent choice to remain pure. Both Frodo and Sam, when they look into the Mirror, see prophetic and apocalyptic futures. As the Eye of Sauron finds Frodo, Galadriel reveals that she, too, has seen the same visions, comforting Frodo with the knowledge that she protects Lothlórien with the power of Nenyá, the Elven Ring of Adamant. She shows Frodo her ring, and "Eärendil, the Evening Star, most beloved of the Elves, shone clear above. So bright was it that the figure of Elven-lady cast a dim shadow on the ground."<sup>89</sup>

That this moment precedes Galadriel's temptation is no accident. Tolkien portrays her as a woman in possession of material goods (Nenyá), power (enough, at least, to repel the forces of the Dark Lord), knowledge (her Mirror possesses divinatory abilities), and blessings (light from the heavens literally shines down on her). Light, as related by medievalist Reno E. Lauro, was considered in the Middle Ages to be "a quasi-spiritual substance. Light is *prima forma corpalis* – the first corporeal form.... *Lumen* is used for light reflected and is called by Grosseteste 'a spiritual body'."<sup>90</sup> Following Tolkien's use of the medieval anchoress-model and highlighting elements of medieval significance, light holds the same emphasized meaning here. Light is

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<sup>88</sup> Fleming Rutledge, *The Battle for Middle Earth: Tolkien's Divine Design in The Lord of the Rings*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004, Print.

<sup>89</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 365.

<sup>90</sup> Lauro, "Of Spiders and Light," 60.

depicted throughout the Bible as a symbol of being with God and of God's blessing; Galadriel, in every way then, is represented as a blessed figure, and should want for nothing.

Yet, following anchoritic doctrine that "the higher the hill the more wind is on it," she is still tempted; Galadriel is complete and incomplete, mirroring the structure of an anchoress' stripped yet fulfilled life.<sup>91</sup> Frodo, recognizing that she has far more strength than he, offers her the Ring, a suggestion met by Galadriel "with a sudden clear laugh." She continues:

"In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!"

She lifted up her hand and from the ring that she wore there issued a great light that illuminated her alone and left all else dark. She stood before Frodo seeming now tall beyond measurement, and beautiful beyond enduring, terrible and worshipful. Then she let her hand fall, and the light faded, and suddenly she laughed again, and lo! she was shrunken: a slender elf-woman, clad in simple white, whose gentle voice was soft and sad.

"I pass the test," she said. "I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel."<sup>92</sup>

This is Galadriel's ultimate moment of hubris. She begins by positioning herself as a Queen, not a Dark Lady, which would seem to be the equivalent to Sauron's Dark Lord, because she is already the Lady of Lothlórien and such a title would not mark a new level of power. She also justifies this choice by making it clear that it is not her decision: "*you* will set up a Queen." (Emphasis is mine.) Continuing, Galadriel places herself on the same level as nature itself and then elevates herself higher by giving the Morning and Night, the Sea and the Sun, etc. proper names. It is Galadriel's intent to raise herself to elemental proportions.

Of significant importance is the fact that Galadriel's temptation is directly tailored to her past transgressions, as it implies that Tolkien has a meaning and higher purpose. Galadriel's

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<sup>91</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, 86.

<sup>92</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 365-6.

primary sin has always been hubris: she remains banished to Middle-earth because she will not repent for her past actions, which include fighting against the angelic Valar and refusing to give Fëanor, another Elf of importance, hairs from her radiant head.<sup>93</sup> Tolkien ensures, then, that her modern-day temptations are also fueled by excessive self-confidence in her own power and ability; that despite one's best attempts at pushing them aside, sinful nature is always there, even if it is dormant. These events are, of course, complete fantasy, and it is likely that no reader of *Rings* will find themselves in similar situations. However, Galadriel is a fantastical being in a fantastical realm, and if these actions are diluted into more generally-applicable terms, such as rebelling against authority figures or thinking oneself better than others, they are indeed relatable depictions of everyday temptations.

This point is made clear previously, upon the Fellowship's initial meeting with Galadriel and Celeborn; afterwards Tolkien notes that "all of them, it seemed, had fared alike: each had felt that he was offered a choice between a shadow full of fear that lay ahead, and something that he greatly desired."<sup>94</sup> If this were not reference enough to Tolkien's argument, Boromir draws it closer still, placing an exact name upon his experience: "Almost I should have said that she was tempting us."<sup>95</sup> The reason why Tolkien chose to highlight temptation in Galadriel is exactly how it plays out with the Fellowship. He means to display that anyone can feel the pressure of sin, no matter how powerful; that temptation can affect everyone differently but will always be present; and that acknowledging and confessing to one's sins is crucial to overcoming them, that greater power is actually obtained through resistance. To prove the last point, one need look no further than Boromir, who, despite his claim that "it need not be said that I refused to listen. The Men of

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<sup>93</sup> Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales*, 241.

<sup>94</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 358.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

Minas Tirith are true to their word,” ultimately succumbs to his temptation. When he dies shortly thereafter, pierced by Orc arrows, his karmic punishment is made apparent: “I tried to take the Ring from Frodo... I have paid.”<sup>96</sup>

Indeed, as Galadriel finishes her speech and begins to overcome the situation, the light-as-purity imagery returns, highlighted by a quick succession of back-and-forth hyperbole. All of the qualities that Frodo describes – beautiful, tall, worshipful – are positive, yet they are tempered by that same sense of elevation, of needing to be more. Even “worshipful” is countered with “terrible.” She teeters between the two in a moment of decision, only signifying her choice with a second laugh. Just as laughter began her temptation, so too does it end it, returning her to everyday joys and amusements. Fittingly, Galadriel reveals at the end that she will “remain Galadriel,” simultaneously referencing her attempts to elevate herself and her ultimate humanization: throughout the chapter, Frodo, as the narrator-figure, has referred to her as “the Lady” or “the Lady Galadriel.” For the first time, she is without title, stripped to her barest persona. She has passed temptation, and though she is reduced in figure her spirituality is unsurpassed.

The change in Galadriel post-Mirror scene is notable. Most readily apparent is her willingness to give Gimli, a dwarf and apparent enemy of the Elves, three strands of her hair when he asks for them, a direct contrast to her proud refusal of Fëanor in her earlier days. However, Tolkien also accentuates Galadriel’s “new persona” in the song she sings as the Fellowship departs Lothlórien:

I sang of leaves, of leaves of gold, and leaves of gold there grew:/Of wind I sang, a wind there came and in the branches blew./Beyond the Sun, beyond the Moon, the foam was

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 414.

on the Sea,/And by the strand of Ilmarin there grew a golden Tree./...There long the golden leaves have grown upon the branching years,/While here beyond the Sundering Seas now fall the Elven-tears./O Lórien! The Winter comes, the bare and leafless Day;/ The leaves are falling in the stream, the River flows away.<sup>97</sup>

Though Galadriel still possesses and acknowledges her power over Lórien, she also has limitations set upon her. In a reference to the proper names of nature in her Mirror speech, the Sun and Moon are now beyond the Lady, and the leaves that she sings into existence are golden, no longer representing the power of the Golden Wood but foretelling the winter and the end of the Elves in Middle-earth. And like Legolas' first song upon entering her realm, Galadriel does not break rhythm or rhyme scheme, accentuating once again her purity and the restrictions that are now forced upon her, here in the form of meter. Still, lest the song seem too melancholic, as if Galadriel has been stripped of joy as well, Tolkien makes clear that it is sung as a blessing, ferrying the Fellowship into the dangerous unknown with as much goodwill as possible. As stated by Mary Quella Kelly, "The songs of the fading Elves repeatedly capture musically the mood of beauty mingled with sadness which yet brings comfort and solace to the hearers."<sup>98</sup>

This use of song not only represents Galadriel's newfound position as one who comforts, it also links her back to Mary, since "Mary is song, from the moment of the Visitation."<sup>99</sup> Though Tolkien was uncomfortable making too much of a connection between the two, it is, perhaps, allowable making the comparison with post-temptation Galadriel, where the presence of her prideful past is not alluded to and she takes on a different characterization. Indeed, "some [medieval] Protestant female poets turned Mary into a potential sinner, like themselves. Brought

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<sup>97</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 372-3.

<sup>98</sup> Mary Quella Kelly, "The Poetry of Fantasy: Verse in *The Lord of the Rings*," *Tolkien and the Critics: Essays on J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings*, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968, 191, Print.

<sup>99</sup> Miri Rubin, *Emotion and Devotion: The Meaning of Mary in Medieval Religious Cultures*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009, 21, Print.

down to earth she offered a model to women because like them she had striven to avoid the many sins which loomed and tempted.”<sup>100</sup> Having now passed temptation, Galadriel has followed another of the anchoress’ doctrines: “follow Our Lady [St. Mary] and not the cackling Eve.”<sup>101</sup> That is, acknowledge sin, but never succumb to it. Now that Galadriel has done so, she serves as a sort of combined anchoress-Virgin Mary figure, acting as a source of inspiration to those still traversing the world’s temptations.

Tolkien utilizes Galadriel’s main functions, then, to demonstrate how she inspires and provides hope to those who must leave her and continue on a darker and more dangerous path, namely Gimli and Sam. It is entirely likely, given the Fellowship’s expected brush with war once they leave the Golden Wood, that this is an intended reference to the soldiers of the World Wars, and that Tolkien, by linking them to Galadriel through courtly love – as will be seen in the following paragraphs – intends to solidify the link between medieval concepts and modern-day applications as well as heighten the importance and lasting inspiration of acknowledging and resisting temptation. To establish this link, Galadriel gives the entire Fellowship gifts upon their departure from Lothlórien (including a wafer-like lembas bread that bears a resemblance to the wafers used in Catholic communion), all but Gimli. Instead, she asks what he desires, to which he requests three hairs from her head, as a remembrance of her shining beauty. Galadriel grants his wish, and so Gimli becomes a case example of courtly love.

Courtly love is defined by its nonromantic qualities, almost never taking place between a husband and wife but rather a knight and his chosen lady, and, according to medievalist Sarah Downey, “one of courtly love’s essential characteristics is its capacity to make the lover a better

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 27.

<sup>101</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, 35.

person and, ultimately, to bring him closer to the divine.”<sup>102</sup> Gimli takes part in this by defending Galadriel’s beauty to all he meets: he informs Éomer that “if ever you chance to see the Lady Galadriel with your eyes, then you shall acknowledge her the fairest of ladies, or our friendship will end.”<sup>103</sup> As Janet Brennan Croft asserts, “the rituals of courtly love offer Gimli a behavior pattern into which he can properly channel and enact his feelings for Galadriel... Superstition, amulets, and rituals were a part of many soldiers’ ways of dealing with the war through magical thinking.”<sup>104</sup> Gimli takes the role of the soldier, but uses religion as his reminder of purity rather than superstition, as Tolkien saw most appropriate. To accentuate this point, Tolkien places the Mirror of Galadriel scene on the calendar date of February 14, St. Valentine’s Day; St. Valentine was most commonly associated in the Middle Ages with courtly love.<sup>105</sup> Additionally cementing the link, the Virgin Mary was also seen as a subject of courtly love, inspiring her subjects to rise above temptation throughout their journeys. A Middle English lyric, clearly intending for the “lady” to be read as Mary, reads: “Upon a lady my love is lente,/...To serve this lady we all be bounde/Both night and day in every place/Where ever we be, in felde or towne,/Or elles in any other place.”<sup>106</sup> There are records, too, though not as directly linked to courtly love practices as these lyrics, of individuals going to anchoresses for advice and carrying similar reminders with them in their journeys. Having overcome her own temptation, Galadriel now follows the Marian-anchoress model of serving as an inspiration to better others’ lives.

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<sup>102</sup> Sarah Downey, “Cordial Dislike: Reinventing the Celestial Ladies of Pearl and Purgatorio in Tolkien’s Galadriel,” *Mythlore*, 29.3-4, (2011): 105, Print.

<sup>103</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 524.

<sup>104</sup> Janet Brennan Croft, *War and the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004, 40, Print.

<sup>105</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 1092.

<sup>106</sup> “188,” *Middle English Lyrics*, ed. Luria Maxwell and Richard Hoffman, New York: Norton, 1974, 177, Print.



Though he is less of a warrior than Gimli, Sam also carries Galadriel's memory with him through his travels. Where Gimli is more aggressive in his chivalric love, Sam uses it defensively. (The most obvious example, his vanquishing of Shelob using the phial of Galadriel, will be discussed in full later in this chapter.) He idealizes Galadriel whenever the journey becomes rough; when he and Frodo use his Elvish rope to navigate the rock maze of Eryn Muil, Sam muses that "it goes hard parting with anything I brought out of the Elf-country. Made by Galadriel herself, too, maybe. Galadriel."<sup>107</sup> Similarly, when the two travel through Mordor on the last leg of their journey, Sam invokes her: "If only the Lady could see us or hear us, I'd say to her: 'Your Ladyship, all we want is light and water: just clean water and plain daylight, better than any jewels, begging your pardon.'"<sup>108</sup> Later, when they come upon a small stream and a patch of weak daylight, he cries, "If I ever see the Lady again, I will tell her! ... Light and now water!"<sup>109</sup> This resonates strongly with Psalm 23:2-4: "He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me."<sup>110</sup> Sam's religious prayer and devotion to Galadriel is rewarded with blessings even in the land of the enemy, just as God rewards His followers in the psalm. I am not here attempting to make a comparison between Galadriel and God; merely the notion that there is a high religious association with the sort of courtly love that Galadriel inspires.

Shelob, it should not be surprising to note, is not representative of God or love but sin and hatred. Indeed, many Tolkien scholars have tackled the dichotomy between her and

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<sup>107</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 611.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* 918.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* 920.

<sup>110</sup> *Bible*, 791.

Galadriel, namely Reno E. Lauro, who sees Galadriel, especially through her phial, as representative of light, while Shelob embodies all things of darkness. Since light was a medieval representation of holiness (which, as mentioned before, Tolkien would have been well aware of as a medievalist) and Sam uses the phial to defeat Shelob, the hobbits' misadventure in her lair is used as an allegory for how all things religious vanquish sin.<sup>111</sup> Lauro's point is indeed valid, and accurately represents what both the Galadriel and Shelob characters represent in *Rings*. However, by painting the conflict as a simple "light conquers darkness" story, she misses many of the specific points Tolkien attempts to make to exemplify exactly how Shelob embodies evil. It is not enough to show Shelob as sinful; Tolkien means to specify *how* she is sinful to properly use her as an example of how, like Galadriel, to avoid and overcome that temptation. It is also crucial, at this point, to remember Shelob's earlier associations with disloyalty and industry, in light of the following arguments that she is inherently sinful.

Shelob is meant to exist in as direct an opposition to Galadriel's ideal example, as an anchoritic figure, as possible. Just as Galadriel uses her seclusion in Lothlórien to protect the rest of Middle-earth from Sauron's powers and recognize her place and imperfections within the diminishing world, Shelob, also alone in a confined space, uses her seclusion to reflect only inwards, leading to a variety of sins: she "served none but herself, drinking the blood of Elves and Men, bloated and grown fat with endless brooding on her feasts... for all living things were her food, and her vomit darkness."<sup>112</sup> Even this is not enough, for her only desire is to grow "swollen till the mountains could no longer hold her up and the darkness could not contain her."<sup>113</sup> Rather than remain content in her present situation, thinking of others in the world,

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<sup>111</sup> Lauro, "Of Spiders and Light," 53-79.

<sup>112</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 723.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* 723-4.

Shelob cares only for herself. Tolkien's imagery of bloating, vomit, and swelling only serves to emphasize the sickness that she embodies, and the unhealthiness that such a lifestyle results in, a possible fate for Galadriel had she given in to her own temptation.

One cannot mention Shelob and temptation without discussing her relation to female sexuality: Tolkien scholar Brenda Partridge, in "No Sex, Please – We're Hobbits," argues that Shelob represents "male fear of the power of women's sexual attraction."<sup>114</sup> There is, fitting with Tolkien's depiction of Shelob-as-evil, significant sexual imagery associated with her, and it is easy to see, from lines such as "Shelob, with the driving force of her own cruel will, with strength greater than any warrior's hand, thrust herself upon a bitter spike" where such association comes from.<sup>115</sup> Like Galadriel's connections with the Virgin Mary, Shelob also has a Biblical mirror in the Great Whore of Babylon, "[populating] her world with various lesser monsters and abominations," which certainly fits with Tolkien's descriptions of Shelob's spawn, and also positions her as the antithesis of Galadriel's courtly love.<sup>116</sup> Where Galadriel inspires men to carry goodness into the world, Shelob spreads only evil.

However, it would be incorrect to place any more emphasis on Shelob's sexual connotations than her gluttony, or her animal anger. Tolkien warns his reader against all of the aforementioned sins equally, with no regard paid to gender roles. If one chooses to focus on sexuality and Shelob's thrust on Sam's sword, for example, they would have to recognize that the act also has repercussions for the male, as Sam pulls back from his blow and sees "his death in

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<sup>114</sup> Partridge, "No Sex, Please – We're Hobbits," 188.

<sup>115</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 729.

<sup>116</sup> Glen Robert Gill, "Biblical Archetypes in *The Lord of the Rings*," *Light Beyond All Shadow: Religious Experience in Tolkien's Work*, ed. Paul E. Kerry and Sandra Miesel, Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011, 73, Print.

her eyes.”<sup>117</sup> Shelob is female *and* she sins; she does not sin *because* she is female. Nowhere does Tolkien place any reference, no matter how insignificant, indicating that it is some feminine quality of Shelob’s that has driven her to her current state of being. It is of crucial importance that the “sexualized” stab does not defeat Shelob but rather infuriates her, so that she no longer toys with her prey but decides to kill him at last. It is only the phial of Galadriel, used by Sam in a last-ditch attempt to save Frodo – utilizing a container of holy light to selflessly help another – that can dispel sin and darkness, not an anti-feminist reading of Sam’s sword-as-phallus.

Though Galadriel represents Tolkien’s idealized vision of religion, he makes it apparent that ideal does not mean perfect. Galadriel is pure and good, sharing qualities with the Virgin Mary, yet she also distinguishes herself from the unattainable Marian ideal, choosing also to align with the anchoritic ideal of complete solitude and devotion in the face of temptation. In many respects, Galadriel is no different from regular mortals: she is faced with her sins and is tempted by them, yet ultimately recognizes the value of maintaining purity and humility over reward; and Tolkien takes great care, through Shelob, to demonstrate just as effectively what Galadriel’s endgame might have been had she given in. This overcoming brings its own reward: final acceptance into Valinor, the Undying Lands in Tolkien’s mythology where the immortal Valar and those blessed by them go instead of dying. It is Middle-earth’s version of heaven, and Galadriel has earned her place there. Still, though she is now preparing for the diminishment of her abilities, her virtuosity remains inspirational and blesses those that encounter her, as exemplified by Gimli and Sam. Nowhere else is Tolkien’s religious ideal – confronting one’s

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<sup>117</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 729.

sinful nature and using that success to better oneself and motivate others – portrayed with more clarity.

#### IV. ÉOWYN – THE FIGURE OF MODERNITY

Éowyn cannot in any way be described as timeless, ethereal, or supernaturally powerful. Though she is the king of Rohan's niece, she is a modern-day "country girl" left behind against her wishes to tend the house while men ride off to war and a descendant of the House of Eorl, a "thatched barn where brigands drink in the reek, and their brats roll on the floor among the dogs."<sup>118</sup> This quote, admittedly, comes from Saruman the dark wizard in a fit of anger after King Théoden denies his offer of peace. However, it had been established earlier in the narrative that Saruman's greatest power is his voice, and his ability to prey on the hidden truths and fears already established in his listeners; thus, it is reasonable to infer that he illuminates here a pre-existing stereotype of Rohan. If we attempt to measure Éowyn against the idealized scaffolding of medieval concepts that Tolkien has set with Arwen, Goldberry, and Galadriel, she would be considered a failure. Yet she is also the only prominent human female character, and the only one to affect the plot through her own actions rather than by inspiring others to change the world; Éowyn rides to war knowing that she will die and slays the Witch-king, effectively winning the Battle of Pelennor Fields and the siege of Minas Tirith for the forces of good. It is therefore both irresponsible and, indeed, near impossible to write at length about the women of *Rings* without giving Éowyn her due attention, just as it is important to recognize that we have moved beyond idealized concepts into a more realistic and relatable representation.

If she is not a medievalized ideal as the other women are, where, then, does Éowyn fit in? While the medievalized women represent Tolkien's qualities for an ideal England, Éowyn is a modern-day woman at war, forced to combine that medievalism with a more contemporary

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<sup>118</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 581.

understanding. Just as the suffragette movement used the medieval symbol of Joan of Arc as a rallying point for their cause (which will be discussed at length later in this chapter), Éowyn serves to combine Tolkien's ideals and the World Wars, demonstrating exactly how his concepts of the arts and crafts movement, nationality and nature, and religion could be applied to England's modern-day situation to achieve national success.

Of Tolkien's timeless women, the most obvious comparison to Éowyn's storyline is that of Goldberry and her representation of nationality. As the king's niece, Théoden repeatedly assigns her to remain behind and watch over those who cannot ride to war, namely the women, the elderly, and the children, a distinct reference to women's roles during the World Wars. Though Éowyn greatly resents this role, describing it as "exile," others see it as positive; Aragorn tells her that "there will be need of valour without renown, for none shall remember the deeds that are done in the last defence of your homes. Yet the deeds will not be less valiant because they are unpraised."<sup>119</sup> Éowyn responds that she is "of the House of Eorl and not a serving-woman. I can ride and wield blade, and I do not fear either pain or death" but rather "a cage. To stay behind bars, until use and old age accept them, and all chance of doing great deeds is gone beyond recall or desire."<sup>120</sup> It is important, moving forward, to understand the underlying tension present in this scene, not solely between Aragorn and Éowyn but in Éowyn's need to distinguish herself as being of a higher rank. Not only does she make clear that she is "not a serving-woman," she is also "of the House of Eorl, a shieldmaiden and not a dry-nurse."<sup>121</sup> She invokes her house twice in the same argument on the same page, both uses elevating herself above commoners. Furthermore, the language that she uses is purely regal and heroic, abandoning all

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<sup>119</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 784.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

concept of her own life for that of her people; she seeks, as Aragorn suggests, no renown.

Éowyn's repeated claims about her lineage are not meant to give herself immediate power and authority, nor do they disparage those who are serving-women and dry-nurses. Rather, she uses them to stress the importance of inserting herself into the coming conflict: just because she is a woman does not make protecting the people of Rohan any less her responsibility.

This could not be less like Tolkien's previous representation of nationality. Goldberry, a timeless being who cares nothing for the outside world or war, is completely content with spending eternity tending house for Tom Bombadil, "caged," as Éowyn would put it, in one section of the Shire's Old Forest. What is Tolkien saying by completely undoing the representation he has established in Goldberry? Though the two characters' passions and desires are wildly different, they do represent similar ideals. The sheltering bubble cast by Bombadil's magic allows for Goldberry to focus herself on her duties of protection through house-tending and natural rejuvenation, two activities appropriate for a time of peace.

However, the green and idealized land of England past/the Shire is no longer our lot in a time of war. Éowyn has no such luxuries since her home is being directly besieged, and so her expression of protection is completely different. She is, in fact, eager to die for her country. When Merry, riding with Éowyn-as-Dernhelm (her masculine identity), surveys his companion for the first time, he notes that she has "the face of one without hope who goes in search of death."<sup>122</sup> This may at first appear antithetical, the actions of a melancholic woman looking to kill herself in the most productive way possible rather than someone with the mindset of protecting her countrymen. But when examined in context of the earlier scene between her and

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid. 803.



Aragorn, in which Éowyn emphasizes her high status within Rohan society, it becomes clear that she is not suicidal but heroic. To die in battle is the only conceivable way to buy her people more time and preserve national integrity. As Aragorn says to Éowyn when she attempts to persuade him not to travel the Paths of the Dead, which she considers suicide, “It is not madness, lady... for I go on a path appointed... Only so can I see any hope of doing my part in the war against Sauron. I do not choose paths of peril.”<sup>123</sup> It is the scene after this argument, quite literally on the following page, when Éowyn first appears in her armor with a sword at her side. Just as Aragorn sees his duty as king is to risk death for his people, Éowyn has internalized his advice amongst her repeated statements of her own royalty, finding self-sacrifice within herself to do *her* part in the war.

Tolkien makes sure to portray such national protection in a positive light, despite the risks: after several drafts, he completely scrapped his initial plan to have Éowyn die in battle.<sup>124</sup> In fact, it is exactly her willingness to sacrifice herself that saves her life. As she stands before the Witch-king hopelessly outmatched, Merry, hiding off to the side in fear, recalls “the face that he saw at the riding from Dunharrow: the face of one that goes seeking death, having no hope. Pity filled his heart and great wonder, and suddenly the slow-kindled courage of his race awoke... She should not die, so fair, so desperate!”<sup>125</sup> Her desperation inspires Merry to act, and it is only because he stabs the Witch-king from behind that Éowyn is afforded the chance to destroy the Nazgûl captain. Furthermore, so great is the strength of her protection that her actions enable Gandalf – who had previously planned to challenge the Witch-king himself – and Pippin to save

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid. 783-784.

<sup>124</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *The History of The Lord of the Rings, Part Three: The War of the Ring*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000, 256, 359, Print.

<sup>125</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 841.

Faramir from the crazed machinations of his father Denethor, and when she is thought dead she is given the same rites and honor as her king, as “a great rain came out of the Sea, and it seemed that all things wept for Théoden and Éowyn, quenching the fires in the City with grey tears.”<sup>126</sup> Because of her selfless willingness to die in battle, her protection extends even into her incapacitation, as she incites nature itself – a more oblique connection to Goldberry’s sense of nation and nature, perhaps – to weep, extinguishing fires that might have damaged Minas Tirith further. And while this may appear to play into a sense of conservatism on Tolkien’s part, depicting a traditional and clichéd self-sacrificing woman, it instead speaks to his progressivism, gendering heroism to create a new form of a female champion. (This will be discussed in full later.)

It is, in fact, her willingness to sacrifice that also links her with Tolkien’s idealized concept of religion. In Galadriel, he depicted how the holiness of purity and goodness can be used to resist her own temptation while also inspiring others. Though Galadriel is presented as an anchoress, Éowyn immediately shuns such a role, as I explained earlier: the last thing she wants is to remain in one spot while others risk their lives around her. However, despite the wartime setting, just as much emphasis is placed on purity. Like Galadriel, Éowyn is consistently clad in white with streaming golden hair, and she is often connected with star imagery, as when Aragorn turns to her as he leaves at night for the Paths of the Dead and “saw her as a glimmer in the night, for she was clad in white; but her eyes were on fire.”<sup>127</sup> As discussed in earlier sections, Reno E. Lauro’s “Of Spiders and Light” establishes the medieval relation between light, stars, and holiness; purity, then, is in Tolkien’s view a consistent religious theme of importance.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid. 845.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. 783-4.

<sup>128</sup> Lauro, “Of Spiders and Light,” 53-79.

It is in the matter of sins and temptation where Éowyn and Galadriel vastly differ. Éowyn is never truly tempted by sin while the war rages; she exhibits neither greed nor envy, sloth nor gluttony, lechery nor anger. Though one might expect her to use anger in her fight against the Witch-king, she instead echoes Galadriel's method of dismissing temptation by "laughing, and the clear voice was like the ring of steel."<sup>129</sup> Medievalist Charles W. Nelson, in his essay "The Sins of Middle-earth," asserts that the races of Middle-earth represent the Seven Deadly Sins, and that men signify the sin of pride, describing its qualities as disobedience, complaint, presumption, and boastfulness.<sup>130</sup> Though Éowyn does disobey Théoden's orders to stay home and complains about the position that is forced upon her, she does not do so under any interpretation of pridefulness. Rather, her actions are completely selfless, as she hopes to die in the act of protecting those she cares for, a Christ-like figure. And while Galadriel's temptation arrives in a crescendo where she proclaims herself a queen of Middle-earth, Éowyn intentionally leaves the role of lord behind, declaring in the moment of her greatest accomplishment, confronting the Witch-king, "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."<sup>131</sup> She makes no reference to her royal lineage, only to her father, Éomund, who was chief marshal of the Riddermark but served under the rule of King Théoden. Éowyn defines herself by her position towards Théoden, a subservient role, and, merely, as a "woman," not the lord of Rohan, the daughter of kings, or a shieldmaiden, as others have described her in earlier pages.

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<sup>129</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 842.

<sup>130</sup> Charles W. Nelson, "The Sins of Middle-earth: Tolkien's Use of Medieval Allegory," *J.R.R. Tolkien and His Literary Resonances: Views of Middle-earth*, ed. George Clark and Daniel Timmons, Greenwood, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000, 87-88, Print.

<sup>131</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 841.

Contrasting how Galadriel elevates herself from how others describe her – i.e. referencing her potential role as a Dark Queen rather than a mere Lady – Éowyn reduces her status. It should be noted here that a feminist reading of this scene that contradicts this claim could, and has been, made.<sup>132</sup> However, Éowyn does not state that she is a woman as a moment of feminist pride. Rather, she is recognizing the loophole in the well-known prophecy that the Witch-king could not be killed by a man. Éowyn’s statement that she is a woman is meant to telegraph her success and sense of victory over the Witch-king, not use her gender to portray herself as “more than.” Clearly, Tolkien is making the point that temptation is healthy, but in a time of war one must focus on combatting immediate physical threats rather than less-threatening internal temptations.

However, temptation is an integral part to Tolkien’s conception of religion, and representing a “modern-day” woman without that confrontation would act against what Galadriel has already set in place. Éowyn’s “final act,” which takes place after the battle is over, is therefore crucial to a complete representation of modern religion. After being healed by Aragorn, Éowyn is forced to rest in the Houses of Healing, where Faramir, the Lord of Gondor, is also staying. She has succeeded and saved many lives, and her vanity seems to recognize this; her words are described as “proud,” and Faramir notes her “proud head,” deliberate invocations of the very sin that Nelson asserts that Éowyn flirts with earlier in the books. She is also consistently called Lady Éowyn, the Lady of Rohan, and the Lady, another direct reference to Galadriel’s hubris; and when Faramir asks her to spend time with him for his own well-being, she responds that she cannot, as “I am a shieldmaiden,” all deliberate ways that her pride is

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<sup>132</sup> Laura Michel, “Politically Incorrect: Tolkien, Women, and Feminism,” *Tolkien and Modernity 1*, ed. Frank Weinreich and Thomas Honegger, Zollikofen, Switzerland: Walking Tree Publishers, 2006, 55-76, Print.

heightened following her removal from battle.<sup>133</sup> It is only when complete victory has arrived that she allows herself to love Faramir, declaring that “I will be a shieldmaiden no longer, nor vie with the great Riders, nor take joy only in the songs of slaying. I will be a healer, and love all things that grow and are not barren... No longer do I desire to be a queen.”<sup>134</sup> Like Galadriel, her wishes for grandeur suddenly vanish, and she chooses to remain a “lesser woman” (in regards to her rank) in order to live in happiness as Faramir’s wife. Éowyn’s confrontation with temptation, and the medievalized anchoritic emphasis on temptation, still arrives, though Tolkien places it after her part in the war has concluded, signifying that such things should be put aside until after the greater good has been preserved and the nation protected.

One cannot mention the Éowyn-Faramir romance without acknowledging the popular critical response to it. Though I have interpreted it as a positive portrayal of Éowyn overcoming her sinful temptation, most critics see it instead as a distinctly anti-feminist stance from Tolkien. Tolkien critic Katherine Hesser marks this as the moment when “[Éowyn’s] identity is clearly defined – as a possession. As Aragorn praises her brother for delivering to Gondor the ‘fairest thing in his realm,’ all of Éowyn’s successes in battle, her fierce loyalty to her country, and her enduring devotion to her family are forgotten as she is placed among... the other idealized females whose beauty is defended and debated throughout the work.”<sup>135</sup> Janet Brennan Croft takes a decidedly lighter approach, though she still finds it “an unsatisfactory conversion because it is only described in emotional terms and no rational reason is given for her change... while not implausible, her change of heart is not adequately explained.”<sup>136</sup> Admittedly, Tolkien’s wording

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid. 961.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. 965.

<sup>135</sup> Katherine Hesser, “Éowyn,” *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, ed. Michael D.C. Drout, New York: Routledge, 2006, 169, Print.

<sup>136</sup> Croft, *War and the Works*, 133.

is oddly chosen in Éowyn's declaration. For instance, though she claims that she no longer desires to be a queen, she notably denied Théoden's request to stay home and protect her people, which would have effectively made her queen. She states that she "no longer" has that desire, though according to earlier pages in the book, she *never* had it.

Despite this, her change of heart does not need too thorough an explanation: she longed for battle to protect her people. Her declaration that she no longer wishes to be a shieldmaiden is prefaced by the exclamation, "Behold! the Shadow has departed!"<sup>137</sup> Shadow, with a capital 'S,' always signifies Mordor and the power of Sauron. She is stating that, because the threat of war is over, her presence as a warrior is no longer necessary. Éowyn only ever fought because she wanted to protect her people, not because she enjoyed being a warrior. Now that Rohan is protected, she simply has no more reason to desire fighting, something which aligns perfectly well with Tolkien's personal history as a soldier in World War I and his immediate distaste for warfare. In many ways, perhaps, Éowyn's insistence upon being a protector is Tolkien's way of coming to terms with the horrors of his own military service. Furthermore, Éowyn is in no way presented as a possession, as Hesser claims: Tolkien makes clear through the preceding dialogue that Aragorn is speaking in jest. In fact, just a paragraph before, Éomer, now king of Rohan, claims in his speech that "Faramir, Steward of Gondor, and Prince of Ithilien, asks that Éowyn Lady of Rohan should be his wife, and she grants it full willing."<sup>138</sup> Éowyn is not a possession, but the Lady of Rohan still, and somebody who can reject Faramir's proposal. Éowyn's declarations in the Houses of Healing, then, should not be interpreted as a loss of agency, or a renunciation of pride, but rather a loss of sin and temptation. Galadriel and Arwen's precedent is

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<sup>137</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 965.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* 977.

followed: their diminishment is not a loss of anything but rather a sign of triumph over evil; death as they propose it is not a negative thing; Tolkien's views are not anti-feminist so much as part of a larger religiously-linked purpose. So too should Éowyn's claims be read.

In her dismissal of Éowyn's marriage, Hesser compares her to Arwen, claiming that they are both "idealized females."<sup>139</sup> There are other comparisons to be made between the two women, though, namely in terms of their storytelling function. It appears, at first glance, almost impossible to link Éowyn to the arts and crafts movement: she does not sing, she does not weave, and she does not tell stories. Like Tolkien's other principles, however, she takes a different tack to display the same values. As represented by Arwen and Lúthien, storytelling in Middle-earth is almost purely historical. Éowyn, though she does not expressly show interest in the arts, instead places value in Rohan's history. She repeatedly identifies herself as being of the House of Eorl, placing herself in the lineage of the very first ruler of Rohan. As mentioned earlier, before fighting the Witch-king, she describes herself not by her currently-held positions but as Éomund's daughter, again acknowledging and asserting herself as part of a national history.

While historical knowledge may not seem like a particularly important or useful possession in a time of war, it was actually an incredibly effective motivational tool used in both World Wars. Paul Fussell explains how soldiers in the Great War utilized national history as psychological boosts to morale: "On September 29, 1914, Arthur Machen published in the *Evening News* an openly fictional romantic story, 'The Bowmen,' in which the ghosts of the English bowmen dead at Agincourt came to the assistance of their hard-pressed countrymen by discharging arrows which killed Germans... It became unpatriotic, almost treasonable, to doubt

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<sup>139</sup> Hesser, "Éowyn," 169.

it.”<sup>140</sup> Éowyn, then, by utilizing the storytelling function to place herself as a part of Rohan’s glorious history of victory and conquest, is after the same effect as the “Bowmen” story, hoping to inspire courage and confidence in herself and her friends by calling upon past victories and glory.

Thus Tolkien’s emphasis on history-as-art returns to the narrative. The same point is emphasized at the end of the series, when she presents “an ancient horn, small but cunningly wrought all of fair silver with a baldric of green; and wrights had engraven upon it swift horsemen riding in a line that wound about from the tip to the mouth; and there were set runes of great virtue” to Merry as a parting gift: “It was made by the Dwarves, and came from the horde of Scatha the Worm. Eorl the Young brought it from the North.”<sup>141</sup> Art and history are explicitly combined here, and though the war is over for Éowyn, it is not for Merry, who must still endure the Scouring of the Shire. When he and the other hobbits are beset by the ruffians who have taken over the Shire, Merry uses the history of the horn to embolden him into blowing it and calling for aid. Again, by being aware of the stories of the past, a character in the present is able to perform courageous deeds.

Finally, one of the largest questions surrounding any discussion of Éowyn arises: what exactly do her courageous deeds mean to her portrayal as a more relatable woman (though still an elevated one) when, in real-world England, feminist and women’s rights movements were in full swing? By portraying Éowyn as an idealized woman at war, Tolkien expressly links her with the wartime events surrounding England at the time that he wrote *Rings*, strengthening the notion that what Éowyn exemplifies is what modern women should strive for. Éowyn is a woman who

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<sup>140</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, London: Oxford University Press, 1975, 115-116, Print.

<sup>141</sup> Tolkien, *Rings*, 978.



wants to put in just as much work as the men; the women's suffrage movement would still have been fresh in Tolkien's mind, and in English factories "95 per cent of the workers were female, and they included not only all kinds of semi-skilled mechanics, gaugers, examiners and tracers, but also some fully skilled tradeswomen."<sup>142</sup> Éowyn is also a woman who disguises herself as a man to ride to war; protesting women during World War I often dressed as Joan of Arc and rode on horses during marches because Joan's "transvestism and military vigilance... subverted the order of femininity... she was and was not a woman... [transcending] the limitations of her sex and... [posing] a challenge to the English and to men... She offered an identification which was neither that of the domestic feminine ideal nor of its obverse, the hysterical fanatic."<sup>143</sup> Indeed, it is because of her masculine disguise that Éowyn is able to ride into battle, yet it is her being female that allows her to slay the Witch-king, whom prophecy decrees no man can defeat. Like the suffragettes' version of Joan, Éowyn succeeds precisely because of her gender cloaking, and she is key to understanding the necessary combination of Tolkien's medieval and modern-day values.

Because of this, Éowyn does not fit neatly into the categories presented by Arwen, Goldberry, and Galadriel. She is a complicated and melancholic woman, and though she saves the day she does so with every intention of dying. However, this does not make her any less of an exemplary character, nor does it negate the ways in which she helps the reader to understand Tolkien's previously-taught lessons. Éowyn applies Goldberry's principles of protection to a military setting, emphasizes Galadriel's purity while pushing temptation aside until after the

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<sup>142</sup> Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War: The British Experience*, Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1981, 63, Print.

<sup>143</sup> Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-14*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, 211, Print.

battle, and interprets history as art to fully use Arwen's principle for inspiration in times of need. Tolkien uses Éowyn to express that just because his ideas are medievalized does not mean that they cannot be adapted to the modern day. *Rings'* previous women display why Tolkien's ideas are important. It is Éowyn who shows why they are exemplary.

## CONCLUSION

The women characters in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* are, barring one or two very minor characters, powerful, wise, significant, and timeless – evocative of an older and otherwise forgotten age. Tolkien wrote them as exemplifiers of the real-world changes he strove to see in England, combining his passion for medievalism and the arts into one potent piece. As I have mentioned earlier, much has been made of Tolkien as either an anti-feminist or progressive, citing the strengths and weaknesses of *Rings*' females but rarely the reasons behind their creation and inclusion. Such arguments may be beneficial towards an analysis of Tolkien as a man, but they do nothing towards advancing the purpose and meaning behind *Rings*. Rather than examining the deficiencies behind these females, I have examined them as Tolkien wrote them: by highlighting their strengths. In doing so, I have identified the qualities displayed in Arwen, Lúthien, Goldberry, Galadriel, and Éowyn – of arts, nature, and religion – and how they were intended not just as forces of light in Middle-earth but powerful themes to reintroduce into England itself.

I do not mean to make any claim or defense of Tolkien as a feminist. He is at best progressive, although it may appear that his female characters participate in a stereotypical trope bordering on the anti-feminist, that of the protective woman. Though this trope does, after a sense, empower women, it also emphasizes their domesticity; after all, women traditionally sacrifice themselves by giving up careers to mind the home and provide a “safe haven” for the family to return to (just as Théoden and Aragorn attempt to convince Éowyn to do). With this trope in mind, it would be a hopeless fight to argue that Tolkien does not place his women into a stereotype that countless other men have used in the real world.

Rather than use the stereotype as a safe way to portray his characters, however, Tolkien positively re-appropriates it and turns them into corrective figures. Throughout the trilogy, the women reject what society demands of them in deference to their own concepts of what is needed; Tolkien plays into preconceived attitudes of the protective woman to subvert expectations and place an emphasis on equality. All of these women are willing to sacrifice themselves for their nation, a distinctly masculine quality in Middle-earth – one need look no further than Frodo's quest to destroy the Ring to exemplify that – while inspiring others with their distinctly feminine qualities. They are meant to be amalgams, figures who perform superhuman deeds that nobody thought possible; inspiring spirits housed in human forms. Arwen, Lúthien, Goldberry, Galadriel, and Éowyn do not care whether or not they are perceived as housewives, or stay-at-home queens, or warriors. The only thing that matters to them is the safety of their people, a truly heroic stance that aligns with both genders. While that doesn't make Tolkien a feminist, it does introduce an important new form of hero, one who can exhibit any range of qualities as long as they perform selfless and heroic deeds.

By moving past a black-and-white dichotomy in this manner, we open up further areas of exploration: of the medieval modern in the rest of *Rings* (of which some presence can surely be found); of Tolkien's personal beliefs in England and the effects of the World Wars; of his sense of literary craft. Most importantly, though, we establish Arwen, Lúthien, Goldberry, Galadriel, and even Shelob as integral to the heart and purpose of *Rings*, and Éowyn as the continuation of an ongoing legacy; the dawn on a dark horizon. Though more prominent figures such as Frodo and Sam or Gandalf and Aragorn carry the weight of the story, these women speak just as loudly.

Reading fairy-stories is, as Tolkien indicated, a rash adventure. But it is an adventure well worth making.

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