

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

URCA: The NCHC Journal of Undergraduate
Research & Creative Activity

National Collegiate Honors Council

2018

Flawed and Formidable: Galadriel, Éowyn, and Tolkien's Inadvertent Feminism

Rachel Maddox

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/ureca>

 Part of the [Educational Methods Commons](#), [Gifted Education Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Commons](#)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the National Collegiate Honors Council at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in URCA: The NCHC Journal of Undergraduate Research & Creative Activity by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Flawed and Formidable: Galadriel, Éowyn, and Tolkien's Inadvertent Feminism

Rachel Maddox

Middle Georgia State University

Since its publication in 1954, J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* has been wildly popular, inspiring an intense fan base and Peter Jackson's multimillion-dollar film series. However, the trilogy's acceptance in the literary canon has been tepid at best, with critics discrediting the work for relying too heavily on elements of fantasy, while those who accept the trilogy as worthy of literary consideration are forced to confront Tolkien's sexist views and the manifestation of these beliefs in his work. In keeping with his well-documented misogyny, it appears that Tolkien intentionally excluded women from his narrative: the Entwives are all inexplicably absent, powerful women are excluded from major scenes and events, and there are "more named horses than women" in the whole trilogy (Viars and Coker 48). Even important women such as Lady Galadriel of Lothlórien and Éowyn of Rohan appear to be idealized caricatures of stereotypically feminine elements rather than developed characters. Galadriel seems almost too delicate to exist in Middle-earth, secluding herself in Lothlórien until Sauron is defeated, while Éowyn acts more like a lovesick teenager than a warrior, nearly attempting suicide after romantic rejection. However, both Galadriel and Éowyn exhibit traits contrary to their status as one-dimensional stereotypes, as they have incredible power and an affinity for darkness unexplained by Tolkien's idealization of womanhood. Through their power and flaws, Galadriel and Éowyn embody feminist ideals, despite Tolkien's evident sexism.

Unlike many misogynists, Tolkien was essentially a "friendly" sexist: rather than despising women, he usually misrepresented them. In a letter to his son Michael in 1941, Tolkien asserts that women operate on sheer instinct, the servient, helpmeet instinct, generously warmed by desire; it is their gift to be receptive, stimulated, fertilized . . . by the male. Every teacher knows that. How quickly an intelligent woman can be taught, grasp his ideas, see his point—and how (with rare exceptions) they can go no further, when they leave his hand, or when they cease to take a *personal* interest in *him*. (49)

According to Tolkien, even the most intelligent women are enslaved by their instincts, prone to lose interest in a subject when their feelings limit their comprehension. He expands on the idea that women are dominated by their emotions in their desire for motherhood, saying, "Before the young woman knows where she is . . . she may actually 'fall in love.' Which for her, an unspoiled natural young woman, means that she wants to become the mother of the young man's children" (49-50). He continues in this vein, claiming that women are inevitably driven by their desire for both motherhood and romance: "A young woman, even one 'economically independent,' as they say now . . . begins to think of the 'bottom drawer' and dream of a home, almost at once. If she really falls in love, the shipwreck may really end on the rocks," whereas her male romantic partner "has a life-work, a career . . . all of which could (and do where he has any guts) survive the shipwreck of 'love'" (50). Thus, according to Tolkien, women are more impulsive, emotional, and fragile than men. In Tolkien's mind, the only thing worse than an "unspoiled natural young woman" operating on emotion is a woman who disregards societal

expectations entirely. As he puts it, such disregard makes women “wanton” and “so depraved as to enjoy ‘conquests’” as men do (50). Tolkien’s specific sexist expectations for female behavior led him to believe that when women shun maternal desire and embrace typically male roles, they become depraved.

Tolkien’s blatant misogyny has not gone unnoticed by literary critics, who note that the geography of Middle-earth is male-centric, as women are only successful in geographic locations indicative of their femininity. These spaces are often secluded from the outside world and are designed to shelter them from the world, leaving “little space left over for women with their own independent agency or ability to traverse across geographic or metaphysical boundaries as the men do” (Viars and Coker 40). Galadriel’s home, Lothlórien, is one of these spaces, as Tolkien uses it to marginalize and shelter her. Not only is Lothlórien secluded from the rest of Middle-earth, but its seclusion isolates the most important woman in the series: “Galadriel’s powers are figured in the woods to which they seem properly tied. These woods are spaces on the map that are hidden from view and therefore feared,” just like the feminine power Galadriel represents (Miller 147). As the woods are veiled and mysterious, so is Galadriel’s influence over the narrative; even as Tolkien bestows power upon Galadriel, he forces her to act from the shadows, marginalizing her in emphatically feminine seclusion (Miller 147). Goldberry, Tom Bombadil’s wife, experiences similar marginalization, as she, too, is forced to exist in the small sphere of a forest, remaining separate from the rest of Middle-earth “in an idyllic Green World” that resembles her femininity (Viars and Coker 40). Though Éowyn is not as geographically restricted as the “powerful and immortal” Goldberry and Galadriel and escapes the confines of her country, she suffers for her freedom, as she is almost killed and sinks into nearly inescapable depression as a result (Viars and Coker 40). Thus, Tolkien especially restricts the powerful characters of Galadriel and Goldberry, while the one female who wanders from her “duty with [her] people” is severely, nearly fatally, punished (*LotR* 767).

Women in Tolkien’s work are portrayed positively only when they remain in their rigidly structured gender roles, as shown by even his most generous critics. “Tolkien . . . held an idealized view of womanhood” that bleeds into his development of his characters (Burns 150). Galadriel plays into this idealization because she “remains true to Tolkien’s female ideal. All the feminine virtues of service, supportiveness, patience, grace, purity, and preservation of life . . . are clearly displayed through her character,” which is more reminiscent of the cult of domesticity than female validation (Burns 155). Éowyn fulfills several romanticized feminine roles: “Her personal healing involves, not only being open to love, but a movement from a desire for power and domination . . . to the desire to heal and help things grow,” signaling her shift from dangerous, typically masculine traits, to safer, more feminine ones (Enright 104-105). Only after abandoning her status as a dangerous warrior can she “enjoy the kind of high beauty linked to the spiritual powers of love and forgiveness” (Enright 106). In this way, Tolkien ensures that Eowyn is only truly validated when she returns to domesticity despite being a remarkable warrior.

Unfortunately, Éowyn’s story also implies that when women break from their naturally submissive natures, there are often disastrous consequences, as seen in several of Tolkien’s characters. Shelob, Tolkien’s only female character who completely defies typically feminine expectations, shows that “when women refuse to stay put, the results are invariably problematic. The representation of independent movement is a crime or failure in women” (Miller 147). As one of the few female characters in the trilogy, the demonic spider that nearly kills Frodo and Sam behaves similarly to Ungoliant, her doppelgänger in *The Silmarillion*, in that they are both

“wholly preoccupied with their own lusts; they operate on the pleasure principle” (Fredrick and McBride 34). They “think only short-term, preferring instant gratification,” like the “wanton” women who reject maternity and whom Tolkien disparaged in letters to Michael (Fredrick and McBride 34; *Letters* 50). In keeping with Tolkien’s belief that women are crippled by their emotional impulses, the spiders’ “irrationality necessitates their female gender. Their self-preoccupation, internalization of their surroundings, and inability to rationalize and build a network of supporters mark them as female” (Fredrick and McBride 34), while Miller notes that “Shelob herself is a bloated symbol of devouring female lust” (141). She lives in a cave and her cavern is “the nastiest hole in the book,” a far cry from a haven of light like Galadriel’s home in the Golden Wood (Miller 140). Shelob’s refusal to be tamed or restricted by propriety renders her the spiritual opposite of Galadriel.

Galadriel appears to fit Tolkien’s sexist ideal of the perfect woman in that she represents physical purity. Though she has a child centuries before the events in *The Lord of the Rings*, by the time the Fellowship enters Lothlórien she is described with chaste, virginal imagery. She is introduced “clad wholly in white,” with hair “of deep gold,” while her light skin matches her hair and clothing to symbolize the virtue of a pure woman (*LotR* 345). Her white, pure imagery reflects the fact that “Galadriel was modeled on the Virgin Mary” (Lakowski 101). Tolkien was fully aware of the relationship between Galadriel and the perpetual virgin, as he wrote a reader, “I think it is true that I owe much of [Galadriel] to Christian and Catholic teaching and imagination about Mary” (*Letters* 407). This religious connection eventually validates her power in Tolkien’s world; Galadriel’s power is essentially safe because she is so far divorced from sexuality. Hers is “a creative power of which Men are incapable but which does not require the disturbing sexuality of women,” so that women are positive only when they deny their sexuality; when they accept it and step outside Tolkien’s preferences, disaster ensues, as seen in Shelob’s characterization (Miller 140). Though beautiful, Galadriel is portrayed as though she is incapable of sexual acts, and Gimli treats her as an unattainable sexual object. The first words spoken about her are Gimli’s declaration that “the Lady Galadriel is above all the jewels that lie beneath the earth!” which is soon followed by his “desire” for “a single strand of [her] hair, which surpasses the gold of the earth” (*LotR* 347, 367). Gimli’s one request is that her hair be “set in imperishable crystal to be an heirloom of [his] house” (367). The symbolic relationship between female hair and sexuality is centuries old, so his tacit request refers not only to his desire for Galadriel but also his acknowledgment of her permanent purity.

In keeping with Galadriel’s physical virtue, her spiritual perfection is romanticized and above reproach. When Faramir wonders at her “perilous” influence over Men and wrongfully implicates Galadriel in his brother’s death, Sam quickly corrects him, claiming that, “folk takes their peril with them into Lorien, and finds it there because they’ve brought it” (664-665). Thus, in Sam’s eyes, Galadriel is not flawed; she is above corruption and not a dynamic—or truly real—woman. Aragorn, with all the wisdom of the heir of Númenor, asserts that Galadriel’s virtue is boundless, that “There is in her . . . no evil” (*LotR* 349). Furthermore, though Galadriel is incredibly powerful and holds titles both as a ruler of her people and the bearer of Nenya, one of the Elven rings of power, Aragorn respects her for her fulfillment of feminine duties rather than her status as a leader. Addressing her as “Lady of Lorien of whom were sprung Celebrian and Arwen Evenstar” and adding, “What praise could I say more?” the wisest and most powerful surviving member of the Fellowship respects Galadriel, not for her place in Middle-earth, but for her offspring (*LotR* 366). He makes no such caveat for her husband.

In keeping with her generally stereotypical depiction, Galadriel's power and agency are constantly undermined by the men in her life, as she remains sheltered by her soldiers, isolated from the real world in Lothlórien. First, Galadriel is not included in the Council of Elrond. In the single most important gathering of leaders of Middle-earth, at which three Ring-bearers (Frodo, Gandalf, and Elrond) are present, and where they determine the fate of the Ring of Power—the most powerful tool in their world—the Lady of Lorien, the bearer of Nenia, the mother-in-law of Elrond and grandmother of Arwen, is not only absent, but it appears as though she is neither invited nor expected. She is not even mentioned by name until Aragorn, Frodo, and the rest of the Fellowship stumble into Lothlórien after escaping Moria. Even then, she is hidden deep within the forest, behind layers of guards and a trail that the Fellowship must be led down blindfolded, so that her perfection is sheltered from the real world outside (*LotR* 338). In her role as Lady of Lothlórien she is not allowed to come into contact with any defects of the world. Her feminine purity must be protected from the ugliness of the world around her and is not permitted to be questioned whatsoever. Like Faramir, Boromir questions Galadriel's motives, stating his distrust of “this Elvish Lady and her purposes” but, like his brother, he is quickly silenced (349). Thus, Galadriel's idealized flawlessness is essential to other characters' understanding of her.

Galadriel certainly shows stereotypically feminine traits; however, these do not ultimately invalidate her embodiment of modern feminist qualities, as the power she wields over her immediate surroundings mitigates her stereotypical aspects. Galadriel is the bearer of Nenia, one of the three Elven rings of power, which automatically makes her one of the most powerful characters—and certainly the most powerful woman—in all Middle-earth. To withstand Nenia's power, Galadriel is demonstrably stronger-willed than every human king who held one of the original nine rings of power, as they all eventually become the Nazgul who serve Sauron throughout the trilogy. She is even more empowered by Nenia's symbolism, as “Nenia responds to Galadriel's will by intensifying the Lady's own inherent light at moments of import” (Donovan 114). Furthermore, centuries before *The Lord of the Rings* takes place, Galadriel calls together the first White Council to protect Middle-earth from the power of the One Ring, meaning that she founded the grouping of the wisest, most formidable trio of characters in the trilogy. Though she is excluded from the Council of Elrond, she is the first who convinces Elrond, Gandalf, and Saruman to gather and discuss the ills of Middle-earth before the events in the trilogy unfold, indicating that, despite her exclusion from the most recent meeting, she has previously reached the feminist ideal of an empowered woman in a position of leadership. Furthermore, Galadriel is the sole possessor of the Mirror of Galadriel. Rather than her husband, Celeborn the Wise, the Lady Galadriel is the one who can “command the Mirror to reveal” many things, allowing Frodo and Sam to see various versions of the future (*LotR* 352). Her possession of Nenia, influence in the White Council, and power over the Mirror all mean that she wields significantly more power than her husband, even though other characters seem too absorbed in her appearance to notice that she is the true ruler of Lorien.

In keeping with her significant power, Galadriel regularly undermines her husband's opinions. Though Susan Carter points out that entry into the story “with her lord suggests that she is kept within the confines of gender roles” and Celeborn is always introduced before her, Galadriel does not hesitate to speak against or simply correct her husband (77). After the Fellowship has been formally welcomed in Lothlórien, Celeborn suggests that “maybe there has been some change in counsel” that would explain Gandalf's absence, to which Galadriel knowingly states, “Nay, there was no change of counsel,” showing both that she is more discerning than her husband and unafraid to question his conjecture (*LotR* 346). She contradicts

him more directly when he suggests, “one would say that at the last Gandalf fell from wisdom into folly,” to which she retorts, “He would be rash indeed that said that thing” (347). These exchanges give “clues that she has an authority independent of her king’s, and superior to his” (Carter 77). Furthermore, Celeborn does not question his wife’s knowledge in these situations. Rather, he assumes that her input is accurate and moves on, suggesting both that Galadriel has been correct before and that she has achieved true intellectual independence from her husband. This indicates her reaching another feminist milestone, as her intellectual individuality reflects a level of freedom feminists strive for.

In addition to her power and indications of autonomy, Galadriel exhibits a distinct darkness that makes her more complex than the stereotypes she embodies suggest. Though other characters believe her to be incorruptible and Tolkien terms her the Lady of Light, Galadriel has a dark side that makes her a well-rounded character. When Frodo attempts to give her the Ring, she refuses, not because she believes herself too lowly for such a gift, but because she is not above corruption as he assumes her to be. Though Gimli claims she is “fair beyond the reach of . . . thought,” Galadriel imagines a future in which she carries the Ring (422). She tells Frodo that “In place of a Dark Lord you will be set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible . . . Dreadful as the storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!” (356). She foresees a violent future with her as the ring bearer, not because she is too weak to control the power of the Ring, but because that power would prey on the side of her that is not incorruptible—the real, flawed side of her. She has already fallen prey to her flaws once before, previous to the events of the trilogy, as described in *The Silmarillion*. In the First Age, before being sequestered in Lothlórien, Galadriel rebels against the Valar, the leadership council of the High Elves, because “she yearned to see the wide unguarded lands and to rule there a realm of her own will,” wishing also “to take vengeance upon Morgoth,” who stole the treasured Silmarils (*LotR* 84, 127). As a result of her defiance, she is banished to Middle-Earth. Her desires and rebellion more closely resemble those of the “wonton” women Tolkien so despised than a flawless queen, proving that she is capable of what Tolkien would perceive as moral failure (*Letters* 50). Rather than becoming a negative representation of women, this deeper, darker layer of Galadriel allows her to take “a richness and depth of character from the shadowiness” that her supposed perfection could never permit (Carter 84). The side of Galadriel that desires to become a dark queen, the side that she actively suppresses, contradicts the perception that she is flawless, brimming with unadulterated light, and shows that her character is multifaceted and as realistic as an immortal Elf can be. This apparent shortcoming makes her genuine rather than dangerous.

However, these traits do not reflect Tolkien’s hidden desire to validate dynamic womanhood; rather, the power that makes Galadriel a rounded character is strikingly similar to traits expressed by the Valkyries of Norse mythology—a mythos with which Tolkien was intimately familiar. After publishing the trilogy, he wrote Michael: “I have spent most of my life . . . studying Germanic matters (in the general sense that includes England and Scandinavia)” (*Letters* 55). He later told a fan that he purposefully named several dwarves after characters in Norse myths, meaning that the world of Middle-earth is directly influenced by Norse mythology (*Letters* 175). Furthermore, the strength exhibited by Galadriel and eventually Éowyn “can be explained . . . [by] Tolkien’s background—that of the medieval Germanic heroic literatures that played such a crucial role in Tolkien’s personal and professional consciousness,” with characteristics of the Valkyries strongly influencing Tolkien’s characters (Donovan 107). The Valkyries were “spirits of war who inhabit bloody fields strewn with the bodies of the slain”

(Lionarons 290). They operated as liaisons between the mortal and immortal worlds and functioned in the morally grey areas of battle, often having the final say in who would die and who would survive.

Galadriel's characterization reflects the influence of Germanic lore in Tolkien's work as she echoes traits of the Valkyries. Like the characters of Norse myth, Galadriel is shown to wield "personal and prophetic power in a battle of universal impact" while her strength of character, shown when she refuses to take the Ring from Frodo, "is Valkyrie-like in that it is an action undertaken as the result of supreme exertion of the character's will" (Donovan 117). If the Ring were to strip her of her self-control and layer of perfection, Galadriel would shun positive Valkyrie tendencies and become the monstrous Valkyrie that lies just skin deep, the "unnatural version of heroic appearance and behavior" that she envisions when she considers taking the Ring (Donovan 119). She admits to Frodo, "my heart has greatly desired to ask what you offer. . . . I had pondered what I might do, should the Great Ring come into my hands," implying that the dark Valkyrie tendencies lie just beneath the surface (*LotR* 356). Under the veneer of light, Galadriel exhibits the potential to become a different kind of Valkyrie, a "baleful, malevolent valkyrie figure" (Donovan 118). If she accepted this darkness within her, she would become like Shelob and transform into the evil Valkyrie, "monstrous in its inversion of medieval ideals of femininity" (Donovan 119). However, Galadriel's decision to remain moral confirms Galadriel as both a powerful and reliable force of good in Middle-earth. The balance between Galadriel's denial of the malevolence of which she is capable and her presentation as a bringer of light and peace reflects her dynamic nature. This layer demonstrates the power of Norse influence in Tolkien's text, as she goes far beyond his stated beliefs about women.

Galadriel is not Tolkien's only female character who is often considered a sexist representation of womanhood, as Éowyn is depicted in terms of the men in her life. She fulfills a caretaking role for Théoden for years until the reader meets her. Even when she passes as a male warrior, she feels responsible for her uncle's wellbeing, staying "close to the king" even though her "company was away on the right" (*LotR* 818-19). Not only does her life revolve around her uncle for years, but Éowyn also adopts a role as a "war bride" and appears defined by her relationship with male characters rather than her own personality (Smith 163). Rather than figuring into the narrative on her own merits, much of Éowyn's story is told from a male perspective, and when Aragorn attempts to leave her behind in Rohan, she functions more like "the beloved wife left alone in the soldier's land of origin" than a valid character in and of herself (Smith 163). She also may reflect Tolkien's sexist belief that "women are apt to break down" when denied a love interest, as Éowyn appears to pursue Aragorn and become emotional after he rejects her (*Letters* 50). She declares to Aragorn that the other soldiers follow him into battle "because they love thee," implying that she, too, loves him, though it is unclear whether her feelings are rooted in her adoration for him as a warrior—as the other soldiers' seem to be—or in her romantic attraction (767). When Aragorn leaves without her, Éowyn weeps at his departure before kneeling and pleading to follow him to battle: "she fell on her knees, saying: 'I beg thee!'" and later has "the face of one that goes seeking death, having no hope," which indicates either her romantic feelings or desperation as a warrior denied battle (*LotR* 768, 823). Her brother also may believe that Éowyn has been compromised by her feelings, telling Aragorn, "I knew not that Éowyn, my sister, was touched by any frost, until she first looked on you," implying that her love for Aragorn, either as a romantic interest or an adored warrior, is to blame for her recklessness in battle (848).

Even when she rejects patriarchal expectations of domesticity and becomes a warrior, Éowyn does not appear to reach her full potential as a reflection of modern feminist ideals. In her role as a warrior, which should be liberating, Éowyn cannot maintain her femininity on the battlefield, as Tolkien has her mask her gender and pass as a male soldier throughout the Battle of Pelennor Fields. As though he cannot fathom Éowyn, as a woman, being an effective warrior, Tolkien has her invent a male hero, Dernhelm, and pose as this man to fight alongside her uncle, “faithful beyond fear” (*LotR* 822). Éowyn is successful in battle only while posing as Dernhelm. As a man she remains unwounded, but the second she removes her disguise and declares “No living man am I! You look upon a woman. Éowyn I am,” she falls prey to a Nazgul (823). Thus, even when she acts heroically, she is safe in battle only as a man, and when her delicate femininity reappears, she is struck down and nearly killed, supporting the assessment that “For Tolkien, the phrase ‘female warrior’ is a conjunction of irreconcilable opposites; he can imagine one or the other, female or warrior, but not both simultaneously” (Fredrick and McBride 36). Though Éowyn struggles against the restraints of femininity by which Galadriel appears to be defined, she is eventually brought back around to the pitfalls and weaknesses of womanhood as Tolkien depicts them.

Not only does Éowyn appear broken by unrequited love and fail as a warrior, but once she finally recovers her identity after the Battle of Pelennor Fields, she also takes longer to heal than her male counterparts, implying that she is weaker than even a Hobbit. Though Faramir, Merry, and Éowyn are all wounded, and though they must stay in the Houses of Healing after the battle, Éowyn spends significantly more time than either Faramir or Merry recovering from her injuries. Merry is permitted to leave his bed the day after the battle, while Éowyn’s caretakers are instructed to keep her on bed rest “until at least ten days be passed” (852). Even when Éowyn defies Aragorn’s orders and leaves the infirmary after three days, Faramir recovers before her, as he is already “walking alone in the garden” when she is finally well enough to leave her bed (938). Though Faramir suffers from “Weariness, grief . . . a wound, and over all the Black Breath” and Merry “has taken a hurt like the Lady Éowyn,” both males regain consciousness as soon as proper treatment is provided (846, 851). Éowyn suffers from a broken arm and the same spiritual shadow that haunts Merry, but she, a “fair maiden, fairest lady of a house of queens,” remains unconscious after receiving the same treatment as the male warriors (849). Instead of regaining consciousness, she begins to “breathe deeply” and remains unconscious while Merry and Faramir wake up and respond to their surroundings (849). She is certainly brave, but she is also delicate—more so than even a Halfling. Still suffering from Aragorn’s rejection, Éowyn may or may not survive the Nazgul’s assault, as Aragorn asserts that she will recover only “if she has the strength to live”—the strength that Merry and Faramir intrinsically possess (848).

Finally, after Éowyn recovers from her broken heart and physical injuries, she still appears unable to provide for herself, as her feminine sensibilities have proven unstable. She achieves renown, not as a warrior queen, but as a “foreign war bride,” traded in marriage to Faramir as a symbol of allegiance between Gondor and Rohan (Smith 161). Her risky behavior in passing as male and her near death imply that Éowyn is incapable of taking care of herself, that she needs a man to keep her safe and rational, so Melissa Smith argues that Éowyn marries Faramir to guarantee her status as feminine: “Tolkien offers Éowyn a second chance to distinguish herself, this time as an ‘international’ war bride, through her relationship with Faramir” (167). Rather than becoming established as a warrior queen, Éowyn is validated only through her marriage. Faramir rescues her from the margins of society, picking up the pieces Aragorn leaves broken and curbing Éowyn’s tendencies toward valor and masculine endeavors:

“Faramir tames Éowyn’s wild warrior impulse. . . . Éowyn’s healing comes from accepting the role her civilization demands from her as a woman: to be a beautiful, helpful, and cheerful companion to a man” (Fredrick and McBride 35). Thus, her marriage to Faramir ensures that, despite her nearly disastrous adventure as a crossdressing warrior, Éowyn returns to Tolkien’s gendered expectations, appearing to develop little as a character outside her failed attempt to rebel against male expectations of her.

However, like Galadriel, Éowyn has several characteristics that undermine her stereotypical elements, including her relationship with Aragorn. Though it is reasonable to believe that Éowyn is dominated by her feelings for the Ranger, the same passages can indicate her inclination toward hero worship—a primarily masculine tendency in the world of Middle-earth—rather than romance. Éowyn’s supposed romantic attraction to Aragorn appears in her desperate attempt to follow him to battle, implying that she “would not be parted from [Aragorn]” because she is in love with him (767). Though it is reasonable to interpret this romantically, it can also be seen as “simple hero worship on a masculine level” (Bradley 83). Interpreting Éowyn’s love of Aragorn as hero worship accounts for the similarities between Éowyn’s treatment of Aragorn and Merry’s idealization of Théoden; when Merry is about to be separated from Théoden, he, like Éowyn, begs to be allowed to follow. Merry reacts emotionally when Théoden attempts to leave him behind at the Battle of Pelennor Fields, demanding, “tie me on the back of [a horse], or let me hang on a stirrup, or something. . . . Run I shall, if I cannot ride, even if I wear my feet off and arrive weeks too late,” a request that closely resembles Éowyn’s plea to follow Aragorn into battle (784). Éowyn likely does love Aragorn, but as a soldier reveres a greater warrior and as Merry loves Théoden. Éowyn’s actions are not those of “a proud lover, but a warrior seeking glory,” a warrior who “desperately wants to be taken seriously,” much like female soldiers today (Hatcher 48). Even when Éowyn appears to confess her love for Aragorn and tells Faramir, “I wished to be loved by another,” Faramir clarifies her statement by asserting that “as a great captain may to a young soldier, [Aragorn] seemed to you admirable” (943). She does not contradict him, further suggesting that her feelings toward Aragorn are neither gendered nor outside her society’s expectations. As a result, though her emotional response to Aragorn is often interpreted as a romantic rejection, her actions may more accurately reflect those of a soldier who has been undervalued by the hero she venerates.

Though Éowyn is not endowed with Galadriel’s mystical power, she maintains significant physical power even when other characters attempt to deny her opportunities to use it. Éowyn’s greatest complaint is that while the Rohirrim fight, she believes she is expected to “mind the house while they win renown, and find food and beds when they return” (*LotR* 767). However, even when she is left behind, Éowyn maintains power over her city and her people; she is not left to patiently wait for the men’s return but is expected to defend Rohan in the event that the Rohirrim are defeated, to answer when there is “need of valor without renown” (767). Aragorn’s reasoning may seem like an attempt to placate Éowyn’s valid complaint, but his insistence that her deeds in a hypothetical defense of Rohan “will not be less valiant because they are unpraised” still imply that though she is undervalued she is neither weak nor deserving of this perception (767). Aragorn continues, telling Éowyn that if she were not tasked with staying home, “then some marshal or captain would have been set in the same place,” meaning her responsibilities are vital to her people and worthy of military recognition (767). Protecting the people of Rohan is, in Aragorn’s mind, a duty reserved for military leaders and just as valid as fighting in the war itself. Though it is easy to interpret Éowyn’s stationing as demeaning, and she eventually decides to follow the Riders into battle, she is still the third or fourth most powerful

military leader in her country even before the Battle of Pelennor Fields. Burdened with protecting the future of Rohan, she reflects the feminist ideal of a powerful woman even when she cannot fight as aggressively as she, or many readers, would prefer.

Finally, at Pelennor Fields, Éowyn exhibits several masculine traits in her actions and physicality. Not only does she defeat a Nazgul, but she conquers the Witch King himself, the leader of all nine Nazgul. She does so through her skill as a shield maiden, delivering the fatal blow to the Witch King's steed with "A swift stroke . . . skilled and deadly. The outstretched neck she clove asunder, and the hewn head fell like a stone" (823). When she attacks the Nazgul and displays true heroism, Éowyn successfully embodies her femininity and reflects typically masculine traits: she kills the Witch King after telling him, "You look upon a woman," and she does not show the traits of a hopeful, lovely maiden, but rather with "the face of one that goes seeking death, having no hope" (823). After watching Théoden die, with no reason to believe that the battle can still be won, Éowyn faces one of the greatest enemies of peace in Middle-earth without flinching, without denying her gender, and without being stereotypically fragile and helpless. Rather, she displays "her strength [and] intelligence" and proves that she "does not have to be transformed into a man to accomplish anything" (Hatcher 50). Éowyn's actions on the battlefield defy the interpretation that she is delicate, fragile, or waiting to be saved by a male hero. She is the only person in the trilogy to destroy a Nazgul's mount and one of two people who defeats a Nazgul himself—the other being Merry, who helps her battle the Witch King. Even more clearly than Galadriel's darkness, Éowyn's layers of strength and resilience directly contradict Tolkien's idealization of female womanhood. Her actions in battle are antithetical to his belief that only "depraved" women "enjoy conquests," solidifying her status as a multifaceted, developed character (*Letters* 50).

Like Galadriel's dual nature, Éowyn's complex mental state and physical abilities are the results of the influence of Valkyries in Tolkien's work. Whereas Galadriel's supernatural powers and influence over other characters come from Valkyrie influence, Éowyn is merely human, but she exercises extreme physical strength and prowess as a warrior. Her ability to defeat the Witch King is rooted in the influence of the Valkyries in Tolkien's construction of the narrative, as other Valkyries were known to assume "the role of military leadership at times of need" (Donovan 122). Tolkien gives Éowyn the strengths represented by preexisting positive female characters, as the Valkyries Éowyn is modeled after use their physical abilities in battle to benefit the greater good; like the women in the Norse mythology, Éowyn has the "personal power and social obligation to take up arms herself as a means of protecting her people" (Donovan 122). She is "stern and proud," reflecting the Valkyrie tendency to eschew sentimentality and challenging Tolkien's ideal that women are "very sympathetic and understanding" (*LotR* 768; *Letters* 49). She has an active nature and tendency toward violence that directly defies Tolkien's ideals, as Donovan asserts that "Éowyn is a character whose nature houses a will that must be satisfied by physical action" (122). Her need to be physically active reflects the Valkyries again and subverts the expectation that women must remain in one geographic location as John Miller argues. Éowyn's psychological intensity combined with "her shield-maiden's skill and courage . . . join with the force of her Valkyrie will to accomplish one of the trilogy's most heroic deeds" in defeating the Witch King (Donovan 123). Thus, her physical strength and psychological complexity combine with her feminine and masculine elements to leave her a complex, powerful representative of Valkyrie traits.

Ultimately, Tolkien's well-noted sexism influenced his writing, and Galadriel and Éowyn reflect some of his misogynist tendencies. This is not the end of their development as characters, though, as the influence of Norse mythology in Tolkien's work undermines his sexist beliefs. Galadriel shows a power and darkness that together make her a realistic representation of femininity: her possession of Nenya, control over the Mirror of Galadriel, willingness to correct her husband, and significant dark side make her a developed character rather than a one-sided stereotype. Éowyn's characterization is equally dynamic, as her strength in battle, psychological complexity, and participation in the typically masculine ritual of hero worship confirm that she, too, exhibits the complexity of a realistic character. This unintentionally tempered depiction of stereotypical elements can shed light on other female characters who are often considered shallow, for if Tolkien's characters are more multifaceted than they appear, then exploring other seemingly stereotypical female characters may render similar results. Focusing on other apparently shallow characters' flaws, rather than their perfections, can help bring female characters back from the margins of their narratives and show that sexist authors, like Tolkien, may create dynamic depictions of womanhood despite their own beliefs.

Works Cited

- Bradley, Marion Zimmer. "Men, Halflings, and Hero Worship." *Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism*. Edited by Rose A. Zimbardo and Neil D. Issacs, Houghton Mifflin, 2004, pp. 76-92.
- Burns, Marjorie. "Wisewomen, Shieldmaidens, Nymphs, and Goddesses." *Perilous Realms: Celtic and Norse in Tolkien's Middle-Earth*. University of Toronto Press, 2005, pp. 129-155.
- Carter, Susan. "Galadriel and Morgan Le Fey: Tolkien's Redemption of the Lady of the Lacuna." *Mythlore*, vol. 25, no. 3/4, 2007, pp. 71-89. *Literary Reference Center*. <http://ezproxy.mga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lfh&AN=24950150&site=eds-live&scope=site>. Accessed January 21, 2017.
- Donovan, Leslie A. "The Valkyrie Reflex in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*: Galadriel, Shelob, Éowyn, and Arwen." *Tolkien the Medievalist*. Edited by Jane Chance, Routledge, 2003, pp. 106-132.
- Enright, Nancy. "Tolkien's Females and the Defining of Power." *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2007, pp. 93-108. *Literature Resource Center*. <http://ezproxy.mga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsglr&AN=edsgcl.161502024&site=eds-live&scope=site>. Accessed January 16, 2017.
- Fredrick, Candice, and Sam McBride. "Battling the Woman Warrior: Females and Combat in Tolkien and Lewis." *Mythlore*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2007, pp. 29-42. *Literary Reference Center*. <http://ezproxy.mga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsglr&AN=edsgcl.163972501&site=eds-live&scope=site>. Accessed January 22, 2017.
- Hatcher, Melissa McCrory. "Finding Woman's Role in *The Lord of the Rings*." *Mythlore*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2007, pp. 43-54. *Literature Resource Center*. <http://ezproxy.mga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsglr&AN=edsgcl.163972502&site=eds-live&scope=site>. Accessed January 21, 2017.
- Lakowski, Romuald. "The Fall and Repentance of Galadriel." *Mythlore*, vol. 25, no. 3/4, 2007, pp. 91-104. *Literature Resource Center*. <http://ezproxy.mga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsglr&AN=edsgcl.163972506&site=eds-live&scope=site>. Accessed February 17, 2017.
- Lionarons, Joyce Tally. "Dísir, Valkyries, Völur, and Norns: The Weise Frauen of the Deutsche Mythologie." *The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous*. Edited by Tom Shippey, Arizona State University, 2005, pp. 271-297.
- Miller, John. "Mapping Gender in Middle-earth." *Mythlore*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2016, pp. 133-152. <http://ezproxy.mga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsglr&AN=edsgcl.453915639&site=eds-live&scope=site>. Accessed February 17, 2017.
- Shippey, Tom. *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*. Houghton Mifflin, 2002.
- Smith, Melissa. "At Home and Abroad: Eowyn's Two-Fold Figuring as War Bride in *The Lord of the Rings*." *Mythlore*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2007, pp. 161-172. *Literature Resource Center*.

<http://ezproxy.mga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsglr&AN=edsgcl.171579965&site=eds-live&scope=site>. Accessed January 16, 2017.

Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

———*The Lord of the Rings*. HarperCollins, 1994.

———*The Silmarillion*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. Houghton Mifflin, 1977.

Viars, Karen and Cait Coker. "Constructing Lothiriel: Rewriting and Rescuing the Women of Middle-earth from the Margins." *Mythlore*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2015, pp. 37-50. *Literature Resource Center*.

<http://ezproxy.mga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsglr&AN=edsgcl.415108719&site=eds-live&scope=site>. Accessed February 18, 2017.