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Peace-weavers and Shield-maidens: Nordic and Anglo-Saxon Influences in Tolkien's Powerful Female Characters

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1. INTRODUCTION

J. R. R. Tolkien's most notable works, *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*, have long been causing debates among scholars regarding the nature of his female characters. Being few in number and seemingly unimportant in comparison to male characters, they have raised the issue of Tolkien's own stance towards women. However, in order to fully understand why he created his characters the way he did, one must take into account the mission behind his work, which was to create a mythology for England. Tolkien was greatly influenced by Old English and Nordic traditional materials, which is why his women exhibit features of peace-weavers and shield-maidens, women which were exceptionally important in the context of their own societies. There is no doubt that the patriarchy of Tolkien's era had a specific effect on Tolkien himself, but there is no evidence that he supported patriarchy in any sustainable way in the discussed novelistic works, and it would be farfetched to say that patriarchy, as it is used today, can be applied to a fictional world which draws on the Anglo-Saxon and Nordic sources. On the contrary, the kind of power Tolkien seems to prefer in his works is the kind that is in complete contrast with the traditionally masculine power, which is why female characters are indeed exceptionally important in Tolkien's universe.

Hence, this thesis will start with the analysis of the position of women in the Anglo-Saxon and Viking society as recorded in literature, and will then focus on the characters of Galadriel, Arwen, Lúthien, Éowyn and Haleth to show the extent to which Tolkien relied on his knowledge of the medieval world.

Accordingly, the here-proposed analysis of the selected female characters from *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* will show that far from being marginal, Tolkien's female characters, especially those that are marked by wisdom and strength, are constructed as the ethical pillars and the true sources of power of Tolkien's fictional world.

2. THE ANGLO-SAXON CONTEXT

2.1. Women in the Anglo-Saxon society

In order to discuss the position of women in the Anglo-Saxon society, it is worth starting with the etymology of the Old English words that bear any reference to woman or womanhood. Christine Fell, in her book *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, deals with this question to some extent. According to her, the most common OE word for a woman, *wif*, is etymologically obscure, yet could be associated with words used to denote the act of weaving (39). This is a credible assumption, according to Fell, due to the fact that "the duties of cloth-making seem to be the ones most consistently linked with the feminine role" (39). Words used to refer to men, on the other hand, seemed to distinguish them as hunters and warriors (Fell 39). For example, the OE word *wæpman* could be etymologically linked to the word 'weaponed', which suggests that in the earlier stages of the Anglo-Saxon society, men were seen as those providing food and protection, while women dealt with the production of garments, weaving and embroidery (Fell 39). Attesting to the important role of women in supplying clothes is the fact that "so-called thread-boxes of bronze" (Fell 40) were buried alongside women in the seventh century. According to Fell, these boxes contained thread, possibly needles, and small pieces of cloth, which were too small to be of any practical use, so there is a possibility of them being an indication of the woman's skill or her household role (40). Another common feature of a woman's grave were spindle-whorls, the makings of which were indicative of the woman's class standing (Fell 40). Moreover, there were class-based distinctions within the very area of cloth-making. Simple spinning and weaving would have had little association with class status, while more sophisticated designs and expensive textiles were usually handled by women who had more money and more time on their hands (Fell 40). Fell, however, suggests that this kind of a distinction would have only been sustained for a shorter period of time, due to the fact that such fine and elaborate garments were required in large quantities, both by laymen and church officials, and women who were in charge of large households would more than likely want to have their slaves trained in the art of embroidery (Fell 40).

Another aspect of household activity one would expect to be handled by a woman at the time is preparation of food, but according to Fell, there is little evidence of any kind to support such an assumption (46). The only existing evidence suggests that grinding of meal was a job assigned to female slaves (Fell 46). Also, Fell states that "among the *Rectitudines*, a

text that specifies rights and duties of estate workers, there is only one woman named among the male workers [...] and she is the cheese-maker" (47). However, it is improbable that one would pay too much attention to allocating jobs according to sex, when food production on large estates was often influenced by weather and they were often under time pressure. Also, one would expect that a woman would be in charge of allocating those jobs, and of running the household in general. Yet, according to the *Gerefa* text, the reeve was in charge of the estate and had "personal control over the kitchen economy" (Fell 48). The only reason why women seemed to do most of the cooking was because it was a less physically demanding activity. According to Fell, even the word denoting a cook, *coc* in OE, exists only in masculine form. The word denoting a person who bakes, however, has both a masculine and a feminine form, yet the only indication of women having anything to do with baking comes from one of the riddles in the *Exeter Book* (Fell 49).

However, there was one duty that seems to have customarily belonged to women, and that was the preparation and serving of drinks. Christine Fell mentions a couple of different kinds of evidence of this practice. Firstly, even though there is no such image related to Anglo-Saxon England, "Middle English literature tends to give us merry pictures of women who ran ale-houses" (Fell 49). Yet, in heroic poetry the act of serving drink is presented as not only a duty of a woman, but of a lady, and Fell mentions *Beowulf* as an example, where it is the queen who serves drinks not only to the king, but to all of the guests as well (50).

2.2 Women's rights

The Anglo-Saxon legislation pertaining to the rights of women was quite elaborate, and women were mostly well protected in all areas of life. According to Doris Mary Stenton, "there is more proportionately about women and their place in society in the laws of Æthelbert than in those of any other Anglo-Saxon king" (7). Æthelbert was the king of Kent from 560 to 616, and is the first Anglo-Saxon king to except Christianity. He was married to Bertha, Christian daughter of Charibert, the king of Paris, and was baptized at some point between 597 and 601 (Kirby 24-28). Æthelbert's law dates back to the seventh century, and represents an attempt to regulate the functioning of the society. However, the true meaning behind some of these laws is somewhat questionable, given the fact that, according to Stenton, "men who wrote them down were unpractised in the art of expressing their meaning in written words" (8).

Concerning marriage and finance, women were paid the "morning-gift" (Fell 56) by their husbands-to-be. A morning-gift "could be a very substantial amount in money and land, and it is paid not to the father or kin, but to the woman herself" (Fell 57). A woman had the right to manage her morning-gift however she wanted. According to F. L. Attenborough's translation of Æthelbert's law, however, this kind of a transaction is referred to as "buying a maiden" (15), which suggests that even though women had quite a bit of independency, taking them in marriage was still possibly seen as buying a piece of property. The finances and properties within the marriage were seen as belonging to both husband and wife, and women had other rights pertaining to their security and independence – a woman had the right to abandon her husband if she deemed the marriage unpleasing (present in the laws of Æthelbert, but this practice seems to have been abandoned in later laws), and if she took the children with her, she had the right to half of the property (Fell 57). Fell also writes that:

> Marriage agreements were drawn up between kin but this does not imply that the girl had no rights or say in the matter. It is fairly obvious that where substantial transactions were involved she would require the services of her older kin as legal and financial advisers. There is no indication that any direct profit accrued to the girl's family and no indication that her wishes were not considered, although parents occasionally allowed their prejudices to show. (58)

Therefore, women not only had the right to choose whether they wanted to marry someone or not, but their financial status and well-being was protected within the union. Moreover, the law protected women in case of any criminal activities committed by their husbands, and if the wife did not know about her husband's wrong-doings she would be completely exonerated. These kinds of laws were first observed in the seventh century, and by the eleventh became even more defined (Fell 59). There were also laws concerning women who became widows. Fell mentions Æthelræd's code, which states that a woman who becomes a widow must remain so for at least twelve months. After that period she is free to marry whomever she wants. Æthelræd's reign lasted approximately from 978 until 1016. He was the king of England, and married to Ælfigifu who later became the wife of Cnut, the eleventh century (1016-1035) king of England, Denmark and Norway. Cnut's law states that, in case a woman remarries before the period of twelve months has passed, she is to give up all of the possessions that she inherited after her husband's death (Fell 61). The rights of women who remained childless or were barren were also protected by law. For example, one of the laws of

Æthelbert states that if a woman dies childless, all of her possessions, including the morning-gift, are to be given to her family, and what is more, there is no evidence of women being repudiated for not being able to bear children (Fell 74-75). The laws of Hlothhere and Eadric were written down some eighty years after Æthelbert's. Hlothhere was the king of Kent from 674 until approximately 680, and was succeeded by his nephew Eadric in 685 or 686 (Kirby 94-99). The laws were issued jointly as a single code, but they may, according to David Kirby, "represent a conflation of two originally separate sets of laws" (99). What separates these codes from earlier ones is the fact that it is much easier to determine their nature and what was really meant by them. According to Stenton, "the intention in the mind of the legislator is brought out much more clearly by the longer sentences of these later laws" (9). There is only one concerning women and it states: "If a man dies leaving a wife and a child, it is right, that the child should accompany the mother; and one of his father's relatives who is willing to act, shall be given him as his guardian to take care of his property until he is ten years old" (Attenborough 19). The later laws of King Æthelstan, who was the first king of all England from 925 until 939, and King Æthelræd II took widows into special consideration, the former exempting them from the yearly taxes, and the latter promising them the protection of both God and the king (Stenton 20). It is worth emphasizing that Cnut's laws were the first to deny anyone the right to sell any woman. (Stenton 21). Stenton describes an example of a marriage settlement which was made before King Cnut and the Archbishop of Canterbury, where the woman was given a pound's weight of gold, an estate, another hundred and fifty acres, as well as thirty oxen, twenty cows, ten horses and ten slaves (23). There were eleven men present as witnesses of the terms of agreement, which were written down in no less than three copies (Stenton 23).

The Anglo-Saxons also practiced distributing their possessions after their death by will. Stenton, however, argues that these documents were not wills in the modern sense of the word, but rather "post-obit gifts made with the consent of the king" (24). Such wills could only be made by the wealthiest of families, and not only by men in the family, but by women as well. As far as gender of the heir is concerned, Stenton claims that:

> In none of these wills is there any indication that the testator has any preference for land to go to the male rather than the female line. Nor is there any hint that in leaving land to a woman the testator is leaving it to a religious house of which the woman named is the head. Land is bequeathed to a woman as though it were the most natural thing in the world to leave it in that way. The bequests to women are not subject to the failure of male heirs. The impression these

> wills give is that men and women were equally concerned to provide for all their children without regard to sex. (Stenton 25)

Stenton also addresses the fact that the aforementioned laws clashed with Christian beliefs which were brought to the Kingdom of Kent by Augustine. According to the scholar, "marriage as a bond which could be broken only by death was an alien conception to the Germanic peoples" (10). When Theodore came to England as the Archbishop of Canterbury in 669, he held the first General Council of the English Church where he forbade incest, abandoning wives for any other reason except adultery, and allowed remarriage after one year to a woman whose husband was condemned to penal slavery, and after five years to a man whose wife left because she was not satisfied with their marriage (Stenton 10). One of the questions he was undecided on was the issue of whether a person whose husband/wife had entered religion might remarry (Stenton 10). After Theodore's death in 690, the men who succeeded him were adamant to completely exterminate all the remaining heathen marriage customs. Subsequent laws pay little attention to women, and the ones that do are reminiscent of Æthelbert's. However, Stenton writes that these new laws are the first to state explicitly that a wife's duty is to obey her husband as her lord (Stenton 11). She claims that "Christianity was an eastern religion and the subjection of the woman to the man was preached with conviction by its most important early convert, St. Paul. To him women were temptation" (11-12). In line with the Christian doctrine, St. Paul saw women as subjects of their husbands, and he only saw marriage as the means of avoiding sin. Women were not allowed to speak in churches or show any kind of attempt of authority over their husbands. However, as Christianity was gaining ground, women were beginning to take religious vows, and "within a generation, monasteries governed by women had become a characteristic feature of English religious life" (Stenton 13). All of those early monasteries were meant for both women and men, and were governed by abbesses (Stenton 13). Nuns were also protected by law. Laws of King Alfred the Great of Wessex (849-899) whose heritage includes legal and cultural reform, penalize the abduction of nuns, as well as attacks on their chastity, and if a man took a nun from the monastery without the permission of the bishop and the king, he would also have to pay a penalty.

Consequently, even though women were still protected by law, their position in the Anglo-Saxon society changed drastically with Christianization. Originally a non-patriarchal system, it was now governed by laws which defined women as subjects of their husbands. In

line with such changes, women sought autonomy, at least a certain degree of it, in religious vows and practices.

2.3. Women in Anglo-Saxon literature

According to Jane Chance, the social ideal of an Anglo-Saxon woman depended upon her role as peacemaker, which was primarily achieved through her role as a mother. Two people from different tribes having children was seen as mixing of blood, which was a way of establishing peace between the two tribes. Aristocratic women who bore this political function were referred to as *ides,* and their most important task was to ensure peace through child-bearing (Chance 1). Chance also argues that there was another way of making peace, a more ritualistic and symbolic one, and that was the passing of the mead-cup to the warriors, a function again assigned to women, as mentioned earlier (1). *Ides* would also hand out gifts to the most valued members of the tribe (Chance 1).

There were certain qualities generally attributed to peacemakers. They had to be cheerful in their dealings with others, but at the same time "close-mouthed" (Chance 1), as well as loyal, loving, and wise. The word *ides* in OE most likely only denoted women of noble standing, because they played a more significant role in social and political dealings between the tribes, but common-born women were also required to be loyal and chaste (Chance 1). *Ides* denoting noble women, however, already signified a change in the usage of the word. Chance writes that:

> While earlier West Germanic usages of the word may have held prophetic or holly connotations, by the seventh or eighth centuries *ides* probably had diminished to "important noble woman," as in the examples from *Genesis* which can be construed as neither holy nor prophetic. Additionally, the word appears in two other contexts which reduce its complimentary connotations even further. (Chance 2)

Ides were not only weavers of peace between different tribes, but within their own tribes as well. They served as counselors and gave presents and rewards to the bravest members of the tribe. There was also a difference in the mead-presenting ritual, the most distinguished man being the one who is first offered the cup. Finally, they had to have the character of a peacemaker, meaning that they had to give council but not talk about it openly to others, as well as be kind-hearted and caring (Chance 4).

The kind of relationship that was very important in the Anglo-Saxon society, usually based on mutual trust and respect, was *comitatus*. It implied a bond between the lord and his thanes, based on mutual protection. Thanes would offer military service to the lord, in exchange for legal and economic protection. The lord was expected to share the spoils of the war with his warriors, which is why he was referred to as the ring-giver. This bond existed in a similar form between the king and the queen. The queen was rewarded for her loyalty and counsel, not only after marriage, but before, as well (Chance 6). As mentioned previously, the Anglo-Saxons practiced the custom of endowing their brides-to-be with money, estates, etc. Chance includes a paragraph from Tacitus' *Germania*, in which he states that all those endowments serve to remind the woman that she is to share everything with her husband, including the dangers and difficulties in the time of war:

> A woman must not imagine herself free to neglect the manly virtues or immune from the hazards of war. That is why she is reminded, in the very ceremonies which bless her marriage at its outset, that she is coming to share a man's toils and dangers, that she is to be his partner in all his sufferings and adventures, whether in peace or war. That is the meaning of the team of oxen, of the horse ready for its rider, of the gift of arms. On these terms she must live her life and bear her children. She is receiving something that she must hand over unspoilt and treasured to her children, for her sons' wives to receive in their turn and pass on to the grandchildren. (Chance 6)

An *ides* herself, however, was not supposed to participate in wars, which is what often made such women victims of marauding tribes, not only in real life, but in the literature of the time as well (Chance 7). However, their passivity and their role in establishing peace usually required the quality of chastity, even holiness, which is what compelled their husbands to keep them safe from such attacks (Chance 7).

However, women who have fulfilled this ideal role are usually in the Anglo-Saxon literature depicted as "doomed and tragic figures, frequently seen as weeping or suffering" (Chance 10). As one of the examples, Chance mentions *Beowulf's* Hildeburh, who is grieving over the loss of her son and brother, as well as the Geat woman mourning Beowulf's death at the end of the poem(Chance 10).

2.4. Biblical models

Regarding the representation of women in Anglo-Saxon literature, Chance argues that there existed "three major biblical models for the Anglo-Saxon woman …in the figures of Eve, the Virgin Mary, and Judith, the last taken from the Apocryphal book of the Old Testament with the same name" (13). Each of these three figures was assimilated into literary culture in a different way, but they were all connected to one another at the same time, especially in the early patristic writings (Chance 13). Chance argues that "the Virgin Mary played a prominent role in Anglo-Saxon England; indeed, the importance of any female saint in England depended in part on her literary and religious relationship with the Virgin" (15).

Eve and Mary sometimes appear together in Anglo-Saxon literature, based on their shared qualities and the idea that Christ, who sacrificed himself to redeem the human kind, was brought into the world by Mary, who is a daughter of Eve (Chance 15). Virginity was seen as one of the most important links between these two women. Chance quotes the early church father, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, who writes that: "Since through Eve, a virgin, came death, it behoved that through the Virgin, or rather from a virgin, should life appear" (14-15). This was, however, not the only parallel. Both Mary and Eve were originally innocent and holy, and both were married. They both had contact with angels – Mary when Gabriel announced to her that she would give birth to the Son of God, and Eve when she was tempted by Lucifer, a fallen angel. Motherhood is also something that connects the two (Chance 15). All these similarities ultimately lead to Mary's typification as the "Second Eve" (Chance 15). It seems to have been a widespread belief that Mary was the one who rectified Eve's sin, and that the salvation of man, just like his fall, started with a woman (Chance 15).

Chance singles out *Christ I* and *Genesis B*, found in the *Exeter Book* and most likely written down in the 8-9th century, as two of the most famous and most interesting depictions of both Mary and Eve. *Christ I* is comprised of twelve lyrical poems, all of which mention either Mary or Christ, explicitly or in metaphor (Chance 16-17). The image of Mary gradually changes as the poems progress. The second lyrical poem introduces Mary as a young maiden, and then progresses through all of her other possible human roles, which are, according to Chance, "all significant images of the Anglo-Saxon *wif*" (17). Her roles become more abstract, divine and allegorical in subsequent poems. Poem 2 does not only portray Mary as a young woman, but as the one who was chosen amongst many. Chance argues that

> The Church Fathers and early commentators such as Ambrose and Fulgentius, as well as Anglo-Latin writers like Aldhelm, saw in her the perfection of all woman-kind through her perpetual virginity. Because of her virginity she was thus chosen to reward all women in the world in this Anglo-Saxon lyric. (Chance 18)

In Poem 3 she is represented through a metaphor of Jerusalem, and in Poem 4 as the Virgin Mother. There is an invocation of Jerusalem in the former, and the poet wants the city to be understood as a kind of Mary, because it is a birthplace of Christ (Chance 20). Since Mary gave birth to Christ, she becomes identified with Jerusalem as an "emblem of Paradise" (Chance 20). Her role is again that of a mediator, between the old Jerusalem and the new, between the world of the fallen man and Paradise (Chance 20). Just like Anglo-Saxon peace-weavers bore children in order to establish peace between tribes, Mary redeemed the fallen world by giving birth to a child. In this poem there is a dialogue between Mary and the "Son of Jerusalem", in which Mary makes a comparison between herself and Eve, the first virgin and mother (Chance 20).

Poem 7 deals with Mary as the Virgin Spouse, the one who has created a "psychological dilemma for her angry and disgruntled husband" (Chance 24). Joseph is in a moral dilemma as to whether to reveal Mary's adultery or to keep quiet and break the law of the Old Testament. Mary, in turn replies through the spirit of the New Testament, and tells him that Gabriel announced to her that she would become the mother of the Son of God via Immaculate Conception (Chance 24-25). Mary acts as a "spiritual messenger" (Chance 25), instructing the fallen man, just like Gabriel instructed her, and represents the triumph of the New Testament over the Old (Chance 25). She is also equated with the Temple of God in this poem. In Poem 9 Mary appears as the Virgin Queen and the Bride of Christ. Chance argues that "she is depicted as both the Anglo-Saxon 'bracelet-adorned Bride' and the patristic figure of Ecclesia [...]" (26). As the archetypal peace-weaver, she resembles more a warrior because she gave herself to God. The metaphor of the bracelet-adorned bride can be seen as manifesting the Germanic *comitatus* metaphors, but can also be explained in terms of patristic writing (Chance 26-27). Chance writes that

> On the tropological or moral level of allegory, she symbolizes the soul of man wed to the bridegroom Christ. On the allegorical level, relating to the life of Christ, the 'nuptial chamber' becomes Mary's womb, through which Christ will pass. On the anagogical level, Mary as Virgin Spouse becomes a type of Church itself. (Chance 27)

Just like the Church, Mary gave spiritual life to man, just like Eve gave man biological life. Moreover, her allegorical representation as the Church gives a deeper meaning to her description as the "bracelet-adorned bride" (Chance 27). In Poem 9 she is depicted confronting the Devil, again resembling a warrior, which will, according to Chance, serve as a model for later female saints and warriors in Anglo-Saxon religious epics (27). She is also allegorized as the Gate to Heaven, based on her role as a mediator between God and man. In Poem 12 the imagery goes back to the one at the beginning of *Christ I.* Mary is reduced to her role as a virgin and woman. This, according to Chance, erases all of her personality and identity, and that anonymity merges with her symbolic role as the Mother of Earth (29).

The second biblical model for Anglo-Saxon women was Judith, taken from the Apocryphal book of the Old Testament, who decapitated Holofernes and led her Hebrew tribe to victory over the Assyrians. The original version of the Anglo-Saxon poem only exist as a fragment, but Chance argues that it was probably a much longer poem, similar to *Juliana* and *Elene*, which are the only two religious epics with female saints as main characters. They were written in the ninth century by Cynewulf, one of four OE poets whose work is known to survive today (31).

The three women share some important similarities. Firstly, there is an emphasis on their chastity. Juliana, Judith and Elene reflect the three categories of virginity, introduced by Aldhelm's treatise on the same subject (Chance 34). Juliana refuses to marry Heliseus and therefore maintains her virginity. Judith is a widow, widowhood being one of these three categories by Aldhelm (contrary to the categorization by the Church Fathers). Finally, Elene represents abstinence within marriage (Chance 34). Elene, unlike Judith and Juliana, is not described as a virgin, but as a militant queen (Chance 47). Secondly, all three women were represented in terms of their warrior-like spirit, used as a spiritual weapon against the Devil and the heathen. According to Chance, spiritual heroism was introduced into Anglo-Saxon literature after the conversion (34). However, some inspiration may have again come from Aldhelm, who believed that "a kind of rationale for virginity in both sexes is provided by the martial image of the virgins as warriors of Christ intent on savaging the eight chief sins and the Devil" (qtd. in Chance 34). Chance argues that Judith, Juliana and Elene show a similar kind of allegorical battling (36). Thirdly, another similarity is represented in the fact that all three women have some significance for the defense of the nation and the English Church (Chance 33). What is more, they are even depicted as types of the Church, as Ecclesia fighting the Synagogue and the heathen (Chance 36). Juliana manages to triumph over the pagans who

represent a threat to Christianity, while Elene confronts Synagogue, represented by 3000 Jews and by Judas (Chance 38). Judith was not a saint or a Christian, but she is allegorized as virtue battling vice (Chance 38). According to Chance, "the *Judith*-poet deliberately employs Anglo-Saxon heroic imagery and diction to cast their confrontation as an encounter between the soldier of God and her assailant" (39).

The third biblical model that belonged to queens who did not remain virtuous and chaste was Eve. The Anglo-Saxons disapproved of Eve's disobedience and her behavior was seen as an inversion of the peace-weaver role (Chance 65). Her fall is used as an explanation behind every other fallen women in real life, as well as in Anglo-Saxon literature. The poet of *Genesis B* describes Eve as having a weaker mind than Adam, which raises the question of the extent of her culpability (Chance 56). According to Chance, Eve is not termed as a virgin by the poet, but other terms are used to denote her, including *wif* and *ides* (67). It has already been explained what both of these OE words mean. Eve is seen as having failed at her role as an *ides*, or a peace-weaver, ironically, due to *comitatus*. Firstly, she believed that such a relationship existed between Lucifer and God, and that he was still one of God's angels at the time of her temptation (Chance 75). The second reason lies in Eve's role as a peace-weaver. She wanted God to look upon her and Adam favorably, not with enmity, and Lucifer made her believe that eating the fruit is the way to achieve that (Chance 75). It is because of this that the poet "exonerates Eve, to a certain extent, because she faithfully pursues her role as a peace-weaver" (Chance 75). Chance argues that the poet's point might have been the fact that Eve took upon herself a decision that did not belong to an *ides*, therefore condemning both herself and Adam (76). Interestingly, several patristic commentators attributed to Eve the responsibility for creating clothes after the Fall, after her and Adam became aware of their nakedness (Chance 78). Since Eve made Adam naked, she was now given the responsibility of clothing him, which "for an Anglo-Saxon society, would seem fitting, given Eve's (and a woman's) role as a (peace-) weaver" (Chance 78). Finally, Chance argues that the poet ends on a positive note, insinuating that Eve's weaving of clothes will later on be glorified by the "heavenly weaving of the Holy Ghost through the Virgin Mary, bringing with it the promise of redemption and recovery of Paradise" (Chance 79).

Therefore, the image of woman as a weaver extends into the Christian literary tradition as well. Eve's weaving of post-lapsarian raiment for her and Adam reminds of her own failed duty as a peace-weaver. In Christian ideology, Eve serves as an explanation behind every other woman who fails to retain her chastity and virtue, as a root of the inherent predisposition of a woman to fall. Mary, on the other hand, rectifies Eve's failure by weaving peace between

man and God, and is represented as incarnation of all the positive roles attributed to women in OE literature. Finally, Elene, Juliana and Judith introduce spiritual heroism into Anglo-Saxon literature, and are represented as spiritual warriors of God, virgin warriors who fight paganism and the Devil.

2.5. Woman as *scop*

Chance also examines two OE elegies written in the late ninth or early tenth century that are commonly believed to be narrated by women, *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament*. However, there were some critics who believe that the narrators were actually male, like Benjamin Thorpe, who claims that the feminine forms of words at the beginning of *The Wife's Lament* are merely scribal errors (Chance 81). Chance admits that "it is unusual to find love poetry in England spoken by women at this relatively early date" (Chance 81), yet she does argue that "these puzzling poems were indeed narrated by women *personae*, if not actually written by them" (81). These female *personae* are represented as "*scopas* who have inverted feminine social roles" (Chance 81). As Chance maintains,

> The metaphor of the *scop* is chiefly conveyed through the use of the word *giedd* or *gidd* to describe what the narrator is reciting. Generally the word *gidd* describes a metrical composition usually true and sad recited by the *scop* in a heroic setting or by some wise man at another ceremonial occasion. It can as well connote the prophetic and enigmatic. (82-83)

In *The Wife's Lament*, the word *giedd* is used by the woman to describe her experiences with the mentioned man, her lover or husband. Similarly, in *Wulf and Eadwacer*, the narrator ends the poem by describing her relationship with her lover or husband as *giedd* (Chance 83). In both poems the female narrators ascribe to themselves the role of a *scop*, and to their lovers or husbands the role of a lord. They are singing a *giedd*, lamenting their unfortunate treatment by those men (Chance 83). "In each case the use of the image of the *scop* or retainer to the lord masks the failure, possibly involuntarily, of a feminine social role" (Chance 83).

The word *giedd* is in most cases present in a specifically heroic and secular context also including a *scop*, and most of these, according to Chance, come from *Beowulf* (83). The speakers are male most of the time, and they either perform the role of a *scop* or of a wise man skillful in the art of song. *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* are the only two instances in which "the *giedd* is rehearsed by a woman in an isolated and private situation,

that is, outside any public formal occasion" (Chance 84). Chance argues that both female *scops* have suffered from feuds and missing kinsmen, both share the isolation of a *scop*, and long for a good and wise lords (Chance 86). However, their endeavors will not be rewarded and their lords would not be pleased with what they are saying.

2.6. Grendel's mother as an inversion of the feminine role

According to Gwendolyn A. Morgan, the horror that Grendel's mother evokes stems from the archetype of the Great Mother and a man's struggle to escape her. Morgan writes that: "the Great Mother becomes the Terrible Mother, a monster which dominates, threatens, and in some manifestations actually devours the male" (55). This suggests that the Anglo-Saxons saw the feminine power as something restraining and even dangerous for men. Moreover, the *Beowulf* poet never mentions Grendel's father, which, claims Morgan, implies that "the male principle cannot endure the suffocating embrace of the female" (59). In light of Erich Neumann's description of the archetype of the Great Mother as a primordial image of the human psyche, Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother in her lair can be interpreted as an "allegory of male maturation" (Morgan 55), or a battle against the overbearing power of the feminine. The battle also evokes "a universal mythic motif, that of the 'divine temptress'" (Morgan 58), due to sexual imagery dominating the description of the battle. In Seamus Heaney's translation of the poem, Grendel's mother "grappled [Beowulf] tightly in her grim embrace" (1542) and "pounced upon him" (1545). Moreover, there is a phallic quality to the weapon Beowulf uses to kill her – a sword from her own battle hall. According to Jane C. Nitzsche, "such erotic overtones in descriptions of battles between male and a female adversary are not especially common in Anglo-Saxon literature" (295). However, one can find such writing in various stories about saints, including the already mentioned epic poem, *Judith*. The difference is, according to Morgan, that in the stories of the saints the leading female figure prevails because of her chastity and her role as the representative of God (58).

Grendel's mother is seen within the Anglo-Saxon literature as the anti-type of Virgin Mary and the peace-weaving queen. In order to emphasize this difference, the poet uses other female figures which frame the narrative of Grendel's mother, making the deviant qualities of her behavior even more prominent. According to Nitzsche, "the role of mother highlights the first half of the middle section [of *Beowulf*] with the scop's mention of Hildeburh and the entrance of Wealhtheow …" (290). Their stories precede the appearance of Grendel's mother,

and stress the idea that a mother must accept the death of her son, and not actively seek revenge. Hildeburh loses both her son and her brother, and all she can do is mourn them, due to her role as a peace-weaver. Nitzsche argues that she "must accept a passive role precisely because she ties the knots that bind her – she is the knot, the pledge of peace" (291). As a peace-weaver she is obligated to accept passivity, yet having lost her identity as a mother, she fails in her role and loses the former identity as well. Grendel's dam is also stripped of her identity as a mother, but unlike Hilderburh, she is completely devoid of the peace-pledge role. However, the *Beowulf* poet uses both *ides* (1259) and *wif* (1519) to describe her. Taking into account Helen Damico's definition of *idesa* as "a generic group of half-mortal, half-supernatural beings" (38), Morgan questions Chance's claim that the use of the term is ironic in the case of Grendel's mother. Moreover, she argues that "the ogress holds a stronger claim to being an *ides* than do her counterparts, for she is certainly semi-supernatural" (60). Also, even though the other three women (Hildeburh, Wealhtheow, and Thryth) are mothers, the word *mōdor* is exclusively used by the poet to denote Grendel's mother. Therefore, Morgan argues that she does not represent "a contrast with the other *idesa*, but a nightmarish culmination of their function gone awry" (61).

Chance, on the other hand, argues that Grendel's mother represents an inversion of the conventional role of the Anglo-Saxon woman as a peace-weaver and a mother (Chance 95). According to her, "such a woman might be wretched or monstrous to an Anglo-Saxon audience because she blurs the sexual and social categories of roles" (97). Her nature is human, but she is monstrous. She is a woman, yet acts like a man. This provides an impetus for a parodic representation of her roles as both a mother and a queen, by contrasting them with established feminine ideals (Chance 97). Unlike other queens and women in the Anglo-Saxon society, Grendel's mother fights her own battles, which is more in line with Anglo-Saxon male lords (Chance 95). It is because of her masculine qualities that the poet occasionally uses a masculine pronoun while referring to her, as well as describing her in terms of qualities and attributes usually ascribed to men. This is visible in the verse below when the poet uses the OE demonstrative pronoun in masculine form *sē* instead of the feminine form *seo* for Grendel's mother, which Seamus Heaney glosses over in his modern English translation:

[...] Grendles mōdor	[...] Grendel's mother
ides, āglæc-wīf yrmpe gemunde	monstrous hell-bride, brooded on her wrongs.
sē pe wæter-egesan [...]	She had been forced down [...] (*Beowulf*, trans.

Heaney 89)

It is precisely this inverted femininity that makes Grendel's mother seem so monstrous to the Danes. Chance argues that "in their eyes recognizably female, she threatens them physically less than her son. But because female 'peacemakers' do not wage war, the analogy implies, by litotes, that her unnatural behavior seems *more* horrible'' (Chance 101, emphasis in the original).

Even though Grendel's mother corrupts gender stereotypes, and is according to Chance seen as monstrous, Christine Alfano analyzes her character within the original (Anglo-Saxon) context and challenges the "woman-as-monster motif" (1), believing it to be a "relatively recent construct that translators, lexicographers, and literary critics have superimposed on *Beowulf*, thereby rewriting both character and text" (1). In *The Issue of Feminine Monstrosity: A Reevaluation of Grendel's Mother*, Alfano uses five different translations of *Beowulf*, all containing monstrous imagery, and argues that "there is little evidence for this in the Old English" (2).[1] Heaney and Tolkien both use images suggestive of her supernatural status. She is referred to as an "ogress, fierce destroyer in the form of a woman" (Tolkien, Beowulf 1045), and a "monstrous hell-bride" (Heaney 1259). Alfano also argues that the translators' use of the word 'dam' instead of 'mother' further diminishes her humanity (3). Chance acknowledges the fact that Grendel's mother is indeed described in human terms, as *ides* and *wif*, but there are discrepancies between the two scholars when it comes to translations of certain terms. For example, Chance defines the term *wīf unhyre* as a "monstrous woman" (95), while Alfano claims that the term is used to denote nothing more but an "awful woman" (2). Also, Alfano further exemplifies this by noting that different translations of words *atolan clommum* tend to be biased (since referring to Grendel's dam), deviating from the literal meaning of the phrase. She argues that while the original meaning of those words is "terrible grip or grasp", the phrase is alternatively translated as "horrible claws", "terrible hooks" or "terrible claws". She uses translations by Chickering and Greenfield to support this claim. Tolkien also uses a similar syntagm – "dire claws" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* 1253), while Heaney translates it as "brutal grip" (1502), which is much closer to Alfano's interpretation. She argues that translators are "motivated by contemporary biases rather than artistic impulse" (2), and thus produce "an exaggerated version of the original *ides, aglæcwif*" (2). She also argues that this not only applies to translators, but to

[1] For further discussion, see Alfano.

lexicographers as well. According to her, "when formulating a definition based on a word's literary context, many of these dictionary makers (and glossary compilers) fall victim to their own internalization of the 'woman-as-monster' stereotype" (4).

2.7. Wealhtheow – the peace-weaving queen

As mentioned earlier, Wealhtheow is represented by the *Beowulf* poet as an ideal Germanic woman, the epitome of a peace-weaving queen. As Hrothgar's wife, she is the key figure in establishing and retaining the invisible web of peace which is represented by the act of passing the cup from warrior to warrior. As the cup-bearer, Wealhtheow takes the cup from one man to another, in an order dependent on their social status. Secondly, her peace-weaving is not only based on the symbolic act of passing the cup, but also on a more concrete verbal deliverance. The poet acknowledges this by stating that she welcomed Beowulf "with measured words" (Heaney 625). Similarly, after the defeat of Grendel, she presents Beowulf with a gift, accompanying the exchange with a speech in which she wishes him "a lifetime's luck and blessings to enjoy this treasure" (Heaney 1225-1226), but also reminding him and everyone else of the *comitatus* ethic. According to Chance, "the peace-weaver herself emblematizes peace, for she appears in the poem with her mead-vessel only after a conquest has been concluded" (290). Wealhtheow first appears in the poem after the contest between Unferth and Beowulf, and then again after Beowulf defeats Grendel. However, the poet reminds the reader that Wealhtheow is not only a queen and a peace-pledge, but a mother as well. After the scop sings the lay about Hildeburh, she talks to Hrothgar, insisting he only leaves his kingdom to his descendants or kinsmen after he dies: "So, while you may, bask in your fortune, and then bequeath kingdom and nation to your kith and kin, before you decease" (Heaney 1176-1179). She does this out of angst for her own sons' future, because "the word is that you [Hrothgar] want to adopt this warrior [Beowulf] as a son" (Heaney 1175-1176).

It is precisely the role of a mother that potentially undermines the political importance of Wealhtheow in some of the translations of the poem. Much like Alfano with regard to Grendel's mother, Josephine Bloomfield argues that translating the poem had led to the rewriting of the character. In her essay *Diminished by Kindness*, Bloomfield analyzes Frederick Klaeber's translation of *Beowulf*, and includes examples which support her claim that the socio-political circumstances of Klaeber's lifetime greatly influenced his translation. Bloomfield maintains that

> Klaeber, who was reared within the educated middle class of the very nationalist and racialist culture of late nineteenth-century Germany, seems to have imposed concepts and relationships on the text – particularly in the areas of kinship, family, and gender roles – that cannot be found in the source text of the source culture. (183)

She goes on to say that his representation of Wealhtheow is "something like a textual trick of mirrors" (184), reflecting those concepts. This is based on the fact that Klaeber translated five separate words, in seven different occurrences, as 'kind' or 'kindness'.[2] For example, in line 1227 Wealhtheow asks Beowulf to treat her sons a certain way, for which the poet uses the word *gedēfe.* Klaeber glosses this word as 'fitting' and 'proper' in other instances, such as in lines 561 and 1670, yet in this case he translates it as 'kind' (Bloomfield 185). Heaney also uses the word "kindly (1219)" in his translation, while Tolkien uses "gracious" (1009).

Bloomfield argues that even a scholar as great as Klaeber was unable to escape the influences of his own culture (185). She explains that "the view of women as socially non-instrumental, essentially maternal beings was so widely accepted that it was regularly expressed in encyclopedias as a given of nature" (Bloomfield 185-186). This kind of stand towards women was also present in Klaeber's university life, as well as, more importantly, in the very laws of the country (Bloomfield 186-188). "…not only did women have no right to assembly in Germany, or right to Oberschule or university education, or naturally, to vote, but the law singled them out as being so limited by nature that rights were simply inappropriate" (Bloomfield 188). The nineteenth-century notion of the "character of the sexes" was used as a reference system "which substituted innate biological and intellectual character for hierarchical status as a basis for limiting women legally, socially, educationally, and politically" (Bloomfield 189). Basically, women, in terms of their social roles, were reduced to mothers, motherhood being something they were naturally predisposed for and something that was supposed to be their only aspiration. Consequently, Klaeber does the same thing to Wealhtheow, which is visible in the above mentioned example. By having Wealhtheow ask Beowulf to be kind to her sons, Klaeber rewrites her character, stripping her of her political role as a peace-weaver, and imposing upon her the role of a "maternal care-giver" (Bloomfield 184). However, her circumstances were most certainly not those of a nineteenth-century Christian bourgeois mother, and her actions and words should not be interpreted in

[2] For more details, see Bloomfield.

such a context. It is more likely that she would be more concerned with the political aspects of her reality and the rules of the succession of power, than with Beowulf's treatment of her sons. Bloomfield concludes by noting that Klaeber was possibly unconsciously forced to change the way Wealhtheow was portrayed, so as to make her more in line with his own concepts of motherhood, in which case "Wealhtheow that we know is a representative not only of the Anglo-Saxon culture but also of the nineteenth-century German bourgeois culture of her translator and editor" (203).

3. WOMEN IN THE VIKING AGE

The description of Viking women in literature has changed depending on the time the author was referring to, and depending on the purpose of the literary text. According to Birgit Sawyer, "Icelandic authors who describe their pagan past let us meet many active, strong-willed, and often war-like women, but such dominant women are conspicuously absent from the sagas written about contemporary Iceland" (295). Christianity installed a new image of a woman, one that was passive and submissive, as well as completely subordinate to men (Sawyer, 259). Since this contrast is also visible in two major histories that deal with both the pagan and the Christian period, *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus and *Heimskringla* by Snorre Sturlason, it seemed to have reflected the change of women's conditions in real life (Sawyer 295).

Certain historical evidence suggests that women, especially older ones, were highly regarded during the Viking age in Scandinavia. Pagan burial customs ended in the tenth or eleventh century, but women's graves dating back to the third or fourth century show signs of particular care regarding the elaborateness of the burial process. According to Sawyer, "in Denmark the quantity and quality of the furnishing in men's graves decreased with the age of the dead man, but some of the richest burials were of women who were 50 years old or more" (230). This suggests that respect for a woman increased with her age, possibly due to the experience gained throughout her long life. Moreover, there are some indications suggesting that women in pre-Christian Scandinavia were also highly regarded due to their association with magic, poetry, and even the possibility to know the unknown (Sawyer 230). According to the Icelandic law, once married, the woman was expected to "assume a completely feminine role with her own well-defined responsibilities quite distinct from those of her husband," and her duties were mostly confined to the farm (Sawyer 230). There she had the

utmost authority and was involved in all family business, but could not participate in the public life (Sawyer 230). Both sexes had very distinct roles within a marriage, but unmarried women sometimes had to take on responsibilities that normally belonged to men (Sawyer 232). Sawyer claims that "there is no hint that women's abilities were doubted in the pagan period and their association with wisdom and magic is notable… Their links with both nature and the supernatural were a source of power" (232).

3.1 Shield-maidens – real women vs. the literary motif

Regarding stories about shield-maidens, Sawyer argues that in Icelandic literature they are mostly found in heroic sagas, which are historically unreliable (296). However, Saxo Grammaticus also includes many examples of shield-maidens, even providing a detailed description:

> There were once women in Denmark who dressed themselves to look like men and spent almost every minute cultivating soldiers' skills; they did not want the sinews of their valour to lose tautness and be infected by self-indulgence. Loathing a dainty style of living, they would harden body and mind with toil and endurance, rejecting the fickle pliancy of girls and compelling their womanish spirits to act with a virile ruthlessness. They courted military celebrity so earnestly that you would have guessed they had unsexed themselves. Those especially who had forceful personalities or were tall and elegant embarked on this way of life. As if they were forgetful of their true selves they put toughness before allure, aimed at conflicts instead of kisses, tasted blood, not lips, sought the clash of arms rather than the arm's embrace, fitted to weapons hands which should have been weaving, desired not the touch but the kill, and those they could have appeased with looks they attacked with lances. (qtd. in Sawyer 296)

Heroic poetry and tales also emphasize masculine qualities in women who were not only warriors, but also beautiful and accomplished. According to Sawyer, male heroes had to overcome those women in order to prove their own masculinity and to deserve them as partners (231). Also, such women were valued as wives and mothers, "not only because of the prestige of winning them but also because their sons could be expected to inherit the qualities of their mothers as well as their fathers" (Sawyer 231). According to Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, "Old Norse-Icelandic sagas present fascinating examples of female characters – shield-maidens and maiden-kings – breaking even further out of the confines of their gender

by fighting with swords and shields, sailing around the world with a retinue, and /or keeping a court, as a king would" (10). Maiden-kings were gendered female, but they would lose their sovereignty by marriage. Shield-maidens, on the other hand, would often take on a male name and identity. Friðriksdóttir argues that such women were equally as successful as men in performing their duties, sometimes even more (11). She also argues that they would often turn to their traditional female roles after they have had enough of the masculine activity, although it was often imposed on them as well (11).

However, most modern scholars do not believe that shield-maidens really existed, and rather explain these women warriors as merely a literary motif (Sawyer 296). Sawyer writes that "according to some, the motif is a loan from antique traditions about the amazons [sic] [...], women who are described as a distinct tribe in Anatolia" (296). Sawyer does not see this as a feasible explanation since there are more differences than similarities between the Amazons and the shield-maidens. For example, Scandinavian female warriors are never described as belonging to a separate tribe, only occasional "war-bands, and in Icelandic literature we only meet single female warriors, acting on their own" (Sawyer 297). Sawyer also mentions recent research, according to which descriptions of shield-maidens stem from misunderstandings by foreigners who would visit the area (especially the Scandinavian coast) and see "temporarily man-less settlements" (Sawyer 297). Carol Clover, on the other hand, claims that literary descriptions of shield-maidens are indeed applicable to the social reality of women at the time, due to the fact that women were often forced to take up the role of a son in families with only female offspring (Sawyer 297).

When conversion to Christianity began, the shield-maiden was replaced by "a Christian ideal of the passive and submissive 'madonna'" (Sawyer 298). Sawyer, however, argues that this view is questionable due to lack of sources, as well as due to the issue of the word "shield-maiden" being used to denote different kinds of women by different authors (298). Furthermore, she goes on to say that it is quite unlikely that the shield-maiden was ever considered an ideal, since her chastity and independence rendered them uncontrollable, and made them a threat to the social order (Sawyer 298). Instead, attention is drawn to the fact that "in the Middle Ages history writing was didactic" (Sawyer 298) and that authors used descriptions of different kinds of women for their own special purposes or in order to convey a message. For example, "Saxo places almost all independent and active women in the pagan past [and] this serves his purpose of demonstrating that such female behavior belongs to a bygone, pagan, and thus imperfect times" (Sawyer 298). The same goes for Icelandic sagas, where women were described as far from ideal, and as a potential threat to men (Sawyer 299).

According to Sawyer, Saxo and the Icelandic writers were heavily influenced by Roman history which might have served as a source for the women that they described in their writing, as well as the Antiquity (Sawyer 299).

Conversion to Christianity affected the attitudes towards women in Scandinavia, much like it did in the Anglo-Saxon societies. According to Sawyer, "Christian authors [...] tended to depict women of the pagan past in the mould of Eve, the root of all evil" (232). Despite that, there are many indication that women were among the first converts, and the most eager ones at that. Sawyer argues that they must have found Christian teachings very appealing:

> They must have found the prospect of the Christian Paradise far more attractive than the gloomy realm of Hel to which they had previously been consigned. Many of them must also have been glad to believe that in the sight of God they were men's equals and that their worth did not depend on their fertility, family or social status; the community of Christians had room for all, including women who were barren or unmarried, as well as orphans and the poor. Christian teaching that all had an obligation to help those in need was especially welcome to women without near kinsfolk, for they had far more limited opportunities to support themselves than men in similar situation. (Sawyer 233)

Conversion to Christianity entailed many changes, but some features of paganism survived, usually in modified forms. For example, Britt-Marie Näsström argues that Virgin Mary may have replaced the fertility goddess Fröja, because many of her functions were taken over by Mary, which may explain Mary's popularity among Scandinavian women (Sawyer 234). Many other pagan female helpers were replaced by Christian saints (Sawyer 235). As far as social standing of women before and after Christianization goes, Sawyer claims that the change was not radical. She argues that "many Viking-age women had both freedom and many opportunities to act, to take responsibility, administer farms, inherit and dispose of property, *but so had their medieval sisters*" (236, emphasis in the original). Women's reputation of wisdom was, however, undermined and their association with magic condemned, but other possible areas of influence opened up, mostly relating to religious practices (Sawyer 236).

Therefore, the disappearance of strong women in literature in Christian times is not representative of the real-life situation. Icelandic family sagas, however, portray very few unmarried women, and Sawyer argues that this is due to the importance that the authors' give to procreation and the institution of marriage (236). Saxo treats strong women quite

unfavorably. Not only does he stress the importance of marriage and motherhood for a woman, but he also characterizes them as un-womanly and condemns them for defending their chastity (Sawyer 236). In his view they are defiant of the order of Nature, which is why he ultimately has them defeated in the end, either in a battle or forced by male heroes to marry them and become mothers (Sawyer 236). Both him and the Icelandic authors oppose to life-long chastity, and believe that a woman should marry and be a good wife to her husband (Sawyer 237). Ecclesiastical writings, however, present the Virgin as an ideal woman (or a widow) who is devoted only to God, withdrawn from public life, with all her property transferred to the Church (Sawyer 237). Such an ideal could not have been openly criticized by Saxo and the Icelandic authors, since they were Christian writers, and the Virgin was replaced by the shield-maiden. According to Sawyer, "both groups shared the same basic intention, to abandon their traditional role and defend their independence, using chastity as their weapon" (238). Due to the inability to openly criticize a Christian ideal, Saxo and the Icelandic writers introduced the figure of the chaste female warrior, possibly inspired by the Amazons. By criticizing their devotion to their chastity and their strength, they covertly opposed the Christian ideal of the Virgin, and that is how the myth of the Nordic shield-maiden was created (Sawyer 238).

4. J.R.R. TOLKIEN – POWER AND THE FEMININE PRINCIPLE

Tolkien's fictional writing is largely influenced by the above discussed Anglo-Saxon and Nordic history, especially due to the fact that he was trying to provide England with the mythology it never had. His fictional world as well as his characters reflect this historical background. This, however, lead to Tolkien's notoriety as regards a relative lack of and representation of women in his fictional writing. Adam Roberts acknowledges this as the reason why "Tolkien is little praised, and indeed is often actively deprecated" (473). Edith L. Crowe argues that "he was reflecting his sources and his times" (136), while Leslie A. Donovan goes on to explain that "those with similar perspectives argue that, as women played central roles in few medieval texts, it would have been inappropriate for Tolkien's modern rewriting of traditional materials to emphasize or substantially expand female roles" (221). Moreover, one has to take into account the socio-historical context in which Tolkien worked. Tolkien was born in the late nineteenth century, when the so called Victorian notion of "separate spheres" was prevalent (Stanton 131). Explaining this notion, Michael N. Stenton

argues that "men are out in the world of work, conflict, money, contending in brutal and unforgiving arenas. Women are at home, providing shelter and comfort, supervising the household and the raising of the children – being typically angels of the house" (Stanton 131). Such views translated into the academic sphere as well. Stanton states that "Oxford University, where Tolkien spent much of his life, enforced this separation of work and home by custom as stringently perhaps as any place in England" (Stanton 131). What is more, C. S. Lewis, who was Tolkien's friend and fellow member of the Inklings, wrote to his friend Bede Griffith that "the decay of friendship, owing to the endless presence of women everywhere, is a thing I'm rather afraid of" (qtd. in Roberts 475). This suggests that the group not only excluded women, but also operated under the impression that a male bond can somehow be tainted or weakened by women. Therefore, Tolkien's writing evokes not only the Anglo-Saxon and the Nordic context, but the early twentieth-century patriarchal English society which, according to Roberts, associated men with strength and women with weakness (475).

Consequently, there are not many female characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, and they do not have an immediate importance when it comes to the plot. However, a closer reading of the trilogy offers a new perspective on Tolkien's treatment of women, as does *The Silmarillion* by providing an insight into how Tolkien treated gender in Arda. William H. Green argues that "Tolkien's fiction may be said to dramatize the 'common gender' value of the pronoun *he*, which until the 1970s was accepted as referring indifferently to either male or female persons" (29, emphasis in the original). In his letter to Michael Tolkien, from March 1941, Tolkien addresses the idea of friendship between a man and a woman, saying that "in this fallen world […] it is virtually impossible" (*Letters* 59). He goes on to say that "two minds that have really a primarily mental and spiritual affinity may by accident reside in a male and a female body, and yet may desire and achieve a 'friendship' quite independent of sex," yet, it is not something that can be counted on (*Letters* 59). Since friendship is so important in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien presumably "shifts sexual identities to invent a sexless world" (Green 30). As a result, his characters embody both masculine and feminine qualities, and are even gender ambiguous, the most prominent example being Gandalf. According to Numann, "the woman is the original seeress" (295), and when men started becoming shamans and seers, they were regarded as highly feminine, because they relied on the anima, or the unconscious, "by which the female is inspired" (Numann 294). This is why they often appeared dressed as women (Neumann 295). Gandalf wears "a tall pointed blue hat, a long grey cloak, and a silver scarf" (Tolkien, LOTR 32), and later on a "gleaming white…robe" (Tolkien, LOTR 645). What is more, Green claims that "even his phallic fire-tipped staff is in

modern stories associated more with fairy godmothers than wizards, more with witches than warlocks" (30). Androgyny seems to be a desirable trait in Tolkien's universe, and characters that are conventionally masculine (or feminine) do not fare well. Melanie A. Rawls argues that

> Attributes of the gender are not necessarily confined to the sex of the same gender, i.e. feminine attributes are not confined to females nor masculine attributes to males. The Macho Man, with his paucity of finer feeling and his neglect of thought in favor of action, is not admired in Middle-earth or Valinor. Neither is the Total Woman, with her wiles and dependence on males. Those beings in Arda who are able to achieve good either embody both Feminine and Masculine within themselves or have access to the nature of the other gender, usually in the form of a spouse, a sibling or a mentor. (100)

However, male and female characters still overall exhibit the qualities corresponding to their respective sex. Rawls provides a list of characteristics which Tolkien attributes to his male and female characters:

FEMININE (understanding)		MASCULINE (power)
	Positive	
love		law
counsel		action
intuition (insight and foresight)		reason
mercy and compassion		justice
	Forms of creativity	
song, dance, healing		fine arts, crafts
weaving		technology
	Negative	
impotence		rashness
passivity		aggression
consuming or devouring		self-aggrandizement

(Rawls, 101)

The main feminine quality is understanding, from which all the other positive qualities arise. All of them are, according to Rawls, "personal, specific, and inner-directed" (102). This is why, unlike male characters, women do not have an immediately apparent influence as far as great events and victories are concerned. However, they do influence individual characters, and that influence can be seen on a larger scale. For example, Arwen is a source of inspiration and strength for Aragorn, as is Lúthien for Beren. Galadriel is probably the one who exhibits the most influence on individual characters. She completely changes Gimly's stance toward Elves, which allows one of the most important relationships in the trilogy, the friendship between him and Legolas. She provides the fellowship with a safe haven after their journey of toil and grief. Listening to her talk in his own ancient tongue, Gimli looks into her eyes and it seems to him that "he looked suddenly into the heart of an enemy and saw there love and understanding. Wonder came into his face, and then he smiled in answer" (Tolkien, LOTR 463). She also weaves Elvish robes for all members of the fellowship, which prove very useful later on by keeping them hidden from unfriendly eyes. Therefore, even though female characters mostly act behind the curtain and are few in number, their importance is undeniable when it comes to the "defining of power", which is, according to Nancy Enright, "a central thematic concern of the text" (118).

As mentioned earlier, even though male characters do exhibit certain characteristics pertaining to the female sex, their power is mostly manifested in areas which are culturally accepted as male, such as warfare. However, according to Rawls, "the stereotypical and purely masculine kind of power [...] is shown to be weaker morally and spiritually than its non-traditional counterparts" (118). For example, Boromir could be described as what has previously been referred to as the "macho" man. He is depicted as "a man after the sort of King Eärnur, taking no wife and delighting chiefly in arms; fearless and strong, but caring little for lore, save the tales of old battles" (Tolkien, LOTR Appendix 1384-1385). He completely lacks any female characteristics which would allow "the proper functioning" (Crowe 140) of his character. His brother Faramir, on the other hand, does possess certain feminine qualities, which allow him a more favourable fate that Boromir's. He is "gentle in bearing, and a lover of lore and music", and "did not seek glory in danger without a purpose" (Tolkien, LOTR Appendix 1385). One could, therefore, assume that Tolkien criticizes traditional masculinity by having Boromir continuously lust for the One Ring, which ultimately leads to his early demise. Aragorn, along with his prowess in warfare and desire for justice, also exhibits certain positive feminine attributes, such as love and compassion, as well as being a healer. Sauron in *The Lord of The Rings* and Morgoth in *The Silmarillion* are also

characterized as having mostly negative male attributes and being outward-directed, lacking insight and understanding, which is what ultimately leads to their defeat. All of these overly-male characters have one thing in common and that is desire for power. Enright claims that Tolkien "makes clear the fact that true power for anyone comes from renouncing earthly dominance and from giving of oneself for the healing and love of others" (134). Taking into account the way in which Tokien constructs his characters, it is possible to argue that Tolkien believed that virtue can only be achieved by those who possess both masculine and feminine qualities, and that, as Crowe argues, "he recognizes the interdependence of male and female, and suggests repeatedly that to ignore one at the expense of the other is a grave mistake" (140). This is why Rawls maintains that Tolkien's female characters represent a blend of traditional male and female roles and as such defy the standardized matrix of gender,

> epitomize his critique of traditional, masculine, and worldly power, offering an alternative that can be summed up as the choice of love over pride, reflective of the Christ-like inversion of power rooted in Scripture, and ultimately more powerful than any domination by use of force. (118)

As Tolkien seems to attribute this power mostly to female characters, the rest of the thesis will focus on some of the key female characters in *The Silmarillion* and *Lord of the Rings*, in order to debunk the often evoked critique of their secondary nature in his oeuvre.

5. POWERFUL FEMALE CHARACTERS IN *THE SILMARILLION* AND *LOTR*

5.1 Galadriel

Despite the overall prominence of male characters in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Enright claims that "Galadriel is the most powerful female figure in *The Lord of the Rings* and, in fact, one of the most important characters of either gender in the story" (125). She certainly seems to be one of the characters Tolkien paid most attention to, given the fact that he kept rewriting and working on her character until his very death. Her history is mostly covered in his writings succeeding *The Lord of the Rings*, such as the "post-*Lord of the Rings* versions of *The Silmarillion*, some of his late letters, the section on 'The History of Galadriel and Celeborn' in the *Unfinished Tales*…" (Lakowski 153)

Tolkien's descriptions of Galadriel differ in the First and the Third Age. This may well have to do with the fact that the race of Elves changes throughout the history of Middle-earth. Rawls argues that "the most influential Noldorin and Sindarin Elves of the First and Second Ages are very masculine… [but] by the Third Age, the race of Elves has swung to the polar principle and has become, overall, much more introverted and less active in the public affairs of Middle-earth" (107). In *The Silmarillion*, Galadriel participates in the rebellion of the Noldor, when Fëanor and his sons rise up against the Valar. She was "the only woman of the Noldor to stand that day tall and valiant among the contending princes", and "the words of Fëanor concerning Middle-earth had kindled in her heart, for she yearned to see the wide unguarded lands and to rule there a realm at her own will" (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 89). Her involvement in the rebellion certainly evokes Eve's disobedience from *Genesis* 2-3. Galadriel was banned from returning to Valinor, just like Adam and Eve were banned from the Garden, due to the sin of pride. Galadriel's prideful streak is emphasized in *Unfinished Tales*:

> Galadriel was born in the bliss of Valinor, but it was not long, in the reckoning of the Blessed Realm, before that was dimmed; and thereafter she had no peace within. For in that testing time amid the strife of the Noldor she was drawn this way and that. She was *proud*, strong, and *selfwilled*, as were all the descendants of Finwe save Finarfin; and like her brother Finrod, of all her kin the nearest to her heart, she had dreams of far lands and dominions that might be her own to order as she would without tutelage… So it came to pass that when the light of Valinor failed, for ever as the Noldor thought, she joined the rebellion against the Valar who commanded them to stay; and once she had set foot upon that road of exile she would not relent, but rejected the last message of the Valar, and came under the Doom of Mandos. Even after the merciless assault upon the Teleri and the rape of their ships, though she fought fiercely against Feanor in defense of her mother's kin, she did not turn back. Her *pride* was unwilling to return, a defeated suppliant for pardon; but now she burned with desire to follow Feanor with her anger to whatever lands he might come, and to thwart him in all ways that she could. *Pride* still moved her when, at the end of the Elder Days after the final overthrow of Morgoth, she refused the pardon of the Valar for all who had fought against him, and remained in Middle-earth. (Tolkien, *Unfinished* 230-231, emphasis mine)

This characterization deviates greatly from the morally and spiritually elevated Galadriel that the fellowship meets. Not only is she prideful and ambitious in post- LOTR writings, but her physical description is more focused on the body. In *The Peoples of Middle-earth* she is described as "tall beyond the measure even of the women of the Noldor [...] strong of body,

mind, and will, a match for both the loremasters and the athletes of the Eldar" (Tolkien, *Peoples* 341). This kind of a portrayal brings her closer to the image of an Amazon or a shield-maiden, rather than the Mary-like figure she becomes in LOTR, which will be discussed later. Unlike in accounts of Fëanor's rebellion, Galadriel exhibits no martial skills as the Lady of Lothlórien.

This portrayal of Galadriel in her youth also exhibits attributes pertaining to the so called valkyries. When describing the traditional mythological function of the valkyries, Jochens states the following:

> At Óðinn's bidding they select the men who are destined to fall in battle and they reward victory to the survivors. As such they form an important link between the divine and the human world. Having withdrawn the heroes from human life, the valkyries continue to look after them in the divine world, where they serve them drink. (qtd in Donovan, 111)

Valkyries were in ON literature portrayed in two different ways. Donovan writes that "the grim, malevolent aspect of the valkyrie is generally considered a remnant of an earlier mythic conception, while the benevolent figure is considered a development of later Germanic mythology and literature" (112). Tolkien obviously uses only certain valkyrie elements to build his characters. Donovan argues that

> By eliminating from his primary women figures the concept common in valkyrie typology of the female inciter and her accompanying vengeance for kin or personal insult, Tolkien constructs them as reflective of moral good, heroic ideals, noble behavior, and responsible leadership. (226)

Galadriel is also described through the images of light and radiance, which are, according to Donovan, often found in valkyrie imagery (230). In *The Peoples of Middle-earth*, her hair is "golden like the hair of her father and her foremother Indis, but richer and more radiant" (Tolkien, *Peoples* 341). In *The Silmarillion* it is "lit with gold as though it had caught in a mesh the radiance of Laurelin" (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 26). Unlike that of the valkyries, "her radiance is not derived from the metallic brightness of armor, arm-rings, or necklaces typical in the portrayals of Old English and Old Norse valkyrie figures" (Donovan 231). Galadriel's light stems from her own heightened moral state. The light imagery is even more emphasized by the phial of the light of Eärendil that she gives as a parting gift to Frodo. There are some

records of medieval valkyries bestowing special gifts upon heroes, as Donovan claims (233). Galadriel's ability to foretell the future is also reminiscent of Skuld, a norn, i.e. a goddess who weaves the fate of mankind, and a valkyrie mentioned in a collection of ON poems called *Poetic Edda*. Donovan claims that both Skuld and Galadriel have a special relationship with a body of water which channels their prophetic ability (237).

Given the certain similarities of valkyries and peace-weavers, Galadriel can also be identified as the latter, even more so. Upon the arrival of the fellowship to Lothlórien, she reconciles the differences between Elves and Dwarves. Her husband Celeborn tells Gimli that he never would have let them enter Lothlórien if he had known the kind of evil the Dwarves stirred up in Moria. Galadriel, however, says: "Do not repent of your welcome to the Dwarf. If our folk had been exiled long and far from Lothlórien, who of the Galadhrim, even Celeborn the Wise, would pass nigh and would not wish to look upon their ancient home, though it had become an abode of dragons" (Tolkien, LOTR 463). She uses the main feminine attribute mentioned earlier − understanding, in order to council Celeborn and to make him more tolerant towards Gimli, in which she succeeds. Moreover, Galadriel engages in gift-giving and cup-bearing, also important duties of an *ides*. She presents each member of the fellowship with a token. Her gifts are very valuable and suggest her ability of understanding individuals on a deeper level. Some of them are useful in a battle, such as the sheath she gives Aragorn, so that his sword "shall not be stained or broken even in defeat" (Tolkien, LOTR 488), but most are of sentimental or emotional value. Her second gift to Aragorn is a brooch, a token of hope, and Sam receives a small box of earth from her orchard. She says: "It will not keep you on your road, nor defend you against any peril; but if you keep it and see your home again at last, then perhaps it may reward you" (Tolkien, LOTR 489). She also offers everyone "the cup of farewell" (Tolkien, LOTR 488), and in true peace-weaver fashion hands it first to Celeborn and then to the rest of the company. Finally, she bestows the fellowship with Elvish robes that "she herself and her maidens wove" (Tolkien, LOTR 482).

Unlike her warrior queen-like nature displayed earlier, LOTR centers more on Galadriel's wisdom, kindness, and her gift of foresight. She is described as "no less tall than the Lord [...] grave and beautiful [...] clad wholly in white" (Tolkien, LOTR 461). Michael W. Maher recognizes certain similarities between Galadriel and the Virgin Mary. Even though "commentators such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas have cited Mary's *humility* before the Divine Will as her paramount virtue" (Maher 225, emphasis mine), which is in sharp contrast with Galadriel's pride, Tolkien himself admits that "it is true that [he owes] much of this character to Christian and Catholic teaching and imagination about Mary"

(Tolkien, *Letters* 442). She could not, by any means, be understood as an allegory of Mary, but Maher recognizes a certain compatibility between Galadriel's character in LOTR, and Mary's description in the *Loreto Litany*, which became very popular during the sixteenth century and includes over 40 titles given to Mary. In it Mary is referred to as "the *Domus Aurea*, the 'House of Gold'" (Maher 227). As already mentioned, Galadriel is often associated with images of light and brilliance, and Lothlórien is referred to by Éomer as "the Golden Wood" (Tolkien, LOTR 562). Maher also argues that in the litany Mary is accorded the attribute *Immaculata* (227), which can be compared to Lothlórien being described as having "no stain" (Tolkien, LOTR 456). Furthermore, since the image of the woman as a weaver extends into the Christian literary tradition as well, Galadriel has similarities with Mary in terms of her role as a peacemaker. She mediates the reconciliation between Legolas and Gimli, just like Mary mediated the reconciliation between man and God, the Old Testament and the New Testament. Mary is also regarded in the litany as *Salus Infirnorum*, meaning "Health of the Sick" (Maher 230). Maher argues that Galadriel exhibits a similar healing power when she gives Sam the box of earth that he later on uses to heal the Shire (230). Another appellation given to Mary is the "Seat of Wisdom" (Maher 230), which is something that can obviously be attributed to Galadriel as well, since she serves as a counselor not only to her husband, but to the fellowship as well, and was the one to summon the White Council. Finally, Galadriel's rejection of the temptation of the One Ring again evokes Eve's disobedience, especially because it takes place in a garden. However, this time the scene of temptation is reversed because Galadriel refuses to take the Ring. She says: "I pass the test…I will diminish and go into the West, and remain Galadriel" (Tolkien, LOTR 476). By doing so, she rectifies the effects of her rebellion in the First Age, and her banishment is revoked. This is analogous to Mary's rectification of Eve's sin, as well as indicative of her humility and awareness of the limitations of her power, which is, according to Romuald I. Lakowski, emphasized by the use of the word "diminish" (162). However, since this Mary-like image of Galadriel clashes so harshly with her depiction in the First Age, Tolkien decided to make one last change to her story at the very end of his life. In his letter to Lord Halsbury, from August 1973, Tolkien writes:

> Galadriel was 'unstained': she had committed no evil deeds. She was an enemy of Fëanor. She did not reach Middle-earth with the other Noldor, but independently. Her reasons for desiring to go to Middle-earth were legitimate, and she would have been permitted to depart, but for

> the misfortune that before she set out the revolt of Fëanor broke out, and she became involved in the desperate measures of Manwe, and the ban on all emigration. (Tolkien, *Letters* 478)

As far as the notion of power is concerned, Galadriel's refusal of the Ring can be interpreted as a rejection of the kind of power that is traditionally seen as masculine, something that, as mentioned earlier, Tolkien saw as paramount. Galadriel's true power is primarily that of understanding, preserving and healing. When describing the three Elvish rings, one of which Galadriel possesses, Elrond says that:

> The Three were not made by Sauron, nor did he ever touch them. But of them it is not permitted to speak. So much only in this hour of doubt I may now say. They are not idle. But they were not made as weapons of war or conquest: that is not their power. Those who made them did not desire strength or domination or hoarded wealth, but understanding, making, and healing, to preserve all things unstained. (Tolkien, LOTR 350)

Even though Galadriel admits to wanting the ring for herself, the Queen she envisions is a mesh of contradictory attributes, summed up in the sentence "All shall love me and despair" (Tolkien, LOTR 476). As she stands before Frodo, she seems to him "beautiful beyond enduring, terrible and worshipful", but as the light of her ring fades, she goes back to being "a slender elf-woman, clad in simple white, whose gentle voice was soft and sad" (Tolkien, LOTR 476). She literally diminishes as she realizes that even though she might only want to use the Ring to do good, it would affect her in ways she could not control. Had she accepted it she would have become dominated by the kind of power usually most tempting to males (as seen on the example of Boromir). Instead, she is "willing to endure personal abdication of power out of love, and it is this renunciation that reveals her spiritual and moral strength" (Enright 126).

5.2 Arwen and Lúthien

Unlike Lúthien in *The Silmarillion*, Arwen's presence in *The Lord of the Rings* is very limited. She is first mentioned and described by Frodo upon his arrival to Rivendell. He refers to her as "a lady fair to look upon" (Tolkien, LOTR 295), and goes on to admire her appearance. She is depicted as follows:

> 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, LOTR 296)

This description coincides greatly with the description of Lúthien in *The Silmarillion*, and Arwen is said to be "the likeness of Lúthien [that] had come on earth again" (Tolkien, LOTR 296). There are other similarities between the two, the most important one being that they both gave up their immortality for mortal men. Devotion to their loved ones is the greatest power of both Arwen and Lúthien, and precipitates what Enright refers to as "the Christ-like choice of taking on mortality out of love" (123).

Arwen's role in the story resembles the role of a fairytale princess, or as Vladimir Propp would define it – "the object of a search" (53). Her passivity gives the reader the impression that Tolkien created her only to serve as a kind of reward for Aragorn. She is the princess in the tower, waiting for her prince to face all the trials and slay all the dragons in order to become worthy of her. Lúthien, on the other hand, is much more involved in the quest of the Silmaril than Beren is, and an example of what Jay Williams refers to as a "practical princess" (qtd. in West 263). After being entrapped in the house of Hírilorn, "she put forth her arts of enchantment, and caused her hair to grow to great length, and of it she wove a dark robe that wrapped her beauty like a shadow, and it was laden with a spell of sleep (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 202). Having escaped, she comes to Sauron's isle, resists capture and manages to defeat Sauron, with the help of Huan of Valinor. After that she "took the mastery of the isle and all that was there" (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 206). Her victory is followed by a very powerful image:

> Then Lúthien stood upon the bridge, and declared her power: and the spell was loosed that bound stone to stone, and the gates were thrown down, and the walls opened, and the pits laid bare; and many thralls and captives came forth in wonder and dismay, shielding their eyes against the pale moonlight, for they had lain long in the darkness of Sauron. (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 206)

Lúthien does not achieve her victory through strength of arms, but through her song, from which "the wolves howled, and the isle trembled" (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 205). Also, it is her

song that moves Mandos to pity, and ultimately leads to Beren being brought back to life, along with her choice to renounce her immortality in order to be reunited with him. An interesting fact from Tolkien's private life is that he had a very personal connection with the love story of Beren and Lúthien. He referred to his wife Edith as his Lúthien, which is why their gravestone is inscribed with the names of the two characters.

Even though Arwen is as not as immediately involved in the plot as Lúthien, she does, as Enright claims, inspire events "through her relationship with Aragorn from afar" (123). Some of this influence comes from the fact that she is, just like Galadriel, depicted in terms of certain valkyrie elements, particularly the tradition of gift giving, as well as elements pertaining to *idesa* figures. The tapestry she sends to Aragorn is, according to Donovan, reminiscent of Brynhild's tapestry from *The Völsung saga* (251). It is a token of hope that she herself "wrought [...] in secret" (Tolkien, LOTR 1015), which links her even further to the valkyrie tradition. Her gift to Frodo, however, is the greatest of all, and not only does it grant him heroic reward, but also the peace he needs. As a token of her love and understanding, Arwen gives Frodo her necklace, saying: "When the memory of the fear and the darkness troubles you [...] this will bring you aid" (Tolkien, LOTR 1276). What is more, having made the decision to become mortal, Arwen also allows Frodo to heal, by giving him her place on the ship that was supposed to bear her into the West. In a letter to Eileen Elgar, Tolkien writes that it was Arwen who "though of a way of healing him" (Tolkien, *Letters* 346). Therefore, her own loss becomes a means of salvation for Frodo. Personal loss is another feature of the Germanic valkyrie figures. Arwen and Lúthien can only gain fulfillment in love if they renounce their immortal lives, as well as their Elven heritage. Donovan claims that theirs is "the bittersweet choice in which joy and tragedy intertwine" (253), and their choice is analogous to valkyrie-brides rejecting their divine heritage for the sake of love. Both women give up their immortal lives for love, at the same time being separated from their kindred. Arwen's choice in particular reflects the future of Middle-earth. Arwen the Elf is representative of the Third Age, when the Elves were still present among men. Arwen becoming Human mirrors the beginning of the Fourth Age, the departure of Elves and the start of the dominion of men.

5.3 Éowyn and Haleth

Even though Tolkien does not go into too much detail when it comes to Haleth's story in *The Silmarillion*, she is not to be overlooked, being the only female leader. She is described as being "a woman of great heart and strength" (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 169), as valiant as her brother. After the death of her father, Haleth "held the people together, though they were without hope" (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 169-170). Even though she is not seen fighting in *The Silmarillion*, she is referred to as an "Amazon with picked bodyguard of women" (Tolkien, *Unfinished* 377) in the *Unfinished Tales*. However, she is more notable as a political leader, and unlike maiden-kings from ON sagas, Haleth does not lose her sovereignty through marriage. The women of the People of Haleth could be referred to as shield-maidens, given the fact that some of them, although few, "went abroad to fight in great battles" (Tolkien, *Unfinished* 377). Also, Haleth never took upon a male name or identity, unlike Éowyn, who never had the kind of leadership role that Haleth had.

Éowyn is, alongside Galadriel, a character that is most complexly depicted when it comes to the issues of power. The two characters are also greatly similar when it comes to physical appearance. Éowyn is depicted as follows: "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" (Tolkien, LOTR 672). Aragorn perceives her as "fair and cold" (Tolkien, LOTR 672). Even though Galadriel is also described through images of gold and whiteness, the portrayal of Éowyn does not evoke Virgin Mary. The "steel" and "cold" attributes are more in line with the female warrior motif. Donovan claims that "the most direct and compelling evidence for the valkyrie tradition in Tolkien's texts resides in the character of Éowyn" (243). She performs the duty of a cup-bearer, and is also a "shieldmaiden" (Tolkien, LOTR 1026). Tolkien emphasizes her martial prowess and her desire to fight in order to create a gender ambiguity so typical of the ON shield-maidens, which becomes explicit when Éowyn decides to pass as a man in order to be able to help her king. She resorts to disguise because, as a woman, she is deemed unfit to go to war. When talking to Aragorn she says: "Lord…if you must go, then let me ride in your following. For I am weary of skulking in the hills, and wish to face peril and battle" (Tolkien, LOTR 1026), to which he replies: "Your duty is with your people" (Tolkien, LOTR 1026). However, Donovan

claims that "in the Rohirrim culture it is acceptable for women to engage in battle" (245), which makes Éowyn's retort "all your words are but to say: you are a woman, and your part is in the house" (Tolkien, LOTR 1027) uncalled for. But, the fact that Tolkien addresses this issue in his narrative attests to his sensitivity to the discrimination of women. He voices the same issue through Gandalf, who says to Éomer:

> My friend [...] you had horses, and deeds of arms, and the free fields; but she, born in the body of a maid, had a spirit and courage at least the march of yours. Yet she was doomed to wait upon an old man, whom she loved as a father, and watch him falling into a mean dishonoured dotage; and her part seemed to her more ignoble than that of the staff he leaned on. (Tolkien, LOTR 1134-1135).

Just like he does with Haleth, Tolkien equates Éowyn with her brother in terms of courage and spirit. However, she is the one who has so much more to lose. According to Donovan, "her loss involves the common valkyrie theme of conflicting loyalties to herself and her society" (249). Her greatest fear is "to stay behind bars, until use and old age accept them, and all chance of doing great deeds is gone beyond recall or desire" (Tolkien, LOTR 1027), which is exactly what she is experiencing, first being bound to Théoden and then to her people. This is why she falls in love with Aragorn, in whom she recognizes "the heroic potential to revive the health of her failing self" (Donovan 249).

Even though Éowyn is drawn to the traditionally masculine kind of power, her encounter with the Nazgûl suggests that it was her womanhood that allowed her to achieve victory. When the Lord of the Nazgûl exclaims that no living man can hinder him, Éowyn responds: "But no living man am I! You look upon a woman" (Tolkien, LOTR 1101). This, however, does not mean that Éowyn finally accepts the culturally imposed submissive role by marrying Faramir and becoming a healer later on. Her victory is only the beginning of her own healing. Enright claims that "her understanding of power remains the male-dominated, physically oriented kind" (131). Just like Galadriel refuses the Ring because she understands the devastating consequences of its power, Éowyn has to renounce the kind of power she desires in order to gain a better understanding of what true power is. She falls in love with Faramir who, according to Rawls, "embodies [...] those positive feminine characteristics lacking in her life" (110), and decides that she "will be a shieldmaiden no longer" (Tolkien, LOTR 1264). Even though her decision might seem like settling for a traditional female role, and is indeed in line with traditional materials Tolkien used, one must not forget what kind of

power he ultimately favors. The renunciation of the shield-maiden role is based on Éowyn's understanding that her continuous desire for power and domination prevented her from achieving peace and wholeness. Instead, by assuming the role of a healer she begins her own process of healing, which is analogous to the healing of Middle-earth after the destruction of the Ring.

6. CONCLUSION

Despite the male-centered context of his world, Tolkien manages to create active heroines. Although he does not give them as much "screen time" as he does to men, Galadriel, Arwen, Lúthien, Éowyn and Haleth attest the fact that Tolkien never underestimated female power. What is more, his women are more likely to make the right choice regarding the use of power. They not only evoke strong valkyrie figures, but are also inspired by Christian figures such as the Virgin Mary. Tolkien uses the peace-weaver motif, as well as the ancient Germanic shield-maiden motif, as a foundation for his female characters, emphasizing their moral and spiritual superiority when it comes to the ethical use of power, which is the key thematic concern of *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to describe how Tolkien used both the Nordic and the Anglo-Saxon context as an inspiration for his female characters. It starts off by providing an overview of the position of women in the Anglo-Saxon society, and how this position changed with the appearance of Christianity. Also, it reflects on different ways of representing women in the literature of the time, with a special focus on *Beowulf* which served as a direct inspiration to Tolkien. What is more, the overview also includes Biblical models, such as Mary and Eve, which proved to be important for the analysis of particular characters. Furthermore, Nordic women and literature have also been dealt with, with the emphasis on the figure of the shield-maiden.

The second part of the thesis takes into account Tolkien's own time and life, and how the patriarchal English society of his time influenced his writing, and, more specifically, his attitude towards creating female characters. This encompasses not only the traditional materials that he used as an inspiration for his writing, and his position regarding gender, but also the way in which he himself establishes gender in his works, primarily in *The Silmarillion*. The notion of gender, as well as the notion of power, are the two focal points of the subsequent character analysis. Galadriel, Lúthien, Arwen, Haleth and Éowyn are analysed in terms of their reference to the traditional figures of peace-weavers and shield-maidens, as well as Christian figures. Their status in Tolkien's narrative is also examined through the assembly of characteristics Tolkien attributes to each gender, as well as through the notion of power. This kind of an analysis unavoidably raises questions of whether the women in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* were created as subordinate to men, which is why this thesis provides an in depth analysis of how Tolkien himself saw power, how he connected the nature of power to gender attributes, and which of his characters wield the kind of power that he seemed to prefer.

Key words: Tolkien, Nordic, Anglo-Saxon, women, power