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Girdles of Iron, Breast-Plates of Silk:

**Homeric Women and Christian Pity in
Tolkien's Middle-earth.**

**By Andrew Fenwick
Supervisor: Dr. D. Manganiello**

Presented to the Department of English
at the University of Ottawa in partial
fulfilment of the degree of Master's of
Arts in English literature.



Andrew Fenwick, Ottawa, Canada, 1994



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This thesis is dedicated to my parents – the only two people in the world who can fully appreciate what both it and they mean to me.

Introduction

I fear you may be right that the search for the sources of *The Lord of the Rings* is going to occupy academics for a generation or two. I wish this need not be so. To my mind it is the particular use in a particular situation . . . whether invented, deliberately borrowed, or unconsciously remembered that is the most interesting thing to consider.

J.R.R. Tolkien to 'Mr. Wrigley' (Letters, 418)

At a meeting of the Tolkien Society of America in 1966, Tolkien's old student and friend, W.H. Auden, delivered a lecture on Tolkien's Middle-earth to the assembled fans. "Tolkien is fascinated with the whole Northern thing," he said, "People seem to divide – they're attracted by either the Northern thing or the Southern thing, by Scandinavia or the Mediterranean – and for Tolkien north is a sacred direction".¹ When Tolkien became aware of these comments he objected only to Auden's portrayal of his home as "a hideous house" and not to the typification of Middle-earth as a "double" world, split between North and South (Letters, 367). Tolkien, especially in later life, was never one to bite his tongue. Had he disagreed with Auden, he would most assuredly have registered his disapproval.

There can be no denying that for Tolkien North was indeed a sacred direction and that the bulk of his imaginative enterprise is based upon a lifetime's intimate acquaintance with the literature of the ancient North: "In any case if you want to write a tale of this sort you must consult your roots, and a man of the North-west of the Old World will set his heart and the action of his

¹ As quoted in The New Yorker 41(15 January, 1966), p.24.

tale in an imaginary world of that air, and that situation" (Letters, 212). While remaining firmly rooted in the North, however, Tolkien's imagination encompassed far more than this one small corner of the globe: during his years as an undergraduate at Exeter College, Tolkien was enrolled in Classical Moderations and specialised for a year in Greek philology, in which he was awarded an A+ (Letters, 12). While the "Northern thing" was pre-eminent in Tolkien's imagination, it was not alone – North and South existed side by side in his mind, one preferred but both familiar.

Beyond the fact that Tolkien was fluent in the language of Homer we can have certain knowledge of only two instances when the epics were consciously in his mind as he wrote of Middle-earth: first, in the margins of an early draft of the chapter "Minas Tirith" from *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien scrawled "Homeric catalogue" next to the description of the Gondorian nobles as they bring in their men for the final defence;² second, and finally, he consistently referred to the Riders of Rohan as "heroic 'Homeric' horsemen" (Letters, 154, 159). Beyond these facts we must rely upon critical observation and internal evidence, and, despite Tolkien's dislike of the search for sources, two critics have in this way been able to trace some of Homer's influence upon him.

The lengthy title of David Greenman's article, "Aeneidic and Odyssean Patterns of Escape and Return in Tolkien's 'The Fall of Gondolin' and *The Return of the King*" speaks for itself. Greenman compares the homecoming of the hobbits in the final chapters of *The Lord of the Rings* to Odysseus' return to Ithaca. In "'There and Back Again' – Odysseus and Bilbo Baggins", Kenneth J. Reckford finds an analogue to *The Hobbit's* chronicle of Bilbo's adventures in Odysseus' wanderings during the four "fairy-tale" books of the *Odyssey*.³ While

² J.R.R. Tolkien, The War of the Ring p. 229. (see bibliography)

³ See bibliography.

useful, both articles are somewhat limited in their approach. Greenman restricts his study to the last half of the *Odyssey* and the final chapters of *The Lord of the Rings*, while Reckford takes an even smaller selection from Homer's second epic and applies it only to Tolkien's first "hobbit novel".

While work on Tolkien's indebtedness to Homer remains scant, the study of Tolkien's women characters has flourished within the last two decades. Although there are several articles on the subject, Melanie Rawls' "The Feminine Principle in Tolkien" is far and away the most comprehensive and useful.⁴ Rawls identifies Tolkien's Middle-earth as a world divided between "masculine" and "feminine" principles. According to her paradigm, the "masculine" principle is Power with its positive aspect manifested as law, action, reason and justice, while in its negative form the masculine principle leads to rashness, aggression and self-aggrandising. On the other side, the feminine principle is Understanding, also with positive and negative aspects: love, counsel, intuition, mercy and compassion versus impotence, passivity, consumption and devouring. More representative of the work done on Tolkien's women, however, are the psychoanalytic studies of Brenda Partridge ("No Sex Please – We're Hobbits"), Sarah Beach ("Fire and Ice: The Traditional Heroine in *The Silmarillion*") and Terri Frontiegea ("Archetype, Stereotype and the Female Hero")⁵. Studies such as these approach Tolkien's women as Jungian archetypes and, unlike Rawls' article, they make little or no attempt to explain Tolkien's women in terms of their narrative or thematic role in Middle-earth.

One thing that all these critics have in common is a conviction, best expressed by Rawls, that, "One cannot acquire much insight into Tolkien's view of women from *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings* – too few women appear in

⁴ See bibliography.

⁵ See bibliography.

these books, and none are pivotal characters". Rawls, dissatisfied with Tolkien's two greatest works, instead concentrates most of her attention on *The Silmarillion*, complaining that "Of the women who appear in *LotR* [sic], only Éowyn of Rohan is depicted in any detail of character, desire, motivation and activity". While there may be *more* women in *The Silmarillion*, that book is, in my view, worse for Rawls' (and my) purpose, for there is *no* woman in Tolkien's collected tales of the First Age who approaches either the "detail of character" or the narrative and thematic importance of an Éowyn or a Galadriel.

The study of Tolkien's Homeric sources and the study of Tolkien's women characters are in roughly the same state of development. Critics who look for Homer in Middle-earth find only isolated events or persons that bear some resemblance to equally isolated events or persons in the two epics, while critics who look at the women of Middle-earth are left with the unsettling sensation that the women play no truly significant role in either the narrative or in the development of thematic concerns. When studied in isolation from one another, the women of Middle-earth and the Homeric influences are indeed difficult to see. When studied together though, the view becomes much clearer.

In his masterpiece, *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien presents what was, for him, a uniquely and entirely feminine principle – the Christian Pity of Mary (a concept that Rawls' depiction of the positive aspects of Tolkien's feminine principle unintentionally describes). To develop this principle, Tolkien re-works and re-deploys the women characters and the entire narrative structure of a much older work that also presents a feminine principle – the Wisdom of Athena in the *Odyssey*.

Tolkien develops Mary's Pity in Middle-earth by deploying five "types" of Homeric women – types that I have labelled "goddess", "queen", "monster", "wife" and "maiden". It is important to note that these five types are based upon a

descriptive classification system and should not, therefore, be confused with *prescriptive* archetypes. My five types are neither universal nor eternal figures but groups of characters from the two narratives who share several obvious traits. My observations of these types are not intended to apply to characters from other works or traditions (although in several cases they may and do).

The types are categorised according to several criteria: similarities of physical appearance and setting, similarities of narrative role or “place” and, most significantly, similarities of thematic role in the development of the feminine principle: just as each of the Homeric types engages the feminine principle of Athena’s Wisdom, so too do Tolkien’s re-presentations of those types engage the feminine principle of Mary’s Pity. In both works the “goddess” embodies the principle while the “queen” and the “monster” are locked in an antagonistic relationship as the former attempts to awaken or quicken the principle in the hero while the latter attempts to overcome both. In both traditions, the “wife” awaits the hero at the end of his journey and greets him with an active display of the principle, thus completing his return. Finally, both the *Odyssey* and *The Lord of the Rings* have a type of woman, the “maiden”, who herself, like the male hero, comes to a better understanding of the feminine principle – an understanding that allows her to mature into one of the more powerful and important types.

The point of intersection for all the types is, as one would expect, the hero. When we come, therefore, at the end of this thesis to study Tolkien’s three “chief” heroes within the context of their relationships with the Homeric women of Middle-earth, we will find that Aragorn, Sam and Frodo are far more Odyssean than has been previously believed. When taken as a whole, the narrative progress and thematic development of Pity in Tolkien’s three heroes is the same as Odysseus’ progress toward Wisdom, since not only do Aragorn, Sam and

Frodo meet the same types as Odysseus, they also interact with them in the same order, in the same way and with the same results.

All this is not to say that Tolkien's Middle-earth is awash in active, detailed or complex women anymore than is the *Odyssey* (or, for that matter, *Beowulf*). Tolkien was no feminist, but we must not allow that to blind us to the fact that his women characters remain absolutely essential to the very structure of his greatest work (albeit it in a wholly traditional and conservative way). Were one to remove the women from *The Lord of the Rings* the resulting gap would be as horrendous a rift – both narrative and thematic – as the gap would be were one to remove Athena, Calypso, Arete and Penelope from the *Odyssey*.

Lady

Frodo (and the Cause) were saved – by Mercy: by the supreme value and efficacy of Pity and forgiveness of injury.

(Letters, 252)

“You think, as is your wont, my lord, of Gondor only,” said Gandalf. “Yet there are other men and other lives, and time still to be. And for me, I pity even his slaves.”

Gandalf to Denethor (LotR, 845)

“Very well,” he answered aloud, lowering his sword. “But still I am afraid. And yet, as you see, I will not touch the creature. For now that I see him, I do pity him.”

Frodo, upon meeting Gollum (LotR, 640)

Since *The Lord of the Rings* first appeared forty years ago, the search for its sources has been marked (and, I believe, marred) by a strong vein of archetypalist criticism. Such an approach does Tolkien’s work a great disservice by disregarding the similarities of form and function between Homer’s and Tolkien’s women and dismissing them out-of-hand as universally apprehended archetypes, be they psychological, literary or cultural. Grounded upon a series of firmly held (and wholly un- or undis-provable) assumptions, the archetypalist argument is indeed difficult to refute when one deals with individual characters. The similarities between Middle-earth and the Homeric Mediterranean, however, extend far beyond the compelling concordance that exists between characters such as Helen and Arwen. Not only are the individual women very much alike in each tradition, but they are also deployed within their narratives toward the same thematic ends.

The narrative shapes and the thematic energy of the *Odyssey* and of *The Lord of the Rings* are provided by the figure of the Lady. Odysseus' Return and Frodo's Choice on Mount Doom are more than just narrative events – both are moments of tremendous thematic importance and both are the fulfilment of actions and themes begun and developed by women. Without those women, even those who seek to hinder the hero, Odysseus' Return and Frodo's Choice could never have been accomplished.

There are, of course, two substantial differences between the *Odyssey* and *The Lord of the Rings*. First, while the *Odyssey* concerns itself with the adventures of one hero, *The Lord of the Rings* has three. Despite this, the two works are not as wholly different as they may at first appear, for the three “chief” heroes of Tolkien's work – Aragorn, Sam and Frodo – when taken together, quite explicitly recall Odysseus. The second difference between the two works is, obviously, the heroic virtue that is itself the “theme”. While the number of heroes and the nature of their heroic virtue may differ, the method of developing that virtue in the hero is, in both, exactly the same; but before we can begin to examine that method and the women characters who are the principal components of it, we must first look briefly at the two different heroic virtues that are at the centre of each work – Wisdom and Pity.

* * *

The central “theme” of the *Odyssey* has been contested for literally thousands of years, and while I will attempt to give a general outline of the topic, I do not propose to enter that debate here. Despite the debate, there are certain truths about the *Odyssey* that the majority of critics, including Tolkien's own contemporaries, generally agree upon. It has always been accepted that the *Odyssey* is the story of Odysseus' growing recognition, under the tutelage of Athena, of the full potential of his *metis*. What has not been so generally

accepted is exactly how to translate the Greek word and concept into modern terms. For a long time now the trend has been to refer to Odysseus' *metis* as "wisdom", but when the *Odyssey* is translated or discussed by its critics, "wisdom" is very often put aside in favour of "cunning", "contrivance", "intelligence" or "quick-wits". There are also, apparently, certain primordial assumptions in the Homeric epics concerning what is *metis* that we no longer associate with wisdom, such as: obeying the gods; desiring personal excellence and the acclaim that goes with it (*aretê*); and recognising the paramount importance of wife and home to the formation of identity. In the *Odyssey*, therefore, Odysseus is "wise" insofar as he is an intelligent contriver who can get himself out of difficult situations with his wits, *and* insofar as he obeys the gods (principally Athena), seeks *aretê*, and desires to return to Penelope.

Most important for this study is the fact that the majority of modern critics agree that Odysseus' wisdom is, at the very least in part, a distinctly feminine concept – for whatever the exact nature of Odysseus' wisdom, the concept is developed entirely by Odysseus' Athena-inspired movement away from the (masculine) world of battle that dominates the *Iliad*, through several encounters *with women*, and toward the (feminine) world of home and hearth embodied by Penelope. When the narrative is broken down into its most general outline, it is easy to see how Odysseus' wisdom is predicated upon the feminine influence: Odysseus begins the narrative on the island of Calypso where he has unwisely given up his intelligent strategems to reach home; Athena (goddess of wisdom and previously Odysseus' protector), impressed by his wise desire to return to Ithaca, helps him leave Ogygia. Odysseus then comes to the land of the wise Arete where he uses his wisdom to gain her trust and help by telling the story of his wise struggles to return. Odysseus is returned by Arete to Ithaca,

where he and Athena join forces to destroy the suitors so Odysseus can do the wise thing and once again join the wise Penelope in their bed.*

The journey of the “corporate” hero in *The Lord of the Rings* is, like his Homeric progenitor’s, a slow growth into an awareness of the full potential of his world’s feminine principle. Furthermore, Aragorn, Sam and Frodo, like Odysseus, achieve this awareness through their encounters with women. Instead of *metis*, though, Tolkien’s heroes gain from the Homeric women of Middle-earth an understanding of the Catholic formulation of Christian Pity. If the Lady of the *Odyssey* is Athena or Penelope, then the Lady of *The Lord of the Rings* must be the Virgin Mary.

There can be no doubt that Tolkien’s deeply felt Catholicism informs every aspect of his work: “*The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision” (Letters, 172). That some critics have gone astray and found in *The Lord of the Rings* a pagan or pre-Christian view of the world is due entirely to Tolkien’s own belief that “Myth and fairy-story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error), but not explicitly, not in the known form of the primary ‘real’ world” (Letters, 144).¹ The theory of artistic sub-creation outlined by Tolkien in his essay “On Fairy-Stories” also owes much to his Catholic perspective.² According to his theory, a piece of human art is a “sub-created” thing – a Secondary world that has been constructed from various

* Please see Appendix, “On the Theme of the Odyssey”.

¹ In her article, “Power and Meaning in The Lord of the Rings” (see bibliography), Patricia Meyer Spacks says that “The Lord of the Rings is by no means a Christian work” (p. 82) and T.A. Shippey, in his book, The Road to Middle-earth (see bibliography), characterizes Frodo as the “image of natural man in native decency” (p. 158) and The Lord of the Rings as “a story of virtuous pagans in the deepest of dark pasts, before all but the faintest premonition of dawn and revelation” (p. 150).

² A point made by David L. Jeffrey in his article, “Name and Recovery in The Lord of the Rings” (see bibliography).

elements of the Primary. As impressive as this power of sub-creation may be, human imagination is limited to producing copies or “versions” of the world that was made by the Creator in an act of Primary Creation (Tree and Leaf, 44-52). For Tolkien, then, the true “joy” of a fairy-story is a fundamentally Christian experience: the joy of a good story “can thus be explained as a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth . . . It looks forward (or backward: the direction in this regard is unimportant) to the Great Eucatastrophe [the Birth, Resurrection and Second Coming of Christ]” (Tree and Leaf, 64-66). Tolkien saw nothing wrong with a good story being enjoyed only as a good story – but if it is truly “good” (a word that Tolkien undoubtedly chose for its moral as well as its æsthetic connotations), then it has the potential to be enjoyed at the intellectual (and even the spiritual) level as well.³

The Lord of the Rings is, therefore, a profoundly Christian work written from a profoundly Christian perspective; even the large-scale pattern of Middle-earth’s history as laid out in *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* has been called “an exact working model of the operations of Christian Providence”.⁴ That the events of *The Lord of the Rings* are governed by a strictly Christian “timetable” cannot be denied: the Fellowship departs from Rivendell on December 25 and Sauron is defeated on March 25, traditionally the date of the Crucifixion, the Annunciation and (in the Anglo-Saxon church) the last day of Creation.⁵ Tolkien was, “convinced that . . . in every world on every plane all must ultimately be under the Will of God”, and that, “the One retains all

³ Dominic Manganiello’s “The Neverending Story: Textual Happiness in The Lord of the Rings” (see bibliography), examines many of the issues and implications of Tolkien’s theories and provides a more full exploration of them than is possible here.

⁴ Urang, Gunnar. “J.R.R. Tolkien: Fantasy and the Phenomenology of Hope” (see bibliography), p. 121.

⁵ T.A. Shippey. The Road to Middle-earth. (see bibliography), p. 148, and Dominic Manganiello’s “The Neverending Story: Textual Happiness in The Lord of the Rings” (see bibliography), p. 13n3 .

authority, and (or so it seems as viewed in serial time) reserves the right to intrude the finger of God into the story” (Letters, 191, 235).

In accordance with Tolkien’s Catholic theology, God’s finger does not “intrude” haphazardly – the hero can only obtain that “grace” through Pity. Tolkien conceives of Pity as much more than compassion⁶ or any other such philanthropic feeling; it is a complicated concept that involves a dual motion of “grace”. Between mortals, “Pity must restrain one from doing something immediately desirable and *seemingly* advantageous” (Letters, 191; emphasis mine). By emphasising the limitations of mortal vision, Tolkien’s formulation of Pity embodies both Christian humility as well as forgiveness of injury: one has Pity for another only when she realises that no human can know all ends and on that basis resists following her own desires in favour of continued belief and hope in the providential Plan. Only by doing this can Pity’s other operation, that of Divine to mortal, be obtained. If one manifests Pity for another, if he is able to exercise the chief Christian virtue of “forgiveness despite personal injury” and humility, then he himself will receive the Pity, or the “grace”, of God. Human Pity is self-denial and a renewal of hope in the providential Plan; the result of human Pity is God’s Pity, an “intrusion” of God’s finger into the story – what appears on the mortal plane as a “miracle”.

Such grace was for Tolkien an ultimately feminine principle insofar as the embodiment of Christian Pity is the Virgin Mary. In his book of reminiscences about Tolkien, Clyde S. Kilby writes that, “Tolkien did indeed have a special reverence for the Virgin Mary” and that his Christianity was always very much a part of everything he wrote.⁷ Tolkien’s own letters demonstrate this reverence:

⁶ Actually, Tolkien would undoubtedly have said that compassion – in its full, etymologically “recovered” sense, “to suffer with” – is the very essence of Pity. He probably would not, however, use the word as I am here: in its modern manifestation as middle-class sympathy and soup-kitchen charity.

⁷ Clyde S. Kilby, Tolkien and the Silmarillion. (see bibliography), p. 53 .

“Our Lady, [is the basis] upon which all my own small perception of beauty both in majesty and simplicity is founded”; “The Assumption of Mary, the only *unfallen* person, may be regarded as in some ways a simple regaining of unfallen grace and liberty” (*Letters*, 172, 286n). Perhaps most tellingly, in a letter to W.H. Auden Tolkien quotes from the song of the Virgin Mary, the *Magnificat*⁸: “we are all equal before the Great Author, *qui deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles* [who has put down the mighty from their seat and has exalted the humble]” (*Letters*, 215). The *Magnificat* is a celebration of God’s power and expresses Mary’s humility and her faith in the providential Plan – a humility and a faith that have obtained the greatest “grace” of God in the form of Christ.⁹

In addition to the letters we are fortunate to have Tolkien’s posthumously published introduction to his translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. This brief yet highly illuminating work fully demonstrates Tolkien’s orthodox Catholic adherence to the constellation of beliefs and devotions that surround Mary. Tolkien states that, “the grace and beauty of [Medieval courtly “courtesy”] . . . derive from the Divine generosity and grace, Heavenly Courtesy, of which Mary is the Supreme Creation: the Queen of Courtesy” (*Gawain*, 3).¹⁰ Gawain is a Christian Knight who “places hatred of sin in the last resort above all other motives, and escapes from a temptation . . . through grace obtained by prayer [to Mary]” (*Gawain*, 5). Finally, Tolkien explicitly links the Divine Lady with her mortal counterparts and makes them her earthly representatives: “We are

⁸ Luke 1:46-55.

⁹ Considering Tolkien’s intimate knowledge of Old English, it is interesting to note in passing that Ælfric translated the *Magnificat* into OE and had it sung at Vespers (Phillip Rogers, “Magnificat.” *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*. David L. Jeffrey, ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992).

¹⁰ It is interesting that Tolkien does not attempt to clarify exactly what he means by “Courtesy”. We can assume that he meant by it what the Gawain-poet did, and if this is the case, given the poem’s time of composition and the context of the word, “courtesy” means nobleness and generosity of spirit and, especially when applied to Mary, a Divine benevolence and goodness (OED).

shown [Gawain's] delight in the company of women, his sensitiveness to their beauty, his pleasure in the 'polished play of converse' with them, and at the same time his fervent piety, his devotion to the Blessed Virgin" (*Gawain*, 4). The Pity that Gawain receives is, according to Tolkien, the direct result of his devotion to Mary and his consequent renunciation of personal desire and renewed faith in Providence.

The Homeric Heroic Age and Tolkien's Middle-earth both operate upon a feminine principle, and while the principles may differ, the feminine remains constant. During their quests the heroes of both worlds encounter many different women who fall into distinct types defined by similarities of physical appearance, function and narrative value, but most importantly, by similar kinds of relationships with the hero and with each other. Before we can reach any conclusions about the similarities of *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Odyssey* at the level of narrative structure, we must, therefore, first acknowledge the similarities that exist between the characters that define that structure – the five types of women whom one finds in both Homer and Tolkien: "goddess", "queen", "monster", "wife" and "maiden".

“goddess”

There are in Tolkien's letters just two references to the source of the wizard Gandalf. In 1946 Tolkien found the illustrations in a German edition of *The Hobbit* to be too “Disnified”, and cited as particularly offensive the artist's depiction of Gandalf, “as a figure of vulgar fun rather than the Odinic wanderer that I think of” (Letters, 119). In a later letter, Tolkien admitted that “*Gandalfr* is a dwarf-name in *Völupsā*” (Letters, 383). Despite his Odinic wanderings and Nordic name, Gandalf the Grey's closest literary counterpart, in a surprising number of ways, is none other than Athena – Homer's grey-eyed goddess of wisdom. Not only does Gandalf resemble Athena in physical appearance (putting aside for a moment the *apparent* gender difference), mental capabilities and in the effect that he has on the hero,¹ but they are both also “ministers of Fate” who guide and inspire their chosen heroes, they have surprisingly similar principal opponents, and they both embody the heroic quality that their hero needs to develop if he is to succeed in his quest.

Gandalf is said to “look like” or “appear” as a tired, old man. The Istari (“wizards”) “appear”: “In the *likeness* of Men . . . old but vigorous, and they changed little with the years, and aged but slowly” (Silmarillion, 361; emphasis mine). Of all five Istari, Gandalf “*seemed* the least, less tall than the others, and in looks more aged, grey-haired and grey-clad, and leaning on a staff” (Unfinished Tales, 389; emphasis mine). When Gandalf makes his very first

¹ Kenneth J. Reckford's “There and Back Again: Odysseus and Bilbo Baggins” (see bibliography), emphasises Gandalf's goal to bring out Bilbo's “Tookish” side as a mirror of the “double motivation” that defines Athena's mode of interaction with human beings in the *Odyssey*; Athena is “a messenger and stimulus from outside” the hero whose urgings to action “correspond also to something in himself” (8). While this observation is (more or less) correct, the similarities between Gandalf and Athena go much further than Reckford apparently realises.

appearance in the tales of Middle-earth, “All that the unsuspecting Bilbo saw that morning was an old man with a staff” (Hobbit, 15). Athena, too, often appears to her chosen heroes in the guise of an old man. As the Achaeans fight over the fallen Patroclus, Athena appears beside Menelaos and “Her form / seemed that of Phoinox” causing Menelaos to call out: “Phoinox, yes – old-timer, full of years” (xvii.621-629)*. In the *Odyssey*, Athena consistently appears in the form of an old man, posing as both Mentos and Mentor (ie. 1.128-130, 24.571). Athena and Gandalf have the same basic accoutrements: Athena prepares for battle by climbing into her chariot, putting on her armour and picking up her spear (viii.428-436); Gandalf enters the battle of the Pellenor fields mounted upon Shadowfax (a horse of near divine parentage; cf. LotR, 526), clad in his white robes and bearing his wizard’s staff. The supremacy of the gods over humans so prevalent in the Homeric epics is also echoed in Gandalf’s relationships with mortals: “I am not going to give an account of all my doings to you [Frodo]” (LotR, 69); “I [Aragorn] call upon him last, for it is the place of honour” (LotR, 267). Finally, both Athena and Gandalf are referred to as the “third” of their order (Athena as “the third born of heaven”, viii.42; and Gandalf in the Unfinished Tales, 393).

Despite outward appearances, there are moments of epiphany when the true majesty of the “goddess” shines through:

Gandalf’s eyes flashed. ‘It will be my turn to get angry soon,’ he said. ‘If you say that again, I shall. Then you will see Gandalf the Grey uncloaked.’ He took a step towards the hobbit, and he seemed to grow tall and menacing; his shadow filled the little room . . . He turned away, and the shadow passed. He seemed to dwindle again to an old grey man, bent and troubled.

(LotR, 46-47)

* References to the Homeric epics are made by book and line number; books from the Iliad are indicated by roman numerals and those from the Odyssey with Arabic.

Later, “by a sense other than sight Pippin perceived that Gandalf had the greater power and the deeper wisdom, and a majesty that was veiled” (LotR, 787). Occasionally in Homer’s epics, mortals are able to pierce the disguise and see the goddess beneath the form; at least one of these instances is interesting in that Achilles recognises Athena when “her grey eyes blazed at him” (i.235) – it is “the gleam of eyes keen and bright from within the shadow of hooded brows” (LotR, 514) that hints to Aragorn that he is talking to his supposedly dead friend (and mentor), Gandalf.

Athena’s descent to the battle before Troy is an epiphany that bears a striking similarity to an equivalent moment in Gandalf’s career, his entry into the battle before Minas Tirith :

Given orders
to do her own will, grey-eyed Athêna left
Olympos, dropping downward from the crests –
as though the son of crooked-minded Krónos
had flung a shooting star, . . .

.....
Down she flashed, to alight amid the troops,
And wonder held them all at gaze

(iv.84-91)

At that moment [Pippin] caught a flash of white and silver
coming from the North, like a small star down on the dusky fields.
It moved with the speed of an arrow and grew as it came,
converging swiftly with the flight of the four men towards the Gate.

.....
“Gandalf!” he cried. “Gandalf! He always turns up when things
are darkest. Go on, White Rider! Gandalf, Gandalf!”

(LotR, 841)

While both Athena and Gandalf are capable of tremendous martial efforts and their epiphanies here are meant to encourage their army and strike fear into the opposition, their primary operations are mental and “spiritual” rather than physical.

Athena's principal mode of action is not physical prowess and "mighty deeds", but her powers of mind and crafty stratagems.² Subtle skill and crafty intrigue is what Gandalf utilises (and teaches to Bilbo) in *The Hobbit*. After Gandalf has played his trick on Beorn and managed to get food and shelter for fifteen people instead of the "one or two" that he had promised, Bilbo can not help but notice "how clever Gandalf has been" (*Hobbit*, 124). The ploy of the wooden horse that was "inspired by Athena" (8.510) and put into action by Odysseus, is paradigmatic of cunning's ability (*metis*) to overcome brute force of arms (*bie*).

Like Athena, Gandalf's real power lies in his mental abilities: "great wisdom they [the wizards] had, and many powers of mind and hand" (*Silmarillion*, 361). The word "Istari" is itself related to an Elvish word, "istar", meaning "wise" or "ways of knowing" and the wizards, like the Greek gods³, possess "eminent knowledge of the history and nature of the World" (*Unfinished Tales*, 388). Gandalf's name in the "True West" (where the Valar dwell) is Olórin, a word that is "often translated 'dream'" but includes in it "the vivid contents of [the Valar's] *memory*, as of their *imagination*: it referred to *clear vision*, in the mind, of things not physically present" (*Unfinished Tales*, 396) an ability that closely resembles the divine *eidenai* ("true-sight" or "divine knowledge") of Athena and the other Olympians.⁴

² In his 1898 work, *The Women of Homer* (see bibliography), Walter Copland Perry explains that Athena, "sprang full grown and full armed from the head of Zeus. She is, therefore, the goddess of reflection, prudence and wise counsel, of intellect and the highest culture" (Perry, 105); Perry goes on to say: "much as she delights in heroes and mighty deeds of war, her chiefest favour is bestowed on men of subtle skill, and even of crafty intrigue" (Perry, 108).

³ Jenny Strauss Clay's *The Wrath of Athena* (see bibliography), contains an excellent study of the powers of the Homeric gods. Pp. 158-159.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

The examples of Gandalf's understanding of "lore" are so numerous that citation is unnecessary; there is one quote, however, of special interest: "This Mithrandir," says Faramir, "was, I now guess, more than a lore-master: a great mover of the deeds that are done in our time. Had he been among us to consult concerning the hard words of our dream, he could have made them clear to us without need of messenger" (LotR, 697). Gandalf's identity as "a great mover of deeds" is the most important similarity he bears to Athena, since their possession of great mental abilities is merely prerequisite to their role as "movers of deeds". Athena and Gandalf are the "doers" in their respective worlds, for it is up to them to accomplish what needs to be done; and although they have the power to compel action, they both rely upon their ability to inspire and influence the actions of mortals. They do not compel, lead and order their chosen heroes; they instead arbitrate between, guide and inspire them.

Both Gandalf and Athena prevent dissension amongst their chosen heroes. At the Battle of Five Armies it is up to Gandalf to prevent the battle between the Dwarves and the coalition of Men and Elves so they can meet the common threat of the Orcs (Hobbit, 263),⁵ and when Háma and Gimli look to come to blows, Gandalf tells them: "We are all friends here. Or should be; for the laughter of Mordor will be our only reward, if we quarrel" (LotR, 533). Similarly, Athena comes to Achilles in order to "check his killing rage" against Agamemnon and prevent a blood-feud from beginning in the Achaean camp (i.230-260), and she convinces the families of the slain suitors and Odysseus to, "Break off this bitter skirmish; / end your bloodshed, Ithakans, and make peace" (24.551-552).

⁵ Gandalf's function in this scene may also owe something to the descriptions found in classical Latin accounts of the ancient Celtic druids (Early Irish Myths and Sagas [see bibliography], p. 10).

Gandalf also guides his followers: “it took a wizard to keep his head in the tunnels and guide them in the right direction” (*Hobbit*, 98) and “even in the gloom and despite all windings of the road he knew whither he wished to go, and he did not falter, as long as there was a path that led toward his goal” (*LotR*, 328). Athena does the same for her heroes. After appearing to Telemachus, the young man “all night long, wrapped in the finest fleece, / he took in thought the course Athena gave him” (1.494). It is important to note that neither Frodo nor Telemachus are compelled to follow the guidance of the “goddess”—the choice and the consequences of that choice are always left to them. It is for this reason that the Istari always appear as old men. They “were forbidden to reveal themselves in forms of majesty, or to seek to rule the wills of Men or Elves by open display of power, but coming in shapes weak and humble were bidden to advise and persuade Men and Elves to good” (*Unfinished Tales*, 389).

More important than the role of peacemaker or guide, however, is the role of “kindler”. Although Gandalf and Athena keep (or bring) heroes together and guide them to their goal, their most important function is to inspire their followers by enhancing or awakening abilities that their heroes already possess but may not know about. In the *Iliad*, Athena’s inspiration is largely martial: “So down the ranks the dazzling goddess went / to stir the attack, and each man in his heart / grew strong to fight and never to quit the mêlée” (ii.526-528) and, “The terrible god [Apollo] cried out thus from his tower, / and on the Akhaian side [Athena],/ glorious daughter of Zeus, went through the ranks / to lift the hearts of those she saw dismayed” (iv.622-625). In the battle for Minas Tirith:

Gandalf took command of the last defence of the City . . .
Wherever he came men’s hearts would lift again, and the winged shadows pass from memory. Tirelessly he strode from Citadel to Gate, from north to south about the wall . . . And then one would sing amid the gloom some staves of the Lay of Nimrodel, or other songs of the Vale of Anduin out of vanished years.

And yet – when [Gandalf] had gone, the shadows closed on men again.

(LotR, 855-856)

The role of “Kindler”, however, goes far beyond merely encouraging tired soldiers. Tolkien wrote that the mission of the wizards is to “train, advise, instruct, arouse the hearts and minds of those threatened by Sauron to a resistance with their own strengths; and not just to do the job for them” (Letters, 202). When Gandalf arrived in Middle-earth, the powerful Elf-lord Círdan gave him one of the three Elven rings, Narya, saying, “it will support you in the weariness that you have taken upon yourself. For this is the Ring of Fire, and with it you may rekindle hearts in a world that grows chill” (LotR, 1122; cf. Unfinished Tales, 389).

Gandalf’s entire career in Middle-earth consists of a succession of inspirations as he “rekindles the hearts” of his heroes; from awakening Bilbo’s and then Frodo’s “Tookish” sense of adventure (Hobbit, 25; LotR, 76) to recalling Théoden to himself (LotR, 536-538). From the very beginning of his “life” in Middle-earth, Gandalf is a Kindler: “though he loved the Elves, he walked among them unseen, or in form as one of them, and they did not know whence came the fair visions or the *promptings of wisdom* that he put into their hearts” (Unfinished Tales, 397; emphasis mine). Athena, too, kindles the valour of her heroes in order to accomplish her mission: “Now Diomédês’ hour for great action came. / Athêna made him bold, and gave him ease / to tower amid Argives, to win glory, / and on his shield and helm she kindled fire” (v.1-4). Like Gandalf, Athena kindles not a new fire, but rather re-kindles an old one or one that has not yet burned as brightly as it could. Twice in the *Odyssey*, her embellishments of Odysseus are compared to gilding silver, already a precious metal, with gold – she is not a blacksmith hammering out something new, but an artisan improving upon something already intrinsically valuable and precious (6.242-245 and

23.157-167).. Like Gandalf, who recognises the inherent courage – and pity – of hobbits as a desirable property to be cultivated in them (*Unfinished Tales*, 331), Athena does not *make* her heroes great, she merely emphasises the characteristics that make them “heroic”.

Athena and Gandalf are both “movers of deeds” through the agency of those mortals whom they inspire and embellish; their narrative roles are also, therefore, strikingly similar. Gandalf in the first chapter of *The Hobbit* and Athena in the first four books of the *Odyssey* (to take but one example) not only look and act the same way, but accomplish precisely the same things.

After a long absence from the Shire, Gandalf one day mysteriously reappears looking for Bilbo, the descendant of his friends “old Grandfather Took” and Bilbo’s mother Belladonna (*Hobbit*, 15, 17). Bilbo, who at first sees an old man and not the mighty wizard, offers Gandalf hospitality (“please come to tea”), an invitation that Gandalf accepts. After his arrival, two things happen to Bilbo: first, “something Tookish woke up inside him, and he wished to go and see the great mountains, and hear the pine-trees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves, and wear a sword instead of a walking stick” (*Hobbit*, 25); and second, Gandalf provides him with the means of realising his new wish: a company of treasure-seeking Dwarves.

Compare this to Athena’s actions in books 1-4 of the *Odyssey*. She appears after a long absence from Ithaca in the form of an old man, Mentos, so that she can visit the son of her old friend Odysseus (1.128-146). Once there she does two things: first, “she put a new spirit in [Telemachus], / a new dream of his father, / . . . / Then godlike in his turn he joined the suitors” (1.359-363). Second, she provides him with a ship and companions so he can go in search of news (2.307-309).

This is but one example among many of both the centrality and similarity of Athena's and Gandalf's actions in their respective narratives. Both are "ministers of fate" who guide and inspire their heroes along their path – the best expression of this aspect of Gandalf's nature being, probably, his final words of *The Hobbit*: "You don't really suppose, do you, that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit? You are a very fine person, Mr Baggins, and I am very fond of you; but you are only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all!" (285). There is, however, an essential difference. Gandalf is an emissary of the Valar's will and not, like Athena, an actual "god": "[Gandalf] was an *incarnate* 'angel' – strictly an [angelos]⁶: that is, with the other *Istari*, wizards, 'those who know', an emissary from the Lords of the West, sent to Middle-earth, as the great crisis of Sauron loomed on the horizon" (*Letters*, 202) – his is the power of administration, not decision-making.

Although he knows the mechanisms and eventual end of the providential Plan, Gandalf, as many of his own comments demonstrate, is as ignorant of the details of that Plan as are the mortal denizens of Middle-earth: "For even the very wise cannot see all ends" (*LotR*, 73); and "Behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker. In which case you [Frodo] also were *meant* to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought" (*LotR*, 69). Athena on the other hand, is an active participant in deciding Odysseus' fate or *moira*. The *Odyssey* begins with Athena "reminding" Zeus of Odysseus and asking the "King of Gods and Men" to allow the hero's homecoming. As soon as Zeus concedes that the time has come for Odysseus' return, Athena begins ordering things and planning his journey (1.103-119).

⁶ In the original, Tolkien uses the Greek text.

Both Athena and Gandalf are, in the final analysis, ministers of a greater will. In Middle-earth, however, no-one but the One can know what that greater will intends – the only thing that Gandalf can “know” is that the Plan of which he is a (very large) part is the Providence of the One and that there is, therefore, cause for hope even in the face of such adversity. In the Homeric epics, Athena is not only aware of Zeus’ plan for Odysseus, but she also has an apparently “free-hand” in organising the exact details of Odysseus’ *moira* (fate). Although both “goddesses” are subject to a greater will, Gandalf must work in hope without Athena’s certain knowledge.

Although their apprehension of the ultimate Plan may differ, Gandalf and Athena both champion that Plan by promoting the communal interest. Athena brings about Odysseus’ return in order to re-establish his wise rule. Gandalf helps bring about the “return of the king” in order to (re-)establish Aragorn’s merciful rule. Athena’s primary interest is not the individual hero but a larger society – it is probably no coincidence that her aid and instruction are given to Odysseus only when the situation in Ithaca demands the return of the king.⁷ Gandalf, too, is the protector of cities.⁸ In *The Hobbit* his aid is essential to the re-establishment of two cities, the Dwarves’ city under the mountain, and the city of Men, Dale. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf again saves two cities from destruction, Edoras and Minas Tirith, even though places such as the nearby Lórien are also under attack. From the very beginning, the concept of community is very dear to Gandalf: “It would be a grievous blow to the world, if the Dark Power overcame the Shire; if all your kind, jolly, stupid Bolgers, Hornblowers, Boffins, Bracegirdles, and the rest, not to mention the ridiculous Bagginses, became enslaved” (*LotR*, 62).

⁷ Clay. *Op. Cit.*, p. 234.

⁸ Copland, (see above), calls Athena the “protectress of cities” p. 106.

In their defence of communities, Athena and Gandalf both face formidable opponents – opponents that in their opposition to the “goddess” themselves resemble one another. Athena’s principal opponent in the *Iliad* is the god of war, “city-destroying” and “man-wasting” Ares (iv.530-531). In the Middle-earth narrative, Gandalf’s opponent is Sauron, whose career in Middle-earth is a long catalogue of destroyed cities such as Numenor, Osgiliath, Amon Sul and Moria.

Originally the lieutenant of Melkor, the most powerful of the Valar (the “gods”) who led a rebellion against the One at the beginning of the First Age, Sauron is by the Third Age the principal “Enemy” of the Valar. The “proper function,” of the Istari, “maintained by Gandalf, and perverted by Saruman, was to encourage and bring out the native powers of the Enemies of Sauron. Gandalf’s opposite was, strictly, Sauron” (Letters, 180). Ares, while not the “enemy” of Zeus in the way that Sauron is the Enemy of the Valar, nevertheless bears the brunt of Zeus’ dislike and displeasure:

“Do not come whining here, you two-faced brute,
most hateful to me of all the Olympians.
Combat and brawling are your element.
This beastly, incorrigible truculence
comes from your mother, Hêra, whom I keep
but barely in my power, say what I will.”

(v.1014-1019)

Like Sauron, Ares’ only joy comes from destruction and he will not be constrained by the edicts of Zeus, choosing instead to follow his mother’s influence, rebelling against Zeus’ rightful authority (much to his own dismay).

When Athena and Ares, who are depicted together on Achilles’ shield as opposing counterparts (xviii.593-596), meet in open combat, Ares is “destroyed” by Athena: “Like a black vapour from a thunderhead / riding aloft on stormwind brewed by heat, / so brazen Arês looked to Diomêdês / as he rose heavenward

amid the clouds" (v.987-990). Significantly, the "death" of Ares bears a striking resemblance to the downfall of Sauron:

. . . black against the pall of cloud, there rose a huge shape of shadow, impenetrable, lightning crowned, filling all the sky. Enormous it reared above the world, and stretched out towards them a vast threatening hand, terrible but impotent: for even as it leaned over them, a great wind took it, and it was all blown away, and passed; and then a hush fell.

(LotR, 985)

Just as Athena, the patron of civilisation and human works, "is the one / to match with [Ares]: she has a wondrous way / of bringing him to grief" (v.873-876), so too is Gandalf, the wizard and bearer of the Ring of Fire, counterpart and opposite of Sauron: "for he was the Enemy of Sauron, opposing the fire that devours and wastes with the fire that kindles, and succours in wanhope and distress" (Unfinished Tales, 391).

The obvious objection to characterising Gandalf as a "goddess" is the fact that despite being a member of the fairly androgynous Maia, he is unmistakably male. Gandalf's gender is the result of Tolkien's conservative view that while men want to explore and go out upon the Road, women want to remain in a fixed realm and order it with their domestic skills (Letters, 50): in order for Gandalf to be a "goddess" (or, for that matter, an Odinic wanderer) he had to be male, otherwise he would have long ago given up his wandering and tried to find a place to "settle down" (as does Saruman). Despite his gender, Gandalf's *essence* remains feminine: "Wisest of the Maiar [sic] was Olórin. He too dwelt in Lórien [the land of Melian, another Maia and Gandalf's female counterpart], but his ways took him often to the house of Nienna [one of the Valar, the "Lady of pity and mourning"], and of her he learned pity and patience" for, "those who hearken to her learn pity, and endurance in hope" (Silmarillion, 34, 31). Furthermore, once in Middle-earth Gandalf finds especial favour with the most

powerful Elf-woman (also the most powerful Elf) remaining in the mortal realms, Galadriel, who wanted Gandalf to head the White Council that she convened (LotR, 376). Gandalf's refusal to put himself forward as the head of the council is an excellent example of his inherent humility. For thousands of years before (and after) coming to Middle-earth Gandalf lives and associates with the female powers of Valinor, from whom he learns the Pity that is his defining attribute.

The "goddess" Gandalf is as much the physical manifestation of Pity as Athena is "wisdom" made flesh. From his first conversation with Frodo, Gandalf is the great champion of Pity:

"O Gandalf, best of friends, what am I to do? For now I am really afraid. What am I to do? What a pity that Bilbo did not stab that vile creature [Gollum], when he had a chance!"

"Pity? It was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need. And he has been well rewarded, Frodo. Be sure that he took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity."

"I am sorry," said Frodo. "But I am frightened; and I do not feel any pity for Gollum."

"You have not seen him," Gandalf broke in.

"No, and I don't want to," said Frodo. "I can't understand you. Do you mean to say that you, and the Elves, have let him live on after all those horrible deeds? Now at any rate he is as bad as an Orc, and just an enemy. He deserves death."

"Deserves it! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement. For even the very wise cannot see all ends. I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it. And he is bound up with the fate of the Ring. My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many – yours not least."

(LotR, 73)

Pity is consistently identified as Gandalf's primary characteristic. When offered the Ring he refuses it saying, "the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for

weakness and the desire of strength to do good” (LotR, 75). In addition to his pity for Gollum (cf. LotR, 67: “I think it is a sad story”), Gandalf has pity for Sauron’s slaves (LotR, 845), and even for Saruman – continuing to hope for his redemption until the very end (LotR, 606). As with Gandalf’s Pity, so too with Athena’s “wisdom”: “My own fame is for wisdom among the gods – / deceptions, too” (13.353-354).

Gandalf is the emissary of the Valar and he comes bearing their Pity (which is the Pity of the One), just as Athena comes bearing divine Wisdom. Athena’s Wisdom brings Odysseus back to his throne for the sake of his kingdom; Gandalf’s Pity is not reserved for a few but for the whole world: “it is not our part to take thought only for a season, or for a few lives of Men, or for a passing age of the world. We should seek a final end of this menace, even if we do not hope to make one” (LotR, 284; cf. also 913). Athena’s Wisdom brings forth wisdom; Gandalf’s Pity brings forth pity – Théoden’s first act after having been healed by Gandalf is to offer Wormtongue his “pity” (LotR, 542).

As the “goddess’s”, Gandalf’s “place” in Middle-earth is, like Athena’s in the Homeric Mediterranean, the Road. His only “home” is the far distant realm of the “gods” and he only returns there when his task in the mortal realm has been completed. The “goddess” is in this way unique, as all the other types of women exist in well-defined (even circumscribed) “places”. These realms are more than just homes though; they are feminised realms that define and that are in turn defined by the women who live in them – instead of following the Road themselves, the majority of these women must wait until the Road brings the hero to them.

“queen”

During the course of his wanderings, Odysseus meets and is aided by three “queens”: Circe, Calypso and Arete. While in many ways quite different, these three women all aid and advise the hero, rule and protect a secluded, magical realm of their own, and present challenges to Odysseus’ wisdom. The two “queens” of *The Lord of the Rings* – Goldberry and the Lady Galadriel – similarly advise, rule and challenge.

Once again, Tolkien’s letters provide scant evidence as to the sources of these women: “Goldberry represents the actual seasonal changes,” he explained to a prospective filmmaker, “in real river-lands in autumn” – she is not, he emphatically states, a denizen of “fairy-land” (Letters, 272); Galadriel, the most memorable of Tolkien’s women characters after Éowyn, has long been recognised by critics and readers alike as Tolkien’s version of the Virgin Mary.¹ Tolkien admitted that there was some element of the Virgin in Galadriel, but denied that she was merely his re-presentation of her:

I think it is true that I owe much of this character to Christian and Catholic teaching and imagination about Mary, but actually Galadriel was a penitent: in her youth a leader of the rebellion against the Valar (the angelic guardians). At the end of the First Age she proudly refused forgiveness or permission to return. She was pardoned because of her resistance to the final and overwhelming temptation to take the Ring for herself.

(Letters, 407)

¹ Brenda Partridge’s “No Sex Please – We’re Hobbits’: The Construction of Female Sexuality in *The Lord of the Rings*” and L. Eugene Startzman’s “Goldberry and Galadriel: The Quality of Joy” (see Works Cited) are typical of the (exceedingly scant) scholarship done on the sources of Galadriel and Goldberry. Both point to the similarities between Goldberry and the archetypal Fertility Goddess while Partridge characterises Galadriel as a blend of “Venus-Aphrodite and the Virgin Mary”.

There is obviously much more to Galadriel's character than a devout Catholic's re-presentation of the Virgin, including the Anglo-Saxon motif of the queen as the cup-bearer: "Now Galadriel rose from the grass, and taking a cup from one of her maidens she filled it with white mead and gave it to Celeborn. . . Then she brought the cup to each of the Company, and bade them drink and farewell" (LotR, 394). This same scene appears dozens of times throughout the literature of the ancient North and it is one of the more recognisably "borrowed" elements of Middle-earth. In her role as "cup-bearer" Galadriel is a Northern woman. But she is not entirely or even principally Northern since she does not fulfil the principal role of the Northern (especially the Anglo-Saxon) queen: Galadriel, like all Tolkien's "queens", is not a "peace-weaver".

Northern women became queens by marrying the king of another tribe with which their own tribe wished to form an alliance. The rite of passing the cup was symbolic of her status as the "peace pledge", both within the hall (between the individual members of the king's company) and between her new lord's hall and her family's. The queen's chief purpose was to have children, thus uniting the bloodlines, and to be a congenial hostess for her lord's guests. Occasionally, the northern queen would give gifts, but they would be largely "private" tokens of mutual esteem or reward – it was the lord who had the power to bind, and be bound to, another warrior through "ring-giving". The queen and the king's treasure were, in fact, counterparts. The queen bound groups together with blood-ties while treasure bound a vassal to his lord – the queen did not and could not give "binding treasure" since she herself was such a commodity.² Every queen was as much a "hall-companion" to the king and subject to his rule as any other retainer.³

² Leyerle. "The Interlace Structure of Beowulf." (see bibliography), p. 155.

³ For much longer and more detailed discussions of the role of the northern queen, see Jane Chance Woman as Hero in Old English Literature, Elaine T. Hansen "Women in Old English

In Tolkien's Middle-earth narrative, the "queen" is *not* a peace-weaver – that function is instead performed by the company of heroes. The Fellowship of the Ring is a union of all the "Free Peoples", bound together, not by a "peace-weaver", but by "friendship" (LotR, 292-293) and not, as are all Northern companies, by an oath of loyalty: "yet no oath or bond is laid on you to go further than you will" (LotR, 298). The eventual outcome of the Fellowship is, among other things, friendship and loyalty between its members, the most memorable being that of Legolas and Gimli. Elf and Dwarf begin the quest distrusting one another (LotR, 320), but by the end of their journeys together they are true companions, with Gimli even agreeing to leave Middle-earth with Legolas "because of their great friendship, greater than any that has been between Elf and Dwarf" (LotR, 1118). Peace has been woven, not by marriage, but by shared hardship. Loyalty has been gained, not by oaths or "ring-giving", but by friendship.

The primary function of the "queen" in both Homer and Tolkien is to aid the hero in the furtherance of his quest, and this aid takes two distinct forms: gifts and advice. There are some standard Homeric gifts that all good hosts give deserving guests: a well-woven cloak, food and drink and, occasionally, if the guest is exceptionally worthy, tripods, cauldrons and other treasure. Although traditionally given by the king, Odysseus consistently receives these things from the hands of women – specifically from "queens".

Although treasure has the greater monetary value and food and drink the greater intrinsic worth, the only gift that Odysseus receives from Circe before his descent into the Underworld is a "tunic and cloak" (10.397, 585) that she wove in her magical grotto. When in Phaeacia, Odysseus receives a cloak from Arete's

Reconsidered" and Bernice W. Kliman "Women in Early English Literature: 'Beowulf' to the 'Ancrene Wisse'." (see bibliography).

daughter, Nausicaa, but is allowed to keep it after the queen recognises it as her own work (7.250). Of the three queens, it is Calypso who provides Odysseus with the most; not only does she give him tools to construct a raft (5.243-246), and a cloth for a sail (5.267-268), she also gives him provisions and, of course, a cloak that she has woven for him: “Stores I shall put aboard for you – bread, water, / and ruby-coloured wine, to stay your hunger – / give you a seacloak and a following wind” (5.175-177). Later, as Odysseus relates his tale to Arete in the hall of Alcinous, he describes the cloak as “Immortal clothing” and as “a cloak divinely woven” (7.277-278, 284).

The “queens” of Middle-earth give their heroes many of the same things that the Homeric “queens” give Odysseus. Both Goldberry (LotR, 139-140) and Galadriel feed the hobbits, with Galadriel giving the magical food of the Elves, lembas, to the members of the Fellowship (LotR, 389). The waybread is a gift that “often in their hearts they thanked the Lady of Lórien for . . . for they could eat of it and find new strength as they ran” (LotR, 447).⁴ The motif of woman as the provider of food is far from a rare occurrence in literature (and culture) and its presence in both Homer and Tolkien could, with real justification, be ignored as mere coincidence; Tolkien’s insistence, however, that it is the custom among the Elves of Middle-earth that the Queen alone controls access to the waybread – “for according to the customs of the Eldalië the keeping and giving of *lembas* belonged to the Queen alone” (Silmarillion, 243) – does echo the recurring sight in the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* (cf. vi.441) of the lady of the house calling on the mistress of the larder to provide the heroic guest with refreshment.

⁴ Considering Galadriel’s association with the Virgin, it is interesting to compare this passage, which describes Aragorn’s unwearying run across Rohan in pursuit of the captured hobbits and buoyed up by Galadriel’s lembas, with Isaiah 40:31: “but those that wait upon the lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint”.

Galadriel not only provisions the Fellowship with food and drink, she also gives them several very important, and interestingly Homeric, gifts. Foremost among these are the cloaks that she dresses them in:

“Are these magic cloaks?” asked Pippin, looking at them with wonder.

“I do not know what you mean by that,” answered the leader of the Elves. “They are fair garments and the web is good, for it was made in this land. . . . Yet they are garments, not armour, and they will not turn shaft or blade. But they should serve you well: they are light to wear and warm enough or cool enough at need. And you will find them a great aid in keeping out of the sight of unfriendly eyes, whether you walk among the stones or the trees. You are indeed high in the favour of the Lady! For she herself and her maidens wove this stuff; and never before have we clad strangers in the garb of our own people.”

(LotR, 390)

It is not too much, I think, to describe these garments as “immortal clothing” or as “cloaks divinely woven”.

In addition to the cloaks and lembas that she gives to all the Fellowship, Galadriel also provides each of the heroes with gifts chosen specifically for them: golden belts and broaches for Boromir, Pippin and Merry; a bow for Legolas; the Elf-stone and a sheath for Aragorn; and the surprisingly intimate gift of three of her hairs for Gimli. Similarly, Arete orders her maidens to carry “a laundered seacloak and a tunic”, “loaves and red wine” *and* a “crammed sea-chest” to Odysseus’ ship (13.76-79) – like Galadriel, Arete provides not only clothing and provisions, but priceless treasures. The treasures that Galadriel gives to Sam and Frodo are, however, far and away the more interesting in that they are very much like the gifts, not just of Arete, but of Circe and Calypso.

Galadriel’s most memorable and important gift is the phial that she presents to Frodo: “In this phial,’ she said, ‘is caught the light of Eärendil’s star, set amid the waters of my fountain. It will shine still brighter when night is

about you. May it be a light to you in dark places, when all other lights go out. Remember Galadriel and her Mirror!” (LotR, 397). Calypso also provides the light of an unfailing star to guide Odysseus through a dark stage of his journey:

Now the great seaman, leaning on his oar,
steered all the night unsleeping, and his eyes
picked out the Pleiadês, the laggard Ploughman,
and the Great Bear, that some have called the Wain,
pivoting in the sky before Orion;
of all the night’s pure figures, she alone
would never bathe or dip in the Ocean stream.
These stars the beautiful Kalypso bade him
hold on his left hand as he crossed the main.

(5.279-287)

Such a gift as this is one that the sea-faring Achaeans for whom the *Odyssey* was written would not have failed to appreciate. In an era of small boats and uncertain navigation, Calypso’s unerring nautical skill would indeed have seemed to be nothing less than magical.

Galadriel’s gift to Sam also resembles what Circe (indirectly) gives Odysseus; at their parting, Galadriel gives Sam a small box, telling him that:

“In this box there is earth from my orchard, and such blessing as Galadriel has still to bestow is upon it. 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.”

(LotR, 396)

The reward of the soil is renewal of the Shire after Saruman’s Revenge; thanks to Circe’s guidance in the Underworld, Odysseus also gains the secret of renewal as Tiresias tells him how to abate Poseidon’s Wrath (10.126-146).

Of all the gifts that Homer’s and Tolkien’s “queens” give, however, what the heroes most highly prize is their prophetic counsel. Both Arete and, somewhat surprisingly, Circe are perceptive women who are able to understand Odysseus’ desires and nature, thus enabling them to give effective counsel and

guidance. Although Circe needs to be subdued by Odysseus at their first meeting (which Odysseus is able to accomplish only through the intervention of Hermes; 10.295-335), when Odysseus finally approaches her to ask her leave to depart, he “took the goddess’ knees in supplication” and Circe, *without any outside influence*, replies, “Son of Laërtês and the gods of old, / Odysseus, master mariner and soldier, / you shall not stay here longer against your will” (10.518, 526-529). Circe then gives Odysseus directions to the Underworld and tells him that in order to hear Tiresias’ prophecy he must follow her counsel and “dig a well shaft” (10.545-559).

Galadriel, like Circe, uses a well as her prophetic medium, providing the hero with visions that, like Circe’s well in the Underworld, are not directly controlled or conjured by herself: “What you will see, if you leave the Mirror free to work, I cannot tell. For it shows things that were, and things that are, and things that yet may be. But which it is that he sees, even the wisest cannot always tell” (LotR, 381). Circe and Galadriel are able to provide access to prophetic visions, but neither is the immediate source of them. Once the hero has received the prophecy, it is up to the “queen” to make it somewhat more understandable and, most importantly, to present the hero with the choices that face him. After hearing of his adventures in the Underworld, Circe counsels Odysseus on how to get home, saying, however, that: “One of two courses you may take, / and you yourself must weigh them. I shall not / plan the whole action for you now, but only / tell you of both” (12.60-63). Galadriel responds to Frodo’s and Sam’s visions in precisely the same manner. “For not in doing or contriving, not in choosing between this course or another, can I avail,” she explains; “but only in knowing what was and is, and in part also what shall be”; and later: “I do not counsel you one way or the other. I am not a counsellor . . . Do as you will!” (LotR, 376, 382). Galadriel, like Circe, does not decide the hero’s course,

but presents the alternatives that the hero must choose between based upon their prophetic vision.

Goldberry is, albeit to a lesser extent, also a source of prophetic vision and counsel. During their first night in the House of Tom Bombadil, after Goldberry has led them to bed and blessed their sleep, the hobbits all have prophetic dreams that hint at their further adventures.⁵ Furthermore, both Merry and Pippin seem to hear Goldberry's voice in their dreams and both take comfort from it (LotR, 142-143). Goldberry's songs also allow the hobbits to see "in their minds pools and waters wider than any they had ever known, and looking into them they saw the sky below them and the stars like jewels in the depths" (LotR, 147). Finally, Goldberry, like Circe and Galadriel, counsels the hobbits on the course of their journey: "Speed now, fair guests!" she said. 'And hold to your purpose! North with the wind in the left eye and a blessing on your footsteps! Make haste while the sun shines!" (LotR, 151).

Goldberry's counsel is actually more like the kind of pragmatic advice provided by the Phaeacean queen, Arete, than the prophetic-interpretative counsel of Circe. Athena, disguised as a girl, tells Odysseus that:

"No lady in the world,
no other mistress of a man's household,
is honoured as our mistress is, and loved,
by her own children, by Alkinoös,
and by the people. When she walks the town
they murmur and gaze, as though she were a goddess.
No grace or wisdom fails in her; indeed
just men in quarrels come to her for equity."

(7.70-78)

In Phaeacea, it is the Lady whose good-will ensures help and favour; Nausicaa tells Odysseus to,

⁵ All except Sam that is, who "slept through the night in deep content, if logs are contented" (LotR, 142).

“Go past [Alkinoos’ throne]; cast yourself before my mother,
 embrace her knees – and you may wake up soon
 at home rejoicing, though your home be far.
 On mother’s feeling much depends; if she
 looks on you kindly, you shall see your friends
 under your own roof in your father’s country”

(6.328-333)

The reason for Arete’s high place in Phaeacia is her ability to perceive a person’s true worth and nature. When Odysseus arrives in Phaeacia he gains his warm welcome by the aid of Athena and Nausicaa and by appealing to the law of hospitality that Alcinous holds so dear. Odysseus accomplishes this by walking *past* Alcinous’ throne and appealing directly to the “queen”. The aid that he requires to return home is not granted him until so counselled by Arete – and she does not counsel the aid until she has heard a sizeable portion of Odysseus’ story (including the catalogue, and celebration, of the “good women” whom he has seen in Hades; 11.251-361):

how does he stand, now, in your eyes, this captain,
 the look and bulk of him, *the inward poise?*
He is my guest, but each one shares that honour.
 Be in no haste to send him on his way
 or scant your bounty in his need. Remember
 how rich, by heaven’s will, your possessions are.”

“Phaiakians,

The Ekhenêos, the old soldier, eldest
 of all Phaiákians, added his word:
 “Friends, *here was nothing but our own thought spoken*,
 the mark hit square. Our duties to her majesty.
 For what is to be said and done,
 we wait upon Alkinoös’ command”

(11.370-382; emphasis mine)

Like Arete, Galadriel is a perceptive queen who judges a hero’s “inward poise” before deciding whether or not to counsel her husband and her people to aid him. Galadriel has “a marvellous gift of insight into the minds of others”

(Unfinished Tales, 230) that enables her, during the Second Age, to see through the disguises of Sauron even as he fools the other Elf lords into believing that he is their ally (Unfinished Tales, 237), and during the Third Age, to “perceive the Dark Lord and know his mind” (LotR, 384). When the Fellowship reaches Lórien, they soon find themselves being tested by Galadriel before being granted shelter and aid:

And with that word she held them with her eyes, and in silence looked searchingly at each of them in turn. . . . each had felt that he was offered a choice between a shadow full of fear that lay ahead, and something that he greatly desired; clear before his mind it lay, and to get it he had only to turn aside from the road and leave the Quest and the war against Sauron to others.

(LotR, 376-377)

In Lórien, as in Phaeacea, not only does aid and shelter depend upon winning the good-will of the Lady, it is the Lady to whom the people turn for counsel, rather than the Lord; Celeborn, Galadriel’s husband, is consistently shown to be not nearly so wise or perceptive a counsellor as Galadriel:

“Here there are eight,” [Celeborn said]. “Nine were to set out: so said the messages. But maybe there has been some change of counsel that we have not heard.”

.....
“Nay, there was no change of counsel,” said the Lady Galadriel.

(LotR, 374)

“And if it were possible, [said Celeborn] one would say that at the last Gandalf fell from wisdom into folly, going needlessly into the net of Moria.”

“He would be rash indeed that said that thing,” said Galadriel gravely.

(LotR, 375)

Finally, unlike the Northern sources, Frodo and his companions follow the Homeric model of leave-taking by making their “official” farewells to the “queen” rather than to the king:

“Great Queen, farewell;
 be blest through all your days till age comes on you,
 and death, last for mortals, after age.
 Now I must go my way. Live in felicity,
 and make this palace lovely for your children,
 your countrymen, and your king, Alkînoös.”

(13.67-72)

The travellers sat still without moving or speaking. On the green bank near to the very point of the Tongue the Lady Galadriel stood alone and silent. As they passed her they turned and their eyes watched her slowly floating away from them . . .

. . . Soon the white form of the Lady was small and distant. She shone like a window of glass upon a far hill in the westering sun, or as a remote lake seen from a mountain: a crystal fallen in the lap of the land.

(LotR, 397)

Although Homer’s and Tolkien’s “queens” are all wise and perceptive counsellors who give guidance and gifts, the similarities between the two visions extend beyond the characters themselves. None of the “queens” (in fact, none of the women in either Homer or Tolkien) can be properly examined in isolation – they are all intimately connected to the realms that they rule. The relationship between “queen” and domain is complex as each is defined by and, in turn, defines the other. Given that the “queens” are all so much alike, it should not be surprising that their realms are also similar. In both Homer and Tolkien, the “queen” is caretaker and gatekeeper of a realm that is either a vision of, or a monument to the eternal realms that lie beyond the mortal world. Their lands are, therefore, potential gateways to what those other realms represent.

Ogygia, Circe’s Island, Phaeacea, Lórien and the House of Tom Bombadil are all such realms. The description of Calypso’s island of Ogygia (5.69-81) is highly reminiscent of both Homeric after-worlds: Elysium, reserved for those mortals of divine lineage, and Hades. The pleasant breezes, the luxury and lushness of the surroundings, the freedom from seasonal variation, the co-

habitation of mortal and immortal (cf. 5.203-211) – these are all aspects of the Elysian Fields. But Ogygia – the island of Calypso: “the concealer” or even “she who buries” – also has “black poplars”, which also grow in Hades (10.552), and “pungent cypress”: a traditional marker of cemeteries. Finally, the violets and “tender parsley” that fill Calypso’s grove are in Homeric literature connected with funerary rites.⁶

Circe’s island is connected to the Underworld not only as the place where Odysseus begins and ends his trip to Hades; it is also a place of deathlike trance and inaction that cuts off the living from life and the world. Not only are the primal forces of nature quelled and silenced – “and wolves and mountain lions lay there, mild / in her soft spell, fed on her drug of evil” (10.224-225) – so too is Odysseus, to all intents, ‘dead to the world’, trapped in an Elysian-like land of eternal death: “So day by day we lingered, feasting long / on roasts and wine, until a year grew fat. / . . . / my shipmates one day summoned me and said: / “Captain, shake off this trance, and think of home – / if home indeed awaits us”” (10.504-510).

Like Ogygia and the isle of Calypso, the house of Tom Bombadil is an Elysian-like realm of comfort and ease. Unlike the Homeric island-realms, Tom’s house is not a place of perfect weather, free from seasonal variation – it does, in fact, rain almost the entire time that the hobbits are there; interestingly enough though, Goldberry controls the rain with her song (LotR, 144). Tom’s house *is* like the Homeric isles insofar as it is both a place of connection with the “after-world” and of domestic activity. As Frodo approaches the Isles of the Blessed at the very end of his adventures, “it seemed to him that as in his dream in *the house* of Bombadil, the grey rain-curtain turned all to silver glass and was rolled back, and he beheld white shores and beyond them a far green country

⁶ William S. Anderson. “Calypso and Elysium.” (see bibliography).

under a swift sunrise” (LotR, 1068-1069; emphasis mine). It is important to note here that Frodo’s vision of the after-realm is connected with Bombadil’s *house* and not to Tom himself, for Goldberry is consistently depicted as the house’s “guiding principle”. Tom’s songs on the Barrow Downs make the connection between Goldberry and the home explicit – “Tom has his house to mind and Goldberry is waiting” (LotR, 160, 163). And while Goldberry performs the majority of the domestic duties (LotR, 139), the claim that she is merely a domestic servant⁷ is off-set somewhat by the occasional participation of Tom: “Then Tom and Goldberry set the table . . . in some fashion they seemed to weave a single dance, neither hindering the other, in and out of the room, and round the table” (LotR, 147). So intimate is the connection between the home and Goldberry that she is the first sight for the hobbits upon entering: “About her feet in wide vessels of green and brown earthenware, white water-lilies were floating, so that she seemed to be enthroned in the midst of a pool” (LotR, 138). This passage also highlights Tolkien’s consistent use of water as an image of Goldberry’s operations, an image-pattern that resonates with Frodo’s vision of “the grey rain-curtain turned all to silver glass” and with the wells of both Circe and Galadriel.

Phaeacea bears a strong resemblance to Olympos, the home of the gods who shower their blessings on the kingdom of Alcinous:

To left and right, outside, [Odysseus] saw an orchard
closed by a pale – four spacious acres planted
with trees in bloom or weighted down for picking:

.....
Fruit never failed upon these trees: winter
and summer time they bore, for through the year
the breathing Westwind ripened all in turn –
.....

⁷ Brenda Partridge makes the claim that Goldberry is nothing more than a domestic servant “dressed up” as the courtly ideal of the Woman on a Pedestal.

These were the gifts of heaven to Alkinoös.

(7.119-141)

This description immediately precedes Odysseus' entreaty to Arete for shelter and aid – the blessings and bounty are there but Odysseus can only look at and not enter the enclosed garden until he has been granted the goodwill of the “queen”.

Calypso's realm is also a land of natural splendour and domestic industry (5.62-80), but unlike Phaeacia, it is also a land of immortality where time stands still and change is denied: Odysseus remains moribund on Ogygia for seven years and yet in all that time nothing happens that Odysseus deems important enough to relate. Immortality is about the *only* thing that comes of staying with Calypso (5.212-222).

Like Ogygia, Galadriel's Lórien is a realm where time seems to stand still: “Frodo felt that he was in a timeless land that did not fade or change or fall into forgetfulness”; “‘The wearing [of time] is slow in Lórien,’ said Frodo. ‘The power of the Lady is on it. Rich are the hours, though short they seem, in Caras Galadhon, where Galadriel wields the Elven-ring’” (LotR, 370, 409). In homage to the land of Doriath where Galadriel lived for many years learning from the semi-divine Melian (Silmarillion, 151-153), “[Galadriel] had endeavoured to make Lórien a refuge and an island of peace and beauty, a memorial to ancient days” (Unfinished Tales, 253). When Frodo enters Lórien (“an island amid many perils” (LotR, 367)), “it seemed to him that he had stepped over a bridge of time into a corner of the Elder Days, and was now walking in a world that was no more. In Rivendell there was memory of ancient things; in Lórien the ancient things still lived on in the waking world” (LotR, 368). The preservation of this land is due entirely to the power of Galadriel, and not “the slender arrows of elven-bows” (LotR, 384): “It was at that time [the Second Age] that [Galadriel]

received Nenya, the White Ring, from Celebrimbor, and by its power the realm of [Lórien] was strengthened and made beautiful" (Unfinished Tales, 237). In this way, Galadriel's realm is also like her tutor's, for during the tumultuous events of the First Age:

. . . Melian put forth her power and fenced all that dominion round about with an unseen wall of shadow and bewilderment: the Girdle of Melian, that none thereafter should pass against her will or the will of King Thingol, unless one should come with a power greater than that of Melian the Maia. And this inner land, which was named Eglador, was after called Doriath, the guarded kingdom, Land of the Girdle. Within it there was yet a watchful peace; but without there was peril and great fear, and the servants of Morgoth roamed at will.

(Silmarillion, 114)

In the *Odyssey*, the realms of the "queens" are more than just visions of the "other worlds" – they are arenas for the development of Odysseus' wisdom. In all three realms, Odysseus' wisdom is challenged by the "queen" and his journey forward cannot continue until that challenge has been met. On the islands of Calypso and Circe, Odysseus' wise commitment to his Return is re-inforced and strengthened by his struggles. On the island of Circe his men come to him and tell him that it is time he must leave; Odysseus recalls himself to his responsibilities as their chief and makes the wise decision to continue with his journey. That Odysseus and his men are able to leave at all is due to Odysseus' wisdom during his first encounter with Circe when he followed Hermes' advice and tricked her into aiding and protecting him and his men instead of transforming them all into pigs (10.295-330). On Ogygia, Odysseus' wisdom is once again re-inforced when Hermes, at the bidding of Athena and as a direct result of Odysseus' desire to Return, comes to Calypso and tells her to let Odysseus go (1.64-77, 106-109). It is in Phaeacia however, that Odysseus' wisdom is tested to its utmost. Once Athena, through Nausicaa (whom Odysseus

has wisely flattered), has led him to Arete, Odysseus relates the story of his adventures. When he reaches the part of his story about the descent into the Underworld, Odysseus strategically dwells on the shades of the good women whom he saw. It is at this point that Arete, who now sees that he wisely values good women, makes her decision to help him.

Just as the role of the Homeric “queen” is to provide Odysseus with help in his Return only after they have been compelled or convinced to do so by Odysseus’ wisdom, the “queens” of *The Lord of the Rings* “take pity on” the heroes and provide them with aid and refreshment (both physical and spiritual) before continuing their quest. Goldberry’s Pity is limited to granting the hobbits a respite from the horrors of their journey. In the House of Tom Bombadil Goldberry bids the hobbits, “Have peace now . . . until the morning!” (LotR, 140) and they are her words that Merry and Pippin hear that night during their nightmares (LotR, 142-143).

Galadriel is clearly the more important of the two. She too “takes pity on” the heroes and their stay in her realm is restful and recuperative. Furthermore, her gifts and advice to them are of the utmost importance in the later stages of the narrative. Although Galadriel ends the narrative like Gandalf, offering Saruman her Pity and giving him “a last chance” for redemption (LotR, 1019), during the earlier chapters she passes through a period during which her Pity is, by necessity, a more “active” trait. She is not an embodiment of Pity like Gandalf but a penitent who gains Pity through an act of Pity: her renunciation of the Ring. Galadriel’s land of Lórien is an arena in which both Frodo and Galadriel herself – who in the First Age rebelled against the Valar because “she yearned to see the wide unguarded lands and to rule there a realm at her own will” (Silmarillion, 98) – are tested. When Frodo offers Galadriel the Ring, her

response is as important to any understanding of Tolkien's universe as it is unforgettable:

"Gently are you revenged for my testing of your heart at our first meeting. You begin to see with a keen eye. I do not deny that my heart has greatly desired to ask what you offer. For many long years I had pondered what I might do, should the Great Ring come into my hands, and behold! it was brought within my grasp. . .

.....
 "And now at last it comes. You will give me the Ring freely! In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!"

.....
 . . . Then she let her hand fall, and the light faded, and suddenly she laughed again, and lo! she was shrunken: a slender elf-woman, clad in simple white, whose gentle voice was soft and sad.

"I pass the test," she said. "I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel."

(LotR, 385)

By refusing to take the Ring for herself, Galadriel exercises the "first principle" of Pity: "restraint from doing something immediately desirable and seemingly advantageous". The result of her Pity is the success of the Quest – for without Galadriel's aid Frodo would never have been able to reach Mount Doom – and the Pity, or the "grace", of the Valar for herself: "She was pardoned because of her resistance to the final and overwhelming temptation to take the Ring for herself" (Letters, 407).⁸ The epithet that best describes both Calypso and

⁸ While Tolkien himself admitted that "I owe much of this character to Christian and Catholic teaching and imagination about Mary" (Letters, 407), that Galadriel is even tempted by the Ring should be proof enough that she is *not* Tolkien's "rewrite" of the Virgin Mary; still, the idea has long been fashionable in Tolkien criticism and should be addressed. Not only is Galadriel a "penitent" and not, like Mary, "the only unfallen person" (Letters, 286n), her Pity is not granted through prayer and intervention, but through actual gifts and physical objects. The only real similarity between Galadriel and the Virgin is the kind of belief that they inspire. Gimli "converts" to Galadriel and becomes her champion, while Sam invokes Galadriel's aid in Mordor and then thanks her for the water and the light even though there is no indication that she has had anything to do with either (LotR, 955, 956).

Galadriel is Faramir's own description of the White Lady of Lórien: "perilously fair". While attracted to Calypso, Odysseus must use his wisdom to overcome her desire to possess him. Similarly, it is Pity that overcomes Galadriel's perilous desire for the Ring. What sets Galadriel apart from Calypso and all other "queens", both North and South, is that the Pity that overcomes her desire is entirely her own.

Ironically, the very power of choice that raises Galadriel above Circe and Calypso is also part of the Homeric model. Odysseus' release from Calypso and Circe is a release from the death of inaction that allows him to once again "choose"⁹ his path toward Penelope. In the same way, it is the power of choice – this time however, the "queen's" own – that frees Frodo from the peril of Galadriel. While the "goddess" continually and consistently presents the hero with an embodiment of wisdom or Pity, the "queen" is a perilous woman who must be "overcome" by an act of will that chooses what the "goddess" represents.

The final similarity between the "queens" of Middle-earth and Homer lies in their opposites. When Odysseus leaves the island of Circe he must pass by a collection of female monsters – the Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis – all of whom attempt to prevent his return by thwarting the wise counsel of Circe. When Frodo enters Mordor he must confront Galadriel's opposite – the monstrous Shelob– who Pitilessly seeks to overcome him and destroy both the Ring-bearer and all hope of the Quest's success.

Those critics who see Galadriel as the Virgin have, presumably, been led to do so by Sam and Gimli.

⁹ While I use the language of free-will somewhat reluctantly in connection with the Homeric epics, it is the language used by most modern critics when they discuss Odysseus' "escape" from the Islands of Circe and Calypso. While it is impossible to know truly how Tolkien would have interpreted these sections of the *Odyssey*, when I consider the deep sense of the power of human will contained in Tolkien's writings I find it hard to believe that he would have read Odysseus' flight from Calypso and Circe as anything less than his recovery of free-will.

“monster”

It is a telling fact that despite the modest variety of positive women in the western heroic tradition, the image of the monstrous woman has remained a relative constant. It is difficult, therefore, to talk about this type without appealing to the archetypes of Jungian psychology or Fryian literary theory. Nevertheless, I believe there is more to say about Tolkien's fascinatingly monstrous Shelob (and her progenitor Ungoliant) than that she is simply an expression of Tolkien's male fears of female sexuality (which I do not doubt she is – at least in part). I also believe that one finds in Shelob a force for evil that has parallels in both the traditional Northern sources *and* in the Homeric ones.

According to the archetypalist view, Shelob is Tolkien's unconscious embodiment of the male fear of the power of sexual attraction.¹ These critics tend to concentrate on the physical description of Shelob and her cave, claiming that both are vaginal and that Sam defeats her with the phallic power of Frodo's sword and Galadriel's Phial. The psychological reading of this episode is perhaps strengthened by the fact that Tolkien was actually bitten by a tarantula when he was a small child in South Africa, although he claimed never to be able to remember the spider, only running across the grass and crying with fright.²

Whatever the psychological origins or significance of the great she-spiders of Middle-earth, critics have been able to trace at least some of Shelob's literary heritage. Tolkien himself (as usual) provided very little in the way of source information; in a letter to his son Christopher, he asks: “Do you think *Shelob* is a good name for a monstrous spider creature? It is of course only ‘she+lob’

¹ Probably the best and most informative psychological reading of Shelob is Brenda Partridge's “‘No Sex Please – We're Hobbits’: The Construction of Female Sexuality in The Lord of the Rings.” (see Bibliography).

² Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien: A Biography (see bibliography), pp. 13-14.

(‘lobbe’=spider [OE]), but written as one, it seems to be quite noisome” (Letters, 81). The one interesting point of this sentence is that it demonstrates Tolkien’s concern that Shelob be two things: monstrous, a “lobbe”, *and* female, a “she”; the gender of this monster is neither circumstantial, nor is it, I believe, merely a case of Tolkien attempting gender parity among his chief villains. The fact that Shelob’s very name includes her sex indicates that any consideration of what she represents must take into account the fact that she is a *female* monster.

Joe Abbot’s “Tolkien’s Monsters: Concept and Function in *The Lord of the Rings*”³, contains an excellent exploration of Shelob’s Northern mothers. Although there are several giantesses in Germanic folklore, the one Abbot centres on is, unsurprisingly, the second monster faced by Beowulf, Grendel’s dam (42-43). The order of events, the description of the confrontation between hero and monster, even the description of Shelob’s cave – all bear a striking resemblance to *Beowulf*. Interestingly, despite the similarities of locale and action, Shelob is herself a remarkably *un-Northern* monster insofar as she is both a “she”, which is rare enough, and a “lobbe”, as only once, in an early Icelandic tale, the Devil (who is indisputably male) appears as a spider and has his leg cut off (40).

That Shelob is female is remarkable; that it is Tolkien who made her so is extraordinary. In his 1936 paper, “*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics”, Tolkien argued eloquently that the poet’s decision to put the monsters at the centre of the poem is not, as had been previously charged, a fault, but a stroke of genius. The monsters, Tolkien claimed, are the thematic centre of the poem. According to his view, Beowulf’s triumph over Grendel is the defeat of the Enemy of God, and by facing the Dragon, Beowulf finds “a potent but terrible solution to Man’s universal war with a hostile world, and his inevitable overthrow in Time, in naked will and courage” (23, 29). While the merits of Tolkien’s argument are

³ See bibliography.

not within the purview of this discussion, the total *absence* of any discussion of what Grendel's dam may represent is interesting. She is dealt with only a few times in the course of the essay, and then only briefly and as ancillary to her son. Tolkien's theory subsumes the female monster under the male almost entirely,⁴ and yet this same man some years later was to create an explicitly and independently female monster, and then place her in the same privileged position that he earlier ascribed to two male monsters. From a secondary and largely ignored monstrosity in *Beowulf*, the female monster becomes in both *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* something much more powerful and narratively important. Clearly, Shelob and Ungoliant are more than Middle-earth's versions of the Northern ogre-giantess.

In contrast to the paucity of female monsters both in the Northern tales that Tolkien loved and in Middle-earth, the *Odyssey* has several. The sirens, the sea-monster Charybdis and the cave-dwelling, intriguingly spider-like Scylla appear in quick succession to block Odysseus' homeward journey after leaving the island of Circe, just as Shelob stands between Frodo, who has just left the relatively safe confines of the forest of Ithilien, and the completion of his quest.

The first female monsters that Odysseus must survive are the sirens whose power lies, as Circe warns Odysseus, in the hypnotic enchantment of their song: "woe to the innocent who hears that sound!" (12.44). Taking Circe's advice,

⁴ The critical practice of interpreting the battle with Grendel's mother almost as an epilogue to the "real" battle with the male monster was not unique to Tolkien. It is still the practice in *Beowulf* criticism today to talk of the two parts of the poem, the first being the battle with Grendel (and his mother) and the second the battle with the Dragon. A better interpretation of the poem that gives the battle with Grendel's dam its full due is Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature*, chapter 7 (see bibliography). Chance argues that the poem should be seen as a three-part narrative: the first, with the battle with Grendel at its centre, is an exploration of the male ideal of martial heroism; the second, with the battle with Grendel's dam at its centre, is an exploration of the female ideal of peace-weaver and hero-rewarder/comforter; and the third, with the Dragon at the centre (discussed only briefly and therefore by implication), is an exploration of the social ideal of peace both inside and outside the confines of the Hall to counter the chaotic nature of reality.

Odysseus warns his crew of the “harpies’ thrilling voices” (12.56) and tells them that “Seirênês / weaving a haunting song over the sea / we are to shun” (12.175-177). In her lair, the first tactic that Shelob uses against Frodo and Sam is the hypnotic power of her eyes:

Frodo and Sam, horror-stricken, began slowly to back away, their own gaze held by the dreadful stare of those baleful eyes; but as they backed so the eyes advanced. Frodo’s hand wavered, and slowly the Phial drooped. Then suddenly, released from the holding spell to run a little while in vain panic for the amusement of the eyes, they both turned and fled together; but even as they ran Frodo looked back and saw with terror that at once the eyes came leaping up behind.
(LotR, 748)

Momentarily released from the enchantment of this harpy’s “thrilling eyes”, Sam and Frodo find themselves trapped by Shelob’s own “haunted weaving”: “Across the width and height of the tunnel a vast web was spun, orderly as the web of some huge spider, but denser-woven and far greater, and each thread was as thick as a rope” (LotR, 749).

After Frodo and Sam manage to cut the webs and escape Shelob’s lair, the narrative describes Shelob and hints at her history and ancestry: “and she served none but herself, drinking the blood of Elves and Men,⁵ bloated and grown fat with endless brooding on her feasts, weaving webs of shadow; for all living things were her food, and her vomit darkness” (LotR, 750). Similarly, the second female monster that Odysseus must avoid is Charybdis, who (as Circe warns him):

“lurks below
to swallow down the dark sea tide. Three times
from dawn to dusk she spews it up
and sucks it down again three times, whirling
maelstrom; if you come upon her then

⁵ I should perhaps note in passing that Grendel’s dam, unlike all the female monsters in the Odyssey, is not a congenital man-eater, her violence being a reaction to the death of her son. In this fashion as well, Shelob seems to have more in common with her Southern brethren than with Grendel’s dam.

the god who makes earth tremble could not save you.”
(12.111-116)

When Odysseus and his men reach the dwelling of Charybdis, they stare in fascinated horror: “My men all blanched against the gloom, our eyes / were fixed upon that yawning mouth in fear / of being devoured” (12.292-294).

The third female monster that Odysseus must face is the cave-dwelling Scylla. Again, Circe has words of warning for her hero:

“Midway that height, a cavern full of mist
opened toward Erebus and evening. . .
.
but that is the den of Scylla, where she yaps
abominably, a newborn whelp’s cry,
though she is huge and monstrous.⁶ God or man,
no one could look on her in joy. Her legs –
and there are twelve – are like great tentacles,
unjointed, and upon her serpent necks
are borne six heads like nightmares of ferocity,
with triple serried rows of fangs and deep
gullets of black death. Half her length, she sways
her heads in the air, outside her horrid cleft,
hunting the sea around that promontory
for dolphins, dogfish, or what bigger game
thundering Amphitritê feeds in thousands.
And no ship’s company can claim
to have passed her without loss and grief; she takes,
from every ship, one man for every gullet.”
(12.87-107)

This horrifying vision is matched by Shelob:

. . . issuing from a black hole of shadow under the cliff, [Sam saw] the most loathly shape that he had ever beheld, horrible beyond the horror of an evil dream. Most like a spider she was, but huger than the great hunting beasts, and more terrible than they because of the evil purpose in her remorseless eyes. . . . Great horns she had, and behind her short stalk-like neck was her huge swollen body, a vast bloated bag, swaying and sagging between her legs. . . . Her legs

⁶ Despite her monstrosity, Sauron refers to Shelob as “his cat ... but she owns him not” (LotR, 751).

were bent, with great knobbed joints high above her back, and hairs that stuck out like steel spines, and at each leg's end there was a claw.

As soon as she had squeezed her soft squelching body and its folded limbs out of the upper exit from her lair, she moved with horrible speed, now running on her creaking legs, now making a sudden bound.

(LotR, 752)

Here we find many of the same monstrous elements typified by Scylla: a cave set high in a cliff wall from which to strike, long clasping legs, a bestial appetite and a huge bloated body. Not even a god can “look with joy” on Scylla; likewise, Shelob is the equal of Sauron, living in uneasy truce with her neighbour: “So they both lived, delighting in their own devices, and feared no assault, nor wrath, nor any end to their wickedness” (LotR, 751).

Like Scylla's mist-filled cavern, Shelob's is full of a stagnant darkness and “as they thrust forward they felt things brush against their heads, or against their hands, *long tentacles*, or hanging growths perhaps” (LotR, 744-745; emphasis mine) (interestingly, both caverns also face north-west). Charybdis' whirlpool is also wrapped in gloom (12.292), and just as the Sirens have “bones / of dead men rotting in a pile beside them / and flayed skins shrivel around the spot” (12.48-50), out of Shelob's lair comes “a foul reek, as if filth unnameable were piled and hoarded in the dark within” (LotR, 744). Lands of death, darkness and rot are common enough in the heroic tradition – Grendel's dam's cave has dozens of its own skeletons – so it is admittedly unremarkable that Shelob's lair should look like the lairs of the *Odyssey*. What sets Shelob apart from her Northern cousins and makes her more like her Southern is not, therefore, so much where she lives or even what she looks like (although the similarities are compelling), but the remarkable power and strength of Shelob *and* her exceedingly important narrative role.

Unlike the Northern (especially the Northern female) monsters, Scylla and Shelob are ultimately undefeatable. Whereas Grendel's dam is an explicitly lesser threat than her more powerful son – "Terror was the less / by just so much as the strength of women, / attack of battle-wives, compared to armed men" (Beowulf, 1282-1284) – Shelob's power is equal to Sauron's and inescapable: "Never yet had any fly escaped from Shelob's webs" (LotR, 751); "no ship's company can claim / to have passed [Scylla] without loss and grief; she takes / from every ship, one man for every gullet". While Shelob and her progenitor Ungoliant disappear from the narrative instead of being defeated in open battle (LotR, 757; Silmarillion, 95), Grendel's dam is spectacularly slain and the hero escapes unscathed from her lair. Sam and Frodo are barely able to survive their encounter with Shelob and their suffering at that passage is at least as terrible as Odysseus':

Then as quickly as he could he cut away the binding cords and laid his head upon Frodo's breast and to his mouth, but no stir of life could he find, nor feel the faintest flutter of the heart. Often he chafed his master's hands and feet, and touched his brow, but all were cold.

"Frodo, Mr. Frodo!" he called. "Don't leave me here alone! It's your Sam calling. Don't go where I can't follow! Wake up, Mr. Frodo! O wake up, Frodo, me dear, me dear. Wake up!"

... "He's dead!" he said. "Not asleep, dead!" And as he said it, as if the words had set the venom to its work again, it seemed to him that the hue of the face grew livid green.

(LotR, 757-758)

"She ate them as they shrieked there, in her den,
in the dire grapple, reaching still for me –
and deathly pity ran me through
at that sight – far the worst I ever suffered,
questing the passes of the strange sea."

(306-310)

It has long been observed that Shelob is no “mere” monster to be overcome by the force of arms like the Orcs, wargs, trolls and other evil denizens of Middle-earth. Tolkien describes Shelob as, “the offspring of Ungoliant [sic] the primeval devourer of light, that in spider-form assisted the Dark Power, but ultimately quarrelled with him” (Letters, 180). Although some critics have assumed her to be one of the Maiar who were corrupted by Melkor at his fall,⁷ Ungoliant is clearly something far more sinister and primal: “The Eldar knew not whence she came; but some have said that in ages long before she descended from the darkness that lies about Arda” (Silmarillion, 85)⁸. Ungoliant and her offspring are not just overgrown arachnids, they are the physical manifestation (Shelob is “an evil thing in spider-form”; LotR, 750) of the Darkness of pre- and anti-creation:

In a ravine [Ungoliant] lived, and took shape as a spider of monstrous form, weaving her black webs in a cleft of the mountains. There she sucked up all light that she could find, and spun it forth again in dark nets of strangling gloom, until no light more could come to her abode; and she was famished.

(Silmarillion, 86)

Indeed it was because of her labours that so little of that overflowing light of the Two Trees flowed ever into the world, for she sucked light greedily, and it fed her, but she brought forth only that darkness that is a denial of all light.

(Book of Lost Tales, v. 1, 152)

⁷ Joe Abbot's “Tolkien's Monsters: Concept and Function in The Lord of the Rings”, p. 41 and John L. Treloar's “Tolkien and Christian Concepts of Evil: Apocalypse and Privation”, p. 59 (see bibliography) both claim that Shelob and Ungoliant are fallen “angels” like Sauron.

⁸ cf. “The Theft of Melko”. In J.R.R. Tolkien, The Book of Lost Tales - Volume 1. (see bibliography): “for here dwelt the primeval spirit Móru whom even the Valar know not whence or when she came, and the folk of Earth have given her many names. Mayhap she was bred of mists and darkness on the confines of the Shadowy Seas, in that utter dark that came between the overthrow of the Lamps and the kindling of the Trees, but more like she has always been” (151-152).

Similarly, the danger that Scylla represents cannot be defeated by a mighty warrior; when Odysseus asks how he is to combat Scylla, Circe offers not advice but a rebuke:

“Must you have battle in your heart forever?
The bloody toil of combat? Old contender,
will you not yield to the immortal gods?
That nightmare cannot die, being eternal
evil itself – horror, pain, and chaos;
there is no fighting her, no power can fight her,
all that avails is flight.

.....
No, no, put all your backs into it, row on;
invoke Blind Force, that bore this scourge of men,
to keep her from a second strike against you.”

(12.125-137)

As if to underscore the power of Scylla, Odysseus conveniently forgets Circe’s injunction against combat and, as he tells Arete, “[I] tied on my cuirass and took up / two heavy spears” (12.273-274). As Circe predicted, they have no effect against the monster and Odysseus’ men are slaughtered and consumed despite his promise that, “by hook or crook this peril [like the Cyclops’ cave] too shall be / something that we remember” (12.256-257). Scylla is not of the same order as Polyphemous. Against the Cyclops, Odysseus’ agile mind and powerful body were enough; against Scylla, “eternal evil itself – horror, pain, and chaos” though, Odysseus’ usual “bag of tricks” is not enough and he is forced to rely on chance and (explicitly so in his second encounter with the monsters: 13.525-527) the power of Zeus.

In their battle with Shelob, Sam and Frodo also do not “win” – they survive thanks to the power of Frodo’s ancient, “magical” sword, Galadriel’s phial and the invisible yet ever-present hand of Providence (LotR, 756-757). The battle with Shelob highlights her exact nature; she is an ancient power – like Scylla, who is

“for” neither Odysseus nor Poseiden – who is an eternal denial of everything that both Frodo and Sauron fight and strive for:

Little she knew of or cared for towers, or rings, or anything devised by mind or hand, who only desired death for all others, mind and body, and for herself a glut of life, alone, swollen till the mountains could no longer hold her up and the darkness would not contain her.

(LotR, 751)⁹

Shelob and Ungoliant seek to deny the world; their mission is its destruction and they are, therefore, against both the forces of Preservation (Men, Elves, Dwarves and Hobbits) and Dominion (Sauron). In the First Age, Ungoliant fights with Melkor and then flees, only to fight with Melian (Silmarillion, 112-113), after which she finds a permanent home between the two, thus giving her thematic position a geographic parallel: “Beyond lay the wilderness of Dungortheb, where the sorcery of Sauron [then Melkor’s lieutenant] and the power of Melian came together, and horror and madness walked. There spiders of the fell race of Ungoliant abode, spinning their unseen webs in which all living things were snared” (Silmarillion, 197). In the Third Age, Melian, Melkor and Ungoliant are all gone, but the dynamic continues between their successors: Shelob’s cave is perched on the edge of Sauron’s land, halfway between Sauron’s tower of evil, Barad Dûr, and the towers of Minas Tirith; and Sam’s principal weapon against Shelob is Galadriel’s phial.

Grendel and his mother have received many different interpretations over the years but they all, including Tolkien’s own, insist that the Grendels are, thanks to their identification in the text as “of the race of Cain”, perversions of

⁹ It is perhaps significant that according to Greek myth, the spider was originally a woman who was turned into an insect for daring to compete with Athena – the patron goddess of all “things devised by mind or hand” – in her weaving ability; Athcity, Kenneth & E.J.W. Barber. “Greek Princes and Aegean Princesses: The Role of Women in the Homeric Poems” (see bibliography), p. 25.

something good. In “The Monsters and the Critics”, Tolkien typifies Grendel as the enemy of God. Jane Chance’s book *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* is a feminist work and could not, therefore, have a more different approach to *Beowulf* than Tolkien; she too, though, typifies Grendel’s dam as a perversion, this time of the ideal of woman as a “peace-weaver” and social guardian (see above, note 4). Both views portray the monstrous woman as an ally of evil that must, and can, be overthrown by the forces of good.

Shelob, however, is explicitly *not* an ally of evil (Sauron). She is a force that denies all ends except her own gloom and hunger. The Homeric monster that most closely resembles the Grendels is the Cyclops, Polyphemous. Like them, Polyphemous is a perversion of the ultimate Homeric law of hospitality; instead of welcoming and feeding Odysseus and his men, Polyphemous traps and then feeds on them. Polyphemous is also the son of Odysseus’ foe Poseiden. The dynamic is simple: Polyphemous, descended from the hero’s chief foe, is bad because he perverts the law and he must therefore be defeated; the Grendels, descended from Cain, are bad because they pervert God’s will. There are only two “sides” in these conflicts. Shelob, however, has no “side”, she denies all “sides” except her own eternal Night and is therefore in the “middle” – both geographically and thematically – of the conflict.

In the *Odyssey*, the female monsters likewise have no “side” except their own. The Sirens desire only to prevent Odysseus’ return and they tempt him with the promise of forever reliving his glorious past and never his future. Scylla and Charybdis are not allies of Odysseus’ foe Poseiden but are instead, like Shelob, monstrous forces of Blackness, of pure undistilled Denial whose only action is destruction and devouring. The Grendels’ nemesis is the hero Beowulf;

Shelob's nemesis is Galadriel.¹⁰ The conflict between Beowulf and the Grendels is entirely self-contained and without reference to external factors or persons. The battles between Sam and Shelob, Odysseus and the female monsters of the *Odyssey* are fought entirely with weapons provided by women outside the immediate conflict: Galadriel's phial and Circe's advice.

The Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis seek to thwart Odysseus' wisdom by preventing his Return: the Sirens with the promise of forever being able to relive his military feats at Troy, Charybdis by annihilating him and his men, and Scylla with the Brute Force that spawned her. Odysseus is, however, wise enough to follow the advice of Circe (that he has wisely won from her) and he escapes the nets of these monstrous women. Shelob, as the anti-type of Galadriel, is a physical manifestation of anti-Pity. Not just devoid of Pity, Shelob is the antithesis of everything inherent in Christian Pity – instead of humility she accepts Gollum's worship (*LotR*, 750-751)¹¹ and instead of self-denial she lusts to eat all the world. Against her desire to consume all and take everything for herself stands the light that Galadriel has freely *given* after her humble and hopeful renunciation of the Ring: "Far off, as in a little picture drawn by elven-fingers, he saw the Lady Galadriel standing on the grass in Lórien, and gifts were in her hands. *And you, Ring Bearer*, he heard her say, remote but clear, *for you I have prepared this*" (*LotR*, 747). The "monsters" of the *Odyssey* and *The Lord of the Rings* do not combat the hero, but the "queen". The Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis seek to prevent Odysseus from following the path to Penelope outlined for him by Circe, while Shelob pits her lust against the light of Galadriel.

¹⁰ Although the relationship of opposition between Galadriel and Shelob is commented on extensively, one of the more insightful and useful explorations (despite its archetypalism) is Peter Damien Goselin's "Two Faces of Eve: Galadriel and Shelob as Anima Figures" (see bibliography).

¹¹ The orcs of Mordor even refer to Shelob as "Her Ladyship" (*LotR*, 766) – probably a perversion of Galadriel's most common epithet, "The Lady".

“wife”

Due to her near total absence in Middle-earth, the “wife” is the most difficult type to talk about in Tolkien’s fiction (the “wife” is second only to the “mother” in lack of representation). Any discussion of the few wives that do exist is further complicated by the overlap that exists between the types that I have somewhat arbitrarily labelled “wife” and “queen”. In all three traditions (Northern, Homeric and Tolkienian), there are two groups of married women. The first group – the “queens” – are defined primarily by their relationship with the hero and to a realm over which they have some power (be it political or magical). Thus Arete, Galadriel and Wealthow, although married, are, according to my paradigm, “queens”; that is, their primary action is outward from the family and toward an exterior hero. The second group – the “wives” – are defined by their relationship with their husband, a relationship based upon the Homeric concept of *nostos* – the hero’s homecoming. *Nostos* is more than a return to the home, it is a re-union of hero and “wife” that gives the hero rest and marks his return from the “death” of endless wanderings to the “life” (and self-identity) of the home.¹ *Nostos* is predicated by and based upon the wife’s ability to maintain and prepare the home for the hero’s return; for Homeric (and Tolkienian) “wives”, the primary *aretê* (“excellence”) is fidelity to both home and husband.² Thus Penelope, Helen, Arwen and Rose are “wives” even though they are all married to “kings”, and their primary action is inward, toward the returned husband who with them forms the nucleus of a new (or renewed) family.

In the vast majority of the Northern sources, the hero’s wife is merely a domestic help-mate who is, in many cases, the source of problems either through

¹ Douglas Frame. The Myth of Return in Early Greek Epic. (see bibliography), p. 34.

² Alasdair MacIntyre. After Virtue. (see bibliography), p. 123.

mismanagement of the household goods or jealous regard of her social status. The primary function of Homeric “wives” is to preserve and protect society’s traditions and, more importantly, to transmit them to the next generation.³ The two women of Middle-earth who are most identifiably “wives” – Arwen Undómiel and Rose Gamgee – both fit this Homeric model.

The Lady Arwen, Rose Gamgee (née Cotton) and, especially, her daughter Elanor are responsible for the transmission of their society’s traditions. Although very little is revealed of Rose, Tolkien was careful to include some interesting facts about Sam’s and Rose’s first child, Elanor: her birthday is March 25th, as if to commemorate the anniversary of Sauron’s defeat, and she is named (by Frodo) in memory of the flowers that grow in Lothlórien (LotR, 1064). The appendices contain further information about Rose and her daughter. “The tradition is handed down from Elanor” that before Sam left Middle-earth he gave the Red Book of Westmarch – the collected memoirs of Bilbo, Frodo and Sam and reputedly the “source” of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* – to Elanor, whose descendants kept it ever after (LotR, 1133-1134). Elanor not only keeps alive the memory of Lórien (in her name) and the history of the War of the Ring (in her birth-date), but she also preserves, after a fashion, the memory of Arwen Undómiel. When Arwen dies, “elanor and niphrodel bloom no more east of the Sea” (LotR, 1100); yet Rose’s daughter, who was a maid of honour to Arwen, is herself an “elanor” that continues to bloom after the passing of the last Elf-woman.

Arwen, too, is responsible for transmitting her race’s traditions. Tolkien wrote that in his marriage to Arwen, Aragorn is “inheriting all that can be transmitted of Elfdom” (Letters, 160-161). Furthermore, the banner that Arwen

³ Werner Jaeger, in his book Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture, Volume One: Archaic Greece, The Mind of Athens (see bibliography), explains that, “The Homeric nobility honours woman as the repository of high morality and old tradition” (pp. 22-23).

weaves for Aragorn is a memorial of all the traditions, symbols and bloodlines through which he makes his claim to kingship:

There flowered the White Tree, and that was for Gondor; but the Seven Stars were about it, and a high crown above it, the signs of Elendil that no lord had borne for years beyond count. And the stars flamed in the sunlight for they were wrought of gems by Arwen daughter of Elrond; and the crown was bright in the morning, for it was wrought of mithril and gold.

(LotR, 881)

Like Elanor, Arwen not only weaves a “text” to preserve traditions, she is herself a memory of the greatest Elf woman that ever lived, Lúthien. Tolkien quite often refers to the similarity of “looks, character and fate” (Letters, 180, 193) between the two: “Arwen, daughter of Elrond, in whom it was said that the likeness of Lúthien had come on earth again; and she was called Undómiel [Elvish, “undome” = between dusk and nightfall] for she was the Evenstar of her people” (LotR, 243)⁴.

Finally, Arwen is the last woman in a long line of maternal descent that stretches back into the far reaches of Middle-earth’s history and possibly even beyond. She is the daughter of Celebrían, who is in turn the daughter of Galadriel. Just as Galadriel stayed with and learned from the semi-divine Melian during the First Age (Silmarillion, 136), Arwen (who is herself more than one thousand years old) has spent many years in Lórien learning about Middle-earth and Valinor from her grandmother (LotR, 243). The import of this long genealogy to Arwen’s husband is best exemplified by the brooch that Galadriel gives to Aragorn: “This stone I gave to Celebrían my daughter, *and she to hers*;

⁴ Lúthien is, in fact, the “first” Homeric wife in Middle-earth. She is, like Arwen and Rose, the progenitor of a new race and the source of a long tradition (it is, in fact, her “story” that Sam sees himself and Frodo getting caught up in (LotR, 739)); she is a powerful weaver who weaves for the benefit of her “husband” (Silmarillion, 206-207); and at the end of her tale she retires with Beren to an island where they spend the rest of their lives in restful marital harmony.

and now it comes to you as a token of hope. In this hour take the name that was foretold for you, Elessar, the Elfstone of the house of Elendil” (LotR, 395; emphasis mine). Tolkien never settled on a single version of the stone’s origin,⁵ but whatever it is, the elessar is a thing made in memory of an unsullied world and handed down by Arwen’s female ancestors until the day Aragorn reclaims the Northern Kingdom and has it “bound . . . upon his brow” by Arwen (Unfinished Tales, 277).⁶ Even Aragorn’s Gondorian “king-name” is inspired by the elessar: “And they named him Elfstone, because of the green stone that he wore, and so the name which it was foretold at his birth that he should bear was chosen for him by his own people” (LotR, 905). Much of Aragorn’s final identity as the King of Gondor is therefore based upon the actions of Arwen – her weaving makes his claim and her gift gives him his name.

So far the similarities that I have been outlining may appear somewhat superficial, even coincidental. But there are several parallels between the Homeric “wives” and Tolkien’s that point to connections between specific characters. In her own small way, Rose is very much Sam’s Penelope, while Arwen recalls both Penelope and Helen.

Odysseus’ moment of greatest despair on the beach of Ogygia is marked by his most poignant expression of his longing for his wife and home (5.158-166); that his thoughts are *primarily* of his wife is made explicit by Calypso: “[will you] stay here, and guard this house, and be / immortal – though you wanted her forever, / that bride for whom you pine each day.” (5.217-219). Similarly, during

⁵ In one version it is the actual stone worn by Aragorn’s ancestor Isildur when he was killed, sent back to Middle-earth by Yavanna (the principal “goddess” of Middle-earth and “lover of all things that grow in the earth”; Silmarillion, 30) and delivered to Galadriel by Gandalf. In the other version it was crafted for Galadriel by Celebrimbor as a memory of the first (Unfinished Tales, 248-251).

⁶ The last thing seen of Aragorn in the narrative of The Lord of the Rings is the elessar: “Then Aragorn took the green stone and held it up, and there came a green fire from his hand” (1018).

Sam's greatest distress his thoughts turn to Rose and the Shire. As he and Frodo make their final approach to Mount Doom, Sam recalls Rose twice in five pages: "I would dearly like to see Bywater again, and Rosie Cotton", "He felt the cool mud about his toes as he paddled in the Pool at Bywater with Jolly Cotton and Tom and Nibs, and their sister Rosie" (LotR, 969, 974). Given the Odysseus connection it is interesting that Sam – who has a marked aversion to ponds and rivers, even among the boat-suspicious hobbits – would associate Rose with the river at Bywater and playing in the Pool.

When Sam returns to the Shire he receives a welcome from Rose that looks remarkably like a contracted version of Odysseus' reunion with Penelope:

"It's Sam, Sam Gamgee. I've come back."

.....
 "Hullo, Sam!" said Rosie. "Where've you been? They said you were dead; but I've been expecting you since the Spring. You haven't hurried have you?"

.....
 "I think you look fine, Sam," she said. Go on now! But take care of yourself, and come straight back as soon as you have settled the ruffians!"

(LotR, 1045-1046)

It is quite a remarkable feat of short-hand. Rose's constant belief in Sam despite the best evidence to the contrary, the almost empathetic understanding of her "husband" ("I've been expecting you since the Spring"), the injunction to return to her once the "ruffians" have been dealt with, Rose is even the last person at the Cotton farm to know of Sam's Return: all these are aspects of Odysseus' reunion with Penelope. The chastisement implied in Rose's "you haven't hurried have you" may even hint at Penelope's final test of Odysseus when she manages to fool him about their marriage bed having been moved – both Sam and Odysseus

return only to find that they must endure their final rebuke from the very woman whom they have been trying to reach.⁷

Most significant, however, is the similarity of what Odysseus' and Sam's return to the "wife" – what their *nostos* – means. Odysseus' reunion with Penelope marks his return to everyday life from the long war of the *Iliad* and the fairy-tale adventures of the *Odyssey*. Similarly, Tolkien wrote that, "the simple rustic love of Sam and his Rosie (nowhere elaborated) is *absolutely essential* to the study of his (the chief hero's) character, and to the theme of the relations of ordinary life (breathing, eating, working, begetting) and quests, sacrifices, causes, and the 'longing for elves', and sheer beauty" (Letters, 161). The final tableau of *The Lord of the Rings* makes this point clear:

And he went on, and there was yellow light, and fire within; and the evening meal was ready, and he was expected. And Rose drew him in, and set him in his chair, and put little Elanor upon his lap. He drew a deep breath. "Well, I'm back," he said.

(LotR, 1069)

The language of this passage is interesting, as it is Rose who "draws Sam in, and sits him down". In this, the absolute ending of the narrative, the hero has become a passive member of a family unit in which the wife provides the energy (and the active verbs).

As provocative as the connection between Rose and Penelope may be, the Middle-earth "wife" who most clearly recalls a Homeric progenitor is the Lady Arwen. There is no character in Tolkien's works as overlooked and, I believe, as misunderstood as Aragorn's shadowy bride. Arwen is neither the "fair maiden" of Medieval Romance for whom Aragorn must fight, nor is her story merely "a

⁷ Many (but not all) of the ideas in this paragraph are drawn from David Greenman's "Aeneid and Odyssean Patterns of Escape and Return in Tolkien's "The Fall of Gondolin" and The Return of the King." (see bibliography).

cautionary tale against passivity”.⁸ Arwen is, in fact, a most complete “wife” as she combines the two most important women of the Homeric epics – Helen and Penelope.

The Penelope connection is the more obvious of the two as both women’s primary “action” is to wait and weave for the hero. It is important to note that they are *not* waiting for the hero to claim or to rescue them (as is the case in Medieval Romance) but for the hero to Return. Arwen and Penelope are far from the archetypal “maidens in distress” – both are in fact equal, if not superior to their heroes. The first thing revealed about Penelope in the *Odyssey* is that she has been, like her husband, blessed with “Athena’s gifts – / talent in handicraft and a clever mind; / so cunning –” (2.122-124); Penelope, also like her husband, “makes a name for herself” (2.131). Penelope’s cunning is so great that she has been able to keep the suitors at bay for ten years by adept manipulation of court politics and, of course, with her famous loom-trick (2.89-116). Because of her cunning, Penelope has become famous and admired, so much so that the disguised Odysseus tells her:

“My lady, never a man in the wide world
should have a fault to find with you. Your name
has gone out under heaven like the sweet
honour of some god-fearing king, who rules
in equity over the strong;”

(19.114-118)

Not only is Penelope, even in Odysseus’ absence, comparable to a good and wise king, her cunning is grown so great that it can even overcome her husband. She is the only character in either epic – except Athena – who is able to fool the master dissembler himself. As a final test of his identity, Penelope tells the

⁸ Melanie Rawls, in her paper “Arwen: Shadow Bride” (see bibliography), claims that Arwen’s death is a tragic and ultimately meaningless event because she “dared and risked nothing” to gain personal autonomy.

triumphant Odysseus that she will have the bed – which is itself “a pliant web / of oxhide thongs dyed crimson” (23.203-204) – brought out to him. Odysseus, who carved the bed frame from a rooted tree himself, is completely taken in: “Woman, by heaven you’ve stung me now! / Who dared to move my bed?” (23.186-187).

If Penelope is Odysseus’ equal, then Arwen is Aragorn’s undisputed superior (at least until Aragorn regains his kingdom, thus making himself worthy of her). The difference between them is made explicit both by Aragorn’s mother – “your aim is high, even for the descendant of many kings. For this lady is the noblest and fairest that now walks the earth” – and by his foster-father Elrond: “But as for Arwen the Fair, lady of Imladris and of Lórien, Evenstar of her people, she is of lineage greater than yours, and she has lived in the world already so long that to her you are but as a yearling shoot beside a young birch of many summers. She is too far above you” (LotR, 1096).

Despite her great nobility, Arwen does fall in love with Aragorn. Aragorn, after several decades of struggling and suffering, does finally become worthy of her love and Elrond brings his daughter to Gondor for the wedding:

And Frodo when he saw her come glimmering in the evening, with stars on her brow and a sweet fragrance about her, was moved with great wonder, and he said to Gandalf: “At last I understand why we have waited! This is the ending. . .”

And Aragorn the King Elessar wedded Arwen Undómiel in the City of the Kings upon the day of Mid-summer, and the tale of their long waiting and labours was come to fulfilment.

(LotR, 1009)

This passage is full of significance for the story of Aragorn and Arwen. The first thing to notice is that Tolkien refers to “*their* long waiting and labours” – he makes no apparent distinction between what Aragorn and Arwen have together accomplished. More important than this, however, is Frodo’s “This is the ending”. While there are many such “endings” in the book, this moment is indeed

the final step in Aragorn's ascent to the throne: the fulfilment of Aragorn's *nostos* comes with his marriage to Arwen. The war, the coronation and the return of the White Tree (Aragorn's familial symbol) are all merely steps along the path to this decisive moment.⁹

The same is true of Odysseus' *nostos*. After he has killed the suitors and cleansed his home, he must then pass Penelope's test before he is allowed into the marriage bed. Penelope tells her husband, "That bed, / that rest is yours whenever desire moves you, / now the kind powers have brought you home at last" (23.259-261). Just as Aragorn's "end" depends upon his marriage to Arwen, so too does Odysseus'. If Penelope had not been as staunch (and as cunning) a protectress of that bed, Odysseus may very well have come home by the grace of "the kind powers" only to find "that bed, that rest" unavailable to him. When Telemachus tries to envision such a thing, he does so by explicitly linking Penelope's fidelity both to the bed and to "true" weaving: "is she married / off to someone, and Odysseus' bed / left empty for some gloomy spider's weaving?" (16.38-40).¹⁰

Arwen's association with Penelope helps to explain her complete absence from the narrative until her crucial "cameo" appearance at the end. Many critics have commented on the lack of romantic love in *The Lord of the Rings* and wondered why "The Tale of Aragorn and Arwen" is relegated to the appendices. When Arwen is seen as a medieval damsel and Aragorn as her medieval knight,

⁹ As David L. Jeffrey demonstrates in his article "Recovery: Name in The Lord of the Rings" (see bibliography), pp. 111-112, Aragorn and Arwen are even philologically compatible. Aragorn's union with Arwen is not just a marriage between races, but a conjoining of two names, each complementing the other – quite probably the highest approbation that Tolkien could have given to their marriage.

¹⁰ Both Aragorn and Odysseus are also recognized by an old female servant, who remembers a bit of lore, before they are "recognised" by their wives. The old nurse Eurykleia recognises the scar that Odysseus received boar hunting (19.509), while the first person to exclaim that Aragorn is the rightful king of Gondor is the old woman Ioreth, herself an "old wife" (LotR, 894), who remembers the "old wives tales" about "Kingsfoil" and the healing hands of the true King (LotR, 900).

Tolkien's strategy does indeed appear strange. When, on the other hand, she is viewed as Penelope, the decision to ignore the romantic love in the body of the narrative makes more sense. Penelope was not the object of a medieval love story – she appears, like Arwen, both before and after the final stage of the hero's Return, as the goal and the goal-guardian that the hero must reach, not as a damsel to be rescued or won. By ignoring the medieval love-story, Tolkien makes the narrative far more Homeric than it might otherwise have been.

Perhaps surprisingly, Penelope is not the only Homeric "wife" whom Arwen resembles – she is also greatly like Helen. Arwen is of mixed descent, like Helen the daughter of Zeus and Leda, being both the daughter of the half-elven Elrond and the maternal grand-daughter and student of Galadriel, who was herself tutored by the quasi-divine Melian. Arwen's beauty is as famous in Middle-earth as Helen's is in the Aegean world and both are considered the most beautiful women alive. Helen has twin brothers who, despite their heroic statures, have no role in the *Iliad*; Arwen's brothers, Elrohir and Elladan, while not twins, nevertheless always act as one in their desire to avenge "their mother's [Celebrían's] torment in the dens of the orcs" (LotR, 234), "Celebrían's torment" being perhaps a gentle echo of Zeus' rape of Leda.

The most significant similarity between Helen and Arwen is their difficult relationship with fate. Because of her passion for Paris, Helen is caught between the Achaeans and the Trojans and she is well aware that it is her doom to be the cause of much death and suffering. Arwen too, is caught in an impossible situation; because of her love for Aragorn, she must choose between immortal life with her father in Valinor and a mortal existence with Aragorn. Like Helen, she is fully aware of her dilemma and of the consequences of her actions: "I will cleave to you, [Aragorn], and turn from the Twilight. Yet there lies the land of my people and the long home of all my kin.' She loved her father dearly" (LotR,

1098). Arwen chooses Aragorn and in that choice, as in all her actions toward her husband, she resembles Penelope. In her actions toward herself and toward the other heroes, however, she resembles Helen.

There are three aspects of Helen's character mirrored in Arwen: weaver, perceiver and reliever. While Penelope weaves (and then unweaves) a funeral shroud for her father-in-law to deceive the suitors, Helen engages in the creation of a large tapestry:

[Iris] found [Helen] weaving in the women's hall
 a double violet stuff, whereon inwoven
 were many passages of arms by Trojan
 horsemen and Akhaians mailed in bronze –
 trials braved for her sake at the wargod's hands.
 (iii.146-150)

Helen's tapestry and Arwen's standard are both testimonials to the heroism of the men who fight for them. Tolkien consistently refers to "the standard of Arwen" (LotR, 1099) and is always reminding the reader of just who made this record of Aragorn's lineage and heroic stature (LotR, 806). Both Arwen and Helen are consistently associated with woven things. When Hector first comes to her, Helen is "among her household women . . . / directing needlecraft and splendid weaving" (vi.375-376). Helen gives Telemachus a "robe of state so royal, / adorned and brilliant with embroidery" that she herself has made (15.122-123),¹¹ and when she is first introduced to Telemachus she brings with her a gift from Artemis:

a golden distaff, and the silver basket
 rimmed in hammered gold, with wheels to run on.
 So Phylo rolled it in to stand beside her,
 heaped with fine spun stuff, and cradled on it
 the distaff swathed in dusky violet wool.
 (4.138-142)

¹¹ Interestingly, and perhaps ironically, Helen gives Telemachus the robe for his mother to keep until his wedding day so that he can give it to his wife (15.135-144) .

Arwen's entrance is similarly marked by a strong association with weaving and woven goods: "In the middle of the table, against the woven cloths upon the wall, there was a chair under a canopy, and there sat a lady fair to look upon" (LotR, 234).¹² The other two characteristics – perceiver and reliever – are closely linked in both Helen and Arwen to their personal dooms. They are each, like the "queens", perceptive of the nature and needs of the heroes they meet. Unlike the "queens" however, these two "wives" offer relief and rest, not aid, and their perceptiveness is based upon an empathetic understanding of the heroes' plight.

Helen is one of the most perceptive characters in the Homeric epics – she is fooled by neither disguise nor external appearances. She recognises Aphrodite when she appears as a "spinning woman" whom Helen "loves" (iii.465-468, 477-478), she recognises Telemachus as Odysseus' son (4.146-150), and she relates how she recognised Odysseus when he sneaked into Troy (4.262-263). Helen can recognise not only a person's form, but also his nature and true worth. Priam, who has had dealings with these men on many occasions, asks Helen to tell him about the Achaean heroes. Helen agrees to reveal what she "sees": "I see / all the Akhaians now / whom I might recognise and name for you" (iii.278-280). Although the epic has already shown these men, this is their first "formal" introduction, and Helen's descriptions of Agamemnon, Odysseus and Aias are all as accurate as the descriptions provided by the narrator/poet. Helen is also able to perceive the true nature and worth of the Trojan heroes. In her conversation with Hector she says:

¹² Arwen as "Helen-weaver" does as much for Minas Tirith as she does for Aragorn. Before her coming, the city is a dying one with few children and *no weaving*. The "look" of Aragorn's ancestral homeland could not be more different than the "look" of Arwen's Imladris: "No hanging nor storied webs, nor any things of woven stuff or of wood, were to be seen in that long solemn hall: but between the pillars there stood a silent company of tall images graven in cold stone" (LotR, 784). Although not explicit in Tolkien's writings, it is a fairly safe assumption that the coming of Arwen is accompanied by the return of "storied webs".

“I wish I had a good man for a lover
 who knew the sharp tongues and just rage of men.
 This one [Paris] – his heart’s unsound, and always
 will be,
 and he will win what he deserves. Come here
 and rest upon this couch with me, dear brother.
 You are the one afflicted most
 by harlotry in me and by his madness”

(vi.409-415)

This passage is an excellent example of Helen’s propensity for offering relief to, based upon her empathetic understanding of, a hero. Helen knows that it is her doom to be the cause of the war, and she sees that Hector is the one who suffers the most instead of her “unsound” husband. She therefore offers Hector the seat next to her on the couch – a position that Menelaos and Paris have brought these two armies together to fight for.

Helen’s perception is so acute as to verge upon the prophetic. When Iris (a divine messenger and female version of Hermes) comes to Helen to urge her to appear on the city walls, the goddess has come at no other gods’ bidding and in disguise (iii.141-145) – this is the only time in the *Iliad* that Iris does either of these things. A possible explanation of this is that Helen herself has somehow unconsciously summoned a goddess who traditionally conveys divine prophecy and will.¹³ A more obvious example of prophetic perception comes when Helen interprets the flight of a hawk while her husband Menelaos is left groping for words:

At this the old friend of the god of battle
 groped in his mind for the right thing to say,
 but regal Helen put in quickly:
 “Listen:
 I can tell you – tell what the omen means,
 as light is given me, and as I see it
 point by point fulfilled.”

¹³ Kenneth J. Atchity. Homer’s Iliad: The Shield of Memory (see bibliography), p. 89 .

(15.189-195)

In this passage too, Helen relieves Telemachus of many of his worries; seeing that he is uneasy about what awaits him at home, she tells him that: “Just [as the eagle has killed the goose], / Odysseus, back from his hard trials and wandering, / will soon come down in fury on his house” (15.197-199). Telemachus, grateful for this reassurance, cries out: “May Zeus, the lord of Hêra. / make it so! In far off Ithaka, all my life, / I shall invoke you as a goddess, lady” (15.202-204).

The best example of Helen as “doom-inspired reliever” comes early in the *Odyssey*. While Telemachus is in Sparta, Menelaos recalls the sufferings of the Achaeans at Troy, and,

A twinging ache of grief rose up in everyone,
and Helen of Argos wept, the daughter of Zeus,
Telémakhos and Meneláos wept,
and tears came to the eyes of Nestor’s son –
remembering,

(4.191-195)

Helen, once again moved by the suffering of which she was the catalyst, decides to relieve the men, temporarily, of their painful memories:

But now it entered Helen’s mind
to drop into the wine that they were drinking
an anodyne, mild magic of forgetfulness.
Whoever drank this mixture in the wine bowl
would be incapable of tears that day –
.....
She drugged the wine, then, had it served, and said –
taking part again in the conversation –
“O Meneláos, Atreus’ royal son,
and you that are great heroes’ sons, you know
how Zeus gives all of us in turn
good luck and bad luck, being all powerful.
So take refreshment, take your ease in hall,
and cheer the time with stories. I’ll begin.”

(4.230-252)

Arwen, too, is a doom-inspired reliever. Her first and only words in the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* are to Frodo and they are quite a remarkable summation of much of what Helen says and does:

“A gift I will give you. For I am the daughter of Elrond. I shall not go with him now when he departs to the Havens; for mine is the choice of Lúthien, and as she so have I chosen, both the sweet and the bitter. But in my stead you shall go, Ring-Bearer, when the time comes, and if you then desire it. If your hurts grieve you still and the memory of your burden is heavy, then you may pass into the West, until all your wounds and weariness are healed. But wear this now in memory of Elfstone and Evenstar with whom your life has been woven!”

And she took a white gem like a star that lay upon her breast hanging on a silver chain, and she set the chain about Frodo’s neck. “When the memory of the fear and the darkness troubles you,” she said, “this will bring you aid.”

(LotR, 1010-1011)

This brief passage is loaded with significance for both who and what Arwen is. Her doom is to be caught, like Frodo, between two realms. Even before their dooms have fallen upon them, Arwen has an apparently empathetic understanding of Frodo: “suddenly it seemed to Frodo that Arwen turned towards him, and the light of her eyes fell on him from afar and pierced his heart” (LotR, 254). Unlike the “queen” Galadriel, Arwen’s inward-perceptiveness apparently extends only to someone facing the same situation as herself, and her empathy is a painful stab of recognition – “and the light of her eyes *pierced his heart*” – not the “silent, searching look” of Galadriel.

Both Arwen and Frodo have forfeited the life that might have been and, out of an unselfish love, taken up a more mournful existence for the benefit of a greater good. Arwen’s pain at her choice is as great as Frodo’s; she therefore understands what he needs and she gives him both short- and long-term relief from the pain of his dark memories. With her gift, Arwen fulfils all the functions of the “wife”. Arwen’s stone is given in memory of the Elessar (both Aragorn and

the stone), and as a fulfilment of all that has been “woven”. The stone proves to be very important to Frodo on several later occasions, as it is the only comfort he has “when the memory of the fear and the darkness troubles him”.

When the stone is no longer enough, Arwen’s second, much greater gift gives Frodo the relief that he desires. Unlike Sam and Aragorn who find rest and comfort in marriage, Frodo finds peace only through Arwen’s gift – and while he never has a “wife” of his own, Frodo’s *nostos* still depends upon the actions of one. As it is Arwen’s doom to remain in Middle-earth, she is able to transfer her right of passage to the Undying Lands to Frodo.¹⁴ Tolkien was explicit and insistent in his claim that Frodo’s final peace is achieved *only* through Arwen’s unselfish gift: “certain ‘mortals’, who have played some great part in Elvish affairs, may pass with the Elves to Elvenhome. Thus Frodo (by the express gift of Arwen) [is allowed to go]”; “Arwen was the first to observe the signs [of Frodo’s future unease], and gave him her jewel for comfort, and thought of a way of healing him” (Letters, 198, 327). What Arwen saw in Frodo, and cured with her gifts, was Frodo’s “last flicker of pride”, his

. . . desire to have returned as a ‘hero’, not content with being a mere instrument of good. And it was mixed with another temptation, blacker and yet (in a sense) more merited, for however that may be explained, he had not in fact cast away the Ring by a voluntary act: he was tempted to regret its destruction and still to desire it. ‘It is gone for ever, and now all is dark and empty’, he said as he wakened from his sickness in 1420 [LotR, 1062].

(Letters, 328)

Like Odysseus, Aragorn and Sam, Frodo’s *nostos* depends on the *intervention* of a “wife” – he cannot simply claim the right of passage any more than Odysseus or Aragorn can claim Penelope and Arwen; it has to be given him by Arwen when she perceives that he needs it. The hero cannot accomplish the *nostos* by himself:

¹⁴ Helen, too, opens the way into the Undying Islands for a hero. Since he is married to a daughter of Zeus, Menelaos is granted the gift of an immortal existence in Elysium.

Penelope holds the suitors at bay; Rosie believes in Sam's return and "draws him in" at the end; and Arwen "weaves" the fates of both Aragorn and Frodo.

Endings are in the special purview of the "wives" of both Homer and Middle-earth as it is the "wife" who provides both fulfilment and relief at the end of the hero's quest. When the wise Odysseus finally returns he finds his home waiting for him, thanks to the wisdom of Penelope whose cunning has not only kept the marriage-bed secure but also has grown to equal Odysseus' own. In exactly the same manner, when the struggles of Aragorn, Sam and Frodo are completed, they find a "wife's" Pity awaiting them. While the "queen" takes pity on the Wandering Hero and gives him aid, the "wife" takes pity on the Returned Hero and provides him with rest and fulfilment. The immediate "descendant" of Penelope in Middle-earth is Rose, who "draws Sam in" and domesticates him. In this light, it is interesting to note that while Sam settles down to raise a large family and be the Shire's perpetual Mayor, Pippin and Merry – who remain unmarried – continue to ride about the Shire in their war-gear (LotR, 1063).

Arwen's renunciation of her immortal heritage and of the possibility of residence in the Undying Lands is as much an act of Pity as Galadriel's renunciation of the Ring – but where Galadriel's Pity is essential to the successful completion of the Quest, Arwen's Pity is directed to what comes after. By renouncing something "immediately desirable", Arwen "takes pity on" both the realm of Gondor and Aragorn (which become one and the same thing after his coronation), therefore enabling her to show Frodo as much Pity as Galadriel has been shown by the Valar. Before setting out from Rivendell, Sam responds to the postulated ending of Bilbo's tale, "and they all settled down and lived happily ever after": "Ah!" said Sam. 'And where will they live? That's what I often wonder'" (LotR, 291). It is no coincidence that Sam asks that question here, in Arwen's home, for it is Arwen's Pity that is to answer that question for both

Aragorn and Frodo (and even, ultimately, for Sam, who also passes to the Undying Lands: LotR, 1134). Finally, Arwen's Pity provides the end of her own story as well, for by choosing to remain with Aragorn, Arwen chooses mortality. As Aragorn lies dying, Arwen, in despair of her choice, says to him:

“I must indeed abide the Doom of Men, whether I will or nill: the loss and the silence. But I say to you, King of the Númenoreans, not till now have I understood the tale of your people and their fall. As wicked fools I scorned them, but I pity them at last. For if this is indeed, as the Eldar say, the gift of the One to Men, it is bitter to receive.”

(LotR, 1100)

Once again, the result of Pity is Pity. Not only has Arwen's choice led her to Pity humans for the death that they must suffer, it also allows her to enjoy the “gift of the One” – presumably, the very grace of God.

While the heroes of the Old Northern sources also “return” after their adventures, there is not nearly the same emphasis placed upon the wife who awaits them – if indeed there even is one. The hero's triumphant return in the Northern tradition is instead marked by a loving and beloved lord and “ring-giver” who rewards the hero – not with rest, repose and fulfilment in the sense inherent in *nostos* – but with gold and personal glory. That is not to say that Tolkien ignores personal glory and the Northern courage that he so admired, but as with most things, Tolkien's attitude toward personal glory is more complicated than a simple re-iteration of the Northern view. As usual, this Homeric “take” on the issue is centred in a female character – the “maiden” Éowyn.

“maiden”

In all studies there are bound to be characters who fall between the cracks of the critical paradigm, and in a study of types, the characters who escape the net are, unfortunately, usually the most fully developed people – the ones who, by virtue of their greater complexity, resist categorisation. Despite this resistance, Éowyn – easily Tolkien’s most complicated female character – does bear a resemblance, admittedly more slight than Tolkien’s other women, to Homeric prototypes.

Éowyn is not consistently aligned with a single type. She is like Nausicaa insofar as her fate is determined by an inappropriate love for a noble man; but instead of her complexity of character “allowing” her to “escape” the Homeric types, she grows and develops as a character (and as a woman) until she becomes a fully realised “queen” in her own right.

Éowyn’s love of Aragorn is very much the same kind of affection that Nausicaa has for Odysseus – both in conception and in lack of potential fulfilment. So similar are Éowyn and Nausicaa thematically that Tolkien’s typification of “the theme of mistaken love [as] seen in Éowyn and her first love for Aragorn” (Letters, 161) could easily be applied to the Phaiakian princess.¹ Nausicaa confesses to her servants, after having talked with Odysseus and seen him washed and ‘embellished’ by Athena (6.242-245), that,

“The Olympian gods cannot be all averse
to this man’s coming here among our islanders.
Uncouth he seemed, I thought so, too, before;

¹ Interestingly, in the early drafts of The Lord of the Rings, Arwen is absent and Aragorn marries Éowyn at the end of his journeys: J.R.R. Tolkien, The Treason of Isengard (see bibliography), p. 448. That Arwen was introduced (as a “wife”) and Éowyn changed (into a “maiden”) could indicate that as Tolkien rewrote Aragorn’s story he wished to make him more “Odyssean”.

but now he looks like one of heaven's people.
 I wish my husband could be as fine as he
 and glad to stay forever on Skhería."

(6.254-259)

Unbeknownst to Nausicaa, her attraction to Odysseus is inappropriate by virtue of the "wife" who awaits him in Ithaca. In the same way, Aragorn is not free to return Éowyn's love, even if he wished to, because of the "wife" waiting (and weaving) for him in Rivendell.

Nausicaa is attracted to Odysseus because he is, she feels, "like one of heaven's people" and she "wishes her husband could be as fine as he". What attracts her is not the man but the noble bearing and god-like demeanour that have been showered upon him by Athena. Exactly the same is true of Éowyn. Like Nausicaa, she is a "daughter of kings" and she finds herself attracted to a "tall heir of kings, wise with many winters, greycloaked, hiding a power that yet she felt" (LotR, 537); as Aragorn later comes to realise, "in [him] she loves only a shadow and a thought: a hope of glory and great deeds, and lands far from the fields of Rohan" (LotR, 901).

Both Nausicaa and Éowyn "go out" to find what they most desire, Éowyn to find glory and an honourable death, Nausicaa a husband, and while in both cases their desire is realised, it is not in the way that they would or could have anticipated. After failing to win Aragorn's love, Éowyn disguises herself as Dernhelm and rides out to battle with the Riders of Rohan with "the face of one without hope who goes in search of death" (LotR, 834). Instead of a glorious death to match Théoden's though, she meets and against all odds defeats the Nazgûl King, thereby earning her as much glory as she could want (Aragorn says that her feat "sets her among the queens of great renown"; LotR, 902). More importantly, she wins for herself the chance to meet and marry Faramir.

Nausicaa's trip to the stream, while certainly not an act of disobedience, is nevertheless inspired by Athena and is therefore a very "private" response to a desire (6.30-45)². Nausicaa goes to the stream with a specific purpose, outlined by Athena:

"How so remiss, and thy mother's daughter?
leaving the clothes uncared for, Nausikaa,
when soon thou must have store of marriage linen,
and put thy minstrelsy in wedding dress!"

(6.30-33)

It is not a surprise, then, that Nausicaa's first thought at the sight of Odysseus would be of marriage. Odysseus is aware of what Nausicaa feels, and while he cannot oblige her, he does wish her well in her search:

"And may the gods accomplish your desire:
a home, a husband, and harmonious
converse with him – the best thing in the world
being a strong house held in serenity
where man and wife agree"

(6.193-197)

Aragorn is equally well-aware of Éowyn's feelings toward him, and like Odysseus he wishes her well, but with someone else: "I have wished thee joy ever since first I saw thee. It heals my heart to see thee now in bliss" (*LotR*, 1014).

Both "maidens" also have the same narrative "place". Odysseus encounters Nausicaa immediately after his renewed determination to return to Ithaca has delivered him from the island of Calypso, while Aragorn's confrontation with Éowyn comes immediately after he has received Arwen's banner and message of encouragement (*LotR*, 806).³ The meal that Nausicaa

² While the psychological significance of the gods is a difficult and contentious point in Homeric criticism, there does seem to be consensus that an epiphany is more than an external stimulant and that actions undertaken at a god's bidding (such as Nausicaa's trip to the stream) are, in the modern term, as much "psychological" as they are divinely inspired.

³ Aragorn's and Éowyn's "confrontation" actually comes at their *second* meeting while Odysseus' and Nausicaa's comes at their first and only meeting. The only difference between

shares with Odysseus is his first among humanity in a very long time and it marks the beginning of the end of his wanderings in “fairy-land” (6.128, 261-264). When Aragorn comes to Éowyn and the women she has been sent to protect at Dunharrow (perhaps a reflection of the regal Nausicaa with her maidens), the encounter is both marked by a meal (LotR, 815) and marks in turn the beginning of the end of Aragorn’s wanderings. From Dunharrow, Aragorn proceeds along *the Paths of the Dead* and emerges on the far side in Gondor with an unseen army at his back, surprising and then destroying the invaders. From Phaeacia, Odysseus is taken in his sleep – “Slumber, soft and deep / *like the still sleep of death*” (13.90-92; emphasis mine) – to Ithaca where he meets Athena who, unseen by the suitors until the very end, disguises him and plots with him to destroy those who are wasting his kingdom.

Nausicaa’s fate is unknown but it can be assumed with relative certainty that given her royal background, she *did* find a husband and “a strong house held in serenity” after the loss of Odysseus. Éowyn, too, after realising that Aragorn is meant for another, finds a husband in Faramir. With him, she journeys to Ithilien where together they build a home “where man and wife agree” as she moves beyond her “Nausicaa-stage”, becoming instead a “queen” like Galadriel and Arete. Even before her marriage to Faramir though, Éowyn displays some of the attributes of a “queen”.

Éowyn is chosen by Théoden to remain behind to “guide and govern” his people because she is “fearless and high-hearted” and “all love her” (LotR, 541-

the two confrontations is, however, chronological. Odysseus meets Nausicaa and then leaves her to wash himself; by the time he returns, Nausicaa is ready to “confront” him with her love. Precisely the same thing happens with Aragorn and Éowyn: he meets her, she forms an attraction, he leaves for a time during which he both glorifies himself and is glorified by the “goddess”, while Éowyn’s affection grows until he returns to be confronted by a “maiden” in love with him. The only difference is that where Odysseus is gone only for a few minutes, Aragorn is gone for almost a week, a time that Tolkien probably found necessary if his modern readers, who no longer believe in love at first sight, were to find Éowyn’s love at all credible.

546). Like the “queens” of both Homer and *Beowulf*, she offers drink to the visiting heroes and stands by the King’s side in his hall (LotR, 545). Finally, Éowyn arms Merry just as Galadriel “arms” Frodo (and Arete “arms” Odysseus) (LotR, 833) and when she first sees Aragorn she regards him, as Galadriel has, “with cool pity in her eyes” (LotR, 537). Despite her “queen”-like attributes, however, Éowyn is dissatisfied with her position and craves the glory and honour of the battlefield;⁴ in order to confound the intentions of Théoden and Aragorn, she eventually disguises herself as a man and rides out with the army. This decision leads to Éowyn’s growth from “maiden” to “queen” – a maturation that is marked by her growth from a “northern” conception of heroism and into a Homeric “type”.

A tale from Middle-earth’s First Age provides both an interesting parallel to Éowyn’s and Nausicaa’s tales and an interesting contrast that highlights the nature of Éowyn’s metamorphosis. The “Narn I Hîn Húrin” – “The Tale of the Children of Húrin” – has as its central concern the tragedy of Túrin and his sister Nienor who unknowingly fall in love and marry.⁵ The meeting of Túrin and Nienor bears an interesting (albeit inverted) resemblance to the meeting of Odysseus and Nausicaa.

When Odysseus is washed ashore on the island of Phaiakia he is wet, cold and hungry and to survive the night he is forced to bury himself beneath a pile of leaves (5.496-505). The next day, Nausicaa, the daughter of Phaiakia’s royal couple, is inspired by Athena to wash her clothes at the stream. When Odysseus

⁴ Interestingly, only the “goddess” Gandalf fully appreciates the depth of Éowyn’s dissatisfaction. He tells Aragorn and Éomer: “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 match of yours” (LotR, 901).

⁵ The only Classical allusion that Tolkien ever admitted to is contained within this tale. He once described Turin as “a figure that might be said (by people who like that sort of thing, though it is not very useful) to be derived from elements in Sigurd the Volsung, *Oedipus*, and the Finnish Kullervo” (Letters, 150; emphasis mine).

sees her he decides to ask for food and shelter, and, “so came out rustling, like a mountain lion, / rain-drenched, wind-buffed, but in his might at ease / . . . / . . . Only / Alkínoös’ daughter, stood her ground, being given / a bold heart by Athena, and steady knees” (6.136-150).

The meeting of Hurin’s children is similar and yet strikingly different. In Tolkien’s version it is not ‘Odysseus’ who lands hungry and beast-like in the land of ‘Nausicaa’ but the exact reverse. In his story, Nienor flees through the wild after her memory has been wiped out by the dragon Glaurung (who will later reveal the incest to Túrin):

. . . and all that day still she ran, as a beast that is hunted to heart-bursting. . . . [Finally] she stood still a moment as in wonder, and then, in a swoon of utter weariness, she fell as one stricken down into a deep brake of fern. And there amid the old bracken and the swift fronds of spring she lay and slept, heedless of all.

(Unfinished Tales, 121)

When she awakes, “she was famished and cold”, “but the rain smote her and drenched her, and she lay like a wild beast that is dying. There Turambar found her, as he came to the Crossings of Teiglin” (Silmarillion, 264).

Here are all the same elements – a hungry, wet, naked, cold and beast-like exile emerging from the underbrush near a stream begging for aid, and a young person of a royal lineage who provides them while also conceiving an inappropriate love. Even the central issue of each episode is the same: Odysseus resists the charms of Nausicaa because he remembers his wife and past; Túrin and Nienor have no past and therefore know of no reason to prevent their love: “Turambar he named himself hiding his past; Túrin son of Húrin. Niniel we named her, not knowing her past: Nienor she was, daughter of Húrin” (Unfinished Tales, 140).

Like Éowyn, Nienor begins her progress toward her doom with disobedience – her confrontation with Glaurung comes about only because

Nienor disguises herself as a soldier and rides out with a company of elves despite her mother's orders to the contrary (*Silmarillion*, 243; *Unfinished Tales*, 115). Nienor differs from Éowyn, however, in the results of her actions. Éowyn meets with success (although bought with much sorrow), while Nienor's will is overcome by the dragon Glaurang who takes from her all memory of who she is.

Éowyn escapes her precursor's tragic fate because she decides, at the last minute, not to fight for the sake of her pride, but for the love she has for her King and her people. When the Nazgûl King tells her to surrender, since, "No living man may hinder me!",

Merry heard of all sounds in that hour the strangest. It seemed that Dernhelm laughed, and the clear voice was like the ring of steel. "But no living man am I! You look upon a woman.⁶ Éowyn I am, Éomund's daughter. *You stand between me and my lord and kin.* Begone, if you be not deathless! For living or dark undead, I will smite you, if you touch him."

(*LotR*, 874; emphasis mine)

Éowyn's primary concern is for her "lord and kin" and her lineage claim is made as a validation of self, not as an aggrandisement. Nienor's confrontation with Glaurang is different – Éowyn says 'this is who I am, and I will defy you'; Nienor's claim is 'I will defy you because this is who I am':

Then Nienor strove against Glaurung, for she was strong in will; but he put forth his power against her. "What seek you here?" he said.

And constrained to answer she said: "I do but seek one Túrin that dwelt here a while. But he is dead, maybe."

"I know not," said Glaurung. "He was left here to defend the women and weaklings; but when I came he deserted them, and fled. A boaster but a craven, it seems. Why seek you such a one?"

⁶ Éowyn's confrontation with the Nazgûl King here takes on the power of prophetic circumstance not very much unlike the meeting of Macduff and Macbeth in Shakespeare's play: Macbeth: "I bear a charmed life, which must not yield / To one of woman born"; Macduff: "Macduff was from his mother's womb / Untimely ripp'd" (V iii, 12-16).

“You lie,” said Nienor. “The children of Húrin at least are not craven. We fear you not.”

Then Glaurung laughed *for so was Húrin’s daughter revealed to his malice*. “Then you are fools, both you and your brother,” said he. “And *your boast shall be made in vain*. For I am Glaurung!”

(Unfinished Tales, 118-119; emphasis mine)

In the short essay “Of ermod” that Tolkien appended to his radio-play “The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth”, he praises, “the northern heroic spirit . . . the doctrine of uttermost endurance in the service of indomitable will”, but goes on to say: “Yet this element of pride, in the form of the desire for honour and glory, in life and after death, tends to grow, to become a chief motive, driving a man beyond the brink of heroic necessity to excess” (Homecoming, 169-170). Both Éowyn and Nienor display fine “northern” courage, but while Nienor does not relinquish her “desire for honour and glory” in her defiance of the monster, Éowyn does. Éowyn turns her back on “pride’s tendency to grow to excess”, and returns once again to “the brink of heroic necessity” by defying the Nazgûl for the sake of her lord and kinsman and not for herself. Significantly, however, she does not die protecting her lord’s body as demanded by the “northern” code, and her fate *continues* to unravel long after the death of the Nazgûl King. After the purely “northern” scene enacted between her, Théoden and the Nazgûl, Éowyn progresses *beyond* it and toward her “Homeric” relationship with Faramir and Ithilien.⁷

Instead of sharing Nienor’s pride (and possibly her fate), she ends the narrative married to Faramir and living in Ithilien as the White Lady, a title that Faramir initially applies to the “queen” Galadriel (LotR, 706):

⁷ Robert Boenig’s “Tolkien and Old Germanic Ethics” (see bibliography) argues that Éowyn survives her “northern” encounter with the Nazgûl because there is a “larger, communal concern” in which she has a role that supersedes her individual interest to gain glory by dying for her lord.

“I will be a shieldmaiden no longer, nor vie with the great Riders, nor take joy only in the songs of slaying. I will be a healer, and love all the things that grow and are not barren.” And again she looked at Faramir. “No longer do I desire to be a queen,” she said.

Then Faramir laughed merrily. “That is well,” he said; “for I am not a king. Yet I will wed the White Lady of Rohan, if it be her will. And if she will, then let us cross the River and in happier days let us dwell in fair Ithilien and there make a garden. All things will grow with joy there, if the White Lady comes.”

(LotR, 1001)

Éowyn ends the narrative, ironically, as a fully realised “queen” because she no longer desires the personal glory that comes with being one – just as Nausicaa, after realising that Odysseus is not and can not be for her, presumably becomes a “wife” in her own right. The only thing that remains between Éowyn and Aragorn is his gratitude to her for having done so much for him in his quest for both throne and “wife”. In the same way, all that Nausicaa has to comfort her after she loses Odysseus is the knowledge that he owes much of his return to Ithaca and Penelope to her: “Fare thee well, stranger; in your land remember me / who met and saved you. It is worth your thought” (8.476-477).

Éowyn’s contentment does not come easily, nor does it come quickly. When Aragorn first encounters her, she is a disgruntled and discouraged woman. She rails against Aragorn’s refusal to take her with him to Minas Tirith and against his renewed admonitions to remain with her people and protect them should the army fail:

“Too often I have heard of duty,” she cried. “But am I not of the House of Eorl, a shieldmaiden and not a dry nurse? . . .

.....
 “Shall I always be left behind when Riders depart, to mind the house while they win renown, and find food and beds when they return?”

“All your words are but to say: you are a woman, and your part is in the house. But when the men have died in battle and honour, you have leave to be burned in the house, for the men will need it no more. But I am of the House of Eorl and not a serving-woman. I can ride and wield blade, and I do not fear either pain or death.”

“What do you fear, lady?” [Aragorn] asked.

“A cage,” she said. “To stay behind bars, until use and old age accept them, and all chance of doing great deeds is gone beyond recall or desire.”

(LotR, 815-816)

Éowyn’s proto-typically feminist complaint springs from a misconception. In her role as “house-guardian”, Éowyn regards herself not as an Arwen (Penelope) or a Galadriel (Arete/Calypso), but as a domestic servant or a drudge. She does not realise that the role being proposed to her by Aragorn allows her far more power and significance than a “dry-nurse”. What she is in fact refusing is the “queen” type that she later becomes after her destruction of the Nazgûl and union with Faramir.

What finally “cures” Éowyn is the Pity of Aragorn and Faramir, just as the possibility of Nausicaa’s eventual marriage is the result of Odysseus’ wisdom. When Odysseus first meets Nausicaa he acts wisely: “And Odysseus came, / debating inwardly what he should do: / . . . / In his swift reckoning, he thought it best / to trust to words to please her” (6.151-157). In the same manner, Aragorn speaks to Éowyn from Pity (LotR, 815-816). The essential difference between Odysseus and Aragorn in this scene is, of course, their ultimate objective. Odysseus is trying to win food and protection for himself while Aragorn’s primary concern is Éowyn’s own well-being. Whatever the different motivations, both Odysseus and Aragorn first display their new (or renewed) “ruling trait” during their encounter with the “maiden” – to this point in the narrative, Odysseus has been unwisely trapped on the island of Calypso and Aragorn has been too concerned with his

(seemingly) wrong choices and regretting the loss of Gandalf to practise much Pity toward others.

While we can only assume that Nausicaa becomes a “wise wife”, Tolkien’s tale explicitly demonstrates Éowyn’s growth into her role as a Pity-dispensing “queen” through her own and Faramir’s Pity. When he first sees her, Faramir “was moved with pity, for he saw that she was hurt, and his clear sight perceived her sorrow and unrest. . . He looked at her, and being a man whom pity deeply stirred, it seemed to him that her loveliness amid her grief would pierce his heart” (*LotR*, 995). Éowyn, like Galadriel, practises the “first principle” of Pity by not doing something that is “immediately desirable” – just as Galadriel renounces the Ring, Éowyn renounces her love of Aragorn. In Tolkien’s vision though, Pity can be the beginning and result of love, but it cannot be the basis:

“I wished to be loved by another,” she answered. “But I desire no man’s pity.”

.....
 And Éowyn looked at Faramir long and steadily; and Faramir said: “Do not scorn pity that is the gift of a gentle heart, Éowyn! But I do not offer you my pity. For you are a high lady . . . And I love you. Once I pitied your sorrow. But now were you sorrowless, without fear or any lack, were you the blissful Queen of Gondor, still I would love you.”

(*LotR*, 1000)

The result of their love is Éowyn adopting the “queen” role – a role that, as we have seen with the previous “White Lady”, Galadriel, involves the reception of divine Pity, and the dispensing of it to others. The “maiden” benefits from the Pity of Aragorn and Faramir to the point where her relationship with her husband is no longer dependent upon Pity, thus freeing her to exercise it herself.

Éowyn’s fate is clearly not one that most feminist readers and critics would choose for her. Instead of re-affirming her independence and uniqueness in Middle-earth, she opts to step into the role of the White Lady and become a

lesser version of the “type” most powerfully exemplified by Galadriel and Arwen. To expect anything other than this from Tolkien would, however, be unrealistic – he was a very conservative member of a very conservative class. And while to modern readers (and to Éowyn herself before she is “healed”) Éowyn’s fate may seem more of a placebo (or even a punishment) than a reward, it is important to remember that according to the paradigms by which Middle-earth works, the role that Éowyn takes for herself at the end of the narrative is far from weak or insignificant. Her place in the world is definitely more circumscribed than that of most of the male characters, but it is not devoid of importance or dignity. Éowyn’s story is not the tale of a “maiden” subdued. It is, rather, the story of the “maiden” triumphant and mature as she grows beyond a largely “northern” vision of glory and into a “Homeric” conception of her potential role in the world as a woman.

Hero(ine)

I have so far been content to discuss the five types of Homeric women in Middle-earth in relative isolation. Such an approach, while useful, cannot be long maintained since the types are part of a larger narrative in which they intersect and interact, and in both Homer and Tolkien, this point of intersection is none other than the hero himself. The central concern of all heroic literature is heroic virtue, and the *Odyssey* and *The Lord of the Rings* are no exception to this rule. Homer's women together develop, challenge and reward Odysseus' wisdom in a single, coherent narrative structure. Similarly, Tolkien's Homer-inspired women develop Aragorn's, Sam's and Frodo's Christian Pity through a series of meetings that, when taken together, recall the structure of the *Odyssey*. The women characters of *The Lord of the Rings* are of paramount importance in any Homeric reading of the work, since Aragorn, Sam and Frodo are Odyssean only in their relationships with women. As has been shown many times elsewhere, when the heroes interact with one another in purely male-male configurations they do so as clearly identifiable Northern heroes (both ancient and Medieval).¹ The male-female relationships, however, are clearly Southern, and when the chief heroes of *The Lord of the Rings* interact with women, they do not do so as Beowulf or Sigurd, but as Odysseus.

In both Homer and Tolkien the "goddess" accompanies the hero, guiding and inspiring him in his quest; the "queen" is a localised figure who provides aid for the Road after the hero has passed a test of his abilities; the "monster" is an anti-type of the "queen" who attempts to prevent the hero's *nostos*; and the "maiden" appears as a final confrontation for the hero before he returns to his

¹ See, for example, Verlyn Fleiger's "Frodo and Aragorn: the Traditional Hero" and George Thomson's "The Lord of the Rings: The Novel as Traditional Romance" (see bibliography).

“wife”. The Homeric and the Tolkienian types differ, then, in neither function nor narrative role, but in the heroic virtue that they develop. Just as the five types develop Odysseus’ Homeric wisdom, so do they develop Mary’s Christian Pity in Tolkien’s corporate Odysseus: Aragorn, Sam and Frodo.

After leaving the island of Calypso, Odysseus encounters and is aided by Nausicaa. By the good grace of Arete, he then journeys to his homeland where he once again puts himself in the hands of Athena who guides him through the last stage of his Return to be reunited with Penelope. The pattern of “queen” to “maiden”, then home (aided by another “queen”) to meet the “goddess” who completes the hero’s Return to his “wife”, is elegantly and subtly reproduced in the final stages of Aragorn’s career.

Odysseus and Aragorn both leave the timeless land of a powerful “queen” (Ogygia and Lothlórien), by water, freshly reprovisioned with food and drink and newly dressed in cloaks “divinely woven”. Both run into “rough weather” and unforeseen problems that take them from the straight road home (Odysseus the Wrath of Poseidon and Aragorn the breaking of the Fellowship). Their return to that road is begun, for each, by their meeting with a “maiden”.

Odysseus’ first reaction to Nausicaa is to enlist her aid by wisely flattering and attracting her. Aragorn’s first reaction to Éowyn is to pity her when he sees that he has unintentionally attracted the “maiden”; ironically, that attraction proves (“Odysseanly”) useful when, because of it, she provides him with essential aid by killing the Nazgûl King. Odysseus easily resists Nausicaa by remaining steadfast in his determination to return, and he wins the favour of the “queen” Arete. Because of her favour, Odysseus is laden with treasure and given transport to Ithaca (while he “sleeps as if dead”) where he awakes to find Athena awaiting him. Aragorn, after telling Éowyn that she must follow her duty and stay to protect her people, follows the Paths of the Dead to Gondor with the

company of men sent to him by the “queen” Galadriel (LotR, 807) where he is reunited with the “goddess” Gandalf.

Neither Odysseus nor Aragorn is able to complete his Return immediately. Odysseus must kill the suitors and be reunited with his father while Aragorn must save Minas Tirith from immediate destruction and then find a way to aid Frodo in Mordor. And just as Odysseus accomplishes his task by continuing to honour and heed the advice of Athena, so too does Aragorn with Gandalf:

“Let none now reject the counsels of Gandalf, whose long labours against Sauron come at last to their test. But for him all would long ago have been lost. Nonetheless I do not yet claim to command any man. Let others choose as they will.”

(LotR, 914)

When Odysseus returns to Ithaca in the guise of a beggar, his wisdom is on the brink of its greatest test in his battle with the suitors – at this moment, the goddess admits that he is almost as wise as she:

“. . . Two of a kind, we are,
contrivers, both. Of all men now alive
you are the best in plots and story telling.
My own fame is for wisdom among the gods –
deceptions, too”

(13.350-354)

Similarly, it is after Aragorn has “returned” to Gondor but remains outside “like a beggar at the door” (LotR, 895) that his affinity with Gandalf is most obvious. Legolas recognises in Aragorn a power and strength beyond that of any other mortal: “I looked on Aragorn and thought how great and terrible a Lord he might have become in the strength of his will, had he taken the Ring to himself” (LotR, 910).² This echoes the fears felt by Frodo about Gandalf and Galadriel as

² That Aragorn’s great power finds its most effective demonstration in an evil that he has *not* committed is at once the most “Tolkienian” aspect of his character and the least Homeric. It is actually quite “Beowulfian”: see Irving, “The Text of Fate” (see bibliography), in which he discusses the traditional Anglo-Saxon poetic technique of defining an ideal by saying what it is not (p.169).

he offers them the Ring and it highlights the importance of the Pity that Aragorn, like them, has shown by refusing to take what Frodo offers. Perhaps fittingly, Aragorn's affinity to Gandalf is made most apparent by the youngest and most immature hobbit, Pippin: "Was there ever anyone like him? . . . Except Gandalf, of course. I think they must be related," (LotR, 904).³

Like his mentor, Aragorn takes Pity as his primary characteristic. During the march to Mordor, some of the soldiers lose hope and "Aragorn looked at them, and there was pity in his eyes rather than wrath" and he allows them to leave the march to fight another battle: "Then some being shamed by his mercy overcame their fear and went on, and the others took new hope, hearing of a manful deed within their measure that they could turn to, and they departed" (LotR, 920).

The wisdom and Pity of Odysseus and Aragorn as well as that of the women whom they have met ensure their Returns. Odysseus is as wise as Athena, and Aragorn – in a marked contrast to the Homeric ethos – has as much Pity for the weak as Gandalf. Finally, both heroes find the end of their story in the arms of the "wife" – Odysseus in bed with the woman whose Wisdom has kept it safe for him, and Aragorn on the throne with the woman whose Pity has led her to choose it over immortality.

Sam's Homeric Return is a comparatively simple progression from "queen" to "wife". Like Aragorn, Sam becomes a ruler upon his return; the appendices tell how Sam is elected Mayor seven times, but since the Mayor's, "only duty was to preside at banquets" and to manage "both the Messenger Service and the Watch" (LotR, 22) it can be safely assumed that no matter how well suited to the job, Sam would have little opportunity to exercise the "stern pity" displayed by

³ Tolkien would have undoubtedly been aware of the apocryphal material that attributes to Odysseus divine ancestry from Athena.

Gandalf or Aragorn. Sam's experiences in Mordor do lead to a vague understanding of Pity, but this understanding does not come through the inspiration of a "goddess" or demonstration of a "queen"; it is an innate compassion brought into flower by hard personal experience:

But deep in his heart there was something that restrained him: he could not strike this thing lying in the dust, forlorn, ruinous, utterly wretched. He himself, though only for a little while, had borne the Ring, and now dimly guessed the agony of Gollum's shrivelled mind and body.

(LotR, 980)

While it is as essential to the successful completion of the Quest as the Pity of Galadriel and Frodo, Sam never consciously formulates or defines his feeling and he is unable to take it with him when he returns. He empathises with Gollum without committing himself to Pity as an end in itself.

Sam's relationship with the "queen" is also different from Aragorn's. In her relationship with Aragorn, Galadriel mirrors Calypso and Arete insofar as she lends him physical aid for his journey (food, drink, treasure, a cloak and a company of soldiers). In her relationship with Sam, Galadriel resembles no-one more than Circe. Circe sends Odysseus to the Underworld where he receives a prophetic vision of home and advice on how to relieve Ithaca of the Wrath of Poseidon. Galadriel gives Sam access to his prophetic vision of home and, more importantly, the gift – the small box of dust – that will allow him to re-order his community and wipe out all signs of Saruman's Revenge: "Galadriel smiled upon them. 'Well, Master Samwise,' she said. 'I hear and see that you have used my gift well. The Shire shall now be more than ever blessed and beloved'" (LotR, 1066). Sam is the *agent* of Galadriel's Pity to the Shire, not, like Aragorn, an embodiment. Sam is also, however, the beneficiary of Rose's Pity as much as Aragorn is of Arwen's (and Odysseus of Penelope's wisdom). Sam's

domestication, which closes the narrative, is a parallel vision (and, in part, the result) of Frodo's journey to the Undying Lands at "the express gift of Arwen".

It is a testimony to Tolkien's subtle touch when dealing with his Homeric material that the most Odyssean character is the one apparently least influenced by the Southern hero. Frodo, more than any other character, reproduces Odysseus' progress from "goddess" to "queen" to "monster" to "wife" as he learns the value and efficacy of Pity and then practises it himself for the benefit of the Shire. As Odysseus grows in wisdom, so too does Frodo engage Middle-earth's heroic virtue in every way possible: he learns, receives, practises and, most importantly, teaches Pity.

Frodo's growth is a long and intricate process that begins in the opening pages of *The Lord of the Rings* and does not end until the final sentence. He begins by receiving a lesson in Pity from the "goddess", a lesson that he will remember but not truly learn until much later. After the "goddess" disappears from the narrative (just as Athena disappears during Odysseus' fairy-tale wanderings), Frodo encounters and receives the Pity of the "queens" Goldberry and Galadriel. Like the other hobbits, Frodo receives only comfort and aid from Goldberry (while Gandalf is being held by Saruman), but during his confrontation with Galadriel Frodo receives both the greatest act and the greatest demonstration of Pity in the narrative (just as the greatest act of wisdom is Odysseus' decision to leave the island of Calypso). Galadriel's renunciation of the Ring is an act of humility and faith, born of Pity for both Middle-earth and Frodo – an act that gains for her the Pity of the Valar.

To this point the similarity between Frodo's and Odysseus' narrative progress is slight. After the breaking of the Fellowship, though, Frodo's movements begin to follow Odysseus' quite closely, albeit in a somewhat altered state. Odysseus' wisdom returns when Athena pleads with Zeus to send the

messenger god Hermes to Ogygia where he will tell Calypso to allow Odysseus' Return (5.9-14; 33-36). This visitation marks the end of Odysseus' wanderings as he sets off alone for Ithaca. On the very borders of Sauron's lands, Frodo has two separate visitations from the "goddess" – the first upon Amen Hen and the second as he stands over Gollum:

And suddenly he felt the Eye. There was an eye in the Dark Tower that did not sleep. He knew that it had become aware of his gaze. . . .

.....
 He heard himself crying out: *Never, never!* Or was it: *Verily I come, I come to you?* He could not tell. Then as a flash from some other point of power there came to his mind another thought: *Take it off! Take it off! Fool, take it off! Take off the Ring!*

(LotR, 421)

It seemed to Frodo then that he heard, quite plainly but far off, voices out of the past:

What a pity Bilbo did not stab the vile creature, when he had a chance!

Pity? It was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity and Mercy: not to strike without need.

I do not feel any pity for Gollum. He deserves death.

Deserves death! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some die that deserve life. Can you give that to them? Then be not too eager to deal out death in the name of justice, fearing for your own safety. Even the wise cannot see all ends.

"Very well," he answered aloud, lowering his sword. "But still I am afraid. And yet, as you see, I will not touch the creature. For now that I see him, I do Pity him."

(LotR, 639-640)

The first visitation saves Frodo from his own folly, just as Odysseus is saved from the folly of remaining with Calypso. The second visitation (really a recalled conversation) is the immediate cause of Frodo's first and most important act of faith and humility. His decision to show the same Pity that Bilbo has shown is *the* turning point of his quest, both personally and universally.

Odysseus, thanks to Athena's intervention, leaves the island of Calypso and starts homeward. Seeing this, Poseidon blows him off course forcing him to abandon his raft and swim ashore (aided by the nymph Ino; 5.344-347) at Phaiakia. There he meets Nausicaa who gives him food and drink and advises him on how best to approach her mother, Arete. Frodo's progress, while somewhat altered, is still very much the same. After Gandalf's visitation, Frodo sets out for the Gate of Mordor but is forced to turn aside when he realises that it is impossible to get into Mordor that way.⁴ He continues on his alternate route until he meets Faramir in a forest glade. Faramir, the future husband of the "maiden" Éowyn, demonstrates his Pity by, like Galadriel (and unlike his brother Boromir), renouncing the Ring – "Not if I found it on the highway would I take it" (LotR, 707) – and giving the hobbits food, drink, equipment and directions.

After parting from Faramir, Frodo proceeds into Mordor through the dangerous pass of Cirith Ungol where, just as Odysseus places himself in the hands of Arete while he is in Phaeacea, he "transfers" his immediate allegiance from Gandalf to Galadriel. Gandalf's lesson has brought Frodo to this point, but it is Galadriel's gift that will carry him through the darkest part of his journey. When he sees the Nazgûl King riding out to war, Frodo feels the Wraith's power:

There was no longer any answer to that command in his own will, dismayed by terror though it was, and he felt only the beating upon him of a great power from outside. It took his hand, and as Frodo watched with his mind, not willing it but in suspense (as if he looked on some old story far away), it moved the hand inch by inch towards the chain upon his neck. Then his own will stirred; slowly

⁴ During his trek to the Gate and to the secret back way, he is guided by Gollum – a creature who used to be a hobbit but has been transformed and forced to live far beyond his natural lifespan by the power of the Ring: all of which is interesting insofar as Ino, Odysseus' guide to the island of Phaeacea after his wreck, was "once an earthling girl, / now in the seas a nereid" (5.345-346). While it is undoubtedly a coincidence, the concordance here would probably have pleased Tolkien well.

it forced the hand back and set it to find another thing, a thing lying hidden near his breast. Cold and hard it seemed as his grip closed on it: the phial of Galadriel, so long treasured, and almost forgotten till that hour. As he touched it, for a while all thought of the Ring was banished from his mind. He sighed and bent his head.
(LotR, 734)

Galadriel's Pity then carries Frodo past Shelob when he remembers Galadriel's words – "*And you, Ring-bearer, he heard her say, remote but clear, for you I have prepared this*" (LotR, 747) – just as it is Circe's advice that carries Odysseus past the Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis. Again, Frodo is the most Odyssean character in his relationship to the "monster"/"queen" dyad. To get past Scylla and Charybdis, Odysseus must remain passive and rely entirely upon Circe's gifts. In his trials, Frodo strikes no blow against Shelob and must rely upon Sam who, as Galadriel's agent, now wields her Phial, cries out a remembered song of Lórien and, eventually, works from the prophetic information gained from her Mirror.

In the escape from the tower and final descent into Mordor, it is tempting to see Sam as the more Odyssean character, but it is important to note that during this whole episode Sam continues to act as the agent of Galadriel's Pity:

Sam drew out the elven-glass of Galadriel again. As if to do honour to his hardihood, and to grace with splendour his faithful brown hobbit-hand that had done such deeds, the phial blazed forth suddenly . . .

'*Gilthoniel, A Elbereth!*' Sam cried. For, why he did not know, his thought sprang back suddenly to the Elves in the Shire, and the song that drove away the Black Riders in the trees.

.....
 . . . The Will of the Watchers was broken with a suddenness like the snapping of a cord, and Frodo and Sam stumbled forward.

(LotR, 949-950)

Not only must Frodo rely upon the power of the "queen" to bring him past the monster, but he is also delivered by the grace and power of the "queen" into the

land of his quest's completion – like Odysseus on the Phaeacean boat and Aragorn along the Paths of the Dead – while in a “sleep like death”.

When the two hobbits finally reach Mount Doom they once again meet Gollum, but the Ring has become so powerful that Frodo is “untouchable now by pity” and he orders Gollum away, warning him that, “If you touch me ever again, you shall be cast yourself into the Fire of Doom” (LotR, 979). Not only is Gandalf's lesson forgotten by Frodo, the symbol of Galadriel's Pity, the phial, is not powerful enough to overcome the power of the Ring: “it was pale and cold in [Sam's] trembling hand and threw no light into that stifling dark. He was come to the realm of Sauron and the forges of his ancient might, greatest in Middle-earth: all other powers were here subdued” (LotR, 980).⁵ At this moment, as Frodo stands “at the very Crack of Doom”, the *previous* actions of Gandalf's and Galadriel's Pity, through Frodo, come together to save the world. Gollum is alive thanks to the Pity that Frodo has learned from Gandalf and the Ring is at the Crack of Doom thanks to Galadriel's Pity that has brought Frodo through Mordor. The Providential finger of God “intrudes into the story” and, miraculously, Gollum bites the Ring from Frodo's hand and stumbles backward into the fire.

“By a ‘grace’, that last betrayal was at a precise juncture when the final evil deed was the most beneficial thing any one [could] have done for Frodo! By a situation created by his ‘forgiveness’, he was saved himself, and relieved of his burden” (Letters, 234). Frodo is “saved” by his Pity, but, “In this case the cause (and not the ‘hero’) was triumphant, because by the exercise of pity, mercy, and forgiveness of injury, a situation was produced in which all was redressed and disaster averted” (Letters, 253). The Pity taught by the “goddess”, given by the

⁵ Yet another reason to argue against Galadriel as Tolkien's version of Mary. It is impossible to believe that Mary's Pity could ever be “pale and cold”.

“queen” and opposed by the “monster” is here triumphant and Frodo’s quest ends in success but not, significantly, in personal triumph. Again, this follows the narrative pattern of the *Odyssey*. Frodo upon Mount Doom is the analogue of Odysseus first setting foot in Ithaca – both have completed their quests through “fairy-land” thanks to the exercise of the heroic virtue taught by the “goddess”, given by the “queens” and “maidens”, and opposed by the “monsters”. They are home, but they have yet to triumph over the despoilers and find relief in the arms of their “wives”.

In both the *Odyssey* and *The Lord of the Rings* there is a fine and yet important distinction made between the individual and the universal, and, from the very beginning, Tolkien is at pains to demonstrate the different operations of grace upon both. Gandalf explains that, “the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many”, and that “he took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity” (*LotR*, 73). Bilbo’s Pity has had *two* effects, one on himself (“he took so little hurt from the evil”) and one with universal importance (“the fate of many”). Likewise, on Mount Doom the Cause “triumphs” while Frodo is merely “saved”. When Odysseus first returns to Ithaca he has been “saved” from wandering, but Ithaca remains in the hands of the suitors, and the Cause itself is yet to “triumph”. Tolkien wrote that, “Frodo (and the Cause) were saved – by Mercy: by the supreme value and efficacy of Pity and forgiveness of injury” (*Letters*, 252). The parentheses make the distinction clear – the grace extended to the Cause and the grace extended to Frodo are linked but not joined: linked in that the ultimate cause of both is Frodo’s Pity, but not joined since one is personal and one universal.

Mythographers and their followers have long concentrated on Frodo’s quest as an archetypal journey involving flight, danger, finding a precious object

and return.⁶ The one thing that these critics rarely take into account is the all-important fact that Frodo's quest is not to possess the precious object but to destroy it. This is not to say that Frodo's quest violates the time- (and Tolkien-) honoured quest tradition; it is instead, transformed. The Ring is destroyed but Frodo returns out of Mordor with a far more precious object – the Pity that has allowed him to save the world by destroying Gollum's "Precious". In a very real sense, the true quest is not to destroy the Ring but to give Frodo an awareness of the power of Pity equal to Odysseus' understanding of wisdom; for without that heroic virtue the anterior effects of the quest (the destruction of evil, the return of the hero, the cleansing of the homeland) would have remained forever unachievable.

With Odysseus' Return to Ithaca and the Fall of Sauron, the final movements of each narrative can finally begin as Frodo and Odysseus set about reclaiming their homelands from those who are destroying it. As these movements begin, the first person whom each hero meets is the "goddess" who has been absent during their fairy-tale adventures (Frodo's Homeric progress begins with his departure from Lothlórien, after Gandalf's "death"). Guided by Athena's wisdom, Odysseus meets his son and trusty servants, tests the suitors and his wife until, finally, he kills the malefactors and completes his Return by cleansing his hall and re-establishing his wise rule. The personal triumph of his return to Ithaca is made universal with his Return to the throne.

After his rescue from Mordor, Frodo follows the guidance of the "goddess", and just as Odysseus brings Athena's wisdom to Ithaca, so does Frodo bring Pity to the Shire. As the hobbits approach their home Gandalf takes his leave of them, saying, "My time is over: it is no longer my task to set things to rights, nor

⁶ W.H. Auden's "The Quest Hero" (see bibliography), p. 44, is perhaps the best example of this.

to help folk to do so” (LotR, 1033); that task instead falls to Frodo. In a replay of his conversation with Gandalf about Gollum, Frodo tries to teach Pippin the value of Pity:

“Well, we’ve come back none too soon,” said Merry.

“Not a day too soon. Perhaps too late, at any rate for Lotho,” said Frodo. “Miserable fool, but I am sorry for him.”

“Save Lotho? Whatever do you mean?” said Pippin. “Destroy him, I should say.”

“I don’t think you quite understand things, Pippin,” said Frodo. “Lotho never meant things to come to this pass. He has been a wicked fool, but he’s caught now. . . He’s a prisoner in Bag End now, I expect, and very frightened. We ought to try and rescue him.”

(LotR, 1043)

During the battle with Saruman’s thugs, Frodo’s “chief part had been to prevent the hobbits in their wrath at their losses, from slaying those of their enemies who threw down their weapons” (LotR, 1054). Frodo’s Pity extends even to Saruman; three times he prevents the hobbits from killing him, until in his bitterness, Saruman says to Frodo: “You are wise and cruel. You have robbed my revenge of sweetness, and now I must go hence in bitterness, in debt to your mercy. I hate it and you” (LotR, 1056-1057). Saruman’s rejection of Frodo’s Pity is a rejection of the (divine) Pity of the Valar: when Wormtongue kills Saruman, his shade “wavered, looking to the West; but out of the West came a cold wind, and it bent away, and with a sigh dissolved into nothing. / Frodo looked down at the body with pity and horror” (LotR, 1058).

Frodo’s role in these final chapters is far from the insignificant or even ineffectual one that many critics have painted it. The issue of possession was of paramount importance to Tolkien and when Frodo says, “It is useless to meet revenge with revenge: it will heal nothing” (LotR, 1056) he means much more than simply ‘two wrongs do not make a right’. Bilbo “took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so.

With Pity” (LotR, 73). Had the hobbits begun their re-possession of the Shire with revenge and not Pity, nothing but evil could have come of it. Frodo’s actions are far more important to the long-term success of their venture than all the arrows and pitchforks of the hobbits – at least as important a part of the Scouring of the Shire as Odysseus’ wisdom is a part of the scouring of his hearth.

Finally, both Frodo and Odysseus *teach* their successors. During the test of the bow, Telemachus is given a lesson in wisdom from his father:

A fourth try, and he had it all but strung –
when a stiffening in Odysseus made him check.
 Abruptly then he stopped and turned and said;
 “Blast and damn it, must I be a milksop
 all my life? Half-grown, all thumbs,
 no strength or knacks at arms, to defend myself
 if someone picks a fight with me.”

(21.135-141; emphasis mine)

By pretending to be weak and incapable of battle, Telemachus follows his father’s wise example and puts the suitors at their ease, making them easy prey to his true strength. Likewise, Sam receives a lesson in heroic virtue from Frodo. As Sam tries to decide how best to use the dust that Galadriel has given him, Pippin suggests throwing it into the air and leaving it to chance while Merry suggests using it all in one nursery:

“But I’m sure the Lady would not like me to keep it all for my own garden, now so many folk have suffered,” said Sam.

“Use all the wits and knowledge you have of your own, Sam,” said Frodo, “and then use the gift to help your work and better it. And use it sparingly. There is not much here, and I expect every grain has a value.”

So Sam planted saplings in all the places where specially beautiful or beloved trees had been destroyed, and he put a grain of the precious dust in the soil at the root of each.

(LotR, 1060-1061)

Frodo's injunction for Sam to use "all his wits and knowledge" gives this passage added resonance with the *Odyssey*, but with the addition of the Lady's "gift" to "help his work and better it" we are given in Sam's quest to redeem the fallen garden of the Shire a very nice image of the operation of grace as a dual motion of both mortal and divine Pity.

At the end of their struggles, Odysseus and Frodo find rest and comfort through the actions of a "wife" and after a brief delay. With the death of the suitors, Odysseus reveals himself to Penelope who first tests him before accepting him. Odysseus then joins Penelope in their bed and the next day re-establishes his rule by re-uniting himself with his father. Frodo's complete enjoyment of the "wife" – his trip to Valinor with his adoptive father Bilbo by the gift of Arwen – is also delayed. Before he leaves with Gandalf, Galadriel, and Elrond, Frodo "assumes the throne" as Odysseus has (and Sam later will) by acting as the Shire's Mayor for a year (LotR, 1059) during which time he is forced to rely upon the comfort of Arwen's white gem instead of the ease of the Blessed Realm. His "wife's" delay before accepting him (the test) teaches Odysseus how wise Penelope truly is, thus preparing him for the rest of his life with her. Similarly, Frodo learns a valuable lesson about himself from the delay between his return and his enjoyment of Arwen's gift:

"But," said Sam, and tears started in his eyes, "I thought you were going to enjoy the Shire, too, for years and years, after all you have done."

"So I thought too, once. But I have been too deeply hurt, Sam."

(LotR, 1067)

Both Odysseus and Frodo undergo a period of anonymity before they are finally rewarded for their efforts and, for both, this period is also highly educational. In his disguise as a beggar, Odysseus sees not only the insolence of the suitors and Penelope's wisdom, but he also learns how he can defeat the suitors despite their

overwhelming superiority of numbers. Upon their return to the Shire, Pippin, Merry and Sam are honoured by the other hobbits while Frodo's heroic efforts go unnoticed by his own people: "Few people knew or wanted to know about his deeds and adventures; their admiration and respect were given mostly to Mr. Meriadoc and Mr. Peregrin and (if Sam had known it) to himself" (LotR, 1063). Just as Odysseus' period of anonymity further prepares him for his reunion with Penelope, so too does Frodo's prepare him to receive Arwen's gift, for his anonymity among his own people spells the end of any remaining desire to "have returned as a 'hero', not content with being a mere instrument of good" (Letters, 328). Unrecognised by his people and suffering from the wound that was inflicted upon him by his pride on Weathertop (LotR, 1063), Frodo's "last flicker of pride" dies and he is finally able to look forward to a life of rest thanks to Arwen's final gift.

The one overwhelming similarity between Odysseus and Frodo is, however, their motivation. Aragorn is motivated to "return" to Gondor by his desire to uphold and fulfil his dynastic claim while Sam is motivated largely by the love that he bears his master. Frodo and Odysseus, on the other hand, are motivated by their memories of home and once again, this link between Frodo and Odysseus is made through the women.

Odysseus makes no distinction between his desire for Ithaca and his desire for Penelope. Throughout all his journeys it is the single image of *his wife by his hearth* that hovers before him, forever beckoning him onward. Similarly, Frodo's desire is to protect the Shire, a land that Tolkien so subtly "feminises" that the identification of the hobbits' homeland with what can only be called a primordial femininity can be – and consistently has been – overlooked.

Frodo explains at several points that his principal desire is to keep the Shire safe: "I should like to save the Shire, if I could – though there have been

times when I thought the inhabitants too stupid or dull for words"; "I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me" (LotR, 75-76, 1067). And just as Odysseus' wish to return is but a part of his wisdom, so too is Frodo's wish to protect the Shire born of his Pity: "Frodo undertook his quest out of love – to save the world he knew from disaster at his own expense, if he could; and also in complete humility, acknowledging that he was totally inadequate to the task" (Letters, 327). The difference between Tolkien's Pity and Homer's wisdom is here readily apparent: it is impossible to imagine Odysseus undertaking anything in complete humility and the entire point of his struggles is to ensure that he is *wholly* adequate to any task. Furthermore, while both Frodo and Odysseus struggle to return, Odysseus (like Aragorn) is trying to regain a throne while Frodo is trying to protect his homeland for the sake of those who live in it. Instead of heroic self-interest, Frodo is motivated by selfless Christian humility to save his world.

This "world he knew" that Frodo "loves" so desperately is elegantly "feminised" by Tolkien from the very beginning of the narrative. The "fighting spirit" that saves the Shire is firmly based in the feminine side of the Hobbits. Bilbo and Frodo both derive their "Tookish" sense of adventure from their mothers. Again, this aspect of their characterisation has an analogue in Odysseus whose name (*Odyssamenos* = "one who is angry and gives cause for anger"; 19.446-453) is given him by his *maternal* grandfather, Autolykos, whom among all his ancestors Odysseus most closely resembles in both fortune and nature. Furthermore, the embodiment in the final chapters of the indomitable hobbit-spirit in none other than Lobelia Sackville-Baggins, who "showed more spirit than most" (LotR, 1051) and whose release from the "lock-ups" is the crowning moment of the Scouring:

Then there was Lobelia. Poor thing, she looked very old and thin when they rescued her from the dark and narrow cell. She insisted on hobbling out on her own feet; and she had such a welcome, and there was such clapping and cheering when she appeared, leaning on Frodo's arm but still clutching her umbrella, that she was quite touched, and drove away in tears. . .

When the poor creature died next Spring – she was after all more than a hundred years old – Frodo was surprised and much moved: she had left all that remained of her money and of Lotho's for him to use in helping hobbits made homeless by the troubles. So that feud was ended.

(LotR, 1059)

The primary means of the “feminisation” of the Shire is the story of the long-separated Ents and the Entwives. When Merry and Pippin are in Fangorn, they learn from Treebeard that while the Ents were content to walk amongst the trees and shepherd them, the Entwives sought to order nature and cultivate large gardens (LotR, 497). Based upon the Hobbits' description of the Shire, Treebeard firmly believes that the Entwives – the very embodiment of a primordial feminine principle – “would like [their] country” (LotR, 493), and when the description of the Shire is compared to the description of the Entwives' gardens it is easy to see why Treebeard would think that:

“[The Entwives] saw the sloe in the thicket, and the wild apple and the cherry blossoming in spring, and the green herbs in the waterlands in summer, and the seeding grasses in the autumn fields. . . The Entwives ordered them to grow according to their wishes, and bear leaf and fruit to their liking: for the Entwives desired order, and plenty and peace (by which they meant that things should remain where they had set them). So the Entwives made gardens to live in. But we Ents went on wandering, and we only came to the gardens now and again.”

(LotR, 497)

Hobbits are an unobtrusive but very ancient people, more numerous formerly than they are today; for they love peace and quiet and good tilled earth: a well-ordered and well-farmed countryside was their favourite haunt. . . .

.....
 The Hobbits named it the Shire, as the region of the authority of their Thain, and a district of well-ordered business; and there in that pleasant corner of the world they plied their well-ordered business of living, and they heeded less and less the world outside where dark things moved, until they came to think that peace and plenty were the rule in Middle-earth and the right of all sensible folk.

(LotR, 13, 17)

Significantly, this description of the Shire recalls not only the Entwives but Lórien and Ithilien – the realms of the “queens” – as well. The passage resonates with words and phrases that throughout *The Lord of the Rings* are consistently associated with the “queens” and with the realms that they both live in and control.

In the Shire, those who follow the agricultural crafts of the Entwives are held in high regard: “Not all is well there,’ said Frodo, ‘but certainly gardeners are honoured’”; “You will be the Mayor, of course, as long as you want to be, and the most famous gardener in history” (LotR, 708, 1067). Due to the Hobbits’ reverence for the essentially feminine principles of agriculture, the Shire is indeed a place that the Entwives like, and, as is revealed within the opening pages of the narrative, Treebeard is quite astute in assuming that the Entwives may have chosen to live there – for they have:

“All right,” said Sam, laughing with the rest. “But what about these Tree-men, these giants, as you might call them? They do say that one bigger than a tree was seen up beyond the North Moors not long back.

.....
 “But this one was as big as an elm tree, and walking – walking seven yards to a stride, if it was an inch.”

“Then I bet it wasn’t an inch. What he saw *was* an elm tree, as like as not.”

“But this one was *walking*, I tell you; and there ain’t no elm tree on the North Moors.”

(LotR, 57-58)

Although some critics have assumed that what Hal sees is an Ent⁷, the evidence from Treebeard is clearly against that conclusion. The Ents neither wander beyond the borders of Fangorn nor has Treebeard, “chief” amongst the Ents, ever heard of the Shire (LotR, 493).

By protecting the Shire, Frodo protects the only place in Middle-earth that can still attract the physical manifestations of nature’s own “feminine principle”. By returning to Ithaca and Penelope, Odysseus returns to the only place in the “human” world of the Homeric epics where wife and hearth have remained true.⁸ Women are not just the “narrative means” by which Odysseus and Frodo accomplish their quests and return to their homes; they provide the impulse for everything that the heroes do. The women of Homer and Tolkien are not just narratively important, they are the very centre and cause of all that happens.

⁷ Neil Isaacs, “On the Possibility of Writing Tolkien Criticism” (see bibliography), p. 10.

⁸ As opposed to the sad story of Agamemnon’s return to wife and hearth and the scene in Sparta where Telemachus sees first-hand a hearth and a wife that have been forcibly restored.

Conclusion

Middle-earth and the Homeric Mediterranean are both governed by a feminine principle: the Southern by Athena's wisdom, the Northern by Mary's Pity. This is not to say that Tolkien's imagined Third Age is a rewrite of the Homeric epics – it is not. Tolkien's imagination was firmly entrenched in the languages, tales, traditions and values of the Ancient North of Europe and his Middle-earth is the product of a lifetime spent in close and loving attachment to the literature of the Norsemen, the Anglo-Saxons, the Finns and many other Northern peoples.

Tolkien was also a deeply devout Catholic who believed that Pity and Mercy were embodied by the Blessed Virgin. When he came to write his masterpiece, then, it is to be expected that he would want to include within the moral framework of his invented world this entirely Catholic feminine principle – the Pity of Mary. But in Tolkien's imagined Third Age, Mary is yet to be born, thus forcing him to find some other way to present his feminine principle. This must have presented Tolkien with a dilemma, for there are no models in the Northern literature that he so dearly loved to which he could have turned. There are indeed women in the northern tales and many of them are positive characters, but nowhere is there a diverse group of women who together develop a single and uniquely "feminine" principle.

Tolkien's imagination is quite possibly the most expansive and most richly variegated that this century has produced, so there is really no need to assume that he would have relied upon a literary model to produce his story. But, in addition to his Catholicism and his love of the Northern legends, Tolkien was also a man who got an A+ in Greek philology (Letters, 12), and who was

intimately familiar with the works of Homer. If he did search for a model he would have immediately found it in the *Odyssey*.

Tolkien disliked the search for literary sources and claimed all his life to have written *The Lord of the Rings* without conscious reference to other tales. At the same time, Tolkien was the first to admit that all stories, and especially fairy-stories, are created from elements drawn from what he called in his essay "On Fairy-Stories" the great Tree of Tales – the vast body of myths and tales that have been passed down orally and in manuscript for thousands of years. Few people in the Twentieth Century have had as intimate or vast an acquaintance with this Tree as Tolkien and I doubt if he himself could have indicated what elements of Middle-earth are plucked from the Tree and what elements are the result of pure invention.

I believe that a Homeric reading of *The Lord of the Rings* is not only possible but fruitful, for such a reading inevitably engages an issue all too infrequently discussed in Tolkien criticism: the absolute centrality of the women characters – and of the feminine principle – in both the narrative and thematic structure of Tolkien's masterpiece of imaginative fiction. *The Lord of the Rings* is first and foremost "a ripping good yarn" but it is also, despite Tolkien's "cordial dislike" of the term, a moral fable for the Twentieth Century. In an age of petty Sarumans and Saurons each trying to establish his own Mordor, Tolkien saw in the power of his faith a way to transcend the limits of self-interest. Rightly or wrongly, Tolkien's vision is of a universe where Hobbits can overcome the evil of pride incarnate by embracing Pity, thus making the world a better and safer place for their fellow man – and woman.

Appendix

On the Theme of the *Odyssey*

Walter Copland Perry's book *The Women of Homer* (1898) interprets the *Odyssey* as a moral fable about the education of a gentleman by the women whom he meets. Odysseus begins the narrative as an uncouth warrior fresh from battle but ends as a fully "civilised" man thanks to the educative influence of the women:

It is hardly necessary to point out that in the primitive as in the modern world civilization was in the main fostered by women. The men were absorbed in war, the chase, and the struggle for existence. On the women devolved the training of the children, the transmission of national customs and traditions from age to age.

(50)

It is therefore a sign of Odysseus' wisdom that he both solicits and listens to the advice of women.

First published in 1933 (first English translation in 1939), Werner Jaegar's *Paideia* is typical of the interpretations given to the *Odyssey* by Tolkien's contemporaries:

In the *Odyssey* as in the *Iliad*, the highest standard of manly character is the traditional ideal of a warlike valour. But the *Odyssey* also exalts the intellectual and social virtues. Its hero is the man who is never at a loss for an apt word or a clever plan. His chief merit is his cunning – the fertile practical insight which saves his life and wins his return to his home through lurking dangers and powerful enemies. . . for it is the society of the *Odyssey* which makes the poem. In the other characters too the emphasis is laid less on their heroic than on their human qualities: their intellectual and spiritual sides usually predominate.

(22)

Jaegar goes on explicitly to link the “social virtues” and “society of the *Odyssey*” that distinguishes this poem from the *Iliad* as the special province of the noble women, claiming that they had a “constant social and legal status as mistress of the household”. Women in the Homeric tradition are prized for their beauty, wisdom, chastity and good housekeeping and all noble-born men are obliged to show them both respect and courtesy for the sake of the household laws and social virtues that they represent (23-24). He goes on to say that Athena, as the goddess of wisdom, embodies, “the feminine power of inspiration and guidance through the trials of the world” (24).

Tolkien’s colleague and acquaintance C.M. Bowra (Letters, 162) was another of this century’s great Homerists. Bowra typifies the story of Odysseus thus:

His main qualities there are cunning and endurance. He keeps his head when others lose theirsHe is throughout a notable leader, resourceful and brave. . . . Lastly, the warrior of the *Iliad* becomes the returned wanderer of the *Odyssey* and needs all his powers of decision, command and improvisation [to return to Penelope].

(120-121)

Contemporary criticism has been more insistent on the importance of home and of the “feminine” aspects of Odysseus’ wisdom. George deForest Lord, in his book *Trials of the Self* (1983), claims that as Odysseus travels away from Troy and toward Ithaca he loses his men and belongings while gaining wisdom:

The other process, that of accretion, is internal, as he gradually gives up the old, egocentric, aggressive habits of the heroic warrior and develops, through a repertoire of new responses, a deepening awareness of the meaning of home. In his visit to the spirits of the great dead, he inherits the culture of his people. In Phaiacia he discovers a paradigm of domestic and community values.

(15)

Odysseus' wisdom (Lord uses the Homeric epithet *aner polutropos* = "many stratagems") includes, "among other qualities, his intuition of the feminine. The epithet, in the case of Odysseus, surely points to his capacity to become quintessential, prototypical, paradigmatic *man* – and thus *woman* also" (17).

Finally, Jenny Strauss Clay, a feminist critic also writing in 1983, links, in her book *The Wrath of Athene*, Odysseus' return to Penelope with the growth of his "humane heroism" (96). Odysseus' return to his wife and home is the fulfilment of the *metis* that sets him apart from the "quicksilver glory" of Achilles' *bie* ("brute force") (102). Odysseus' story is that of his return from the male experience of war to Penelope's feminine experience of a domestic existence – an experience that Clay typifies as more "real" (i.e. more in common with the everyday life of humanity):

The properly human . . . Odysseus and Ithaca . . . defines itself in opposition to both the subhuman and the superhuman. It accepts the necessity of toil, suffering and mortality, but also offers the possibility of endurance and heroism and also of justice.

(132)

For Clay, Odysseus' return to home and wife is a return to true heroism and justice – the means and end of wisdom.

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