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# Constructing Lothiriel: Rewriting and Rescuing the Women of Middle-Earth From the Margins

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## Mythcon 50

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## Constructing Lothíriel: Rewriting and Rescuing the Women of Middle-Earth From the Margins

### Abstract

Examines the presence and absence of female characters in Tolkien, in the Peter Jackson films, and in fanfiction, paying particular attention to a “footnote character,” Lothíriel, and what the body of fanfiction built around her brief mention as the daughter of Imrahil and wife of Éomer reveals about reader engagement with Tolkien’s texts.

### Additional Keywords

Fanfiction—Female characters; The Lord of the Rings (film trilogy). Dir. Peter Jackson — Female characters; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Lothíriel; Tolkien; J.R.R.—Characters—Women; Tolkien; J.R.R.—Fanfiction



CONSTRUCTING LOTHÍRIEL:  
REWRITING AND RESCUING THE  
WOMEN OF MIDDLE-EARTH  
FROM THE MARGINS

KAREN VIARS AND CAT COKER

SCHOLARS OF FAN STUDIES BELIEVE THAT FAN FICTION can be seen as an interpretive and analytical act that gives insight into the reception of a text by its audience. This paper will examine the depiction of Tolkien's female characters in *The Lord of the Rings* and related works through the lens of fan fiction: How do Tolkien's most loving and devoted readers, his fans, view the women of Middle-earth? In the case of significant characters like Éowyn and Arwen, quite a bit is known and thus fan-writers have various resources to work with as source references, including the texts as well as the earlier drafts of the novels as published in *The History of The Lord of the Rings*.

In the case of other characters such as Lothíriel, their presence is little more than (quite literally) a footnote. As a genre of literature, fan fiction functions both as derivative work (in that some writers conscientiously choose to ascribe to Tolkien's canonical texts and display a wealth of knowledge of these texts, linguistically and historically) and as transformative work as writers choose to select, ignore, or rewrite those aspects of Tolkien's work they find problematic. In the body of scholarly work on Tolkien and fan fiction thus far, little attention has been paid to how writers have chosen to characterize the women characters, or what stories, genres, and tropes have been used in these stories. By reading the poems, short stories, and even novels that fans have written inspired by these characters, a new picture of the women of Middle-earth emerges: one in which women aren't always fabulously beautiful or amazingly brave, but take their place alongside the male denizens of Tolkien's universe all the same.

#### TOLKIEN FANDOM HISTORY

Popular history and criticism dwell overmuch on Tolkien himself as being a man of his time. As an Oxford don who came of age in the first half of the twentieth century, clearly his attitudes towards women *must* perforce be antifeminist and patriarchal: idealized at their best, degraded at their worst. However, evidence demonstrates that in both his personal life and in his

fiction, this is incorrect. Anwyn writes in the recent movieverse-inspired volume, *A People's Guide to J.R.R. Tolkien*, that

[T]he text of *Lord of the Rings* does not for a moment bear out the idea that Tolkien had any kind of derogatory opinion about women. Three things are clear: that he was far from a misogynist, that the female characters in his masterpiece *collectively* represent everything that is great about being a woman, and less representation does not equal less importance. (Anwyn 115, emphasis in original)

That said, the vast majority of the main characters in his books are *still* men, and a sizeable percentage—if not outright majority—of his most active and admiring fans are still women. How to make up for this disparity? Traditional scholarly work on Tolkien and women has focused on a variety of critical and historical approaches examining the work of both Tolkien and his mythological and literary inspirations (the *Nibelungenlied*, *Beowulf*, *El Cid*, etc.<sup>1</sup>) from a variety of critical views, but much of the work that has been done to date in Fan Studies has focused on the Jackson film fandom rather than on traditional print fandom. This becomes a complicated issue because much of the contemporary fandom *is* directly inspired by the films, but the character of Lothíriel is restricted to the original books, thus again creating hybrid texts with mixed canons.

A fannish history of Tolkien demonstrates an enthusiasm for his worlds and mythology from the very beginning. Piecing together fan actions and reactions can be problematized, however, because of the ephemeral nature of fan works in general. Many of these publications were not preserved by their owners or collected by libraries, and in some cases the authors of the work themselves later choose to disown their own work for a variety of reasons both personal and professional. Thus, piecing together these historical fan discussions often requires some bibliographic detective work: locating and identifying the texts themselves, confirming citations, and sometimes just being able to get a *look* at the items in question. There can also be the issue of maintaining the historical record: because many fanzines and texts were amateur publications, they were printed on cheap paper with cheap ink—neither of which lend themselves particularly well to archival preservation. Obtaining copies of some of these works is not unlike obtaining photocopies of Renaissance quartos. Despite the omnipresence of the Internet, web publications can be even more fleeting as fans enter and exit fandoms and communities. Finally, the Tolkien estate itself takes a very dim view of any

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<sup>1</sup> See DuPlessis.

material not forthrightly approved by J.R.R.'s son Christopher, further driving underground an already samizdat-like body of literature.

Sumner Gary Hunnewell's Tolkien fandom bibliography (itself disseminated only on the web) shows fan works published in fanzines as early as 1959—only three years after the initial publication of the first volume of *Rings* (Hunnewell 5). Initial fan writings were focused heavily on criticism and analysis, with some poetry thrown in for good measure in an attempt to construct their own version of the canonical lore that was heavily referenced (yet incomplete) within the initial volumes of Tolkien's novels. At that time, *The Silmarillion* was a work-in-progress tome that had been promised to fans in the imminent future; the large volume of mythology and verse that Tolkien had begun before *Rings* was completed would not be published until 1977, after his death. While elements of *The Silmarillion* such as "The Lay of Beren and Lúthien" and other pieces of the work directly referenced in *Rings* appeared in the Appendices of later editions, it was well-known that Tolkien had much more of the work completed than was then actually available to his readers. Further, Tolkien himself had a problematic relationship with his fans: the respectable professor did not care for his books' adoption by the counterculture movements of the time, though he later appreciated their support when they loudly boycotted the unauthorized editions of his work that appeared in America.

Within his fandom itself, stand-alone amateur publications quickly began to appear, rather than just the occasional poem or essay. Critical discussions of the novels unsurprisingly focused on many of those topics Tolkien scholars are fond of today—homosexual overtones in the series, racism in the books, Tolkien's literary sources and forebears, and the roles of women in his world. In 1961, fan-turned-professional author Marion Zimmer Bradley wrote a lengthy essay entitled "Of Men, Halflings, and Hero Worship" in the fanzine *Astra's Tower*. The bulk of the discussion centers around the characterization of Éowyn and her "love" for Aragorn—a love that Bradley posited was a form of hero worship and a desire to *be* Aragorn (or at least *be like* Aragorn: noble and wise, a warrior and a healer, an exotic foreigner raised by elves and gifted with preternaturally long life) rather than a true romantic inclination.

So popular was this work, it was reprinted in the long-running zine *Niekas* in 1966, in the compilation anthology *Tolkien and the Critics* in 1968, and as a solo work in 1973. Bradley also wrote a pair of fictional stories set in Tolkien's world, *The Jewel of Arwen* in 1961 which expanded on Arwen's backstory, and "A Meeting in the Hyades" in her own fanzine *Andúril* in 1962, in which Tolkien's hero Aragorn meets Bradley's own hero Regis Hastur, who appeared in her Hugo-nominated novel *The Sword of Aldones* that same year.

(An interesting “chicken and egg” game can be found here: Bradley had been working on *Sword* for some years but it would be fascinating to try to pin down a concrete date of the creation of Regis Hastur between these two works. This was during the time period when Bradley was writing short novels at the pace of a book a month, so the cross-pollination of her reading and writing provides space for both speculation and later projects.) *The Jewel of Arwen* was also published as a standalone chapbook and appeared in the first edition of her professional retrospective anthology *The Best of Marion Zimmer Bradley* in 1985. However, it was dropped from later reprints of the book without comment, presumably due to pressure from the Tolkien estate.

### CREATING LOTHÍRIEL

Though Tolkien’s heroines are far from shrinking violets, with the exceptions of Éowyn and Galadriel they are also restricted to specific loci within the text: Goldberry is essentially a river nymph, and though powerful and immortal, she remains apart in an idyllic Green World; Arwen is a tragic damsel whose literal journey from Elven realms to Human ones is traditional self-sacrifice in the name of love; Rosie Cotton is the idealized “girl back home”; and Ioreth and Lobelia Sackville-Baggins are essentially comic relief. Shelob, the other most powerful female character in the books, is a monstrosity who threatens the heroes. There seems to be little space left over for women with their own independent agency or ability to traverse across geographic or metaphysical boundaries as the men do. Even Éowyn and Galadriel have their own limitations of space imposed upon them *after* the War of the Ring: Éowyn is removed to Ithilien with her new husband while Galadriel goes West with the other Elves. While tales of the women’s (or Women’s, per Tolkien’s own usage) adventures continue on in the Appendices, their stories effectively come to a close in the final chapters of *Rings*. While noted unhappily by Tolkien’s first women readers in the 1950s, contemporary women readers find these “endings” profoundly discouraging and problematic. In her study on fan fiction based on the character of Rosie Cotton, Amy H. Sturgis writes,

For Tolkien, then, Rosie’s worth lies not only in the inspiration her existence provides during the quest, but also in the promise of her actions after the Ring’s destruction—loving Sam, of course, and also performing her “ordinary life” activities of cooking, homemaking, nurturing, and mothering. Such efforts empower Sam (and through him the Shire) to, in Tolkien’s words, breath, eat, work, and beget. This role makes Rosie more than a mere memory but no less of an ideal. Tolkien’s defense of Rosie as an essential ingredient to his message provides the reader with a better understanding of Rosie as a symbol of humble

hearth and home, but it fails to offer a deeper appreciation of Rosie as a character and individual. (Sturgis 166)

Fan interpretations of the character run the gamut from the patriarchially oppressed to the sexually liberated. To engage with Tolkien's women, it seems, their narrative must be substantially rewritten.

Peter Jackson's film adaptations initially offered their own form of revisionism for contemporary audiences. He expanded on the women characters' roles to provide counter-narratives to those of the men as well as working in additional exposition. Thus it is Arwen, rather than the Elvish warrior Glorfindel, who rescues Frodo from the Ringwraiths in *Fellowship of the Ring*, and Galadriel who summons Elvish auxiliaries to the aid of Rohan in *The Two Towers*. Initial drafts of the scripts also placed Arwen with the auxiliary Elvish forces at the Battle of Helm's Deep, before fan outcry necessitated her return offstage. Flashback scenes drawn from "The Tale of Arwen and Aragorn" in the Appendices also fleshed out her role in the second and third films. Goldberry, however, was completely excised, while Rosie Cotton remained the idealized "girl back home," appearing in the margins of the film at the very beginning and ending sequences in Hobbiton. Audience reception to the changes was mixed: new fans wanted more powerful women while traditional fans were torn because of disobedience to the source text. This resistance to adapting the narratives of women in Tolkien's legendarium reached new peaks when Jackson and his co-authors Phillipa Boyens and Fran Walsh created a new female character—the Elf Tauriel—for the film adaptations of *The Hobbit*. Tauriel, a warrior caught in a love triangle between Legolas and the Dwarf Kíli, seemingly represented the worst excesses of fanfashion creation. And yet—it is also true that without Tauriel, as well as the inclusion of Galadriel, there would be *no women at all* in those films.

Most recently, Una McCormack has made the compelling argument that

the simplest strategy available to a writer attempting to make up for the lack of women in *The Lord of the Rings* is to create female characters and write stories about them. Since there is no textual evidence *against* the existence of these women—and since women are so often erased from history or placed in the margins—the fanfiction writer is arguably reinscribing a history that has somehow been lost in translation or transmission. (McCormack 311-312)

McCormack's thesis seems to be borne out through the addition of Tauriel. After all, the events portrayed in *The Hobbit*, both film and book, are from the perspective of Bilbo Baggins in his memoirs *There and Back Again*, which later

became *The Red Book of Westmarch* and then was re-inscribed as part of the *Thain's Book* which Tolkien eventually "translates." Given the historical treatment of women in records, why should Bilbo "remember" to write of Tauriel's involvement, limited as it was, and in turn, why shouldn't Tolkien have dismissed these digression from the text? And in their turn, why shouldn't other women writers rescue the narratives of women from Jackson, or from Tolkien?

Lest this offend Tolkien purists all too much, Megan Abrahamson has noted that we can successfully read Tolkien *himself* as a fan author in terms of his retoolings of myth for his legendarium, especially in *The Silmarillion* (and, we might add further, the more recent *The Fall of Arthur*). Drawing upon his famed Preface which deplores allegorical readings of his work, she declares that

If we, like Tolkien, value the "freedom of the reader" over the "purposed domination of the author," then we must accept the possibility of transformative interpretations of a text, and that these transformative interpretations will make their way into various fan expressions, including fanfiction. (69)

Other scholars have also weighed in on the importance of reconsidering the women of *The Lord of the Rings*. Sarah Workman has made a powerful case for reconsidering the seemingly passive acts of mourning by Galadriel, Eowyn, Arwen, and Goldberry as genre and structural markers for the text: "[T]he women of *LotR* literally and figuratively ground the text; fantasy and elegy prove mutually illuminating in order to reposition the women as not only central to the text, but also heroes who prevail on their own terms" (79). Both of these discussions of authorial control and reading can be used to demonstrate how we may also reread other, fannish texts.

Particularly after the initial release of the first film, *Rings* (or *LOTR*) fandom online was flooded with Original Character (termed OC) stories featuring women warriors as counterparts, love interests, or replacements for the nine male heroes. This is a far from unusual development in fan works; known as a Mary Sue, this type of character frequently redresses a need within the feminine audience for a character with which they can identify.<sup>2</sup> It is also one of the most loathed types of character as they are frequently viewed as a "wish fulfillment" for the fan author, a transparent way for them to create an idealized persona whose stories can take over the source text. Such vitriol has been aimed at presumed Mary Sues so as to all but discourage the creation of or even attempting to write OCs. Some critics of this attitude view it as a form

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<sup>2</sup> See Pflieger.



of internalized misogyny—while such stories are often hardly commendable, do they necessarily earn by their very existence the level of hatred aimed at them? Thus the initial problem of creating Lothíriel is that no matter what permutation an author will choose, she will still be (to all intents and purposes) an Original Character and may well face the accusation of being a Mary Sue.

#### PEACE-WEAVER OR SHIELD-MAIDEN? LOTHÍRIEL AS A ROMANCE HEROINE

Interestingly, Lothíriel's construction as a character has developed along two very different models of literary interpretation: that of contemporary romance novel heroines<sup>3</sup> and that of neo-Victorianism. Both frameworks focus on the relationships between men and women, on marriage, and on family. Since all we know of Lothíriel canonically centers around her marriage and family relationships, these two seemingly disparate models make interpretive sense from a fan reader/writer's perspective. Tolkien's own novels are essentially postmodern in their construction they seamlessly combine Anglo Saxon culture (via the nations of Gondor and Rohan) and elements of Fairie (Rivendell and Lóthlorien) with idyllic pre-industrial ruralism (Hobbiton) as an allegory for the World Wars.<sup>4</sup> It makes sense for his readership to similarly incorporate disparate elements in their own works, especially from the twenty-first century feminist perspective. To present Lothíriel as a romance heroine is to emphasize her relationships within the domestic sphere, to place her at hearth and home and surrounded by her menfolk. To view her as a neo-Victorian is to construct what we perceive of as "traditional" gender roles and relations and paste them onto Tolkien's world— itself a fantastical reconstruction of an idealized Anglo-Saxon, European society.

These are the facts that we know about Lothíriel from her brief appearance in the Appendices: she is the only daughter of Prince Imrahil and sister to his three sons, named as Elphir, Erchirion, and Amrothos; she marries Éomer in 3021 of the Third Age; they have at least one son, Elfwine the Fair, who succeeds Éomer as King of Rohan. The roots of her name mean "flower-garlanded maiden." Since she is not present in the proper narrative, she has no

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<sup>3</sup> We would like to specify that the stories discussed are primarily het (or heteronormative) fiction in which Lothíriel is depicted in a relationship with a man— most often but not exclusively to her canonical husband Éomer. While femslash, or stories depicting lesbian relationships, often make up a small portion of any fandom, we only found two references to such stories for Lothíriel. One of them, "Rebuilding" by bomberqueen17 depicts Lothíriel in a relationship with Éowyn, while the other was in a Yuletide request post that asked for a Lothíriel/Arwen story that does not seem to have been filled. See Femslashtuletide.

<sup>4</sup> See Croft.

voice; her own mother is not named, nor are any daughters she may have had—Tolkien’s timelines and genealogies being focused rather more on maintaining lines of political ancestry and kingship than anything else. As such, Lothíriel creates the perfect space for the fan writer to play in Middle-earth, largely unfettered by requisite events or extant character traits. Her appearance is completely up to the imagination: she may be beautiful or plain, clever or foolish, obedient or rebellious. What she becomes is up to each individual’s interpretation and imagination.

The majority of contemporary romance novels have at their core a preoccupation with navigating the prescribed roles of women within society. Tania Modleski identifies the novels as being encoded with “anxieties, desires and wishes which if openly expressed would challenge the psychological and social order of things” (30). Some might read this as a “retro” desire for a nonexistent, “simpler” time when the dating and marriage pool was hierarchically organized and roles were strictly delineated. However, viewed within a more concrete historical perspective, women’s roles were rather more complicated than that; in fact, there was often a sort of peace-weaver/shield-maiden dichotomy whose mutual expectations hinged on navigating the world of men. As described in Kathleen Herbert’s study of women in Early English society, the Shield-Maiden is

the fierce virgin who keeps all men at her spear’s length distant, or only comes to closer quarters with her spear or axe. ... the Peace-Weaver [is] the royal bride who holds out her hands in welcome to bring warring tribes together at her wedding feast. (7)

These two archetypes are reflected at a slant within the genres of fan fiction in which Lothíriel appears, most particularly that of the romance.

Fan authors who reject a purely compliant characterization face the task of making Lothíriel both independent and capable of a happy marriage. Modern romance heroines are materially independent in ways that are presumably impossible for Lothíriel in Middle-earth: they have property rights and often gainful employment; they also usually have the freedom to pursue their own ends.<sup>5</sup> Lothíriel, conversely, is at her father’s disposal, even when he is portrayed as kind; she may balk at an arranged marriage with Éomer and even plot an escape, but she cannot flee her father’s authority. Prince Imrahil, as introduced in *The Return of the King*, is kin to the ruling family of Gondor which is itself characterized as in conflict. Denethor’s rule of Minas Tirith has left the White City vulnerable to foreign attack while he knowingly sends his younger son Faramir to his death. Imrahil’s introduction is after the Battle of

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<sup>5</sup> See Regis 110-111.

the Pelennor Fields, where he welcomes Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli as the City's saviors and informs Éomer that his sister Éowyn still lives. His is ultimately an ancillary role used to bring the other characters together. Similarly, Lothíriel's role, such as it is, is to fill in the relevant spot on the family trees in the Appendices and assure us that Éomer, too, had a happy ending.

Instead of having freedom and security at the outset of a story, Lothíriel often gains them through her relationship with Éomer, as did heroines of older romances. Marriage to Éomer provides her with greater material wealth than she has a princess of Dol Amroth. Her marriage likewise elevates her social status so that she may do as she pleases, so long as her husband does not object (and Éomer, rewritten as a typically stern but loving romantic male lead, almost never objects). This makes marriage desirable, especially in the stories in which Lothíriel is attracted to Éomer and afraid that he might not reciprocate. When he does, she gains not only a compassionate marriage and "happily ever after," but also greater freedom.

Lothíriel's characterization also fits in many ways with classic Victorian expectations of "true womanhood" in which the cardinal virtues of womanhood are submissiveness, purity, domesticity and piety. Though piety is typically absent in Lothíriel's characterization (and Middle-earth as a whole<sup>6</sup>), the remaining virtues appear often in the fan fiction surrounding her character. Her name of "flower-garlanded maiden" even fits in with Victorian expectations of women: physical purity and a feminine "special affinity for flowers" (Welter 33). Lothíriel is often described as being between eighteen and her mid-twenties, and sometimes younger, though dates given in the Appendices indicate that her age at the time of marriage is twenty-two. This happens to be the typical age of a woman who married in the nineteenth century, when women were "warned not to wait until they reached 'the shady side of thirty'" (Green 21). She is also usually a virgin. Medieval history shows that "virginity arose as a social bargaining chip," mediating "the conflicting interests of pregnancy, childrearing, access to material goods, and the creation and maintenance of kinship groups and social hierarchies" (Blank 25). Her sexual life was essentially the political tool of her family. Victorian interest in virginity focused on money and social status, but also as a literal, physical expression of a woman's inherent goodness and purity. An unmarried and

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<sup>6</sup> Middle-earth has little in the way of formal religion. Though unexplained in the text itself, it may be supposed that the creator beings of the world, the Valar, are uniformly acknowledged across all the nations and peoples of Middle-earth. Since they are very "real," with their servants the Istari (such as Gandalf) walking among them, there needs to be no interpretive debate about their existence or morals. If anything, Tolkien's world implies a general kind of secular humanism.

sexually experienced woman was considered “fallen” from the good grace of her family and society as a whole. Consider this example from “She Who Is Anonymous” by Lady\_Demiya, in which Éomer, moved by Lothíriel’s physical beauty, touches her face: She responds with surprise, and despite “seemingly enjoying the touch,” informs him that “Customs seem to be different in your lands. A man would never dare touch a woman as such without proper courtship” (Lady\_Demiya). It is thus a woman’s responsibility to help men rein in their animalistic natures, even when she herself is tempted.

In “The Abduction of Éomer, King of Rohan” by Lialathuveril, Lothíriel finds herself making camp for an evening with Éomer (whom she believes to be a Rohan messenger named Léona) and reflects, “Certainly my Aunt Ivryníel would advise me to run and hide in the forest, rather than spend a night in the company of that most dangerous of animals, a strange man.” She also considers how her actions impact her future marriage prospects: “I had now spent four nights away from under my father’s roof, much longer than I had originally intended. In many eyes, that fact alone would make me ineligible—if it ever came out that I had spent them in Léona’s company . . . I grinned to myself. There went my chances of becoming Queen of Rohan!” (Lialathuveril). Transgressing the rules of propriety could leave a woman without marriage prospects, even if nothing “improper” occurred; the intimation of scandal was just as bad as any actual event.

Feminine submission is the next most proper indication of Victorianized maidenhood. Welter states that “submission was perhaps the most feminine virtue expected of women” and obedience, whether to a father or to a husband, was the primary expression of such submissiveness (27-28). In fan fiction, Lothíriel may at first object to marrying Éomer, but in the end, she always does, often at the behest of her father. Likewise, if she wants to marry Éomer, they must typically seek her father’s permission for the alliance. Green emphasizes this male hand-off of power over the betrothed: “Before she became engaged, a woman answered to her father for most of her actions; once betrothed, that power passed to her fiancé” (18). Thus, Imrahil appears as a figure in most of the stories about Lothíriel and Éomer, even if only in Lothíriel’s thoughts. To continue the previous example from Lady\_Demiya’s “She Who Is Anonymous,” Lothíriel tells Éomer “My father would not approve” as she chides him for an uninvited touch. However, in the same work, he tells her to turn around, back to the landscape she was admiring before he approached her. She frowns, clearly uncomfortable, but responds “You are a king, so I must obey” (Lady\_Demiya). In a different story by the same author, titled “Love is a Dance,” Éomer watches Lothíriel circulate at a dinner party, pointedly noticing that “She is an obedient daughter—a perfect example” (Lady\_Demiya).

In “The Abduction of Éomer, King of Rohan,” Lothíriel runs away to avoid an arranged marriage with Éomer, but thinks often of her father and his possible response to her flight. She wonders: “What would my father say? I feared I was in for a severe reprimand. At least such a very public flight should have put paid to King Éomer’s interest in me; surely now he would not want me anymore, good connections or not. Unless Father decided my escapade was all the more reason to get me married off as quickly as possible and made him an offer he could not resist?” (Lialathuveril). Lothíriel’s disobedience makes her a risky marriage prospect, for a woman who would defy her father will likely defy her husband—and may reject other social constraints, as well. This would not only be socially problematic for any woman, but more so for a ruling party within a political match.

Depending on the author’s interpretation, Lothíriel may be versed in the practical domestic arts or she may be ignorant of housework due to her social status. If the latter, she is usually capable in household management and directing servants. “Total devotion of a woman to her husband require[s] that she be an exemplary steward of his home,” whether she performs the actual tasks herself or not (Green 59). Éomer, in his disguise as Léona, tells Lothíriel of a Rohirric court woman’s duties over dinner one evening:

[she] supervises [servants], assisted by her ladies. And she will serve the cup of welcome with her own hands.” He blew on the hot stew [which Lothíriel had cooked]. “By honouring her husband’s guests she strengthens the bonds of peace between them.” He hesitated. “It is a position of importance, Lothíriel, not just an ornamental one.” (Lialathuveril)

Lothíriel often appears as a healer. This role is “part of the broad set of nurturing responsibilities with which [women were] charged” (Green 165). In both Anglo-Saxon and Victorian times the world held many more health-related risks and fewer means to combat them; illness and death were common enough in daily life that most if not all women needed nursing skills. “[T]he sickroom called for the exercise of [a woman’s] higher qualities of patience, mercy and gentleness as well as for her housewifely arts” (Welter 32). Nursing, especially of sick men, allowed a woman to “feel useful and accomplished” as well as increasing her influence (Welter 32). It was a rare opportunity for a woman to make decisions for a man, and for him to be dependent on her rather than she on him.

A woman attending the sick was permitted to put aside some of her requisite female delicacy in the service of ministering to others. As a healer, she could speak with an authority that would be obeyed, especially in an infirmary or medical setting; she would be expected to have the internal strength and

courage to face a variety of wounds and ailments; she would at least have intellectual knowledge of the human body if not experience physically tending it. In a story called "The Healer and the Warrior," Lothíriel is present in the Houses of Healing when Éomer enters with an infected wound. She immediately and firmly orders him to take off his clothes. When Éomer "stare[s] at her as though she had grown a second head," she reflects that "she should have phrased her request differently, perhaps," but is otherwise unworried about her choice of words (Maddy051280). At other times, she considers the impropriety of being alone with a strange man, even to treat his injuries, and what her father might say, so she has not otherwise abandoned expectations of typical maidenly behavior.

### CONCLUSION

Lothíriel's character has proven expansive, growing from a few lines in one of the appendices to the heroine of hundreds<sup>7</sup> of fan works. Participatory fan fiction culture, which reaches out to include even minor characters, embraced her: she is a canonical character, but there is infinite flexibility in developing her characterization. While this is a challenge for those writers used to having canonical controls over characterization, history, and events, it does provide a greater outlet for their creative growth. She provides a love interest for the popular Éomer without fans having to negotiate the issues of a more developed canonical character; she provides an entrée for fans seeking a woman's story in the pages and celluloid of *Lord of the Rings*. The diversity of fan interpretations articulates the complexity of cultural expectations, personal experiences and literary traditions regarding women within a postmodern context, making Lothíriel herself a creation of infinite variety.

In her essay, McCormack states that, "[a]s a woman reader and writer, I often find myself in the position of explaining that I love Tolkien *despite* . . . the absence of women," making additional studies into women's reading and writing about Tolkien a rich area for further consideration (309). Much of the scholarship on Tolkien's fandom has revolved around the idea of *what* fans are doing rather than *how*; further, the history of women in Tolkien fandom and of women writing about Tolkien is one that is only now being investigated in more depth. As McCormack notes, there are more named horses than women in *The Lord of the Rings*, and further examination into the

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<sup>7</sup> With regard to actual numbers of stories, we tallied the search results from several online, publicly accessible archives, including Archive Of Our Own (71 stories), Fanfiction.net (188 stories), and the Henneth Annûn Story Archive (92 stories), for a total of 351 stories. While additional material is available in other fannish venues such as Tumblr, tags and search terms led to less precise counts there.

inherent tensions and contradictions of women exploring a text which largely excludes them—and us—is an opportunity to understand women’s reading, writing, revision, and adaptations in a new way.

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