

***“You are a woman, and your part is in the house.”***  
**– Gender Norms and the Female Characters in *The Lord of the Rings***

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## Abstract

This thesis examines whether the female characters in *The Lord of the Rings* books conform to gender norms or challenge them. In this thesis, two aspects of female gender norms are analyzed in particular; woman's role in society, and qualities that are traditionally deemed feminine. Four female characters, Éowyn, Galadriel, Arwen, and Goldberry, have been chosen to be analyzed. The analysis is conducted by carefully reading through the story, and closely examining all of the parts, in which these four female characters are present, or are spoken about by other characters. Then, each of these characters is analyzed in terms of actions, words, outer appearance, and qualities in order to determine whether or not they challenge the gender norms. The analysis suggests that Éowyn and Galadriel seem to be challenging the female gender norms by acting in ways that are traditionally associated with masculinity, such as being powerful, taking on leadership positions, and in the case of Éowyn, occasionally choosing to emphasize masculine aspects of herself. On the other hand, Arwen and Goldberry are mostly conforming to the traditional woman's role, and displaying mostly qualities, that are considered traditionally feminine.

## Tiivistelmä

Tämä opinnäytetyö tutkii *Taru Sormusten Herrasta* -kirjoissa esiintyvien naishenkilöhahmojen mukautumista perinteisiin sukupuolinormeihin, tai vaihtoehtoisesti niistä poikkeamista. Tässä opinnäytetyössä tarkastellaan erityisesti kahta naissukupuolen normeihin liittyvää tekijää; naisen paikkaa yhteiskunnassa, sekä ominaisuuksia, joita pidetään perinteisesti naisellisina. Neljä naishenkilöhahmoa, Éowyn, Galadriel, Arwen, ja Kultamarja, on valittu analyysin kohteeksi. Analyysi suoritetaan lukemalla tarina huolellisesti läpi, ja tarkastelemalla erityisesti kaikkia niitä kohtia, joissa kyseiset neljä henkilöhahmoa ovat läsnä, sekä myöskin sellaisia kohtia, joissa muut hahmot puhuvat heistä. Analyysin kohteena on naishenkilöhahmojen kieli, teot sekä ulkoiset ja sisäiset ominaisuudet sekä niiden kuvaukset, joiden avulla määritellään hahmojen mukautumista sukupuolinormeihin ja mahdollista normien haastamista. Analyysin perusteella näyttäisi siltä, että Éowyn ja Galadriel haastavat sukupuolinormit käyttäytymällä perinteisesti maskuliinisuuteen yhdistettävillä tavoilla, esimerkiksi olemalla voimakkaita, ja esiintymällä johtoasemissa, sekä Éowynin tapauksessa myös ajoittain päättämällä korostaa maskuliinisia puolia itsessään. Arwen ja Kultamarja taas esiintyvät pääasiallisesti perinteisessä naisen roolissa, sekä heistä on havaittavissa vain perinteisesti naisellisina pidettyjä ominaisuuksia.

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# 1 Introduction

*The Lord of the Rings* is often considered a literary masterpiece, and the creator of the adult fantasy literature genre. Despite its position as a classic cult favorite, it has received criticism on one aspect in particular: the seeming lack of female characters. The epic fantasy story about the battle of good and evil is full of diverse male characters, but only a handful of significant female characters are present in the story. Furthermore, there has been no definite conclusion to the debate on whether or not these female characters are strong, independent and powerful, and essential to the plot, or if they are conforming to the gender norms and only there to fulfill the traditional woman's role of being subservient to the men in the story. In my thesis, I will analyze the female characters in the Lord of the Rings, and aim to determine if these characters are indeed taking on the traditional woman's role and submitting themselves to the norm, or if they challenge the norm in any way, by taking on actions that are traditionally seen as deferring from the role traditionally seen as suitable for women. In addition, I will not only investigate the characters' actions and words, and their conformity or resistance to the norms regarding women's role, but I will also be examining the qualities and features of the female characters, and determine if they display qualities and features that are traditionally seen as feminine, or if they differ from the stereotypical idea of femininity. Chapter 2 introduces the research material, chapter 3 discusses the theoretical framework of the analysis, chapter 4 summarizes previous research on female characters and gender norms in *The Lord of the Rings*, chapter 5 contains the analysis, and chapter 6 is dedicated to discussion and conclusions.

## 2 Research Material

As my research material I will use *the Lord of the Rings* book series by J. R. R. Tolkien. In this section I will introduce the author of the series, J. R. R. Tolkien, the genre and plot of *The Lord of the Rings* -book series, and the female characters chosen for analysis.

### 2.1 Author: J.R.R. Tolkien

This section is based on the book *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography* by Carpenter, H. (1977).

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, often called Ronald by his family (p. 13), was born on 3 January 1892 in South Africa (p. 12). His parents, Arthur and Mabel Tolkien, were both originally from England, but had moved to South Africa because of Arthur's job (pp. 9-10). However, when Arthur died in

1896 (p. 16), Mabel moved back to England with Ronald and his little brother Hilary (pp. 16-17). In England the family lived in various locations, but a notable one to *The Lord of the Rings* is a small country village called Sarehole, as it inspired Ronald's imagination (p. 20). While living in Sarehole, Ronald's deep interest in Latin also begun developing (p. 22). In 1904 Mabel died (pp. 29-30), leaving the Tolkien boys in the care of a Catholic priest, Father Francis Morgan (pp. 31-32), as Mabel had converted to Catholicism a few years before her death (pp. 23-24). The Catholic faith was also important to Ronald (p. 31), which can be observed in his writings. Tolkien's love for languages is also a notable part of his work, as the world of his stories is full of far developed languages. While studying at King Edward's school, Tolkien's aptitude for languages became even more evident than before, and he found his particular interest in linguistics and principles of languages (pp. 33-34). Tolkien studied in Oxford's Exeter College (p. 49, p. 52), at first the Classics (p. 54), but later changed to English Language and Literature (p. 63). He became a Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon in Oxford and ultimately Oxford's Merton Professor of English Language and Literature (p. 111).

## 2.2 The Lord of the Rings

This section provides information on the genre and plot of *The Lord of the Rings*, as well as its writing process.

*The Lord of the Rings* is a fantasy epic, often quoted as the first piece of writing in the genre of adult fantasy. *The Lord of the Rings* is set in the mythical world of Middle-Earth, which, despite being mythical, resembles our world in many aspects. Middle-Earth has a complex history, which includes various different peoples and creatures such as Hobbits, Dwarves, Elves, and Men, as well as Orcs and trolls, along with several highly developed languages, the most developed ones being the two different Elvish languages, Sindarin and Quenya. *The Lord of the Rings* focuses on one hobbit, Frodo Baggins, and his journey in destroying a powerful magical ring, that is the source of power for the evil force of Middle-Earth, Sauron. On his quest, he is joined by eight other people: the hobbits Sam, Merry and Pippin; the men Aragorn and Boromir, the dwarf Gimli, the elf Legolas, and the wizard Gandalf, who together are called the Fellowship of the Ring. The story depicts Frodo's journey to Mordor, a place where Sauron lives, and the only place where the ring can be destroyed for good. Through various trials and tribulations, and with the help of many friends and allies, at the end of the story the ring is finally destroyed and Sauron defeated.

Originally, *The Lord of the Rings* was supposed to be a much shorter sequel to Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (pp. 184-186), first published on 21 September 1937 (Carpenter, 1977, p. 182). *The Hobbit* is a fantasy story that is also set in Middle-Earth, similar to the *Lord of the Rings*. *The Hobbit* tells the story of how Frodo Baggins's uncle, Bilbo Baggins, finds the One Ring of Sauron. However, the style of the story is quite different from that of *The Lord of the Rings*; *The Hobbit* is clearly a story for children, and contains numerous fairytale-like elements, such as a singing wallet owned by one of the trolls that Bilbo encounters on his journey. Despite the children's fairytale-like qualities of the story, the history and mythology of Middle-Earth was already vastly developed, as Tolkien had already written (but not yet published) drafts of *The Silmarillion* (Carpenter, 1977, pp.183-184), which contains accounts of the mythology of Middle-Earth. This vast mythology lead to *The Lord of the Rings* becoming quite a different genre compared to *The Hobbit*, as well as becoming much longer than originally planned (Carpenter, 1977, pp. 185-204). Tolkien begun writing *The Lord of the Rings* shortly after the release of *The Hobbit* (Carpenter, 1977, p. 185), but the story took years to finish. The first part of the story, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, was published in the summer of 1954, and the other two parts, *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*, shortly after (Carpenter, 1977, p. 217).

## 2.3 Characters

This section includes brief introductions to the female characters I have chosen to analyze.

### 2.3.1 Éowyn

Éowyn is first introduced in the second book, *The Two Towers*. She is the niece to king Théoden, who rules one of the kingdoms in Middle-Earth, called Rohan. Éowyn is the Shieldmaiden of Rohan, and also actively taking care of king Théoden, as he is old and in need of assistance. Éowyn dreams of becoming a warrior, and getting glory for achieving greatness on battle field. She goes on to fulfill her dream, but gets terribly wounded in the process. However, she is healed, and decides to become a healer herself, instead of continuing as a warrior. She marries Faramir, who is of noble lineage and a respected military captain.

### 2.3.2 Goldberry

Goldberry first appears in the first book, *The Fellowship of the Ring*. She is referred to as River-daughter, which is "mythologically similar to a water nymph or a dryad" (Enright, 2007, p. 95). She lives in the Old Forest, far away from the rest of the world, together with her husband, Tom Bombadil. Both Goldberry and Tom Bombadil are keeping to themselves, and not meddling with

the events outside of their cozy home and beloved forest. However, both Goldberry and Tom Bombadil are powerful beings, above the ranks of mere humans.

### 2.3.3 Arwen

Arwen's first appearance also occurs in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. She belongs to the noble and immortal race of Elves, and is the daughter of one of the most powerful Elves, Elrond. For a long time, she lived with her mother's relatives, but during the events of *The Lord of the Rings*, she has returned to live with her father. Arwen gives up her immortality to marry Aragorn, who is one of the members of the fellowship, and at the end of the story becomes a king who unites two long separated kingdoms.

### 2.3.4 Galadriel

Similar to Goldberry and Arwen, Galadriel first appears in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Galadriel is one of the most powerful Elves, and in fact one of the most powerful characters, in *The Lord of the Rings*. She lives in the realm of Lothlórien, which she is preserving and protecting with the power of one of the lesser magic rings called Nenyá. She is incredibly wise, and well-informed of the events of the world around her. She is married to Celeborn, and they rule Lothlórien together. However, it can be observed that Galadriel is the more powerful one.

## 3 Theoretical Framework

### 3.1 Approach

My aim is to analyze if the female characters that I have chosen are adhering to traditional gender norms, or if they are breaking the norm. I will determine what is traditionally seen as the woman's role, as well as the characteristics that are usually associated with traditional femininity. I will then proceed to analyze if the female characters fulfill the traditional woman's role, or if they are doing something that is considered to be part of a more masculine role. I will also analyze, if the characters display characteristics that are considered traditionally feminine, or ones that are traditionally viewed as more masculine. Taking into consideration both the female characters' actions when it comes to submitting to or resisting the traditional woman's role, as well as the amount of traditional femininity they display, I will then discuss whether or not they adhere to the norms imposed upon the female gender. I will focus on four female characters in particular, Éowyn, Goldberry, Arwen and Galadriel, and will analyze their actions and words, as well as outer appearances. To conduct my analysis, I will closely examine all the chapters and passages where

each of the female characters is present or mentioned by other characters, and carefully analyze each detail.

### 3.2 Gender and Norms

It is important to note that gender and sex are two different concepts that should not be confused with one another, and cannot be used interchangeably. The term ‘sex’ is used when referred to the biological sex of a person, and is traditionally divided strictly into two binaries, male and female (Wiesner-Hanks, 2011, pp. 2-3). Gender, on the other hand, “is not exactly what one “is” nor is it precisely what one “has”.” (Butler, 2004, p. 42). Instead, gender is seen as more performative, and more of a spectrum rather than a strict division into the two categories of male and female (Wiesner-Hanks, 2011; Butler, 2004). However, gender is still usually understood in terms of feminine and masculine. Butler (2004) describes gender as follows: “Gender is the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes”, and “Gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized” (Butler, 2004, 42). Butler criticizes this convention of using the binaries as the only parameters by which gender is understood and defined, as it leaves out a number of permutations of gender that are outside of the binary (Butler, 2004, p. 42). According to her, “a restrictive discourse on gender that insists on the binary of man and woman as the exclusive way to understand the gender field performs a *regulatory* operation of power that naturalizes the hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption” (Butler, 2004, p. 43; italics in the original text). One way of regulating gender is its normativity.

### 3.3 Female Gender Norms

The term ‘norm’ is not the same thing as ‘rule’ or ‘law’. According to Butler, “a norm operates within social practices as the implicit standard of *normalization*” and are more difficult to distinguish and pinpoint than rules or laws (Butler, 2004, p. 41). A norm is also not the same as the action that is governed by the norm, but it determines, which actions and practices are to be recognized as part of the norm (Butler, 2004, p. 42). Thus, gender norms refer to the actions and practices that are normative for a gender, traditionally categorized by the binaries of female and male gender (Butler, 2004; Wiesner-Hanks, 2011). In my analysis, I will focus particularly on two



aspects of female gender norms: qualities that are traditionally viewed as feminine, and the role that women are expected to take on in society.

### 3.3.1 Traditional Femininity and Woman's Role

Williams (2012) offers a great overview and synthesis of qualities that are traditionally considered normative for the female gender, referred by Williams as 'traditional femininity'. Although the book discusses femininity and the ways it is constructed in fitness magazines, it is also relevant in terms of researching the femininity of the female characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, as the definition of traditional femininity is general and can be applied universally to researching the displaying of femininity in multiple different contexts.

Traditional femininity is described by Williams as the "ideals of white, middle-class femininity valued through the first half of the twentieth century, particularly the 1950s, and often still stereotyped as feminine today" (Williams, 2012, p. 4). Qualities that are associated with traditional femininity are usually related to being community-focused, concerned with social relations, taking care of one's home, and also being beauty- and youth-focused. Williams lists the following qualities as traditionally feminine: sociability, humbleness, others-orientation, domestic-orientation, passivity, dependence (on men), and submissiveness. Further attributes for traditional femininity are "understanding, compassionate, affectionate, kind, helpful, warm, tactful, sensitive to others' feelings, sociable, concerned with equity, and able to devote oneself to others" and "concerned with being sociable and equitable to others, as caring about their and other's appearance, and as unassertive" (Williams, 2012, p. 12, p. 16). Traditionally feminine women are expected to sacrifice their personal interests and aspirations for the well-being of others, and portray themselves as the "perfect wife and mother", the epitome of niceness" (Williams, 2012, p. 18). Behaving in a manner that can be considered rude and bad, is not acceptable behavior for traditionally feminine women. Interestingly enough, bad behavior is often associated with ugliness, which brings us to another central point of traditional femininity, i.e. the focus on looks and being beautiful (Williams, 2012).

Williams claims that magazines and fairytales alike portray women as "needing to focus on beauty, connecting youth and beauty with good girls and ugliness and old age with bad girls" (Williams, 2012, p. 17). Furthermore, the beauty of women is not intended only for themselves, but for others to look at. What is considered beautiful has changed throughout history, and will continue to change, but there are some qualities that seem to be always connected with the traditional femininity defined by Williams. Thinness seems to be a significant beauty ideal when it comes to

traditional femininity, as the ideal woman can be described as “fragile and weak, petite in comparison to men, and uses her appearance to demonstrate her class” (Williams, 2012, p. 44). The reasons behind this trend are linked to the idea of women being submissive to and dependent on men: “thin bodies take up less space, have less strength, and are more easily dismissed. Slim bodies are docile, childlike, nonassertive, and helpless without a man”, and “small size conjures up the idea of a delicate, dependent creature” (Williams, 2012, p. 44). Smaller size is also a factor that sets women apart from men, thus being thin means being different from men, i.e. more feminine. In addition to these traditionally feminine qualities, there is a certain role that women are expected to take on in society in order to fit the norm of being a woman.

The role of women has traditionally been on the private sphere; the role of wife and mother, who stays home and takes care of the household where she warmly and kindly takes care of and welcomes in everyone, whereas men occupied the public sphere of work and politics (Wiesner-Hanks, 2011; Williams, 2012). Married women were not expected to work, and if they did, their wages belonged to their husbands. Unmarried women, who worked, were not paid too much in order to stop them from being independent, and they were encouraged to give their wages to their family (Wiesner-Hanks, 2011, pp. 45-46). In traditional gender roles, women were always dependent on men, and submissive to men. Women were not expected to be independent, or make decisions on their own (Wiesner-Hanks, 2011).

## 4 Previous Research

This section contains a synopsis of previous research on female characters in *The Lord of the Rings* and their submission to or resistance to gender norms.

The role of women in *The Lord of the Rings* has been analyzed before, with opposing opinions and various conclusions. Previous analyses have mostly focused on the character of Éowyn, specifically on her choice to become a warrior. When the men of Rohan ride to war against the dark forces of the evil Lord Sauron, Éowyn chooses to go with them instead of staying home with her people. However, after receiving glory but also injury on the battlefield, she decides to set aside her original dream of being a renowned warrior, choosing to become a healer instead, as well as accepting Faramir’s request to marry him. Fredrick & McBride (2007) argue that the decision to choose the path of a healer instead of warrior indicates her submission to her husband, and thus also to the prevailing gender norms. An opposing viewpoint is presented by Hatcher (2007), who claims that

the change of career path is not dictated by the gender roles and Éowyn's need to submit to her husband and to the cultural ideals of a woman's place, but rather by Tolkien's wish to promote healing and peace instead of war and destruction. In this light, Éowyn's choice can be seen as a positive turn of events, as she is choosing a career that is most highly valued in Middle-Earth. Hatcher also points out that the change of heart is a result of Éowyn's own internal reflection, and not a result of external factors, for example Faramir's orders. On the contrary, Faramir does not wish to control Éowyn, for he sees her as his equal, and instead of looking down on her he greatly admires her achievements in war (Hatcher, 2007).

When going to war, Éowyn disguises herself as a male warrior, Dernhelm, to fit in with the rest of the warriors, all of whom are male. According to Fredrick & McBride (2007), this demonstrates that in order "to depict Éowyn as an actual warrior, Tolkien transforms her into a man", reinforcing the idea that only men are supposed to be warriors, and as a woman, Éowyn could not do what she does as Dernhelm (p.35). Thus, the decision to be disguised as a man takes away from Éowyn's efforts to break away from the traditional gender norms, and ends up enforcing said norms instead. However, Hatcher has an opposing opinion on this matter also, as she argues that disguising oneself as a man is not the same as becoming a man, and that "[t]o ride with the Rohirrim, Éowyn is forced to be disguised as Dernhelm, a soldier in the cavalry[.]", implying that the disguise is a mere means for Éowyn to go to war without getting noticed by her brother who did not wish her to come (p. 49). In addition, it is the very fact that she is a woman allows her to do great deeds on the battlefield: she kills the leader of the Nazgûl, about whom a prophecy was made that no living man could kill him. In addition to Éowyn, Galadriel and her femininity has also been analyzed to some extent.

Galadriel's powerfulness and wisdom have often been noted, and the fact that she appears stronger and more influential than her husband. Enright (2007) says the following about Galadriel: "It is she who is the wiser and more powerful, though both rule together, and he clearly has both wisdom and power" (p. 99). According to Enright, Galadriel knows information about the fellowship that her husband does not, for example about Gandalf leaving on the journey together with the fellowship, but not making it all the way to Lothlórien (p. 99). Also, it is her power and not Celeborn's that the hobbits feel in Lothlórien (Enright, 2007, p. 99). Enright also points out, that it is Galadriel, who "mentally tests each member of the Fellowship, offering him a choice between the danger that lies ahead and something else that he greatly desires" (2007, p. 99).

## 5 Analysis

In this section I will analyze each of the female characters and their actions, words, and outer appearance, and determine whether or not they break the gender norms. I will divide this section into sub-sections by character.

### 5.1 Éowyn

The character of Éowyn, and her adherence to or differing from gender norms is the most researched of the characters. As can be seen in the section on previous research, Éowyn's decision to fight in the war alongside the men of her country, as well as her choice to become a healer at the end, have been analyzed from multiple angles, with varying conclusions, which is why I will not be focusing on those parts of her storyline. However, there are some aspects of her character and storyline that have not been analyzed as thoroughly, and those are the ones that I will be focusing on. First of all, it must be noted that Éowyn herself is aware of existing norms concerning the role of women. When Aragorn tells Éowyn that her role as the leader of her people is equally important to the role of the soldiers, Éowyn answers by saying

‘All your words are but to say: you are a woman, and your part is in the house. But when the men have died in battle and honour, you have leave to be burned in the house, for the men will need it no more. 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.’ (Tolkien, 2008b, p. 1027).

This shows that Éowyn not only thinks that there are unfair gender norms in place regarding the role of women, but also that she purposefully wants to resist the norms and do exactly the opposite, as she sees herself as capable of doing the same as any man can do. She is vocal about her discontent with her role as a leader who has to stay home. She is “weary of skulking in the hills” and wants to “face peril and battle” instead (Tolkien, 2008b, p. 1026). She also wants to make it clear, that she is not eager to fill the traditional woman's role as a home-maker and a nurturer, as she reminds the others: ““But am I not of the House of Eorl, a shieldmaiden and not a dry-nurse?” (Tolkien, 2008b, p.1026). However, it is the very lack of gender bias when choosing the leader of the home front that causes Éowyn to acquire the position that she sees as discriminatory.

When the kingdom of Rohan makes the decision to participate in the ongoing war, the king, Théoden, wants to lead the soldiers, taking his heir Éomer with him. This results in a situation, in which the people who stay home have no leader, for no man from the ruling family is left. When deciding the temporary leader who is to rule the people in Théoden's name, the king's servant, Háma, suggest Éowyn for the position:

‘I said not Éomer,’ answered Háma. ‘And he is not the last. There is Éowyn, daughter of Éomund, his sister. She is fearless and high-hearted. All love her. Let her be as lord to the Eorlingas, while we are gone. (Tolkien, 2008a, p. 683).

Thus, Éowyn is chosen for the task because of her ability to lead and encourage the people, and not because she is a woman. The reason why Éowyn is forbidden to join the men on the war front is not because of her gender, but because it is her duty to fulfil her role as a leader: “did you not accept the charge to govern the people until their lord’s return? If you had not been chosen, then some marshal or captain would have been set in the same place, and he could not ride away from his charge” (Tolkien, 2008b, p. 1026) is what Aragorn tells her, when she shows her discontent with her role. However, she is tired of hearing about duty, as she seems to think of it as submitting to the traditional woman’s role of staying in the house: “‘Shall I always be chosen?’ she said bitterly. ‘Shall I always be left behind when the Riders depart, to mind the house while they win renown, and find food and beds when they return?’” (Tolkien, 2008b, p. 1027). Even though she is unwilling to accept the role as a leader of her people, she is nevertheless breaking gender norms by doing so, as well as by deciding to join the war later on. However, it must be noted, that there are other occasions, which show her in activities more in line with the traditional woman’s role.

When king Théoden and his men go to war, he leaves the hobbit Merry behind, and orders him to serve Éowyn (Tolkien, 2008b, p. 1049). Merry is desperate to join the war, and begs king Théoden to let him come with them, but Théoden refuses. At this moment, Éowyn comes to his aid disguised as Dernhelm, and takes Merry to ride with her (Tolkien, 2008b, pp. 1052-1053). She then proceeds to look after him when they are riding toward the war front. Arguably, this might be seen as pure solidarity toward Merry, who similarly to Éowyn was forbidden to join the war, and therefore causes Éowyn to understand his plight and to feel sorry for him. However, this could also be seen as an act of nurturing and caring for a person, in an almost motherly way. Thus, Éowyn could here be seen displaying traditionally feminine qualities, when she decides to take Merry with her, and look after him on their journey. Éowyn can also be observed serving king Théoden, which is traditionally seen as an important part of woman’s role. On two different occasions, Éowyn is serving wine to the king and his guests: when king Théoden and his guests are having a meal at his table, it is mentioned, that “there also waiting upon the king was the lady Éowyn”, and on another occasion, when king Théoden and his men are about to leave for war, Éowyn brings the king a cup of wine, and proceeds to serve it to the other men as well (Tolkien, 2008a, p. 680, p. 682). She also seems to be constantly present wherever king Théoden is, in case he needs help from her. When Éowyn is first introduced in the story, she is described to be standing behind king Théoden, and as

soon as the king stands up, Éowyn is there to support him: “The woman hastened to the king’s side, taking his arm” (Tolkien, 2008a, p. 669, p. 672). However, it is evident in other parts of the story that it is not her wish to stay in the traditional woman’s role, but to fight together with the men of her people, as can be seen in the examples quoted in the previous paragraphs. It is not only her actions that lend themselves well to be analyzed in terms of gender norms, but her appearance also offers some interesting information about her femininity.

Éowyn’s appearance is often described as a mixture of traditionally feminine and resistantly feminine features. Upon her first introduction to the reader, her looks are depicted as follows:

Grave and thoughtful was her glance, as she looked on the king with cool pity in her eyes. Very fair was her face, and her long hair was like a river of gold. Slender and tall she was in her white robe girt with silver; but strong she seemed and stern as steel, a daughter of kings. Thus Aragorn for the first time in the full light of day beheld Éowyn, Lady of Rohan, and thought her fair, fair and cold, like a morning of pale spring that is not yet come to womanhood (Tolkien, 2008a, p. 672).

Based on this description, Éowyn is displaying both traditional femininity and resistant femininity. The features that are considered traditionally feminine, include her beauty, long golden hair, and slenderness. However, these features are paired with contrasting ones — features that are traditionally viewed as more masculine — such as being tall, stern, and cold. Later on, she is also described as standing “still as a figure carved in stone, her hands clenched at her sides” (Tolkien, 2008b, 1028). This portrays her as rather far removed from traditionally feminine qualities of warmth, softness and kindness, and shows her as cold and rigid instead. Additionally, it seems that Éowyn herself intentionally wishes to accentuate the more masculine features about her, for example by her choice of clothing, as well as by trying to avoid displaying any emotion. This can first be observed when she is chosen as the temporary leader in place of king Théoden, and is thus left behind when the men go to war: “Alone Éowyn stood before the doors of the house at the stair’s head; the sword was set upright before her, and her hands were laid upon the hilt. She was clad now in mail, and shone like silver in the sun” (Tolkien, 2008a, pp. 683-684). She is choosing to dress like a male soldier, rather than wearing traditionally feminine clothes, and she is also carrying a sword, as if indicating that she is always prepared for battle. This can be witnessed again when Merry meets Éowyn at Dunharrow: “As they drew near Merry saw that the rider was a woman with long braided hair gleaming in the twilight, yet she wore a helm and was clad to the waist like a warrior and girded with a sword” (Tolkien, 2008b, p. 1041). This is also when Éowyn is seen resisting the stereotype of women being more emotional: “he [Merry] would have thought that she had been weeping, if that could be believed of one so stern of face” (Tolkien, 2008b, p. 1041).

## 5.2 Goldberry

Starting from the first mention of Goldberry, the text would suggest that her role is that of the traditional housewife: she waits at home while her husband, Tom Bombadil is outside on his adventures. The following quote is also supporting the idea that Goldberry is at home preparing dinner for her husband, much like the traditional gender roles would encourage women to do:

Tom Bombadil burst out laughing. ‘Well, my little fellows!’ said he, stooping so that he peered into their faces. ‘You shall come home with me! The table is all laden with yellow cream, honeycomb, and white bread and butter. Goldberry is waiting. Time enough for questions around the supper table. You follow after me as quick as you are able!’ (Tolkien, 2007, p. 158).

Tom Bombadil is here talking to the hobbits, whom he finds in the woods, and invites them into his home to have supper. Bombadil’s words leads the reader to understand that Goldberry is at home preparing the supper for Tom Bombadil and his guests. Goldberry’s role as the home-maker is further emphasized, when Goldberry is portrayed busying herself with setting up the table and preparing the supper, as well as when Tom Bombadil asks her if the meal is ready and if there is enough food for all of them (Tolkien, 2007, pp. 162-163). Tom Bombadil also mentions that it is Goldberry who usually cleans the house: “‘This is Goldberry’s washing day,’ he said, ‘and her autumn-cleaning’” (Tolkien, 2007, p.169). However, Enright has an important note to make on Goldberry’s and Tom Bombadil’s relationship:

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. The hobbits watch the dance-like movements of Tom and Goldberry as they set the table, hers defined by grace and beauty, his both merry and whimsical. They respect each other most deeply, and, together, offer the hobbits what they need on this resting place of their journey (2007, p. 96).

This demonstrates the idea that even though Goldberry might have the traditional role of a housewife, it does not necessarily mean that she is oppressed by her husband. In addition to having the traditional woman’s role of cooking and cleaning, Goldberry also displays some motherly qualities, which is another traditionally feminine aspect of her character.

Goldberry’s motherly qualities and behavior can be observed when she wishes the hobbits goodnight and reassures them that they do not need to be afraid of anything during the night: “‘Have peace now,’ she said, ‘until the morning! Heed no nightly noises! For nothing passes door and window here save moonlight and starlight and the wind off the hill-top. Good night!’” (Tolkien,

2007, p. 164). When the hobbits wake up in the middle of the night after having nightmares or uneasy sleep, they clearly remember her words, and are reassured and calm again (Tolkien, 2007, p. 167). This is similar to a situation where a child is lulled back to sleep by her mother after having scary dreams, which can also be seen as belonging to the realm of traditional woman's role as a nurturing mother figure. Additionally, her looks are also displaying traditional femininity.

Goldberry's beauty is the first thing that the hobbits notice about her when they arrive at the home of Tom Bombadil and Goldberry; their first encounter with Goldberry leaves them mesmerized with her beauty. She is described as having "long yellow hair" that "rippled down her shoulders", and she is wearing an embellished gown (Tolkien, 2007, p. 160), both of which are features that can be associated with traditional femininity. The appearance of beauty and focus on looks is also in itself a feature that is a part of a traditionally feminine expression of gender. On another occasion she is described as small and slender, and having 'slender grace' (Tolkien, 2007, pp. 162, 178), which are also physical features that are connected with traditional femininity.

### **5.3 Arwen**

Arwen is first introduced to the reader when the hobbits arrive at Elrond's house in Rivendell, where she is sitting at the table at a welcome feast that is held to the guests (Tolkien, 2007, pp. 295-296). However, when the male characters have a meeting about the future of the Ring, there is no mention of Arwen being in the meeting with them (Tolkien, 2007). This might suggest that Arwen does not usually participate in political discussions and making important decisions, but leaves it to be handled by the men. This can be seen as conforming to traditional gender roles, as it has been common in history that only men have a say in political matters and men are the ones to make decisions. In addition to her passiveness when it comes to politics and important decisions, she is often portrayed as someone who stays at the privacy of her home, which also puts her in the category of traditional woman's role and traditional femininity.

Arwen is described as "her whom few mortals had yet seen", because she had been staying with her mother's relatives in Lothlórien, which is more secluded from the rest of the world (Tolkien, 2007, p.296). Furthermore, it is implied, that she has been kept a secret on purpose:

“Often is it seen,” said Aragorn, “that in dangerous days men hide their chief treasure. Yet I marvel at Elrond and your brothers; for though I have dwelt in this house from childhood, I have heard no word of you” (Tolkien, 2008b, p. 1387).



These factors suggest that Arwen has been staying home, and has been protected and kept away from the public eye by the male members of her family, which is in line with the idea of traditional woman's role: that a woman belongs to the home and the private sphere. The idea of Arwen staying at home is also mentioned on another occasion, when she is said to be staying in the house of Elrond, while her brothers rode out on errands (Tolkien, 2007, p. 296). To add to that, other factors that link her to traditional gender norms are her beauty and youthfulness.

On the occasion when the reader is first introduced to the character of Arwen, there is emphasis on her beauty and youthfulness, which are described as follows:

In the middle of the table, against the woven cloths upon the wall, there was a chair under a canopy, and there sat a lady fair to look upon, and so like was she in form of womanhood to Elrond that Frodo guessed that she was one of his close kindred. Young she was and yet not so. The braids of her dark hair were touched by no frost; her white arms and clear face were flawless and smooth, and the light of stars was in her bright eyes, grey as a cloudless night; yet queenly she looked, and thought and knowledge were in her glance, as of one who has known many things that the years bring. Above her brow her head was covered with a cap of silver lace netted with small gems, glittering white; but her soft grey raiment had no ornament save a girdle of leaves wrought in silver (Tolkien, 2007, pp. 295-296).

In this quote, there are elements that emphasize her youthful looks and embellished clothes, both of which are qualities associated with traditional femininity. However, there are also other attributes, such as wisdom and knowledge that are used to describe her, signaling that she is not a mere pretty object to be looked at. Furthermore, it is not only Arwen, whose looks are closely examined; the male characters who are present at the meeting are also described in a similar manner. However, on Arwen's part there is more emphasis on her youthfulness and beauty, perhaps suggesting that these are a distinct feature of femininity in particular.

#### **5.4 Galadriel**

Unlike Arwen, Galadriel is very much involved with the matters of Middle-Earth, and is actively participating in governing her realm, Lothlórien. One could even argue that she has more power and influence than her husband, Celeborn. Her power appears to be a crucial part of Lothlórien and its lands, to the point where it can be sensed by the people who visit it: "You feel the power of the Lady of the Galadhrim", is what one of the elves, Haldir, says to the hobbits who are marveling at the magical atmosphere of Lothlórien (Tolkien, 2007, p. 457). Admittedly, her strong influence and

presence everywhere in Lothlórien is at least in some capacity thanks to one of the lesser magic rings, Nenya, that she is using, but that does not necessarily undermine her importance and power. On the contrary, it can be seen as a testimony to her power, as it is her, and not anyone else, who got to wield the ring. In addition to being in a powerful position in Lothlórien, her name is also famous outside of its borders.

On numerous occasions, when the characters are talking about Lothlórien, Galadriel is mentioned, whereas her husband is not. Many who have never visited Lothlórien and have never met Galadriel, seem to be afraid of her, and she seems to have the reputation of an evil and dangerous sorcerer among some people. For instance, a rider of Rohan is surprised when Aragorn mentions that they come from Lothlórien and have the favor of Galadriel, as well as gifts given by her: “‘Few escape her nets, they say. These are strange days! But if you have her favour, then you also are net-weavers and sorcerers, maybe.’” (Tolkien, 2008a, p. 562). This would suggest that because Galadriel is powerful, she must also be bad, as women are not expected to be both powerful and good. In this manner, by being both good and strong, Galadriel is breaking the norm when it comes to what is traditionally viewed as feminine. Being feared and respected is also not typical for women, as women are traditionally thought of as weak and submissive, rather than commanding respect. However, Galadriel is clearly shown respect, even when she is not present. This can be seen, for example, when a man who is supposed to take the weapons of everyone who go to meet king Théoden of Rohan hears that the weapons of the fellowship are from Galadriel: “‘Wonder came into the man’s eyes, and he laid the weapons hastily by the wall, as if he feared to handle them’” (Tolkien, 2008a, p. 666). In addition to being respected and even feared by strangers, also the people who know her show similar attitudes towards her.

The people who know her also recognize her strength, and hold it extremely important to have her favor, as she holds the power in Lothlórien and even beyond. For example, when the fellowship of the Ring arrives at Lothlórien and the members are asked to introduce themselves, one of the elves, Haldir, says the following about Aragorn: “‘The name of Aragorn son of Arathorn is known in Lórien,’ said Haldir, ‘and he has the favour of the Lady. All then is well’” (Tolkien, 2007, p. 447). It also seems, that it is in Galadriel’s power to decide how the fellowship is to be treated on their way through the woods of Lothlórien: “‘You are all to walk free, even the dwarf Gimli. It seems that the Lady knows who and what is each member of your Company’” (Tolkien, 2007, p. 455). Before this, the members of the fellowship had been blindfolded, but upon Galadriel’s word they could now walk freely. This also suggests that she is wise and knowledgeable, and has insight into things that are happening in her realm and outside of it. Her wisdom and the power that comes with it is

well demonstrated on two occasions. Firstly, when the fellowship first meets Galadriel, she telepathically has a conversation with each of the members, looking into their deepest thoughts and testing their will to carry on with the task of destroying the Ring. Secondly, she shows Frodo the possible outcomes of the future in her mirror, and reveals that she carries the ring *Nenya*.

Galadriel is also described to have some physical features that differ from the stereotypical traditional femininity. When the fellowship meets Celeborn and Galadriel, the following is said about them: “Very tall they were, and the Lady no less tall than the Lord” (Tolkien, 2007, p. 461). When Galadriel speaks, her voice is described as “clear and musical, but deeper than woman’s wont” (Tolkien, 2007, p. 462). Both of the features, tallness and deep voice, are traditionally associated with masculinity more than femininity, which is why it can be said that Galadriel is here breaking the norm of traditional femininity. However, her beauty is also mentioned on numerous occasions, and praised by various characters; therefore, she is also displaying traditional femininity as well as resistant femininity. Furthermore, her beauty is not only marveled by others, but she herself is also aware of it, and seems to think of it as valuable. This can be seen when Frodo offers her the Ring after Galadriel reveals that she is carrying *Nenya*. Galadriel describes how she would be if she were to accept the Ring:

In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!’ (Tolkien, 2007, p. 476).

This shows a combination of traditionally feminine qualities and resistantly feminine qualities, both of which seem to be essential to Galadriel, and displays, or at least wishes to display, both of them. However, she turns down the opportunity to become more powerful than anyone else, and decides to remain humble and less powerful, but this has more to do with saving Middle-Earth from Sauron and the destruction that he brings rather than her lack of willingness to be powerful.

## 6 Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of my thesis was to analyze four female characters—Éowyn, Arwen, Galadriel, and Goldberry—in *The Lord of the Rings* book series, and determine if they adhere to gender norms or if they challenge them. I particularly focused on two aspects of the female gender norms: women’s role in society and qualities, that are traditionally viewed as feminine. The analysis was conducted

by carefully reading the books, and closely examining the words, actions, and outer appearance of each of the characters in order to determine if they submit themselves to the norms or if they differ from them.

In conclusion, the four female characters chosen for analysis are placed in quite different positions in the spectrum of gender norms and femininity. Éowyn and Galadriel can rather often be observed acting in ways that challenge the gender norms. When it comes to Éowyn, not only the seemingly obvious factor of her becoming a warrior, but also several other aspects, reveal that she actively wishes to resist the role traditionally assigned to women. She is not only displaying traditionally masculine characteristics such as graveness and strength, but also chooses to emphasize the masculine aspects of herself by dressing in armor and carrying a sword. In Galadriel's case, her resistance to gender norms is seen best in her characteristics of being incredibly wise and powerful to the point that she exceeds the wisdom and power of her husband. She also fights the stereotype of women being portrayed as either beautiful and good, or powerful and bad, by being both extremely powerful and extremely beautiful. On the other hand, Goldberry and Arwen are more traditionally feminine than Éowyn and Galadriel. Although Arwen is also described as wise and intelligent, her beauty is more often focused on, and her actions are more in line with the traditional woman's role. She is not part of any political discussions or making plans, and she is not portrayed as powerful or an active agent in general. Instead, she stays at home in Rivendell, and only leaves when she gets married to Aragorn. Goldberry is also portrayed as being mostly at home, and taking care of the household. She is also displaying traditionally feminine features, and her beauty is often emphasized, and no traditionally masculine qualities are associated to her.

In light of these findings, it would seem that there is no particular pattern, according to which the female characters would behave in relation to gender norms. It would appear that there is a balance of more traditional and non-traditional women's roles, as well as masculine and feminine qualities displayed by the female characters. The scope of my thesis was quite large, which means that there is more material for further analysis, as every detail cannot be discussed in a bachelor's thesis. Along with continuing the analysis of the female characters, the male characters also offer an excellent opportunity for studying gender norms, as the male characters also display an interesting combination of traditionally masculine and feminine qualities.

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