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Abstract

Offers an opposing viewpoint on the “taming” of the woman warrior in Tolkien, suggesting that Éowyn’s rejection of the warrior’s life is a fulfillment of Tolkien’s theme of healing and rebirth rather than a subjection to a male partner.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Éowyn; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*; War; Women

FINDING WOMAN'S ROLE IN *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

MELISSA MCCRORY HATCHER

IN *The Lord of the Rings*, J.R.R. Tolkien gives the 20th century a fantasy epic of medieval proportions. It is a story of the littlest person, a hobbit, overcoming the tides of war. In his trilogy, Tolkien fashions a narrative that forcefully asserts the idea that wars should only be fought to protect and preserve, not to conquer and destroy. While a number of critics have accused Tolkien of subsuming his female characters in a sea of powerful men, one heroine, Éowyn, the White Lady of Rohan, is given a full character arc in the novel. After being rejected by Lord Aragorn, Éowyn searches for meaning in life, choosing to follow her brother, Éomer, to fight in the War of the Ring. The White Lady of Rohan chooses as her fate to die in battle with glory and honor. However, after being wounded by a Ringwraith and restored in the courts of healing, she decides to give up life as a warrior and become a healer. Modern scholars have seen this as a choice to accept conventional female submissiveness. However, in choosing the path of protecting and preserving the earth, Éowyn acts in accordance with Tolkien's highest ideal: a fierce commitment to peace. Rather than submission, Éowyn embodies the full-blooded subjectivity that Tolkien posits as essential for peace. While other characters—most notably Sam—also embody this ideal, it is Éowyn who most successfully fulfills the role. In making this argument, I hope to show how modern criticism has misread the role of women in Tolkien's epic, and has thus overlooked much of the importance of his vast and compelling work.

Many modern scholars discount this fantasy epic not only because of its genre, but for its mass-market appeal and its seeming lack of depth. Feminist critics, however, have been even harsher in their dealings with Tolkien. While a professor at Oxford, J.R.R. Tolkien formed a male literary club. The Inklings, including C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams, were the first audience to hear *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. This male-dominated institution inspired Candice Fredrick and Sam McBride in *Women Among the Inklings* to pose the idea that "Middle-earth is very Inklings-like, in that while women exist in the world, they need not be given significant attention and can, if one is lucky, simply be avoided altogether" (108). Tolkien's world of men seems, to most, very chivalric in its philosophy of leaving women behind, and some female readers feel abandoned by Tolkien's lack of women characters. There are only three significant ones: Galadriel, Arwen, and Éowyn. Hobbit women are mentioned,

but only as housewives or shrews, like Rosie Cotton or Lobelia Sackville-Baggins. Tom Bombadil's wife Goldberry is a mystical washer-woman. Dwarf women are androgynous, while the Ents have lost their wives. When discussing male and female characters, it is important to note that only the real humans achieve emotional fullness, and the mythic individuals attain only romanticized futures.

Those rare readers and scholars who dissent from the majority of critics often cite presentism as their chief defense, arguing that we, as readers in the 21st century, should not judge Tolkien by our modern feminist standards. Claiming that Tolkien lived in a different time where women were more subservient, these scholars justify this idea by insisting that "[s]exism was the norm and not subject to evaluation and attention" (Fredrick and McBride xiv). This idea of presentism, however, fails both to adequately explain Tolkien's own sexism and to take seriously the powerful female characters in *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien's contemporaries were Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury group and Gertrude Stein and her Paris writers group. Tolkien himself worked with several strong female scholars at Oxford such as "medieval historian Margerie Reeves and Mrs. Sutherland, a fellow of Lady Margaret Hall specializing in Provençal studies" (Fredrick and McBride 4). Moreover, when Tolkien was writing his masterpiece, from 1937 to 1948, women were even controlling the home front in England—taking over "male" jobs during World War II. He and the Inklings were aware of the women's movement and lived at a time when it was impossible to ignore. Therefore, it is certainly not adequate to make the argument of presentism to defend a man living only fifty years ago.

Tolkien himself, in reality, probably *was* the stodgy sexist Oxford professor that feminist scholars paint him out to be. In a letter to his son Michael he says, "How quickly an intelligent woman can be taught, grasp [her professor's] 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*" (*Letters* 49). Despite Tolkien's beliefs in the modern woman's intelligence and value, *The Lord of the Rings* and its characters should be judged on their own internal merit, without considering the biography of its author. This is not an attempt to defend any anti-feminist ideas in Tolkien's own life, but in his work, where in the character of Éowyn we are given a complete individual who fulfills Tolkien's theme of peace, preservation, and cultural memory.

Tolkien's theme for peace shines through every page of this war-torn work. Gregory Bassham has identified the following six elements as the keys to happiness in Middle-earth: delight in simple things, making light of one's troubles, getting personal, cultivating good character, cherishing and creating beauty, and rediscovering wonder (Bassham 49). It is significant that all of these ideals are exemplified in Éowyn and Sam, but in very few others. Samwise Gamgee, Frodo's gardener and protector, begins his journey as an adventurous

hobbit who wants to see elves, foreign lands, and exotic creatures. In his journey with Frodo, he is virtually unaffected by the power of the Ring, and he ultimately ends the novel as the character in the most-favored position. At the conclusion of "The Scouring of the Shire," the Hobbits are all relieved that their adventure is finally over. However, Sam concludes the chapter by insisting, "I shan't call it the end, till we've cleared up the mess [...]. And that'll take a lot of time and work" (*Return* 327). Sam is married to Rose Cotton, and their first child is born exactly two years after the destruction of the Ring, "the twenty-fifth of March" (*Return* 334). Jane Chance highlights the fact that "Sam the gardener marries an appropriately named Rosie Cotton, as if to illustrate further the imminent fertility that will emblazon the reborn Shire" (*Tolkien's Art: A Mythology for England* [Art] 179). This same gardener, who inherits Bag End and becomes the Mayor of Hobbiton, even has the final words of *The Lord of the Rings*. "Well, I'm back" summarizes the restorative theme and highlights the return to those elements of happiness (*Return* 340). Samwise re-plants trees in all of the Shire's most-beloved spots with the magic seeds and earth given to him by the Lady Galadriel. Before Frodo leaves on the ship from the Grey Havens, he charges Sam to "keep alive the memory of the age that is gone, so that people will remember the Great Danger and so love their beloved land all the more" (*Return* 338). Again Tolkien stresses that Sam's goal is to *preserve* Middle-earth. Éowyn, as we shall see, also assumes the role of preserving cultural memory. Characters like Éowyn and Sam take on the role of writing Middle-earth's future, and therefore, they can be seen as versions of the author himself, who does not want this story to be forgotten. In fighting both to participate in *and* to recount the story, Éowyn embodies the persistent struggle of women in the West to assert their voices and presence, to avoid erasure, and to figure in history (and fiction) as they do in life.

Sam is obviously more of a central figure than Éowyn. In *Tolkien's Art*, Chance defines the heroes of the epic as "Aragorn, Frodo, or Sam" (144). However, I intend to argue that Éowyn enacts in brief what Sam epitomizes throughout the work. Both Éowyn and Sam begin their journeys seeking adventure and glory. It is important to note that Éowyn and Sam undergo transformations, giving their characters full arcs. Jorge J.E. Gracia emphasizes this point, noting that Sam "is slowly transformed from a rather immature and simple hobbit in search of adventure into a resourceful servant, a loyal companion, a fierce guardian, and a loving friend" (67). Éowyn, too, embodies these ideals by the end of her journey. However, critics often see Éowyn's transformation as an act of submissiveness, while Sam's is seen an act of heroism.

While the theme of preservation is made clear through Sam's transformation, some scholars have found it difficult to see women's role in this theme. However, Tolkien stresses the importance of women as healers or protectors of Middle-earth and the human spirit. Even during battle, women

were looked to for preservation: in the Houses of Healing “dwelt the few women that had been permitted to remain in Minas Tirith, since they were skilled in healing” (*Return* 133). Éowyn, who dedicates her life to protecting Middle-earth, is central to this idea. Her role is central to understanding Tolkien’s message in *The Lord of the Rings*; as Fredrick and McBride note in *Women Among the Inklings*, “Éowyn has more speaking lines and appears in more scenes than any other woman in *The Lord of the Rings*” (112).

Two other female characters assist in fulfilling Tolkien’s theme of peace while serving as gift givers to the Fellowship: Lady Galadriel of Lothlórien and Arwen Evenstar. Galadriel, the Lady of Lothlórien, is depicted as an all-seeing Mother Nature figure, who can read the thoughts of the fellowship. Galadriel gives gifts to the members of the fellowship to help them with their journeys. She also joins Bilbo, Frodo, and the rest of her kin on the ship from the Grey Havens at the end of the novel, while characters like Éowyn are left to write Middle-earth’s story. Like Éowyn, Galadriel is depicted as a preserver and healer, as Lothlórien is a type of House of Healing. Galadriel and Éowyn are both described as fair, and they are both in positions of power. Éowyn chooses to leave her position of power to fight in battle.

Another important female character can be found in Arwen, the elf. She is the exalted chivalric ideal of a woman. As with Galadriel and Éowyn, Tolkien also depicts Arwen in a position of power and with a fair appearance. Most importantly, Arwen and Éowyn both have feelings for Aragorn. While Arwen waits at Rivendell for his return from the War of the Ring, Éowyn rides to battle with him. Éowyn takes an active role in comparison to Arwen’s passive waiting. Arwen Evenstar is a symbol of the unattainable, a perfect match for the unattainable Aragorn in Éowyn’s eyes. At the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, Arwen becomes the giver of gifts. She forfeits her place on the ship to the Grey Havens to stay with Aragorn. When arguing over who is the most beautiful, Gimli finally concedes to Éomer that “[y]ou have chosen the Evening; but my love is given to the Morning” (*Return* 274). Arwen, the owner of the Evenstar jewel, is the evening, and Galadriel, ruler of Lothlórien, the morning. Each only represents half of nature; combined, they may seem to form a complete woman shining throughout the day and night, but Éowyn is a complete character within herself.

Éowyn, as a self-realized woman, is both a warrior and a healer. In “Arwen: The Elf Warrior?” Jessica Yates characterizes Éowyn as a classic woman warrior, who fulfills the six criteria for that designation: sense of identity and purpose, military training, armor, good weapons and a horse, magic powers (e.g., turning the Nazgûl’s prophecy back on itself), and a due regard for chastity and modesty. Yates insists that Éowyn, as a fulfillment of the classic woman warrior, is not concerned about self-transformation or having a love interest; rather, she is concerned with her sense of identity and purpose (14). This

classification as a woman warrior leads the reader to understand the deep literary roots of Éowyn and her passion.

In our introduction to Éowyn in *The Two Towers*, Aragorn describes her as "strong" and "stern as steel" (127). Aragorn's use of "steel" to describe Éowyn may imply both the embodiment of a weapon used for war, and an object to be used by men, a dichotomy which has often been misunderstood by modern critics. Tolkien also depicts Éowyn as having an inner darkness, a hidden demon that drives her to act. A potential source for Éowyn can be seen in Hervör, the heroine of the Icelandic epic, *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*. (It should be noted that Tolkien's Inklings were formed out of the Coalbiters, a group of Oxford scholars who met to study Icelandic.) King Heidrek's niece, Hervör, is not trained from childhood in warfare; rather she picks up a sword one day and rides to battle. She is caught up in the pride of being raised as royalty and then suddenly discovers she is an illegitimate heir. Hervör rides to battle to avenge her slain kinsmen, but only to redeem her pride. Hervör is also a character with a "darkness" inside. Her fury over the injustice of her slain kinsmen drives Hervör to fight in battle. Taking what we know from this source material, it could seem that Tolkien belittles Éowyn's cause by making hers a plight for unrequited love.

However, long before Éowyn joins the Riders of Rohan in battle, she is a strong, vivacious character. In one of her first scenes, Éowyn quips back and forth with Aragorn. After he refuses to ride with her brother, she asks him if she could ride with his company. Aragorn tells her to defend her homeland while the men go to battle and not to think of these deeds as less valuable because they go "unpraised" (*Return* 47). Éowyn quickly retorts that "[a]ll your words are but to say: you are a woman, and your part is in the house" (*Return* 47). This brings to light Éowyn's challenge of a traditional woman's role in Middle-earth, which closely mirrors the fight of women throughout the 20th Century. She places words in Aragorn's mouth that she feels she has heard from her uncle King Théoden and her brother Éomer throughout her life. These are the men who leave her in control of Edoras, while they fight to protect it. However, this position of power is not enough for Éowyn. She wants to ride and fight in battle with the men of Rohan. Éowyn later insists to Aragorn, "But I am of the house of Eorl and not a serving-woman. I can ride and wield blade, and I do not fear either pain or death" (*Return* 47). Éowyn feels that oblivion, not death, is the true fate to be feared. She is also listing her qualifications to ride with Aragorn. She has been trained just like the men of Rohan and feels there is no reason why she should be left behind to tend to the women and children. These are the words of a powerful woman who is not going to be oppressed by a man, even if he will be her king. Even in this first scene, Éowyn is depicted as a woman seeking glory in battle, not love.

Unlike Éowyn, Aragorn, although heroic, is virtually a stagnant character throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. He may have doubts about his destiny as Isildur's heir to become king, but Éowyn is desperately searching for meaning in her life. She sees the revered Aragorn and wants to follow him into battle to win glory for herself. When Aragorn asks at this time of war what she fears, she replies, "A cage [...]. To stay behind bars, until use and old age accept them, and all chance of doing great deeds is gone beyond recall and desire" (*Return* 47). As feminist critics have pointed out, much of Western literature has denied female desire, subordinating women's desire to that of their male counterparts—the presumed subjects of Western thought. Although Éowyn does not achieve her desire here, because of her immature wish to be like the stereotypical male hero, Tolkien acknowledges that she has a complex and powerful subjectivity. Her desire not to be caged, like an animal, beyond "recall," speaks again to her recognition that oblivion, not death, is the true fate to be feared. She, like Sam, dreams of the tales later generations will tell of her. Ultimately, Éowyn fears being put in a cage of conventional female submissiveness.

The following morning as the company prepares to depart Edoras, Éowyn appears "clad as a Rider and girt with a sword" (*Return* 48). Again she begs Aragorn to let her ride with the company, but he sternly refuses saying only, "Nay, lady" (*Return* 48). Aragorn's terse replies to her pleading indicates a recognition of her bravery. His short replies are clues that he realizes her true longing and potential as a great warrior, not that he is embarrassed because she has feelings for him. Éowyn's begging "on her knees" does not signify a desperate woman in love, but a warrior who desperately wants to be taken seriously (*Return* 48). While at first she had challenged Aragorn in private, Éowyn cunningly pleads with him in front of his men. She displays this cunning by genuflecting, as a sign of a soldier of lower rank—different in degree, not kind. Any young boy who wanted to go with the company might have done the same thing. On her knees, Éowyn is obviously not a proud lover, but a warrior seeking glory, but she is refused because she is a woman. The reader is given a clue as to Aragorn's real feelings about refusing Éowyn's request when Tolkien adds, "only those who knew him well and were near to him saw the pain that he bore" (*Return* 48). Aragorn, like the reader, is pained at having to leave Éowyn behind because of social mores. Aragorn is portrayed as frustrated because he is trapped within the constraints of conventions with which men have shackled women throughout time.

One of the arguments against Éowyn's case is that she has to become like a man to accomplish anything. Feminist scholars Fredrick and McBride reinforce this idea by saying, "to depict Éowyn as an actual warrior, Tolkien must transform her into a man" (113). This argument undermines itself, in attempting to define gender division by assuming that there are "men's roles." However,

Éowyn does not fit into an assumed gender role. Her transformation occurs when she comes to a point of self-realization in her life, not when she is dressed as a warrior. To ride with the Rohirrim, Éowyn is forced to be disguised as Dernhelm, a soldier in the cavalry. When Merry first meets Éowyn, he says, "she wore a helm and was clad to the waist like a warrior and girded with a sword" (*Return* 60). This instance and her pleading scene with Aragorn occur long before Éowyn disguises herself as Dernhelm. In comparison to her source character, she is obviously stronger than Hervör in the Icelandic *Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*. Hervör, King Heidrek's niece, "did more often harm than good" (10) and only fought "for store of wealth" (11). While they are both disguised as men, Hervör has to be disguised because she is not adequately trained. Éowyn is pictured from the beginning as a warrior, and even with a disguise, there is no real transformation into a man.

Even in her disguise, Tolkien brings to light Éowyn's loving, almost maternal actions that show her complexity as a complete character and a self-realized woman. Dernhelm tells Merry "I will bear you before me, under my cloak," when no one else will dare to take the little Hobbit into battle (*Return* 71). She connects with the unwanted Hobbit because no one wants her to fight in battle either. This shines a light on the love and nurturing that Éowyn will soon spread over Middle-earth; carrying Merry gives the reader a pregnancy image that foreshadows Éowyn giving birth to a new life on the battlefield. She and Merry will soon be transformed from under her cloak into warriors. This relationship with Merry is also important in illustrating her importance as a character: she is a hero in the same mold as hobbits because they all will come to realize the importance in fighting for preservation.

When Éowyn slaughters the Ringwraith in the Battle of Pelennor Fields, Merry describes her as having "the face of one that goes seeking death, having no hope" (*Return* 115). This could play into the idea that her darkness is one of unrequited love for Aragorn, but there is also no hope in seeking vanity—for one can never have enough. After Dernhelm and Merry witness the attack on King Théoden by the Lord of the Nazgûl, Merry hears Dernhelm speak to the Ringwraith. The voice that now "seemed strange" to Merry demanded that the Nazgûl leave at once (*Return* 114). The Lord of the Nazgûl taunted Dernhelm saying, "Thou fool. No living man may hinder me!" (*Return* 114). Merry heard Dernhelm laugh and reply, "But no living man am I! You look upon a woman. Éowyn I am" (*Return* 114). This declaration seemed to shake the Ringwraith's confidence for it made no answer, and it is indicative of a cultural overlooking of women in general. It is important to note that Éowyn fulfills the prophecy of the Ringwraith to her advantage. Her being a woman, not a woman disguised as a man, is crucial to slaying this monster. A potential source for this scene could be Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The three witches have told Macbeth that he should fear

“no man born of woman.” Macbeth’s last scene perfectly mirrors the Nazgûl scene when Macduff kills him because he was not from “woman born” (he was born by a cesarean section). In this reading, Éowyn becomes a Macduff figure and shows her strength, intelligence, and the good wishes of fate. Éowyn obviously does not have to be transformed into a man to accomplish anything; on the contrary, her being a woman will change the tides of war.

She slaughters the winged creature with one fell swoop, but the Ringwraith then flings his black mace on Éowyn, which can be seen as one last attempt to keep her in her place. While Merry stabs the Ringwraith from behind, Éowyn “drove her sword between crown and mantle” (*Return* 116). A male Hobbit does assist in the defeat of the Ringwraith, but Éowyn has the final blow. Éowyn’s struggle and defeat of the Ringwraith are her attempts to prove her worth and to battle the stereotype that women should not participate in warfare. In contrast, Tolkien is showing that even the smallest and the most marginalized people are necessary in the fight to defeat evil. Through Éowyn and Merry, we see the presumably weak and ignored as heroes in *The Lord of the Rings*. In *Tolkien’s Art*, Jane Chance emphasizes the importance of their killing of the Nazgûl by saying, “The service they render, a vengeance impelled by pity and love for their lord, is directed not only to the dead king and father Théoden, or to Rohan and Gondor, but to all of Middle-earth” (174). This defeat of evil in Middle-earth reinforces the idea that women and hobbits can be as valiant at arms as their male compeers, but they—unlike one-dimensional characters such as Boromir or Gimli—are well-equipped to pursue what is essential: peace, preservation, and cultural memory. Éowyn’s great deed serves as a turning point in the battle, and it serves as foreshadowing for Éowyn’s decision to become a healer and a preserver of Middle-earth.

Later in the chapter “The Houses of Healing,” Aragorn tells Éowyn’s brother Éomer that “in me she loves only a shadow and a thought: a hope of glory and great deeds, and lands far from the fields of Rohan” (*Return* 146). Throughout the work, shadows are a powerful and recurring image of the Dark Lord, Sauron. The idea that Éowyn has a shadow within her and she loves only the shadow within Aragorn reinforces the concept of vanity. Éowyn’s vanity can be seen as the most powerful aspect of her dark sinful nature, and she projects this as love onto Aragorn. The White Lady of Rohan loves only the thought of glory, which stands in direct opposition to Tolkien’s theme of peace, preservation, and cultural memory. The love of Aragorn is not her darkness; rather her inner flaw is her hope of glory and great deeds. While modern feminist scholars see Éowyn’s darkness as “an unwillingness to accept her lot in life: living as a female who, as such, is disbarred from a life of glory on the battlefield,” her shadow is her vanity, which goes against Tolkien’s theme for the works (Fredrick and

McBride 113). Therefore, Éowyn's vanity is depicted as an evil shadow that overtakes her as the Dark Lord overtakes Middle-earth.

Éowyn's shadow can also be seen as a positive characteristic. Her shadow of vanity and resulting transformation are what make her an interesting character. Éowyn is more than a traditional passive female or a traditional warrior woman. Her shadow is what ultimately separates her from Sam. While they both fulfill the message of the work, the loyal, resolute Sam does not have a dramatic change in character. Sam becomes stronger and wiser, but Éowyn conquers an evil within herself that is not present in Sam, in a struggle which can be paralleled to the fight with the Dark Lord.

Éowyn's defeat of her shadow, however, is not a simple battle of good versus evil, like Aragorn's with the Dark Lord. Vanity can be seen as a positive aspect of her character: her confidence, determination, and self-esteem. This adds even more complexity to Éowyn's transformation. She must try to maintain these healthy aspects of her personality, while realizing the importance of her role in the peace, preservation, and cultural memory of Middle-earth.

One of the keys to Éowyn's transformation and character arc is the love of Faramir, the Steward of Gondor. They have both been wounded in battle and await news of the Great War together in the Houses of Healing. Some critics choose to see Faramir as an oppressive male figure, who clips Éowyn's wings. Fredrick and McBride insist "Éowyn's healing is a victory, not only for Faramir but for their civilization; an unruly impulse to transcend prescribed gender roles has been successfully thwarted" (113). Earlier in the same argument they conclude that "Éowyn's healing comes from accepting the role that her civilization demands from her as a woman: to be a beautiful, helpful, and cheerful companion to a man" (113). Faramir understands that she "wished to have renown and glory and to be lifted far above the mean things that crawl on the earth" (*Return* 261). Faramir also empathizes with her admiration for Aragorn, as the greatest lord of men, but "when he gave [her] only understanding and pity, then [she] desired to have nothing, unless a brave death in battle" (*Return* 261). Aragorn pities Éowyn because of her great and unused skill in battle. The novel gives no indication that Aragorn pities her because he is in love with another. Faramir, a self-realized man, concludes his profession of love by insisting that "I do not offer you my pity. For you are a lady high and valiant and have yourself won renown that shall not be forgotten" (*Return* 262). By calling her valiant, Faramir specifically asserts the idea that Éowyn has avoided what she most feared: a fate in which "all chance of doing great deeds is gone beyond recall and desire" (*Return* 47). Faramir highlights the idea that Aragorn only pities Éowyn, while he does not pity the shadow within her. Rather he realizes she has a weakness and wants her to grow as an individual. Faramir sees Éowyn as his equal, and he does not attempt to oppress her.

By showing Éowyn her vanity and expressing his love for her, Faramir allows Éowyn to see the limits of her desires and her true potential. Immediately after his profession of love, “the heart of Éowyn changed, or else at last she understood it” (*Return* 262). Faramir helps Éowyn understand the world and her high place in it. She proclaims that “the Shadow has departed,” and she no longer desires to be a queen (*Return* 262). In the end, Faramir “asks that Éowyn Lady of Rohan should be his wife, and she grants it full willing” (*Return* 276, emphasis added). The reader is left with the implication that they enjoy an equal partnership throughout life. In *The Mythology of Power* [*Power*], Jane Chance claims that “[t]he rebirth of Middle-earth is matched by the healing of two ‘stewards,’ Éowyn of Rohan and Faramir of Gondor—the one hurt in spirit and the other in body” (122). This re-emphasizes the importance of Éowyn’s role as a chosen character to enact Tolkien’s theme of fighting for peace, not glory. Faramir may end Éowyn’s selfish quest for vanity, but he does not put her in a cage. Tolkien himself in a letter to a fan insists that “[t]his tale does not deal with a period of ‘Courtly Love’ and its pretences; but with a culture more primitive (sc. less corrupt) and nobler” (*Letters* 324). The love of Faramir and Éowyn is not Courtly Love, like that of Aragorn and Arwen, because Éowyn takes an active role in the relationship. Faramir and Éowyn can be seen as more of a modern ideal for marriage, the uniting of equal life partners. Therefore, the love story and subsequent “healing” process of Éowyn should be seen as an independent woman’s self-willed transformation.

After the Shadow has departed from Éowyn, she declares, “I will be a healer, and love all things that grow and are not barren” (*Return* 262). Éowyn finally realizes that one must fight to protect and preserve their piece of the earth. She has engaged in battle and will now grow life from the barrenness left by war. Chance says that Éowyn’s restoration comes from accepting “her more realistic role as beloved of Faramir rather than of Aragorn” (*Power* 114). This again demonstrates the modern criticism that Éowyn’s darkness was simply one of unrequited love. However, Tolkien does not depict Éowyn merely getting married and having children; he chooses her to have an active role in rebuilding Middle-earth as a healer.

If Aragorn can be called Tolkien’s Christian King, then Éowyn is certainly the Christian wife and leader in *The Lord of the Rings*. In Éowyn we see a cultivator of peace, a healer, and one who helps defeat the powers of darkness, just like Aragorn. Ideally, in Christian marriages, the man is supposed to love the wife first, and the wife is supposed to reciprocate his love; this concept is taken from the idea that Christians love Christ because he first loved them. Tolkien deliberately chose to incorporate these ideals into Faramir and Éowyn’s relationship rather than Aragorn and Arwen’s. Like Aragorn, Éowyn should be read as an important fulfillment of Christian ideals in Tolkien’s work.

With the massive popularity of the film versions of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien's epic story has again proved relevant to a modern audience. It is important to notice that Éowyn is the only female character who did not have to be updated for the movies. Peter Jackson, the director of the Miramax/ New Line films, portrays Arwen as an elf warrior and Lady Galadriel as an all-seeing narrator who sets the plot in motion, taking these ideas from *The Silmarillion* and *The Book of Lost Tales*, but it is important to note that Éowyn is the only female character given a full character arc completely within *The Lord of the Rings*. We should not read Éowyn as the "only" female character that is given any significance, but rather, the character Tolkien chooses to fulfill his theme of peace.

Gracia, in "The Quests of Sam and Gollum for the Happy Life," proposes that Tolkien's theme for the work is "by forgetting ourselves [...] we earn the good life and it is by giving that we receive" (71). Truly, after her transformation into a self-realized woman, Éowyn embodies these ideals even more than Sam. She leaves her glory days of battle behind her to preserve Middle-earth as a healer. Chance also reiterates this idea by saying, "The fertility and renewed vitality of the Shire [and all of Middle-earth] symbolize the power of restored community in its enablement of healing through love and care" (*Power* 126). Like Sam, Éowyn is given the important task of taking care of the land she has been given to preserve it for future generations.

Éowyn is an expansive character who expresses many emotions like grief, pride, love, and fear. Many characters in the novel, like Boromir, Faramir, and Aragorn, are not given the opportunity to express this wealth of emotions. Éowyn also grows and changes, unlike many of the major characters such as Aragorn. Therefore, Éowyn's role should not be slighted; Tolkien has chosen to put her at the forefront of his theme of preservation.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, women are not the Anglo-Saxon passive "peace-weavers," but self-realized women who enact peace and justice. Chance says *The Lord of the Rings* "reflects Tolkien's genius in providing a voice for the dispossessed in the modern world" (*Power* 2). Truly, Tolkien's message should be found empowering to the individual, especially women who are most often dispossessed in literature. Éowyn is a complete individual, one who Tolkien chooses to enact his mission of peace.

The lesson of *The Lord of the Rings* is that the marginalized, the ignored, and the presumably weak are a necessity in the destruction of evil. Women and hobbits should not stay in their traditional places, because extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. Unlike one-dimensional characters such as Boromir, Gimli, Faramir, and Aragorn, Éowyn is a complete and expansive character who is allowed to change. *The Lord of the Rings* has been misread by modern scholars who see women as non-existent. On the contrary, Éowyn not

only embodies equal strength in physical violence, but more importantly, she is equipped to pursue what is essential: peace, preservation, and cultural memory.

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