

- focus of evil, and asserted that Christ was the divine protector of the U.S.A. 'America is great', he said, 'because America is good.'
21. *The Lord of the Rings*, op. cit., p. 271.
  22. *Ibid.*, p. 271.
  23. Robert Giddings and Elizabeth Holland, *J. R. R. Tolkien: The Shores of Middle-earth* (London: Junction Books, 1981), pp. 158–63.
  24. *The Lord of the Rings*, op. cit., p. 1069.
  25. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
  26. *Ibid.*, p. 739.
  27. *Ibid.*, p. 266.
  28. *Ibid.*, p. 434.
  29. *Ibid.*, p. 446.
  30. *Ibid.*, p. 495.
  31. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
  32. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
  33. In 1983 this model seems to match the foreign policy of both Downing Street and the White House. The 'Empire of Evil' that President Reagan sees in Russia is, like Mordor, an appropriate object for total destruction. *The Lord of the Rings* feeds the Western ideologies of Cold War, and whatever ideologies are promulgated on the other side, the fact that they are materialistic might limit their extension to a universal frame for the justified war.
  34. *The Lord of the Rings*, op. cit., p. 750.
  35. I am indebted to the work of Ms. Jane Davidson for this perspective on Shelob, though the details of this version of it must be my own responsibility.
  36. *The Lord of the Rings*, op. cit., p. 752.
  37. *Ibid.*, p. 756.

Honors 251C  
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Tolkien"

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## No Sex Please—We're Hobbits: The Construction of Female Sexuality in *The Lord of the Rings*

by BRENDA PARTRIDGE

The claim that *The Lord of the Rings* contains no sex must be strongly refuted; it is there, though it is closely interwoven with and often masked by the various other themes and symbolism. A close analysis of the male relationships and the female characterization reveals much about Tolkien's attitude to sexuality and the role of women.

To understand these relationships and the characters in *The Lord of the Rings* we need to know the background of Tolkien's own relationships. The group of writers and academics with whom Tolkien associated at the University of Oxford, the Inklings, is particularly important. A study of the group is completely and sympathetically documented in Humphrey Carpenter's book *The Inklings* (1978).<sup>1</sup> The group met frequently and regularly to discuss their own writing and other literary and academic matters. Characteristically of the British male of a particular socio-economic class, marked forever by school life in an exclusively male school (often boarding school), the group tried to carry into adult life the club clannishness its members had enjoyed at school. Carpenter attempts to locate

the qualities which held the Inklings together and gave them their very strong sense of group identity. He dismisses Christianity, the occult, literary areas of interest and opposition to modernism because of too great a diversification of interests and beliefs, and finally comes down on the idea of friendliness as the cement and seal which held the Inklings together.

The friendship was, of course, exclusively male. Although marriage of Oxford dons was by this time quite common, in the main university life was still dominated by males. Academics worked in their colleges and in general had their meals there. Wives and families were at home in the suburbs. But there is more to it than that. It is the attitude expressed by Lewis, Tolkien and the leading members of The Inklings which claims attention. Lewis was very outspoken about it. It was an article of his faith that full intimacy with another man was impossible unless women were totally excluded. 'A friend dead is to be mourned,' he wrote in his diary 1922, 'a friend married is to be guarded against, both equally lost.'<sup>2</sup> Believing women's minds were not meant for logic or for great art it was his view that women had little to say that was worth listening to. 'Then men have learned to live among ideas,' he wrote in *The Four Loves* (1960):

they know what discussion, proof and illustration mean. A woman who has had merely school lessons and has abandoned soon after marriage whatever type of culture 'they' gave her—whose reading is the Women's Magazines and whose general conversation is almost wholly narrative—cannot really enter such a circle. . . . If the men are ruthless, she sits bored and silent through a conversation which means nothing to her. If they are better bred, of course, they try to bring her in. Things are explained to her: people try to sublimate her irrelevant and blundering observations into some kind of sense. But the efforts soon fail, and for manners' sake, what might have been a real discussion, is deliberately diluted and peters out in gossip, anecdotes and jokes.<sup>3</sup>

Although Carpenter points out that Tolkien was capable of sympathizing over the plight of a clever woman trapped by marriage into an intellectually empty life,<sup>4</sup> it is clear that he held an equally dismissive view of female intellect; in 1941 he wrote:

How quickly an intelligent woman can be taught, grasp the teacher's ideas, see his point—and how (with some exceptions) they can go no further, when they leave his hand, or when they cease to take a personal interest in him. It is their gift to be receptive, stimulated, fertilized (in many other matters than the physical) by the male.<sup>5</sup>

In his relationship with his wife, Edith, documented in Humphry Carpenter's biography of Tolkien, a substantial part of the difficulties in the relationship stems from Tolkien's refusal to admit Edith into his circle of male friends.

He perceived that his need of male friendship was not entirely compatible with married life. But he believed that this was one of the sad facts of a fallen world: and on the whole he thought that a man had a right to male pleasures, and should if necessary insist on them.<sup>6</sup>

The importance of Tolkien's male friendships, particularly with Lewis, has a significant bearing on *The Lord of the Rings*. Although by Lewis's own admission Tolkien was not one of his main, close friends,<sup>7</sup> Lewis was, as far as Tolkien was concerned, a very important friend. The friendship was at its most intense in the early days but was disturbed by the appearance of Charles Williams. Tolkien came to resent the close relationship which developed between Williams and Lewis. The friendship was also seriously rocked by Lewis's marriage, in his sixties, to Joy Davidman. Tolkien, as a Roman Catholic, had deep objections to Lewis's marrying a divorcee, but, Carpenter points out:

. . . there was, perhaps, some other and deeper reason why he resented it. His friend Robert Murray noticed that when he talked about Lewis and the marriage it seemed almost as if he felt that some deep tie of friendship had been betrayed by it.<sup>8</sup>

That there may have been an erotic element in the relationship is hard to determine. Although always publicly denied previously, there is considerable and irrefutable evidence of Lewis's sexual ambiguity.<sup>9</sup> In *The Allegory of Love*, which he published in 1936, he argued that in the Middle Ages heterosexual romantic love played but a small part in art as in life, and that social harmony was motivated by the love of man for man—'the mutual love of warriors who die together . . . the

affection between vassal and lord . . .'. Significantly he compares this to 'a small boy's feelings for some hero in the sixth form . . .'.<sup>10</sup> There is also considerable evidence of deep homosexual feelings (and a latent sadism) between Lewis and his friend in Belfast, Arthur Greeves, revealed in Lewis's letters examined by Walter Hooper (*They Stand Together: The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves 1914–1963*).

And understanding of Lewis's ambiguous sexuality and latent sadism gives dimension to the seemingly chance remark about Tolkien soon after they first met. Lewis described him as 'a smooth, pale, fluent little chap . . . thinks all literature is written for the amusement of *men* between thirty and forty. . . . No harm in him: only needs a smack or so.'<sup>11</sup>

To determine from biographical and autobiographical material if Tolkien's feelings for Lewis were in any way sexual is more difficult. Mr. and Mrs. Tolkien began to sleep in different rooms at the same time that Tolkien's friendship with Lewis seemed to be at its height. Tolkien kept a diary in one of his own secret languages. His jealousy explodes when Williams comes on to the scene. He is distressed when Lewis marries. He only begins to keep a diary after C. S. Lewis died in 1963. He was quite specific about the reasons for the cooling of the friendship:

We were separated first by the sudden apparition of Charles Williams, and then by his marriage. But we owed a great debt to the other, and that tie, with the deep affection that it begot, remained.<sup>12</sup>

It would not be sensible to push this evidence any further than it will easily go in an attempt to understand the undercurrents in the relationships which existed between Tolkien, Lewis and Williams. However it does provide a new perspective in the examination of *The Lord of the Rings* and explains the relationships of the sexes in the book summarized very aptly by Edwin Muir:

. . . all the characters are boys masquerading as adult heroes. The hobbits . . . are ordinary boys, the fully human heroes have reached the fifth form; but hardly one of them knows anything about women, except by hearsay. Even the elves and dwarves and the ents are boys irretrievably, and will never come to puberty.<sup>13</sup>

This comment of Muir's succinctly sums up the relationship of the sexes in *The Lord of the Rings*. In ascertaining Tolkien's attitude to women the most obvious factor is the lack of female characters. Mirroring Tolkien's friendships it is a very exclusive male world. The women that do appear are conceived along very traditional lines either as the idealized goddess figure or as the romantic heroine. The interaction between the male characters and the female is for the most part stilted and distant. The relationships between the males on the other hand is often intensely close and supportive. It is the lack of magical powers and the general helplessness of the hobbits that promotes their friendship with the great Gandalf and in fact throughout their travels invites a protective care from all the human and elfin rulers they meet en route. Most are male and this together with the hobbits' small size makes the protection appear almost paternal. Tom Bombadil is the first to rescue them. Feeding and housing the hobbits and later teaching them about ancient history and the glories of nature he combines the Nature deity<sup>14</sup> with the role of Wise Man, tutor and father figure, as do Gandalf, Strider, Treebeard and the kings and their sons who similarly supply the hobbits with material necessities, protection and advice.

Size and lack of magical power are two reasons provided to account for this care and protection of the hobbits, a third is the feudalistic basis of the relationships. Echoing the feudal society of the ancient Norse myths and the medieval tales of chivalry, the hobbits, like the rest of the warriors, play the role of vassal to the various kings. Pippin swears an oath of fealty to Dethenor<sup>15</sup> and, despite Dethenor's madness, serves him loyally, saving Faramir from the funeral pyre lit mistakenly by Dethenor in the depths of his despair. Merry, too, swears allegiance to Theoden<sup>16</sup> and though he breaks his word by refusing to obey the king's command not to ride into battle with the Rohirrim, he is forgiven and the two are reconciled as the king lies dying:

Merry could not speak, but wept anew, 'Forgive me, lord,' he said at last 'if I broke your command, and yet have done no more in your service than to weep at our parting.'

The old king smiled. 'Grieve not! It is forgiven. Great heart will not be denied. Live now in blessedness; and when you sit in peace with your pipe, think of me. For never now shall I sit with

you in Meduseld, as I promised, or listen to your herb-lore.' He closed his eyes and Merry bowed beside him.<sup>17</sup>

As we have seen in Lewis's metaphor idealizing love between men as the deep bonds between warriors, it is obvious that one attraction of the ancient myths, particularly the Norse myths, albeit a subconscious attraction for Tolkien and Lewis, is their portraying of male intimacy, physical as well as mental, in a context which is socially acceptable. That is, war provides a context in which men can be acceptably intimate because they are at the same time being seen to live up to the socially desirable stereotype image of the aggressive male. Similarly aggression on a smaller scale in games, particularly rugby, is another means of promoting socially acceptable physical contact between males.

#### *Frodo and Sam*

War and its stimulation of male intimacy on the battlefield appears in *The Lord of the Rings* in another context more modern than its chivalric counterpart. Tolkien wrote that his characterization of Sam Gamgee was based on his admiration for the ordinary soldier, in particular the batman of his First World War experience. The system of batman, 'a servant who was detailed to look after his kit and care for him much in the manner of the Oxford Scout',<sup>18</sup> again reveals a desire for intimacy and devotion between men. Bearing this in mind the description of the relationship between Frodo and Sam offers interesting study. Sam's desire to be with Frodo at the beginning is portrayed as stemming from the love and loyalty of a servant for his master, and Sam is indeed the faithful batman prepared to lessen the load of Frodo's pack.

'I am sure you have given me all the heaviest stuff,' said Frodo. 'I pity snails, and all that carry their homes on their backs.'

'I could take a lot more yet, sir. My packet is quite light,' said Sam stoutly and untruthfully. . . .<sup>19</sup>

Sam's loyalty later provokes Frodo's exasperated affection and gratitude in 'The Breaking of the Fellowship'. His displeasure is described in the patronizing overtones of an officer

chastising a disobedient soldier who is endangering the mission through a foolhardy loyalty.

'Coming, Mr. Frodo! Coming!' called Sam, and flung himself from the bank, clutching at the departing boat. He missed it by a yard. With a cry and a splash he fell face downward into deep swift water. Gurgling he went under, and the River closed over his curly head.

An exclamation of dismay came from the empty boat. A paddle and the boat put about. Frodo was just in time to grasp Sam by the hair as he came up, bubbling and struggling. Fear was staring his round brown eyes.

'Up you come, Sam my lad!' said Frodo. 'Now take my hand!'

'Save me, Mr. Frodo!' gasped Sam. 'I'm drowned, I can't see your hand.'

'Here it is. Don't pinch, lad! I won't let you go. Tread water and don't flounder, or you'll upset the boat. There now, get hold of the side and let me use the paddle!' . . .<sup>20</sup>

As Sam stubbornly refuses to leave Frodo, however, Frodo reverts from the superior officer to the simple man glad to have companionship. 'Frodo actually laughed. A sudden warmth and gladness touched his heart.'<sup>21</sup>

From then on, as they alone together face peril after peril, their relationship develops an intensely intimate bond. This bond is described in a variety of terms, invoking and combining several different and important images: the bond of officer and batman, Christ and his devotee, and it is also a caring and very physical bond between two men.

When Frodo is first wounded it is Sam that insists the company halts to give him rest. During Frodo's convalescence Sam remains constantly at his side day and night as Gandalf tells Frodo,<sup>22</sup> and when Sam comes in to greet the recovering and conscious Frodo there is the first sign of a physical side to his affection for Frodo, though Sam is embarrassed.

At that moment there was a knock on the door, and Sam came in. He ran to Frodo and took his left hand, awkwardly and shyly. He stroked it gently and then he blushed and turned hastily away.

'Hullo Sam!' said Frodo.

'It's warm!' said Sam. 'Meaning your hand, Mr. Frodo. It has felt so cold through the long nights. . . .'<sup>23</sup>

Much later when the pair are making their way with Gollum through the marshes, sinking into despair, Sam voices his fears about their lack of food. Pessimistically Frodo advises him that he need not worry for they are not likely to need food:

'I don't know how long we shall take to finish,' said Frodo. 'We were miserably delayed in the hills. But Samwise Gamgee, my dear hobbit—indeed, Sam my dearest hobbit, friend of friends—I do not think we need give thought to what comes after that. To *do the job* as you put it—what hope is there that we ever shall? And if we do, who knows what will come of that? If the One goes into the Fire, and we are at hand? I ask you, Sam, are we ever likely to need bread again? I think not. If we can nurse our limbs to bring us to Mount Doom, that is all we can do. More than I can, I begin to feel.'

Sam nodded silently. He took his master's hand and bent over it. He did not kiss it, though his tears fell on it. Then he turned away, drew his sleeve over his nose, and got up, and stamped about, trying to whistle. . . .<sup>24</sup>

Their fortunes do take a turn for the better later and they manage to rustle up a feast of stewed rabbit. Frodo, on finishing the meal, sleeps and then, as later, when Frodo lies apparently dead from Shelob's poison, Sam looks upon his face. Once more it is the disciple looking at his saviour, but it is also a lover or very close friend gazing upon the face of his beloved:

And for a moment he lifted up the Phial and looked down at his master, and the light burned gently now with the soft radiance of the evening-star in summer, and in that light Frodo's face was fair of hue again, pale but beautiful with an elvish beauty, as of one who has long passed the shadows.

The final, full yielding of Frodo's body to Sam's arms comes in the scene of the whipping of Frodo. Again the physical relationship of the pair is contained within and subconsciously masked by the religious overtones (Christ's torture and the loving tending of his body by Mary Magdalene).

He was naked, lying as if in a swoon on a heap of filthy rags: his arm was flung up, shielding his head, across his side there ran an ugly whip-weal.

'Frodo! Mr. Frodo, my dear!' cried Sam, tears almost blinding him. 'It's Sam, I've come!' He half lifted his master and hugged him to his breast. Frodo opened his eyes.

'Am I still dreaming!' he muttered. 'But the other dreams were horrible.'

'You're not dreaming at all, Master,' said Sam. 'It's real. It's me. I've come.'

'I can hardly believe it,' said Frodo, clutching him. 'There was an orc with a whip, and then it turns into Sam! Then I wasn't dreaming after all when I heard that singing down below, and I tried to answer? Was it you?'

'It was indeed, Mr. Frodo. I'd given up hope, almost. I couldn't find you.'

'Well, you have now, Sam, dear Sam,' said Frodo, and he lay back in Sam's gentle arms, closing his eyes, like a child at rest when night-fears are driven away by some loved voice or hand.<sup>27</sup>

The union becomes complete, the relationship now consummated develops with no further hesitancy as the two are engaged in the remainder of their battle to destroy the ring and struggle to return to their friends. Finally, Frodo, in the role of saviour, successful but ultimately destroyed in the attempt, leaves Sam and the others to journey towards death. Sam remains and marries—the only function of the marriage lies in Tolkien's habitual tidying up of loose ends; Sam's children will grow up and flourish in the new world. The marriage also ensures that Sam, bereft of Frodo, will not be completely alone though the companionship it provides will never reach the depths of passion and spiritual intensity of the relationship of Sam and Frodo.

### *Shelob*

The physical intimacy and beauty of Frodo's and Sam's coupling is in direct contrast with another very intense relationship in the book: the fierce and protracted struggle with Shelob, the one female monster in *The Lord of the Rings*. As Robert Giddings and Elizabeth Holland have already pointed out in their book, *J. R. R. Tolkien: The Shores of Middle-earth*, Tolkien's characterization of Shelob derives strongly from several mythical sources, Sigurd's killing of the dragon, Fafnir, Theseus and the Minotaur, the spider, Ariadne, and Milton's Sin in *Paradise Lost*.<sup>28</sup> Like Milton, Tolkien is following a tradition in portraying woman as a threat, with implied sexual overtones. Pandora's

box let loose all the evils of the world. Eve's succumbing to the serpent produced a similar effect. Circe and the Sirens lured men to their death. Male fear of the power of women's sexual attraction is revealed in the constant connection with black magic, the witch and her familiar, the cat. Shelob herself is compared to a cat in the way she is fed food by Sauron.<sup>29</sup>

The cat itself is often used as an image of a woman, to imply a prescribed ideal of woman's sexuality as graceful, sensual and aloof. These traditional images of wicked and fallen women, due perhaps to the strength of their sexual power, often appear more cunning and devious than their male counterparts. The male figures tend to present a more open threat which is basically that of stronger physical power, the most obvious example is the giant.

The threat of Shelob obviously lies, in part, in her size and strength. Her power is very great indeed. She has existed from the beginning of time, she remains unconquered and whilst we get some sensation of the evil of Sauron with his 'dreadful Eye that sought to look in them' he remains invisible, his minions do the dirty work. Shelob as a presence is far more vivid and vile:

There agelong she had dwelt, an evil thing in spider-form, even such as once of old had lived in the Land of Elves in the West that is now under the Sea, such as Beren fought in the Mountains of Terror in Doriath, and so came to Luthien upon the green-sward amid the hemlocks in the moonlight long ago. How Shelob came there, flying from ruin, no tale tells, for out of the Dark Years few tales have come. But still she was there, who was there before Sauron, and before the first stone of Barad-dur, and she served none but herself, drinking the blood of Elves and then, 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. Far and wide her lesser broods, bastards of the miserable mates, her own offspring, that she slew, spread from glen to glen, from the Ephel Duoth to the eastern hills, to Dol Guldur and the fastnesses of Mirkwood. But none could rival her, Shelob the Great, last child of Ungoliant to trouble the unhappy world.<sup>30</sup>

There are noticeable underlying sexual overtones in the reference to her spawning broods of monsters, reminiscent of Milton's Sin. The symbolism of the description of Shelob's lair

also presents a sexual interpretation. The battle takes place underground and this setting derives partly from ancient underground mythologies and as Robert Giddings and Elizabeth Holland point out: 'Those who see myth itself as an expression of man's psychology . . . develop the idea of the cave representing the womb to which we all long to return.'<sup>31</sup> Shelob's lair, reached by entering a hole and journeying along tunnels, may also be seen to represent the female sexual orifice. At the entrance Frodo and Sam have to force themselves through the bushy, clutching growths (the pubic hair). 'As they thrust forward they felt things brush against their heads or against their hands, long tentacles, or hanging growths perhaps.'<sup>32</sup> These growths turn out to be cobwebs which enmesh the victim but Frodo, with the obvious phallic symbolism of the sword, pierces the web.

Then Frodo stepped up to the great grey net, and hewed it with a wide sweeping stroke, drawing the bitter edge swiftly across a ladder of close-strung cords, and at once springing away. The blue-gleaming blade shore through them like a scythe through grass, and they leaped and writhed and then hung loose. A great rent was made. Stroke after stroke he dealt, until at last all the web within his reach was shattered, and the upper portion blew and swayed like a loose veil in the incoming wind.<sup>33</sup>

The diction used to describe the tearing of the web, 'rent' and 'veil', is traditionally associated with the tearing of the hymen.

Frodo's and Sam's swords, however, despite their Elven magical powers, which usually stand them in good stead, are not adequate on their own to combat Shelob. They require superhuman aid in the form of Galadriel's phial. Galadriel's phial indeed represents good versus evil using conventional light versus darkness imagery, but it also represents a phallus more potent than their swords. When Frodo falters as he tries to out-menace Shelob, the temporary diminishing of the phial's powers is described not in light and dark terms but in sexual terms.

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*.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the phial's powers, Frodo as a man is ultimately overpowered by the female Shelob; paralysed by her venom he lies helpless waiting to be sacrificed at her will. He is rescued only through the valiant struggle of his male companion, Sam.

No onslaught more fierce was ever seen in the savage world of beasts, where some desperate small creature armed with little teeth alone, will spring upon a tower of horn and hide that stands above its fallen mate.<sup>35</sup>

The description of Sam's battle with Shelob is not only a life and death struggle of man and monster, good against evil but also represents a violent sexual struggle between man and woman. Shelob's 'soft squelching body' is a metaphor for the female genitals swollen and moist in sexual arousal. 'Great horns she had, and behind her short stalk-like neck was her huge swollen body, a vast bloated bag, swaying between her legs.'<sup>36</sup> Her impenetrable skin hangs in folds like the layers of the labia.

Knobbed and pitted with corruption was her age-old hide but ever thickened from within with layer on layer of evil growth. The blade scored it with a dreadful gash, but those hideous folds could not be pierced by any strength of men, not though Elf or Dwarf should forge the steel or the hand of Beren or of Torin wield it.<sup>37</sup>

So Sam valiantly stabs at the monster, pitifully helpless as she rears over him.

Now the miserable creature was right under her, for the moment out of the reach of her sting and of her claws. Her vast belly was above him with its putrid light, and the stench of it almost smote him down. Still his fury held for one more blow, and before she could sink upon him, smothering him and all his little impudence of courage, he slashed the bright elven-blade across her with desperate strength.

The male organ puny compared with the vast, evil smelling mass of the female is described in euphemistic sexual terms as his 'little impudence'.

It is not surprising that Sam seeks reassurance from the superhuman, symbolic male organ. '... and he fumbled in his breast with his left hand, and found what he sought: cold and hard and solid it seemed to his touch. ...'<sup>39</sup>

And so Sam and Shelob interlocked climax in an orgasm with the male phallus thrusting hard inflicting great pain and a deadly blow deep into the female sexual organ.

... She yielded to the stroke, and then heaved up the great bag of her belly high above Sam's head. Poison frothed and bubbled from the wound. Now splaying her legs she drove her huge bulk down on him again. Too soon. For Sam still stood upon his feet, and dropping his own sword, with both hands he held the elven blade point upwards, fending off that ghastly roof; and so Shelob, with strength greater than any warrior's hand, thrust herself upon a bitter spike. Deep, deep it pricked as Sam was crushed slowly to the ground.<sup>40</sup>

In the aftermath of the climax as the erection subsides the male, though victor, is again seen as frail and overwhelmed by the female's bulk.

Shelob then crawls away in agony as Sam in a final gesture holds up the phial, once more asserting male supremacy, brandishing the phallus, male symbol of power.

As if his indomitable spirit had set its potency in motion, the glass blazed suddenly like a white torch in his hand. It flamed like a star that leaping from the firmament sears the dark air with intolerable light. No such terror out of heaven had ever burned in Shelob's face before. The beams of it entered into her wounded head and scored it with unbearable pain, and the dreadful infection of light spread from eye to eye. She fell back beating the air with her forelegs, her sight blasted by inner lightnings, her mind in agony. Then turning her marred head away, she rolled aside and began to crawl, claw by claw, towards the opening in the dark cliff behind.<sup>41</sup>

The imagery portraying this gesture appears at first sight to be more overtly religious, representing the Christian victory over paganism. However, as we have seen before, in *The Lord of the Rings* sexual implications are shrouded in religious symbolism, just as they are in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The phial is phallus-shaped, the female linked with sexuality is seen as evil, paganism. Once again Tolkien interprets myth in such a way as to reveal his inner fear or abhorrence of female sexuality, but his attitude is reinforced by the prejudices inherent in the religious symbolism itself.

*Eowyn, Goldberry and Galadriel*

In comparison with the intimacy of the portrayal of the male characters and their relationships the female characterization shows a distinct lack of knowledge of women, relying heavily on mythical literature for inspiration and incorporating many of Tolkien's aforementioned prejudices against women.

Eowyn unlike Goldberry and Galadriel is mortal and reveals possible weaknesses and whims that the others as ideal deities do not. Much of her characterization stems from courtly romance, her fate in many ways paralleling that of Elaine in Tennyson's *Idylls of The King*.<sup>42</sup> However an extra dimension to the character, one which comes closer to revealing a more sympathetic view of women, may be seen in her dissatisfaction with her position as a woman. She is left to rule the kingdom when her father and Eomer go to war,<sup>43</sup> but she is not satisfied with this and, disguising herself as a warrior, rides with the Rohirrim into battle. Here perhaps we do see a certain sympathy for the plight of a clever woman trapped by marriage as previously mentioned. However, any understanding of a woman's dissatisfaction with an unfulfilling career is cast aside by Tolkien, who ultimately lays the blame not on poor career prospects and intellectual frustration but on unrequited love. Eowyn's desire for action stems from her despair that Aragorn can not return her love. Tolkien's solution is marriage, to Faramir, and this marriage is Tolkien's own invention. There is no such reward for Tennyson's Elaine who dies of grief alone.<sup>44</sup>

A picture of 'married bliss' has appeared much earlier in *The Lord of the Rings* in the description of Tom Bombadil's and Goldberry's marriage. Goldberry combines the courtly ideal of the woman on a pedestal, a rare beauty to be worshipped from afar, with a more down-to-earth ideal of woman as domestic servant. The courtly ideal may be seen in the portrayal of Goldberry as a goddess-like figure as elf-queen and daughter of the River; like other mythical goddesses she is at once distant and on a higher plane, a figure-head providing inspiration:

The hobbits looked at her in wonder; and she looked at each of them and smiled. 'Fair lady Goldberry!' said Frodo at last, feeling his heart moved with a joy that he did not understand. He

stood as he had at times stood enchanted by fair elven-voices; but the spell that was now laid upon him was different: less keen and lofty was the delight, but deeper and nearer to mortal heart; marvellous and yet not strange.<sup>45</sup>

But paradoxically, because she in part derives from the goddess of fertility, Goldberry, playing the role of earth-mother, appears less distant as a wife carrying out her domestic duties. Ideal goddess and earth-mother, she not only carries out her tasks of cleaning and providing food and comfort without complaining but also manages to maintain her figure and beauty without effort, her hands perhaps not saved by the possession of a washing-machine so much as by elven magical powers. As a spirit of the River she is able to turn rainy weather to her advantage to do the washing and autumn-cleaning.<sup>46</sup>

Robert Giddings and Elizabeth Holland point out that much of the inspiration for Tom Bombadil and Goldberry as spirits of the earth and river lies in MacDonald's story *The Golden Key*.<sup>47</sup> A little girl, Tangle, running away from three bears is entrapped by a tree and rescued by a magical creature (an air-fish) who leads her to a cottage. There a beautiful woman, called Grandmother, bathes her and feeds her with essence of the fish's spirit. As a result she is able to understand the language of animals. This story is linked with classical and other mythology 'Like Pan, Tom Bombadil is the symbol of fecundity, the very life-force itself.'<sup>48</sup> However, there is a distinct variation on the MacDonald story and other mythology which promotes a female deification of the life force, in Tolkien's portrayal of Goldberry and Tom Bombadil. For it is he as husband who is attributed with and imparts knowledge of the secrets of nature. Goldberry, following the ideal stereotype of submissive and retiring wife, withdraws from the room to sleep or busies herself with domestic chores when Bombadil is engaged in discourse with fellow males, the hobbits.<sup>49</sup>

Galadriel, in comparison, remains much more a goddess figure and is seen to have a very great deal of power and wisdom. The mythical and literary figures that her characterization derives from are described in detail in *J. R. R. Tolkien: The Shores of Middle-earth*.<sup>50</sup> Retaining elements of ancient fertility goddess (supplies seeds to promote growth of



vegetation in the new world), she appears to be a combination of Venus-Aphrodite and the Virgin Mary, whose role is emphasized in Catholic doctrine. She is linked, in the name of 'Llothlorien' with the lily which is the symbol of purity used particularly by Roman Catholics.<sup>51</sup> And indeed she appears to be the guiding force and inspiration rather than her husband, Celeborn. Having shown Frodo and Sam their fate in her mirror, when tested in turn by Frodo for possible desire to retain the Ring for personal aggrandizement, she shows herself to be a truly formidable power.<sup>52</sup> Above all, it is her gifts that enable Frodo and Sam to overcome the perils of Mordor and restore the lands ravaged by the evil of Sauron.

Her insight and wisdom seem to derive much from the wise and powerful ideal of the Catholic idolization of the Virgin Mary. However, Tolkien also places a strong emphasis on her physical beauty. 'Frodo ate and drank little, heeding only the beauty of the Lady and her voice.'<sup>53</sup>

Gimli, also overwhelmed by her beauty, requests only a strand of her hair<sup>54</sup> and, openly weeping as they depart, Galadriel's last words still resounding in their ears, declares: 'I have looked the last upon that which was fairest.' . . . 'Henceforward I will call nothing fair, unless it be her gift. . . .'<sup>55</sup> The idealization and romanticism of his portrait of Galadriel retains echoes of Tolkien's sentimental description of his wife,<sup>56</sup> though this romantic idealization did not make up for the fact that he tended to ignore his wife as an intellectual companion. And indeed the ancient, Norse and Christian mythologies in which he was immersed reinforced Tolkien's refusal (and that of countless generations) to accept the full and active participation of women in every area of life. For they present an idealized female deity who, though wise and inspirational, is still in many ways remote and passive:<sup>57</sup> still the lady on the pedestal who inspires the knight, the figurehead on the ship, the painted lady on the fuselage of fighter planes. As a deity she retains her beauty and does not age—a hard ideal for any real woman to live up to; and though she is the source of inspiration, it is the male heroes that play the active role in setting the world to right.

Tolkien's deep involvement with his male friends to the exclusion of women has strongly influenced the male and

female portraits in *The Lord of the Rings*. His drawing upon mythology and courtly romance as major sources for his material has reinforced the prejudices in Tolkien's own ideas, because the prejudices are inherent in the conventions and symbolism of literary and religious tradition. Such tradition itself reveals deep-rooted contradictions which reflect conscious and subconscious conflicting attitudes to sexuality and the definition of the economic and political role of men and women in society.

NOTES

1. Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams and their Friends* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1978).
2. *The Inklings*, p. 164.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
6. Humphrey Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1977), p. 156.
7. *The Inklings*, p. 32.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
9. The matter was interestingly raised by Godfrey Smith in the *Sunday Times* in December 1981 and he devoted several precious column inches to it. Former female students at Oxford wrote in and contributed personal anecdote and case history to account for what Godfrey Smith termed his 'unmannerly' and churlish treatment of female students. Other readers wrote in referring him to other evidence of Lewis's unorthodox sexuality. See below.
10. Quoted in *The Inklings*, op. cit., p. 167. The letters which passed between C. S. Lewis and his friend in Belfast, Arthur Greeves, provide evidence of sadism and involve the idea of inflicting pain upon the female. But others are clearly homosexual in interest and at times involve paederasty. See *They Stand Together: The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves 1914–1963*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Collins, 1979), pp. 159, 160, 165, 166, 170–71 and 188 and 174–214, 180 and 224. An item in *The Guardian Diary* ('Spankerama', 28 January 1982) on the sexual associations of whipping brought an interesting correspondence, including a letter from Jad Adams who wrote to point out that it was a fascinating reflection on the 'way our public school culture has permeated the world that the sexual perversion involving caning and spanking is referred to in New York sex parlours as "English"' (*The Guardian*, 1 February 1982). See Ian Gibson, *The English Vice: Beating, Sex and Shame in Victorian England and After*

- (London: Duckworth, 1979), especially pp. 48 and following.
11. *The Inklings*, op. cit., pp. 22–3.
  12. *Ibid.*, p. 252.
  13. Quoted in *The Inklings*, op. cit., p. 223.
  14. Robert Giddings and Elizabeth Holland, *J. R. R. Tolkien: The Shores of Middle-earth* (London: Junction Books, 1981), p. 44.
  15. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1975), p. 786.
  16. *Ibid.*, p. 831.
  17. *Ibid.*, p. 876.
  18. Humphrey Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography*, op. cit., p. 81.
  19. *The Lord of the Rings*, op. cit., p. 83.
  20. *Ibid.*, p. 426.
  21. *Ibid.*, p. 437.
  22. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
  23. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
  24. *Ibid.*, p. 649.
  25. *Ibid.*, p. 678.
  26. *Ibid.*, p. 741.
  27. *Ibid.*, p. 944.
  28. Giddings and Holland, op. cit., p. 118.
  29. 'And Orcs, they were useful slaves, but he had them in plenty. If now and again Shelob caught them to stay her appetite, she was welcome: he could spare them. And sometimes as a man may cast a dainty to his cat (*his cat*, he calls her, but she owns him not) . . . ' *The Lord of the Rings*, op. cit., p. 751.
  30. *Ibid.*, p. 755.
  31. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
  32. *Ibid.*, p. 745.
  33. *Ibid.*, p. 749.
  34. *Ibid.*, p. 748.
  35. *Ibid.*, p. 748.
  36. *Ibid.*, p. 752.
  37. *Ibid.*, p. 755.
  38. *ibid.*, p. 755.
  39. *Ibid.*, p. 756.
  40. *Ibid.*, p. 756.
  41. *Ibid.*, p. 757.
  42. Giddings and Holland, op. cit., p. 89.
  43. *The Lord of the Rings*, op. cit., p. 546.
  44. Giddings and Holland, op. cit., p. 90. Aragorn's and Arwen's betrothal in fact seems somewhat superfluous and is attached as an appendix (1170). Tolkien is perhaps tidying up loose ends or, more likely, attempting to follow epic tradition. The hero, after performing his feats, marries, has children, and lives happily ever after—order is established through the continuity of the line. Throughout the rest of the book, however, there seems a reluctance on Tolkien's part to have Aragorn associated with the love of a woman in his role as saviour.

45. *The Lord of the Rings*, op. cit., p. 138.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
47. Giddings and Holland, op. cit., p. 39.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
49. *The Lord of the Rings*, op. cit., pp. 140 and 144.
50. Giddings and Holland, op. cit., p. 75.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
52. *The Lord of the Rings*, op. cit., p. 385.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 393.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 396.
55. *Ibid.*, pp. 398–99.
56. Description of Edith dancing in the woods early in their marriage: 'Her hair was raven, her skin clear, her eyes bright, and she would sing and dance'—Humphrey Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien—A Biography*, op. cit., p. 97.
57. Tolkien's reliance on myth to portray women characters with its two dimensional stereotyping itself reveals a lack of knowledge and wariness of women. Paradoxically a more human and less distant dimension of Galadriel is presented in the awe and embarrassment of many of Frodo's companions. Gimli's infatuation has been already noted; Sam also reveals puerile shyness when the Lady presents him with a gift, *The Lord of the Rings*, op. cit., p. 396: 'Sam went red to the ears and muttered something inaudible, as he clutched the box . . .'