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## Perilous and Fair: Women in the Works and Life of J.R.R. Tolkien (2015) ed. Janet Brennan Croft and Leslie A. Donovan

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*Perilous and Fair: Women in the Works and Life of J.R.R. Tolkien*, edited by Janet Brennan Croft and Leslie A. Donovan. Altadena, CA: Mythopoeic Press, 2015. vii, 349 pp. \$19.95 (trade paperback) ISBN 9781887726016.

This excellent collection of essays is long overdue, for in spite of the breadth and depth of scholarship dealing with female characters or feminist themes in Tolkien's work, there has not been, to my knowledge, an entire volume devoted to this topic. Furthermore, as Croft and Donovan note in their introduction there remains "a continuing and alarming tendency among some current Tolkien scholars to remain unfamiliar with or to disregard outright the more positive readings of Tolkien's female characters and gender politics found easily in both classic and recent research"(2). Examples are Candice Frederick and Sam McBride's *Women Among The Inklings: Gender, C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien and Charles Williams* (2001) and more recently Adam Roberts's essay "Women" in *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien* (2014). Croft and Donovan express dismay that in spite of the impressive amount of scholarship on female characters in Tolkien, Roberts stresses "female passivity" in *The Lord of the Rings* (2). Similarly, Nancy Enright's essay cites Frederick and McBride's categorical statement about gender roles in *The Lord of the Rings*: "Men are the doers, workers, thinkers and leaders. Women are homemakers, nurses and distant love interests" (119) as an example of the erroneous and oft-repeated assumption that Tolkien was biased against women, simply because he worked in a primarily male environment and was a members of the Inklings, which Frederick and McBride decry as "blatantly sexist" (119). To rectify these misapprehensions about the role of women in Tolkien's life and work, the editors have included here seven "classic" essays published between 1984 and 2007, and seven new essays "that build on past studies and point to new directions for the topic." Croft and Donovan present their collection of essays as a "representative sample, rather than a definitive canon," and explain their choice of the words "perilous" and "fair" as a metaphor for the rich and complex "issues of female power" explored in the essays (3). The essays are grouped under thematic headings: Historical Perspectives, Power of Gender, Specific Characters, Earlier Literary Contexts, and Women Readers. My review does not always follow this arrangement, however, for my own reading of the volume sometimes led me to find connections between essays from different groups.

Robin Anne Reid's "The History of Scholarship on Female Characters in J.R.R. Tolkien's Legendarium: A Feminist Bibliographic Essay," is far more than an expanded annotated bibliography, because Reid not only comments on the essays and articles presented, she also draws connections between them and thus provides a comprehensive overview of the relevant work. The essay is organized chronologically, which allows Reid to trace the evolution of scholarship on

Tolkien's female characters over time, revealing "not only the increasing attention paid to these characters, but also a growing application of newer critical theories and methods" (13). For example, in the 1970s only two articles specifically about female characters in Tolkien's work were published; in the 1980s, this increased to four; in the 1990s, there were only three. By contrast, Reid notes, "During the first decade of the twenty-first century, twenty-three articles and book chapters were published on Tolkien's female characters" (23). As milestones in the evolution of Tolkien scholarship Reid cites the publication of the first encyclopedia devoted to Tolkien's work, *The J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment* (ed. Michael D.C. Drout, 2007) and the transition of Tolkien-themed publications such as *Mythlore* from fanzines to peer-reviewed journals. Reid concurs with the *MLA International Bibliography*, however, that work that has been published outside of traditional peer-reviewed academic journals, such as *Mallorn*, the *Minis-Tirith Evening Star* and early issues of *Mythlore* should be included in bibliographies of scholarship on Tolkien, for they often contained pioneering work. For example, of the ten articles dealing with female characters in Tolkien published between 1971 and 1996, six appeared in *Mythlore*. Regarding scholarship on Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* films (*The Hobbit* had not yet been released at the time this essay was written), Reid discusses "essays that, in dealing with the film, also develop an original analysis of female characters in Tolkien's text to the extent that the discussion includes new and relevant approaches to them" (26). Reid's bibliographical excavations reveal a "daunting" amount of Tolkien scholarship—in a footnote she mentions that a search she conducted in June of 2014 on Tolkien subjects not related to film returned "1,897 sources: 1,268 Academic Journal Articles; 457 Book Articles; 83 Books; 47 Dissertation Abstracts; 37 Book Collections; four editions; and one website" (14 n.2), which Reid attributes not only to the shifting literary canon, but also to the expansion of Tolkien studies to include "scholars in disciplines across and outside the humanities who increasingly draw on inter-, multi-, and trans-disciplinary methodologies to publish scholarship on films, games, fan culture, tourism, and marketing" (14-15). In addition to the ever-evolving field of critical approaches, Reid notes an increase in venues for scholarship on Tolkien, such as the on-line open-access *The Journal of Tolkien Research* and the launching of a Tolkien Studies Area at the 2014 National Popular and American Culture Association conference. Reid's very thorough critical essay fills the need for a bibliography focused exclusively on the very rich panoply of female characters in Tolkien's work, and as such complements previous bibliographical work by Douglas A. Anderson, David Bratman, Michael D.C. Drout, Merlin DeTardo, Richard West and others.

John D. Rateliff's contribution, "The Missing Women: J.R.R. Tolkien's Lifelong Support for Women's Higher Education," is the only essay in the

volume to deal specifically with the role of women in the life of Tolkien. Rateliff sets out to correct the impression given by biographer Humphrey Carpenter and critics such as Edwin Muir that the author spent most of his life in the company of men (with the notable exceptions of his mother Mabel Suffield and his wife Edith Bratt) and that the relative dearth of female characters in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* was a consequence of Tolkien's predominantly masculine world. As proof that Tolkien did not at all perceive his world as devoid of the feminine, Rateliff quotes Tolkien's indignant reaction to Muir's characterization of *The Return of the King* as "a boy's story," as expressed in a 1965 BBC interview: "I thought it was very rude, coming from a man who so far as I know is childless, writing about a man surrounded by children—wife, daughter, grandchildren" (41). Rateliff also reminds us of the crucial role that Mabel Suffield, who knew French, German and Latin, had on Tolkien's early linguistic education, and draws attention to Tolkien's pride in his maternal aunt Jane Suffield, who earned a science degree and served as headmistress of a women's college. Even more significant in Rateliff's view is the fact that in his professional life Tolkien welcomed women to his tutorials and continued to support and encourage former female students throughout their careers, in sharp contrast with C.S Lewis's dislike and disdain for women in academia, which as Rateliff notes was unfortunately the predominant attitude towards women at Oxford at the time. Some of Tolkien's former students included Stella Mills, who worked on the OED and published a translation of *The Saga of Hrolf Kraki* (1933); Mary Challans, who became a successful author under the name Mary Renault; Elaine Griffiths, who held a fellowship at St. Anne's; Ursula Dronke, who became a prominent *Edda* scholar; and Simonne d'Ardenne, who earned a doctorate and became a professor at the University of Liège. A telling detail of Tolkien's generosity toward his female students is that he allowed d'Ardenne to publish her thesis, an edition of *Pe Liflade ant te Passiun of Seinte Iulienen*, solely under her name, although in fact he had collaborated with her on the work. Rateliff combs the correspondences of former female students and finds nothing but praise for Professor Tolkien, and no indication whatsoever that he treated female students any differently from male students; how to explain, then, Tolkien's comment in a letter to his son Michael, in which he suggests that while women can excel under the tutelage of a male professor, most cease to flourish once "they leave his hand, or when they cease to take a personal interest in him" ? (60) Rateliff suggests that Tolkien "was observing a very real phenomenon but completely missing the factors that caused it" (62), which ranged from the lack of female mentors for women in higher education to social pressures on women to abandon all professional aspirations once they married. Tolkien may not have given much thought to the social and economic challenges that his former female students faced once they "left his hand," but he continued to have intellectual exchanges

with many of them, and would no doubt be very pleased indeed that his former Merton Professorship at Oxford is currently held by renowned linguist Suzanne Romaine.

The Oxford of Tolkien's day had a long way to go in terms of gender inclusiveness, but Tolkien's world, as Rateliff clearly demonstrates, was far from being a men's club. Still, in spite of the presence in *The Lord of the Rings* of female characters such as Éowyn and Galadriel, who push the boundaries of gender to the limits, not only Edwin Muir but also Edmund Wilson and other critics were quick to pejoratively label Tolkien's epic as a "boy's book." Tolkien took offence, as well he should have, according to Sharin Schroeder: "In the mid-twentieth century, associating Tolkien's work with boys was a form of insult against its supposed predominately male readers" (71). But as Schroeder points out in her essay "She-who-must-not-be-ignored: Gender and Genre in *The Lord of the Rings* and the Victorian Boys' Book," in the nineteenth century, the epithet "boys's book" would have placed Tolkien in the company of H. Rider Haggard, Robert Louis Stevenson, and other "vociferous and influential" male writers who "glorified the boy, intentionally wrote for youthful male readership, and were more concerned with disassociating their work from a reading audience of women" (72). Andrew Lang played a large part in the association of boy's books with romance, praising the works of Haggard and Stevenson in his reviews and characterizing the popular novels of his day as being "all about drawing-rooms" in his preface to *The Red Romance Book* (1905). To his young readership, Lang recommended "a good old romance of knights and dragons and enchanted princesses and strong wars" (75). The boy's books were a success, and their readers included the young J.R.R. Tolkien himself, who named Haggard's novel *She* as one of his favorite books in a 1966 telephone interview with Henry Resnik. Schroeder also notes that one of the words Tolkien most often used to describe *The Lord of the Rings* was *romance*. Thus, Tolkien "inherited all of the baggage of the quest romance genre, in which women were rare," and yet "his construction of gender did not, as early negative reviewers assumed, participate in the same constructions of gender as the boy's books with which it was linked" (77). To prove this point, Schroeder examines *She* (1887) through the lens of Tolkien's critical ideas on language, myth and story-telling, as expressed in the Resnik interview but also in "On Fairy-stories," letters and other writings. The attention to detail and verisimilitude in Haggard's fantasy, his construction of the plot around language, and his evocation of an ancient world lost in time were all aspects of *She* which resonated with Tolkien. This being said, no reader of *The Lord of the Rings* and *She* could fail to note the similarities between Galadriel and the terrifying and beautiful queen of *She*, Ayasha: "Both She and Galadriel are beautiful, immortal women (who are capable of death). Both ask their guests to look into pools of water that show the guests scenes from far away. Both explain

that these pools are not magic. Both can inspire fear but also undying loyalty in the men who meet them. But She is evil, and Galadriel, without the Ring, is good” (73). This last difference cannot be overstated, for it highlights the most significant way in which Tolkien’s work does not adhere to gender stereotypes prevalent in romances and boy’s books. Whereas Haggard’s heroine “perpetuates the idea that females in power are willful, capricious, emotion-driven, and fear-inducing” (87), “Galadriel, on the other hand represents the powerful woman at her best” (86). Tolkien’s work also diverges from the gender stereotypes of the “good old romance of knights and dragons” so valued by Lang, in that the moral failings of Tolkien’s male characters do not revolve around sexual infidelity, as they do in Malory. Tolkien presents a more nuanced understanding of the male hero as being tempted above all by desire for power. Ultimately, “*The Lord of the Rings* highlights the virtue of sublimating or deferring individual desires in order to create a society in which all live without fear” (92).

As its title suggests, the “Power of Gender” section contains three classic essays which examine the theme of power in Tolkien’s work from the perspective of gender. The earliest of these, Melanie Rawls’s “The Feminine Principle in Tolkien,” first published in *Mythlore* in 1984, explores Tolkien’s construction of gender, which Rawls’s Jungian-inspired analysis reveals to be anything but traditional. In both the *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, Rawls perceives a complex and nuanced concept of the interplay between Masculine and Feminine traits: “it is clear that Tolkien believes that gender and sex are not one and the same, and that gender, or Masculine and Feminine, is a condition of the universe that goes deeper, higher and wider than sex” (99). Thus while “Feminine and Masculine possess different characteristics that are meant to complement and augment one another” (99) this complementarity of the “prime feminine characteristic of *understanding*” and “the prime masculine characteristic of *power*” (100) must exist within both male and female characters in order for those characters to be whole. Rawls argues that because Eru creates the world through song, a feminine mode of creativity like healing, dance and weaving, “the Feminine Principle lies at the heart of all creation and has done so from the beginning.” Furthermore, “the best of the males in Arda display these feminine traits” (105). Beren and Tuor are singers, Elrond and Aragorn are healers, Fili and Kili prefer harps over gemstones, and Faramir listens and reflects before taking action. The male characters who are covetous and controlling bring suffering upon themselves and upon others. Sauron is the ultimate example of masculine possessiveness and aggression taken to an extreme, but Fëanor, Saruman, and Denethor also possess an excess of negative masculine traits. Rawls also demonstrates that an excess of negative feminine traits can be equally destructive. Shelob embodies the negative feminine traits of self-absorption and unbridled consumption, and Tar-Míriel, last queen of Númenor, and Aredhel, Turgon of

Gondolin's sister, illustrate the negative-feminine trait of impotence. Rawls notes insightfully that "most of the weak or wicked females do not so much actively participate in evil deeds as they are powerless to initiate any deed, much less halt an evil act" (108). Male characters can also wither under the negative feminine traits of impotence and passivity, as seen in the plight of King Théoden before Gandalf releases him from Saruman's spell. Throughout his legendarium, Tolkien presents a balance of masculine and feminine powers as the ideal. Rawls astutely points out that this balance exists from the beginning of creation among the Vala, and furthermore, "in terms of power and creativity, the feminines of Arda are the equals of the masculines and sometimes surpass them"(114), as seen in the case of Varda's creation of the stars and Yavanna's creation of the Two Trees. Most importantly, Rawls's classic essay successfully argues against simplistic critical approaches which base discussions of gender solely on the numbers of female characters found in Tolkien's works, or on the "traditional" roles they superficially inhabit. As Rawls states in her concluding paragraph, "There is no war between the sexes in Tolkien's subcreation. . . . Feminine and Masculine are diverse—not subordinate or antagonistic to each other. Tolkien shows us how this is to the greater glory of each" (117).

In another classic essay, "Tolkien's Females and the Defining of Power," Nancy Enright puts forth the argument that the female characters in *The Lord of the Rings* redefine the very notion of power through their qualities of caring, sacrifice, and love. It is refreshing to read Enright's analysis of Goldberry, a character who is often overlooked. As the first powerful female who appears in the story, she is "the prototype for other, more significant characters in *The Lord of the Rings*" (121). On the surface the lithe and lovely Goldberry seems to be little more than a beguiling water nymph, and yet "despite her lack of physical strength, she represents the power of nature, ancient and renewing" (122). After Tom Bombadil frees Merry and Pippin from Old Man Willow, Goldberry offers wholesome food, rest, songs and laughter to the hobbits to help them recover from their recent brushes with danger. Enright stresses the parity between Goldberry and Tom Bombadil: "While Tom Bombadil is called 'Master', it is clear that both husband and wife are equally in command of their little household, though their roles differ from each other" (121). Goldberry's elf-like beauty, grace and kindness have a restorative and enchanting effect on the hobbits, which they will encounter again when they first meet Galadriel, who physically and spiritually is a loftier, more powerful version of Goldberry. Galadriel is a bearer of one of the three elven rings, which were endowed with powers of healing, preservation and understanding, which Enright describes as an "alternative to traditional, male-oriented power" (125) . As custodian of the ring Nenya, Galadriel surpasses her husband Celeborn in wisdom, empathy and clairvoyance. She also possesses humility and a willingness to sacrifice her own desires for the greater good, as

evidenced by her resistance to the temptation to take the One Ring from Frodo, even though this would make her the most powerful being in Middle-earth. Enright presents an overview of the various comments by critics, Tolkien's correspondents and Tolkien himself which suggest that Galadriel's character was heavily inspired by the Virgin Mary. A key theme of Enright's essay is that Christian values such as self-sacrifice, humility, love and forgiveness are paramount in Tolkien's redefinition of power in *The Lord of the Rings*, and that it is largely through female characters that this is brought about. In Enright's analysis, of all the characters, Arwen embodies best the virtue of self-sacrifice, for it is she "who makes the Christ-like choice of taking on mortality out of love . . . her renunciation of her Elven immortality suggests the humility of Christ in laying aside the privileges of divinity (while retaining His divine nature)" (123-124). Arwen, of course, cannot be both mortal and immortal, and she gives her jewel and her passage to the Undying Lands to Frodo, thus "her loss—freely chosen out of love for Aragorn—becomes yet another means of salvation for someone else" (124). Whether one interprets the selfless actions of the female characters in *The Lord of the Rings* from a Christian or humanist perspective, Enright's essay clearly demonstrates that "characters who are ultimately most powerful are those, whether male or female, who willingly lay down their own power, and even, in some cases, their lives for others" (130).

Edith L. Crowe begins her classic essay "Power in Arda: Sources, Uses and Misuses" by challenging the idea that there exists a single standard by which one can gauge the presence or absence of feminist ideas in Tolkien's work. For one thing, feminists themselves cannot agree upon a definition of feminism. Therefore, "to say that Tolkien's work is completely incompatible with feminism is to accept not only too limited a view of Tolkien's writings, but too narrow a definition of feminism" (136). While Crowe laments the "disappointingly low percentage of females that appear in his best-known and best loved works, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* (136), she also contends that "in Middle-earth, Tolkien exhibits *attitudes toward power* that are quite compatible with, if not identical to, the attitudes of many who define themselves as feminists" (137). Eru Ilúvatar, whose name means "Father of All" in Quenya, as Crowe reminds is, may lie "firmly within a familiar patriarchal religious tradition" (138) but the resemblance to the Judeo-Christian Yahweh ends there, for with the Valar Tolkien "has managed to incorporate female power at the penultimate level at least" (138). Varda in particular but also Yavanna, Nessa, Vaná, Estë, Vairë and Nienna all create, watch over, or care for different aspects of Arda and illustrate that "spiritual power, as embodied in the Valar, is almost equally the province of male and female." Crowe finds this to be "an improvement over the Primary World," where, as she wryly comments, "its major religions are not oversupplied with images of female spiritual power." Another improvement regarding gender in



Tolkien's subcreation which Crowe finds "extremely refreshing" is not only that "the Fall of both Elves and Men is a male's fault (139)" but that in each case the males in question (Fëanor and Ar-Pharazôn) either disrespect or disregard the females present in their lives. A very interesting observation made by Crowe is that while female characters, like male characters, can be oppressed and even come to violent ends, there is a "refreshing absence of violence against women as women." Moreover, "men (or Elves) who treat women poorly come to a bad end" (147). Crowe concurs with Enright and Rawls that the necessity of a balance between male and female elements and the denunciation of abusive power are themes found throughout Tolkien's work which are also embraced by many feminists.

The analysis of power is continued in the essays dealing with specific characters and the historical contexts of Tolkien's female characters. In "The Power of Pity and Tears: The Evolution of Nienna in the Legendarium," Kristine Larsen explores the many facets of the enigmatic character Nienna. In the 1977 published *Silmarillion*, the solitary Nienna makes brief but significant appearances as mourner for the collective suffering which Melkor causes in Arda; she is prescient in her understanding of the depth of his ill-doing, and as Larsen notes "she weeps for all living beings and for all hurts in the world." Larsen hastens to point out, however, that Nienna is far more than "a stereotypical weepy woman" (190). She uses the restorative and cleansing powers of her tears to water the Two Trees at their creation, and to try to revive them at their death by washing away the stains of Ungoliant. Larsen's careful analysis of Nienna reveals that this character went through several metamorphoses in the decades-long process of the creation of Tolkien's legendarium. In *The Book of Lost Tales*, composed between 1916 and 1926, Mandos passes judgement on the dead elves who come to his halls, while "a human's heart is read by Nienna, and his or her doom pronounced. Some go to the company of Mandos, some . . . she drives out to be captured by Melko . . . and the majority set sail on the black ship Mornië" (193). To Christopher Tolkien, the Christian symbolism in the three paths awaiting human souls after death is obvious; Larsen cites other critics who perceive Greek and Norse resonances in Nienna, but finds the evolution of Nienna within Tolkien's legendarium to be of greater significance than any parallels with other mythologies: "Regardless of one's interpretation of this early Middle-earth afterlife, it is clear that the merciless Nienna of *The Book of Lost Tales* bears little resemblance to the kinder, gentler underworld goddess of the *Lord of the Rings*-era texts of *The Silmarillion*" (193). In the "Quenta" and the "Annals of Valinor," which follow *The Book of Lost Tales* chronologically, Nienna is no longer the spouse of Mandos, but is described as the sister of Manwë and Melko, and acts as a powerful Vala imbued with compassion and pity rather than as a harsh and pitiless judge. In the next revision of the legendarium, "The Quenta Silmarillion,"

the solitary Nienna dwells in the halls of the dead, and uses her understanding of pain and sorrow to offer solace and healing to the souls sent to the Halls of Mandos. Her role in *The Silmarillion* is not only to console the bereaved, but to teach others how to exercise pity, mercy, and compassion. Larsen astutely notes that a certain Maia referred to as Olórin, who in the “Valquenta” seeks out Nienna to learn pity and patience—virtues which ultimately prove to be more powerful than force alone throughout Tolkien’s legendarium—is none other than Gandalf. “Thus, in the actions of Gandalf, we see the hand—or perhaps tears—of Nienna, affecting Middle-earth in ways that rival those of Varda or any other of the Valar” (200). Larsen also draws some compelling parallels between the compassionate Nienna and the Virgin Mary as “Our Lady of Sorrows.” Larsen concludes that in a sense Nienna constitutes the very soul of Middle-earth, in her embodiment of sorrow for that which has been lost and longing for that which could be.

Leslie A. Donovan’s classic essay “The Valkyrie Reflex in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*: Galadriel, Shelob, Éowyn, and Arwen” finds fault with critics who make use of “classical epics, Christian typology, psychological archetypes, or contemporary gender constructs” (222) to analyze the women in *The Lord of the Rings*, because these discussions are “peripheral to Tolkien’s primary interests and goals” (223). For a fuller understanding of the female characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, according to Donovan, we must look to medieval literature, for “not only Tolkien’s women characters but all his Middle-earth fiction have their heritage in the literature and culture of the Middle Ages” (223). As a medievalist and philologist specializing in Anglo-Saxon literature, Tolkien was greatly inspired by strong women in Nordic myths and literature, in particular, the valkyries. Donovan reminds us that “the word ‘valkyrie’ comes from the Old Norse *valkyrja*, meaning ‘battle-determiner’ or ‘chooser of the slain’” (229). It is not surprising, then, that the valkyries carry with them some negative attributes such as inciting warriors to seek vengeance for insults, which Tolkien omits in the characters of Galadriel, Éowyn, and Arwen. He reshapes these characters “as reflective of moral good, heroic ideals, noble behavior, and responsible leadership by means of a female identity concordant with contemporary perceptions of women as significant forces within society and the world” (226). Donovan identifies several traits and attributes which are found in both “benevolent valkyrie figures” such as Wealhtheow, Sváva, Brynhild and Hervör and in Galadriel, Éowyn, and Arwen. These include “divine or semidivine origins or ancestry . . . noble social status . . . superior wisdom . . . exceeding beauty” (228). More importantly, Tolkien’s heroines and the benevolent valkyries “choose actions based on the operation of their own strong wills, and . . . undergo the loss of something central and precious to their lives” (229). Readers of Donovan’s essay may wonder what the hideous Shelob has in common with the beautiful and benevolent Galadriel, Éowyn, and Arwen aside from physical

prowess and a strong will. For Donovan, Shelob, with her intricate and seemingly endless web, “recalls the weaving or sewing traditions of Germanic valkyrie figures” (242). Arwen and Galadriel also each create woven or sewn textiles imbued with special significance or powers, such as the banner Arwen sends to Aragorn and the cloaks and rope that Galadriel gives to Sam and Frodo. In Donovan’s analysis, “Shelob represents an opposition that serves to intensify Tolkien’s emphasis on the benevolent valkyrie motifs reflected in his other women characters” (239). It is Éowyn, however, who offers “the most direct and compelling evidence for the valkyrie tradition in Tolkien’s texts” (243). Radiant and beautiful, with golden hair, shining eyes, and white garments, she embodies all of the qualities of the benevolent valkyrie figure—hospitality, honor, loyalty, bravery—and yet it is love for her uncle King Théoden which leads her to realize her ambition of showing great valor in battle, and her love for Faramir which will allow her to continue to have a positive impact in her people, by uniting Rohan with Ithilien. By applying his theory of *eucaastrophe*—the happy turn of events—to his recasting of the medieval valkyrie figure, Tolkien creates unique female characters who are relevant to the modern world.

While Donovan sees mainly Germanic influences in Éowyn, Phoebe Linton finds themes in some medieval French and Middle English romances which parallel certain aspects of Éowyn’s narrative and psychological trajectory. In her essay “Speech and Silence in *The Lord of the Rings*: Medieval Romance and the Transitions of Éowyn,” Linton examines the link between female speech, silence and autonomy. In her analysis, *The Lord of the Rings* is “a modern romance inspired by medieval models” (258) and thus Tolkien models Éowyn “on the medieval female knight, using the romance quest conventions as points of inspiration from which he transcends traditional patterns” (260). Linton notes that female knights in medieval literature are noteworthy but few; they include Silence, the heroine of the thirteenth-century poem *Le Roman de Silence*, the historical Joan of Arc, who appears in several medieval texts, including *Le Ditie de Jehanne d’Arc*, by Christine de Pizan, and Avenable, a character in the mid fifteenth-century *Prose Merlin*. All three of these female protagonists assume the attire and functions of the male knight as he appears in medieval literature; they wear armor and bear arms and participate in quests and battles. All three heroines are also subjugated in the end: Joan of Arc, by burning at the stake, and Silence and Avenable, by marriage to powerful monarchs. While Tolkien’s shield-maiden Éowyn may be inspired by a medieval paradigm, she diverges from it in significant ways. Whereas the strength of female knights such as Joan of Arc, Silence, and Avenable derives traditionally from their virginity, Éowyn’s strength derives from her personal character. Certainly, there is no evidence that Éowyn is anything other than physically pure, but the emphasis is on her fearlessness in battle and her loyalty to King Théoden, for whom she risks her life, rather than on

her virtue. Éowyn's alternance between speech or silence is also more complex than that of her medieval predecessors, and is often determined by what Linton calls her "narrative arc" (263). In her phase as court lady, Éowyn is described as a statuesque and impassive noblewoman clad in white, standing steadfastly and silently at her uncle King Theoden's side. As acting lord of the Riddermark, Éowyn speaks to express her disappointment at being left behind to protect her home, which she views "not as a place of safety or comfort, but of silence and oppression" (271). Her speech is characterized by bitterness and despair, reflecting her lack of agency, in spite of the title and responsibilities that have been bestowed upon her. As a shield maiden of Rohan, Éowyn, like the female knights of medieval romances, disguises herself as a man in order to leave the domestic stewardship forced upon her for an active role in battle. She must keep silent in order to maintain her alias as the knight Dernhelm, but as Linton points out, "crucially, silence here is her own choice" (273). When Éowyn reveals her identity as a woman to the Nazgûl before slaying him, "her voice becomes her own again" (274). In the final phase of her development, "Wife and Healer," unlike the characters Silence and Avenable, Tolkien's female knight is able to choose what course her life will take in the future. Éowyn uses speech to accept Faramir's offer of marriage of her own free will, and to affirm her choice of a new role: "I will be a healer" (quoted from *The Lord of the Rings*, 277). Linton concludes her insightful essay by noting that "speech and silence never remain fixed in Tolkien's work, meaning he creates a free-moving female character both in the world of the story and in reader interpretation" (278).

As Leslie A. Donovan's and Phoebe Linton's essays demonstrate, Éowyn's literary ancestry can be traced back to medieval literature and Nordic mythology, but Melissa Smith also sees striking parallels between the shield-maiden of Rohan and the war-brides of World Wars I and II. In "At Home and Abroad: Éowyn's Two-fold Figuring as War Bride in *The Lord of the Rings*" Smith examines accounts of twentieth-century war-brides, who generally fell into one of two categories: "the newlywed wife left in the homeland by the soldier . . . or a bride of foreign origin married after a necessarily hasty engagement to a serviceman in the occupying, usually friendly, country" (206). Éowyn finds herself in circumstances that approximate both of these situations. Although Éowyn is not married to Aragorn, her strong attraction to him makes it doubly difficult for her to stay behind when he departs for the Paths of the Dead. Like the mixed feelings of many women who saw their men off to the two terrible World Wars of the twentieth-century, Éowyn's emotions range from fear for Aragorn's safety to a desire that he distinguish himself nobly in battle. However Éowyn fails to comply with social expectations of war brides to keep a cheerful demeanor and bolster the morale of the other civilians left behind, as prescribed in twentieth-century memoirs such as Ruth Wolfe Fuller's *Silver Lining: The Experience of a War*

*Bride* (1918). Instead, Éowyn is resentful and angry at Aragorn's refusal to let her ride with him and complains bitterly about the "demoralizing passivity" to which she is relegated (211). But while Éowyn turns out to be "unsuccessful as the war bride-left-behind," she is given "a second chance to distinguish herself, this time as an 'international' war bride, through her relationship with Faramir" (211). Here again Smith draws on studies of marriages between Allied servicemen and women from other cultures. In the uncertainty of wartime, proposals of marriage came quickly. Some foreign war brides reported receiving proposals from their husbands-to-be within twenty-four hours of their first meeting; likewise, Faramir's declaration of love for Éowyn comes just days after they meet in the Houses of Healing at Gondor. Assimilation into a new culture is also required of the foreign war bride, and Éowyn accepts this new challenge, declaring that she will exchange the wild, warlike ways of the Rohirrim for the more refined and nurturing ways befitting a lady of Gondor: "Faramir and Éowyn's marriage, like many wartime marriages, is viewed as the positive unification of two cultures" (215). Their successful union, and the "analogy or comparison of Éowyn to the war brides of Tolkien's time adds further proof," in Smith's view, "to the influence of the World Wars on Tolkien's works."

In "The Fall and Repentance of Galadriel," Romuald I. Lakowski delves into the multi-layered identity of Galadriel, "one of the best known and best loved characters in *The Lord of the Rings*" (153), but also one of the most enigmatic and complex. When trying to view a full portrait of Galadriel, the reader has to take into consideration early drafts as well as diverse works composed after the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, including the later parts of *The Silmarillion* (1977), "The History of Galadriel and Celeborn" in *Unfinished Tales* (1982), notes which Tolkien provided for Donald Swann's Song Cycle *The Road Goes Ever On* (1967), and letters Tolkien wrote shortly before his death in 1973. In short, as Lakowski stresses throughout the essay, Tolkien never stopped reflecting upon and attempting to rewrite the character of Galadriel, particularly on the post-*Lord of the Rings* era, which Lakowski sees as an indication that "Tolkien himself obviously felt dissatisfied by his treatment of Galadriel" (253). The most perplexing questions are whether Galadriel was in fact banished from the West by the Valar, whether she remained in Middle-earth because of the ban or by choice, and the conditions of her pardoning and eventual return to Valinor. Lakowski carefully combs through Christopher Tolkien's introduction to "The History of Galadriel and Celeborn" in *Unfinished Tales* as well as the chapter "Farewell to Lorien" in *The Lord of the Rings* and finds that "the earliest of the references to a specific Ban on Galadriel's return dates from 1967, a full 25 years after the drafts of Book II of *The Lord of the Rings* were first written" (159). In effect, in "The Mirror of Galadriel" Galadriel makes several comments about returning to the West, and in Lakowski's view, "the only reasonable or natural interpretation of

these passages is that Galadriel thought at this point she was free to return to Valinor” (159). There are also conflicting versions of Galadriel’s exile. In *The Silmarillion*, Galadriel is mentioned as taking part in the revolt of the Noldor against the Valar, but is also “clearly included in the general pardon of the Valar at the end of the First Age” in the “Quenta Silmarillion” (157). A very different account of Galadriel emerges from the “The Shibboleth of Fëanor” (published in *The Peoples of Middle Earth*). Here, Galadriel is “portrayed as something of an Amazon” as Lakowski puts it, a strong warrior who originally follows Fëanor in his rebellion against the Valar, but who then fights against him when he instigates the kinslaying at Aqualondë. Tolkien called her “proud, strong, and self-willed” (160), and she refuses twice the pardon of the Valar and the offer to return to Valinor. This contrasts sharply with the image of Galadriel in “The Mirror of Galadriel” as it appears in the published text of *The Lord of the Rings* in which Galadriel is depicted as wise and even humble, preferring “to diminish” rather than enhance her power with the Ring. The most extraordinary examples, however, of Tolkien’s near obsession with rewriting the character of Galadriel can be found in two letters written in the last years of his life. In the first, written on 25th January 1971 to Mrs. Ruth Austin, Tolkien states Galadriel “owes much . . . to Christian and Catholic teaching about Mary” but then explains that she differs significantly from Mary in that she had been a rebel and a prideful one at that, who was only pardoned because she refused to take the Ring when Frodo brought it to Lothlórien. In the second letter, written on 4th August 1973, just a month before he died, Tolkien “completely exonerated Galadriel from any part in the Rebellion of the Noldor,” going so far as to described her as “unstained” (165). Lakowski admits to having difficulty reconciling these different versions of Galadriel. Were they the result of Tolkien’s perfectionism? His Catholicism? His fascination with his own artistic creation? Whatever the reasons, the great importance that Galadriel had for Tolkien throughout the many iterations of his legendarium and in his reflections on his subcreation should lay to rest any criticism that he paid little attention to female characters in his work.

Another female character whose story Tolkien told in various writings over time is Lúthien Tinúviel. The characters Beren and Lúthien were dear to Tolkien’s heart, as evidenced by his placing their names under his and Edith’s names on their tombstone. The story also occupies an important place in the legendarium, Tolkien having composed several versions of it over a span of several decades. It is not difficult to understand why Tolkien scholars and Tolkien himself have been so drawn to the dramatic story of Lúthien Tinúviel and Beren, a tale of passion, sacrifice, suffering, heroism, and eternal love, which arguably contains one of the most extraordinary female characters in Western literature. Cami D. Agan’s essay “Lúthien Tinúviel and Bodily Desire in the Lay of Leithian,” focuses largely on the character of Lúthien Tinúviel as she is presented

in *The Silmarillion* of 1977, but also draws on “The Lay of Leithian,” which dates from the 1920s and in which Tolkien tells the story of the lovers in octosyllabic couplets. This version was eventually published in *The Lays of Beleriand* (1985). Agan’s approach is thematic rather than chronological. In contrast to the case of Galadriel, Tolkien seems to have revised the story of Beren and Lúthien not out of a dissatisfaction with inconsistencies in his treatment of the characters, but rather because he found this part of his subcreation so compelling that he kept returning to it and retelling it in both prose and poetry. The story of Arwen and Aragorn’s love has striking parallels to it, and Tolkien has Aragorn recite a song about the meeting of Beren and Tinúviel in the chapter “A Knife in the Dark” from *The Fellowship of the Ring*. In her essay, Agan describes Lúthien as “a powerful force” who keeps the quest to recover the Silmarils alive “when male figures—Thingol, Celegorm, Curufin, Beren, Felagund—fail or thwart the personal and larger objectives” (168). Daughter of the Maia Melian and Elwë (also known as Thingol), one of the leaders of the Teleri, Lúthien possesses extraordinary strength and abilities, some of which derive from her quasi-divine lineage. Agan stresses however that Lúthien’s powers are not located primarily in the spiritual realm; they are in fact very much rooted in Lúthien’s physical being: “Her power, represented as singing, weaving, transforming, healing, and shape-shifting, has its foundation in the body, works through the body, and allows her to gain a status—the Elf who becomes human—that is defined by processes of the body” (169). Lúthien’s powers are also driven by her desire for Beren, making her “a rare textual example in Tolkien’s legendarium of one who acts on sexual desire and is neither demonized as monstrous nor directly punished by the narrative for her desires” (169). As a natural environment removed from societal and familial constraints, the forest serves as the safe and almost sacred space where Lúthien “awakens the forest from winter” with her song and awakens love and desire in Beren: “Lúthien’s physical actions—dancing and singing—inaugurate the fecundity of spring and the text directly parallels this fruitful awakening with Beren’s” (170). Agan draws a parallel between the Forest of Arden in Shakespeare’s *As you Like It*, in which Rosalind and Orlando first exchange marriage vows and the role of nature in the story of Beren and Lúthien. In her close reading of “The Lay of Leithian” and “Of Beren and Lúthien,” Agan perceives “a secret pastoral marriage and nightly rendezvous” which constitute a kind of “honeymoon period . . . appropriate to the season” (172). What is most original and interesting in Agan’s analysis is the way she builds the main thesis of her essay around the assumption that Beren and Lúthien consummate their love in the forest before their “doom” leads them through many physical and emotional torments; their strength, Agan convincingly argues, derives precisely from the physical consummation of their desire: “Lúthien and Beren’s feats as the tale unfolds might be viewed as achievable *through* their sexual union: their

union/choice beyond race, beyond politics or systems of control. . . . By acting on their ‘pure’ desire, Lúthien and Beren construct one body . . . that can then proceed to act on and respond to the bodies of others” (173).

A woman such as Lúthien, acting on her desire and defying patriarchal authority, would likely have been burned as a witch in Shakespeare’s day, as Maureen Thum reminds us in her essay “Hidden in Plain View: Strategizing Unconventionality in Shakespeare’s and Tolkien’s Portraits of Women”: “from about 1570 to 1700 . . . between 60,000 and 200,000 were executed, over 75% of whom were women” (284-285). Shakespeare nonetheless created strong female characters who pursue, and ultimately obtain, the objects of their heart’s desire through transgressing the narrowly-defined gender roles prescribed for them in Shakespeare’s day. Ambitious and intelligent women in Tolkien’s day found that many doors were still closed to them, and yet Tolkien’s fiction depicts women who overcome significant and even life-threatening obstacles to realizing their desires, although they may initially seem to be conforming to societal norms. Many of Shakespeare’s female characters also transgress social and gender boundaries in ways that would have been overtly condemned in Renaissance England. Drawing upon Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of “experimental fantasticality,” Thum argues that in *Twelfth Night* and *The Lord of the Rings*, Shakespeare and Tolkien created parallel worlds similar to the socially subversive world of the medieval carnival. Within these imagined worlds, women could achieve goals not possible during the historical times in which each writer lived: “both Shakespeare and Tolkien use similar strategies to disarm reader resistance and to provide a sympathetic view of women in assuming powerful roles” (281). Thum chooses *Twelfth Night* as the focus of her analysis because the exploration of gender in this play goes beyond mere role reversals and cross-dressing. For example, Thum notes that “none of the male characters display the expected behavior patterns associated with the traditional ideal of manhood” and that “the female characters . . . all share attributes commonly ascribed to men, and, thus, are highly unconventional figures” (288-89). Likewise, Tolkien calls into question traditional concepts of masculinity through the failure of figures like Boromir and Denethor. Thum draws an interesting comparison between Viola and Éowyn and Olivia and Galadriel. The former characters must both disguise themselves as men in order to accomplish their goals. Olivia and Galadriel, while they do not wear a physical disguise, are both inwardly quite different from how others perceive them. Olivia wears “a mask of convention” to “deflect attention from the fact that she has power and autonomy as an orphan who is subject neither to her father’s nor her brother’s will” (295) This allows her to run her estate without interference and to marry the man of her choice. Galadriel, on the other hand, makes no attempt to hide her extraordinary powers. She is recognized as a very powerful force in Middle-earth and even feared and revered by other characters. Instead,



Galadriel's "masquerade" occurs on the level of the narration itself. She is described as a beautiful and slender women clad in white, with a radiant but almost ethereal appearance. In short, she "seems to be an expected heroine of romance . . . confined to a garden-like realm" (300). Thum argues that "Tolkien expresses her powers implicitly to make them more acceptable to members of his audience, many of whom still subscribe to more conservative views of women" (301). In societies which seek to control the choices of women, "The woman cloaked in conventionality blends in; her mask is invisible, so that she expands gender roles even while her unconventionality remains hidden in plain view" (303).

Uma McCormack begins her essay "Finding Ourselves in the (Un)Mapped Lands: Women's Reparative Readings of *The Lord of the Rings*" by recalling her surprise and dismay when she learned that "there are more named horses than named women in *The Lord of the Rings*" (309). But beyond the issue of how few or how many female characters there are in Tolkien's work, McCormack raises the larger theoretical question "Does it matter when a reader is in some way absent from a loved text?" (309). McCormack's answer is that it does matter, because "a reader's absence . . . or . . . presence in ambivalent terms—makes love for that text difficult and even painful" (309-310). One way that some women have "found a presence for themselves" in *The Lord of the Rings* is by writing women characters—and through these characters, writing themselves—into the narrative through fanfiction. McCormack affirms that "fanfiction is a valid creative activity, which encompasses a wide variety of styles, employs varying techniques, and is written for numerous purposes" (311). Her essay examines three examples of fanfiction which "provide insight into different ways in which . . . women writers negotiate and repair representational gaps in Tolkien's work" (311). One way is by creating female characters and writing them into the main narrative. This is illustrated by a story entitled "Missing," in which a younger sister of Faramir and Boromir is the main character, and McCormack's own story, "Lady of Silences," about Finduilas, Faramir and Boromir's mother, in which the author takes "passing mentions of her from the main text of the book and Appendices to conjecture what life she might have led" (313). "Speaking of Love" is told from the point of view of Ioreth's lover and female life-companion, thus addressing "a triple absence from history that occurs through the intersection of sexuality, gender and class" (314). Other works discussed here are the novels *Captain My Captain* by Isabeau of Greenlea, told from the perspective of the sole woman serving with the Riders of Ithilien, *Fallen*, by Aliana, in which the narrator is a nurse serving in the Houses of Healing, and McCormack's *A Game of Chess*, about the early years of Faramir's and Éowyn's marriage. It is unfortunate, in McCormack's opinion, that responses to Tolkien by male authors have met with more success than fanfiction by women. Her essay is a fitting

conclusion to a volume on women in Tolkien's work which is edited and written by women critics, scholars, and creative writers. McCormack cautions, however that women writing women into Tolkien's texts do take risks: "to go unread; to go dismissed; to have one's creative work characterized as derivative or adolescent" (325). It is an undertaking both "perilous and fair," to quote the title of this very rich volume.

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