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At Home and Abroad: Éowyn's Two-fold Figuring as War Bride in *The Lord of the Rings*

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Abstract

A reading of Éowyn as a war-bride, providing new insights into her relationships with both Aragorn and Faramir and into the challenges facing war-brides throughout history. Considers her as the left-behind war bride in her interactions with Aragorn, and as the war bride accompanying her husband to a new country with Faramir.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, Edith—As war bride; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Éowyn; War brides

AT HOME AND ABROAD:
ÉOWYN'S TWO-FOLD FIGURING AS WAR BRIDE
IN *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

DELISSA SMITH

RAISED IN THE COMPANY of great warriors, in a society that has taught her to glorify the battle-arts, Éowyn, Lady of Rohan, seems an unlikely choice as a participant in *The Lord of the Rings'* single romantic storyline. Noble, cold, and stern, she desires to find death, not to renew life; she searches for glory, not healing. Yet, amid the carnage and hopelessness of combat in *The Return of the King*, J.R.R. Tolkien develops a courtship centered on Éowyn, one that is ultimately imbued with the same wartime ethos that surrounded the young women of World Wars I and II.¹ Éowyn, shield-maiden of the Rohirrim, and Faramir, a former captain newly succeeded to the title of Steward of Gondor, figure principally in what is popularly termed a "wartime romance"—a relationship characterized by an accelerated intimacy attributed to the pressures and fears of war, including the uncertainty of prolonged separation and death. As Tolkien constructs it, however, Éowyn's attachments are not so simplistically binary: Aragorn, son of Arathorn, has also attracted her affections, creating a system that actually allows for a comprehensive representation of the several incarnations of the World Wars' "war brides." Éowyn's respective relationships with Aragorn and Faramir thus cast her in the dual roles of war bride-left-behind and foreign war bride, and while comparison of her experiences with the courtship, marriage, and assimilation experiences of women in the war-torn twentieth century reveal her to be a negative example of the former, she is clearly, for Tolkien, a positive exemplar of the latter.

Though not usually pinpointed as a social issue in past periods of international warfare, the principles that lie behind the concept of the "war bride" make it a timeless and world-encompassing phenomenon—perhaps every

¹ The influence of the events and atmosphere of the two World Wars upon the works of J.R.R. Tolkien has been extensively investigated. He has even been classed, by Brian Rosebury, Croft tells us, with the "killed war poets," a group that included Wilfred Owen and Edmund Blunden, because of thematic similarities amongst their works (qtd. in Croft 13). Of the many analyses of the war's influence on Tolkien that are available, perhaps the best source is Janet Brennan Croft's *War and the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien*—though war brides do not enter her discussion.

bit as old as the span of human history.² Yet the term “war bride” is itself a relatively new one, seeming to rise into prominence in the social and cultural upheavals of the First World War that Tolkien experienced so intimately. Indeed, the first citation of the term’s use in the *Oxford English Dictionary*— a project that famously provided Tolkien with his first post-war job³ (researching for the *W’s*, no less [Gilliver, Marshall & Weiner 7])—is dated 1918, the year the Great War ended (“War”). *OED* aside, the term appears often in the literature and even in the pop culture of the time. Writing during the First World War, for example, a woman named Ruth Wolfe Fuller, whose husband was drafted into the United States army two months after their marriage, subtitled her brief reminiscences, “The Experiences of a War Bride.” Even earlier, in September of 1914, a short play entitled “War Brides” was written by Marion Craig Wentworth and was staged for the first time in January of 1915 (Wentworth 6). Detailing the choices of women in a war-torn country, Wentworth’s drama enjoyed some notable success in the climate of the times. Little different is the climate of the Second World War; the term “war bride” surfaced repeatedly in the media, in movies like *I Was a Male War Bride* (1949), starring Cary Grant, and in popular radio shows, like “Fibber McGee and Molly.” In one episode of “Fibber McGee,” aired on 3 March 1941, Fibber receives a letter informing him that he is to report for induction into the army, as he has been drafted into the Armed Services. Although the letter turns out to be a copy of his original World War One draft notice, Fibber is convinced throughout the episode of the letter’s contemporary authenticity. Upon hearing of her husband’s seeming re-call into the army, his wife Molly cries, “Imagine me! A war bride! Again!” Molly’s dismay at the prospect of a repetition of her experiences confirms that the previous war had produced a social figure that was being recognizably reproduced in 1941. War brides from Molly’s generation even saw enough common experience between themselves and the new brides to introduce themselves on those terms—one newlywed from London who had made Canada her new home wrote, “I recall that the day after I arrived a friend of my husband’s family came to call. She told me that she had been a war bride from the first World War” (Hibbert 147).

Of the two waves of newlyweds, the focus of research generally tends to the war brides of WWII because of the greater scope of the phenomenon during this time—war brides were documented as entering America from over fifty different countries, including nearly 30,000 from Great Britain (Shukert & Scibetta 2), both during and after the war. By accepting the definitions of a war

² As but one example, in an article examining Roman-Barbarian marriages in the late Empire (about 250-550 CE), Blockley notes that, of the thirty-three connubial unions he lists, “Most involve military men, who, by the nature of their careers, are mobile” (Blockley 71).

³ Tolkien worked for the *OED* from 1919 to 1921 (Crabbe 16).

bride as provided by Ruth Fuller and the *OED*, it can be judged that these war brides generally belonged to one of two categories: the newlywed wife left in the homeland by the soldier, as Ruth Fuller defines herself (Fuller 6), or a bride of foreign origin married after a necessarily hasty engagement to a serviceman of the occupying, usually friendly, country (Shukert & Scibetta 2). The slightly derisive connotation saddled upon the term "war bride"⁴ emerged from the widespread popularity of these latter "lightning marriages" (19) during the war—hasty alliances made attractive to native young women by the war-created shortage of marriageable men and to soldiers by the loneliness of being abroad (Glenn 60). While the motive for the marriage may have appeared questionable to an older generation with more traditional courtship ideals⁵ (and who, with the character of Hedwig in Wentworth's "War Brides," would probably have said, "You make a mock of marriage!"—lines 270-71), "[t]ime was precious for lovers who made the most of every minute [...] before one or both had to return to ships or planes or stations to fight the war again" (Shukert & Scibetta 18). Tolkien was aware of and understood this trend, explaining in response to a criticism of Faramir and Éowyn's too-speedy courtship: "In my experience feelings and decisions ripen very quickly (as measured by mere 'clock-time', which is actually not justly applicable) in periods of great stress, and especially under the expectation of imminent death" (*Letters* 324). This summary directly defines the psychology of wartime marriages that produced the war brides of WWI and II.

Éowyn's first figuring as a war bride is as the beloved wife left alone in the soldier's land of origin. Although not Aragorn's wife,⁶ the representation of this initial relationship is portrayed through the interactions of the two while Aragorn sojourns at Dunharrow before passing through the Paths of the Dead.⁷

⁴ Some women have expressed a preference for the term "international bride," finding "war bride" to be derogatory (Houston 1). "War bride" is used throughout this paper precisely because of the baggage, both derogatory and romanticized, that the term carries with it. It is also useful because it defines at once both of Éowyn's roles.

⁵ According to Joyce Hibbert, the majority of war brides were in their twenties. One woman, though a little older than the majority, still tells of a conservative English village's shocked reaction: "[M]y fast-moving courtship caused quite a stir [...]. The villagers thought I'd taken leave of my senses!" (Hibbert 22).

⁶ Apropos to this argument is the fact that "[f]or some time while writing this part of *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien intended that Aragorn and Éowyn should marry" (Hammond & Scull 406).

⁷ Critics have put several faces on Éowyn's love. Part of Aragorn's attractiveness is obviously his heroic stature. In explanation, Siegfried Sassoon's "Glory of Women" criticizes, "You love us when we're heroes, home on leave / Or wounded in a mentionable place. / You worship decorations; you believe / That chivalry redeems the war's disgrace" (lines 1-4). A slight twist to this idea is Croft's argument that Éowyn's feelings are also typical of the kinds of homoerotic, non-physical "crushes" experienced by soldiers in the

The White Lady's reactions at times mirror those of Ruth Fuller, whose husband is called away to training camp, and then France, during WWI. Further comparisons can be drawn with the experiences of Edith Tolkien, whom Tolkien married "shortly before he was posted to France" (Croft 14) on 22 March 1916.⁸ Éowyn receives the news of Aragorn's perilous proposed journey in much the same manner that Fuller accepts the news of her husband's recruitment: shock, followed by a frightening internal struggle. Lady Éowyn stares at Aragorn "as one that is stricken" and goes white upon hearing of his plans. Though she confides her fears to no one, she is later observed to be in a "great torment of mind" (*LotR* V:2 766). Similarly, Fuller recalls an overall feeling of "helplessness" concerning the difficult decision she is forced to make—should she and her husband claim exemption?⁹—in the face of the "mass of conflicting emotions" which beset her (Fuller 4-5). Éowyn's torment is attributed to her fear, not only that Aragorn will never return from his endeavor, but also that the course he is choosing will not bring him honor; she begs him instead to ride boldly to battle (*LotR* V:2 766). Fuller is also interested in the glory of her husband: she and her husband ultimately choose not to claim exemption because to do so would be a "compromise with honor" (Fuller 5).

The women are also united in their desire to accompany their loved one, and again joined in their grief at being parted from him. Éowyn pleads, "Lord [...] if you must go, then let me ride in your following. For I am weary of skulking in the hills, and wish to face peril in battle." Aragorn refuses her wish, replying, "Your duty is with your people" (*LotR* V:2 766-67).¹⁰ Indeed, the role of the war bride at home is to set aside grief and "carry on" single-handedly, as Éowyn does in her watch over her people, preserving as closely as possible the status quo. When her king inquires how she fares, Éowyn replies, "All is well. [...] All is now ordered, as you see. And your lodging is prepared for you" (V:3

First World War. "Handsome young soldiers were attractive in part because they were doomed," she reports, and "sometimes the lower ranks had hero-worshipping crushes on their officers as well" (Croft 52). Faramir suspects this as well, and he theorizes to Éowyn, "[A]s a great captain may to a young soldier he seemed to you admirable" (*LotR* VI:5 943).

⁸ Several commentators attribute the timing of Tolkien's marriage to the permeating wartime mood. Croft goes inside Tolkien's head, claiming he must have been motivated by an awareness of the possibility of his death in battle (14), while John Garth notes the outward signs: "He had grasped the urgency of the moment, as his official graduation, his attempt at publication, and his marriage all demonstrate" (131).

⁹ Fuller is probably referring to the Conscription Act of 1917, under which "men with dependents were specifically exempted by law" from the draft (Jacobs & Gallagher 10).

¹⁰ Aragorn is not being merely dismissive. He implies that he, too, is denying his own desires in order to perform what he knows to be his duty: "I do not choose paths of peril, Éowyn. Were I to go where my heart dwells, far in the North I would now be wandering in the fair valley of Rivendell" (*LotR* V:2 766).

778). Fuller, too, cannot bear to be parted from her husband, and taking a job in Boston to be near his training camp, she must still bid him a permanent farewell as he crosses the ocean for France. She is determined, however, to “do her bit” (Fuller 31), allowing herself only a minute or two for tears and immediately embarking upon a sort of private mission in her involvement with the Red Cross (42) and enduring in her day-to-day existence (35). Still, however busy they might be, the lonely women hunger for news of the action and their loved ones. Éowyn terms her isolation an exile (*LotR* V:2 766) and listens eagerly to the descriptions of the battles and of her relatives’ deeds as related to her by Aragorn’s men (765). Likewise, Fuller plans with her husband for the sending of cablegrams before he even departs (Fuller 25) and comes to rely upon them to make France seem “not so far away” (41). Motivated by a similar sentiment, Tolkien “adopted a code of dots” which allowed him to communicate his location to Edith while she, in her turn, “traced his movements on a large map pinned to the wall” (Garth 144). Éowyn’s vigil upon the walls of Minas Tirith, waiting for Aragorn’s return, is also a reflection of this war bride characteristic. “Does not the Black Gate lie yonder?” she asks Faramir, demonstrating her faithful watchfulness, “And must he not now be come thither? It is seven days since he rode away” (*LotR* VI:5 940). This anxiety, as all three women demonstrate, is the fate of the war bride.

Although Éowyn, as we have seen, represents what we might call the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of a modern homebound war bride, she fails to be an exemplary one. Ruth Fuller meant her book as a prescription to women dealing with wartime separation from their spouses: “[T]he *women* of the Country [have] a very definite and necessary part to play; they [are] to maintain optimism and courage, keeping the Lamp of Inspiration trimmed” (Fuller 14-15), she opines, declaring also the “great need for cheery courage and patriotic loyalty among the women” to buoy up the confidence of the as yet amateur soldiers (18). “Morale is a woman’s business,” concurs a smiling face on a WWII advertisement in New Zealand (Montgomerie 24). Thus, while their men waged physical battles, women battled the intangible, spiritual foes of uncertainty: falling spirits, and the strain of helpless anticipation. Éowyn’s experiences,¹¹ temperament,¹² and

¹¹ It is easier to be sympathetic to Éowyn’s plight when one considers her situation. She is an orphan, raised by men in a warrior society where being male is the norm, and she is trained in battle arts but forbidden to fight (Rogers & Rogers 109). While playing the “ignoble” part of waiting upon an uncle who is decaying into a “mean dishonored dotage,” she is also continually subjected to the “poison” of Wormtongue, who is cunningly twisting the words of his master: “Dotard! What is the house of Eorl but a thatched barn where brigands drink in the reek, and their brats roll on the floor among their dogs?” (*LotR* V:8 849). Wormtongue is guilty on two counts, this “son of lechery” having lusted after Éowyn as she grew in

desires¹³ are in direct opposition to compliance with this mode of thinking, and with negative results. She bitterly complains of her lot: "Shall I always be left behind when the Riders depart, to mind the house while they win renown, and find food and beds when they return?" (*LotR* V:2 767). Here, she and Edith find in common their reluctance to put up a plucky façade. Edith, shunted from village to village¹⁴ and finally fed up with her circumstances, which now included a new baby, called hers a "miserable wandering homeless sort of life" (qtd. in Garth 246). Éowyn's own powerful expressions of discontent are not beneficial to Aragorn's spirits. Instead, he is greatly troubled—"[H]e kissed her hand and [...] rode away, and did not look back; and only those who knew him well and were near to him saw the pain that he bore" (*LotR* V:2 768). She also attempts to divert him from his duty,¹⁵ calling his quest to seek the Paths of the Dead "madness" (766). Edith too, seems to find more to be thankful for in Tolkien's convalescence than in his military service—"Every day in bed means another day in England,"¹⁶ she reminded him (qtd. in Garth 232). Éowyn later abandons her place with her people, seeking honor of her own on the battlefield,¹⁷ whereas Fuller finds her little duties as an army Hostess exhilarating (Fuller 20) and regards it as her obligation to send her husband away with a

beauty (509). "Such a reaction from such a person can make a young woman feel downright dirty," suggest Deborah and Ivor Rogers (109).

¹² Gandalf observes to Éomer, "[S]he, born in the body of a maid, had a spirit and courage at least the match of yours" (*LotR* V:8 848-49). She is also "fearless and high-hearted" (III:6 512), and describes herself as one who "cannot lie in sloth, idle, caged" (VI:5 938). Agreeing, Lynnette Porter calls her "a woman of action; being patient and passive is difficult for her in the best of times and certainly not wartime," citing Éowyn's desire to help in the Houses of Healing (Porter 95).

¹³ Probably because of the former two, Éowyn desires a glorious death in battle, which has been attributed on Tolkien's part to the Anglo-Saxon basis for Rohirric culture (see Dickerson 37). She also desires the unattainable love of Aragorn, which is synonymous with her first desire, since, as Aragorn says, "[I]n me she loves only a shadow and a thought: a hope of glory and great deeds, and lands far from the fields of Rohan" (*LotR* V:8 849).

¹⁴ In two years, Edith and her cousin, Jennie Grove, had lived in 22 different sets of lodgings while following Tolkien from camp to camp (Garth 246).

¹⁵ For a discussion of Éowyn (and Arwen) as a female temptress, see Petty, 59.

¹⁶ Sassoon again casts aspersions upon such sentiments in a poem bitingly called "Their Frailty": "He's got a Blighty wound. He's safe; and then / War's fine and bold and bright. / She can forget the doomed and prisoned men / Who agonize and fight" (lines 1-4).

¹⁷ Even on the battlefield, Éowyn contends with purely spiritual foes. "The Nazgûl whom she destroys is not a mortal being," comments Dickerson in *Following Gandalf*. "[I]t is not a physical enemy—but a spiritual foe: a wraith" (30). Like Sauron, the power of the Nazgûl seems to be in the despair it creates in the hearts of those in its proximity (143), and despair was probably a feeling many war brides contended with, metaphorically, at home.

smile (9). Perhaps delving into his own wife's discontented experiences for inspiration, Tolkien, who would probably claim along with C.S. Lewis that he had no insider knowledge of "the mysteries of the Bona Dea" or her doings during wartime (Carpenter 153), seems to reflect on the hardships and ill effects of female passivity in his stern Lady of Rohan. Éowyn, in her petulance and reluctance to accept her role, is clearly not the model war bride typified by Ruth Fuller.¹⁸

Though unsuccessful as the war bride-left-behind, Tolkien offers Éowyn a second chance to distinguish herself, this time as an "international" war bride, through her relationship with Faramir. Unlike the war brides that waved good-bye as their husbands were posted overseas, foreign war brides were not forced to experience to the same degree the demoralizing passivity that caused so much difficulty for Éowyn in her relationship with Aragorn. Her new role caters instead to her strengths, requiring the intrepid spirit and desire for activity so prominent in her character. A study of Japanese war brides noted that "many of the women had shown a taste for independence before [their] marriage[s]" to Anglo soldiers in Japan (Glenn 61). This is certainly true of Éowyn, whose war deeds and disobedience demonstrate a hunger, rather than a mere taste, for independence. The position of the Japanese girls is, of course, reversed in *The Return of the King*; Éowyn has entered Faramir's country in the name of war, rather than he hers, but the courtship between the two nevertheless has many similarities to descriptions of courtship as experienced by young soldiers and their lovers in foreign lands. The noble pair's relationship develops quickly, beginning with an almost immediate declaration from Faramir. In but their first interview together, Faramir half-confesses, half-requests, "[I]t would ease my care, if you would speak to me, or walk at whiles with me. [...] Neither flower nor lady have I seen till now in Gondor so lovely, and so sorrowful" (*LotR* VI:5 939). This direct type of approach to a relationship was common amongst the young soldiers on tour. A war bride from Sussex describes her surprising experience with a fast-moving Canadian: "I met my [future] husband at a local hotel where I'd been invited to a party. He introduced himself and, after an hour or so, informed me that I would like living in Canada after we were married" (Hibbert 32). Such forward acknowledgement of interest is uniquely acceptable in wartime romances, when relocation and even death loom large in the future,

¹⁸ This is not to condemn Éowyn, however. Few of the women left at home found it easy to follow Fuller's model and remain chipper or even faithful. In the play "War Brides," a pregnant character named Hedwig dramatically refuses to do "her bit" for the fatherland and shoots herself after writing to the emperor, "I refuse to bear my child until you promise there shall be no more war." (lines 668-670) And, unfortunately, "wartime separation sometimes gave rise to wartime adultery," although the number of illegitimate births during WWII did show a decrease from peace-time numbers (Montgomerie 157).

and relationships must grow quickly if they are to endure separation. “There was a sense of urgency about the whole thing,” one bride explains, “You never knew whether you’d be there tomorrow” (19). The love of Faramir and Éowyn transpires rapidly indeed, and mere days¹⁹ after meeting, the two have confessed their love. Her dual roles clash, however, and the idealistic faithfulness of the war-bride-left-behind does battle with the readiness of the foreign war bride, making her remarkably resistant to becoming attached too quickly. She is not immediately overwhelmed by “a man in uniform”—or rather, she has already been impressed by a man in uniform, in the form of the Heir of Isildur. It is Faramir who pursues while Éowyn muses quietly on her love for Aragorn. True to war bride form, however, the uncertainty of both Aragorn’s return and reciprocal affection influences her to surrender her heart to Faramir, who so willingly offers the latter. As one girl from Scotland observed, the reason GIs were so attractive to Scottish girls was the fact that “they were *there*—all young Scottish men were gone into service” (Shukert & Scibetta 7). To most civilian girls, absence—and the pressures of wartime—made the heart willing to accept the more available romantic offerings.

To a participant in the war marriage fervor, the betrothal of Éowyn and Faramir would also have looked familiar. Enlisted men were obliged to complete a very long and sometimes exhaustive application process to their superiors in order to marry while on duty. In other words, it required the approval of fellow men-at-arms in order to make a marriage possible (23). Those present to offer them congratulations upon the exchange of wedding vows were also usually limited to fellow servicemen and -women; soldiers were stationed far from family and were not frequently allowed leaves of absence. Catherine Roberts-Swauger relates, “My bridesmaids were buddies stationed with me at Old Sarum. [...] We were married in the little church of St. Mary’s on the grounds of Tidworth House. The uniforms of the United States on one side and the Air Force Blue of the Royal Air Force on the other. A young GI sang *Oh, Promise Me and I Love You Truly*” (27). In similar fashion, Faramir and Éowyn receive approval for their union from their battle-mates and celebrate their happiness at a feast meant to commemorate the deeds of valor performed on the battlefield, especially those of the deceased Théoden. Éomer announces, “[T]hey shall be trothplighted before you all,” and the health of the pair is drunk by all of the company of valiant hearth-companions (*LotR* VI:6 955). Éowyn continues to figure as a war bride as she is betrothed and toasted in a gathering of soldiers.

¹⁹ Éowyn and Faramir stand on the walls together for the first time five days after meeting on 25 March. The second time, when they confess their love, occurs before 30 April, when the pavilions appear (according to Tolkien’s schema). A closer estimate of the date would be sometime around 8 April, as Éowyn has been invited to the celebrations on the Field of Cormallen, but declines to go. See Tolkien’s Appendix B.

A major concern for the war brides of the two World Wars was the process of assimilation. Acceptance by the husband's family and culture was a difficult barrier to overcome,²⁰ and the prospect was especially intimidating for wives who spoke a foreign tongue (Glenn 64) or had been on the side of the enemy during the war. Parents were sometimes very adamant against their daughter's association with soldiers because they feared the girl would accompany the soldier to his homeland upon the war's termination and never be seen again (Shukert & Scibetta 24). Some of these young girls were even ostracized by their countrymen: "the local papers in Edinburgh did not write articles in favour of the local girls marrying GIs. On the contrary, we were made to feel like traitors!" (25) remembers Beverly Schoonmaker. Colored a turncoat in their homelands, many women faced ill receptions in their husbands' countries as well. "Even middle-aged women seemed resentful that I had 'caught' one of their boys. 'Pity they didn't wait to marry a nice, clean, American girl,' I was told by a professor's wife," (80) Brenda Hasty recalls. The welcome was even more unkind if the new relatives considered the bride to be of inferior stock. Reports one woman: "Mother-in-law was a fine woman. [...] But a shadow had fallen over her life. Her son, in the eyes of the villagers, had degraded himself by an alliance with *l'ennemi*. He had betrayed them by wedding une Anglaise. She was kind to me, but I was not on a level with une bonne Canadienne" (Hibbert 110). Others were treated with respect, though as oddities: "We had the dubious distinction of being placed on the train²¹ ahead of the natives," recounts Gwen Chushcoff, "and [we were] led through a huge crowd [by a woman] calling officiously 'Make way for the War Brides.' [...] Needless to say we felt like freaks" (Shukert & Scibetta 80-81). Whether welcomed with joy, animosity, or indifference into their new families and countries, nearly all felt apprehensive of the drastic change in locale:

My friends and I [...] had many discussions as to just what we had done by marrying men we hardly knew and preparing to leave all that was dear and familiar for a life in a land completely unknown. We went to a brides

²⁰ Sidenotes that would only add further complexity to the argument are Edith's "international bride" symptoms. She not only had to be accepted by Father Morgan and the Roman Catholic Church, but by the TCBS. The fraternity had always been threatened with a break-up whenever a woman entered the picture, and the friends' "congratulations were tinged with the anxiety that they might lose a friend" (Garth 33). Such an apprehensive acceptance must have been bothersome for Edith and a point of anxiety to her husband.

²¹ European war brides and other dependents were transported en masse over the Atlantic Ocean on luxury liners like the *Aquitania*. After landing, they were put on trains and carried to various stations around the United States and Canada, where, hopefully, someone would claim them.

club each week, where we were shown films and given lectures about our new country, and these were a help. But the fears still crept in. What had we done? (Hibbert 36-37)

Éowyn, though a foreigner, is able to overcome the problem of language through her learnedness in the Common Speech, but she voices her anxieties about acceptance in her new home and removal from Rohan by saying wistfully to Faramir, "Then must I leave my own people, man of Gondor? And would you have your proud folk say of you: 'There goes a lord who tamed a wild shieldmaiden of the North! Was there no woman of the race of Númenor to choose?'" (*LotR* VI:5 944). Here Éowyn's fears exactly prefigure the experiences of her modern counterparts, in which the dread of resentment, the discomfort of being considered inferior or abnormal, and the anxiety of separation from home are all addressed. Some of these fears are well founded—both Aragorn and Faramir at some point express the sentiment that the Rohirrim are a lesser race (Straubhaar 102). For his part, Faramir describes them as loving war and valor for its own sake—a diminished state, according to him—and while Gondorians are from a High race, the Rohirrim are Middle Peoples, Men of the Twilight (*LotR* IV:5 663).²² Interestingly, Éowyn is ultimately successful as a foreign war bride because of her ability to adapt;²³ she renounces the "lower" ways of the Rohirrim, declaring, "I will be a shieldmaiden no longer, [...] nor take joy only in the songs of slaying. I will be a healer, and love all things that grow and are not barren" (VI:6 943). Thus changed, she can perform with ease her role as the hand of revitalization to a darkness-inflicted land and as Princess within her new culture, having been well-schooled by her upbringing in a royal house.²⁴ Figuring so

²² Shippey reinforces the idea of the Rohirrim as a savage, less sophisticated people, comparing them to the Sioux or Cheyenne in *The Road to Middle Earth* (127).

²³ Taft provides a comprehensive list of requirements whereby an immigrant may be judged "fully assimilated." The list includes cultural knowledge and skills (including proper language use), social interaction (especially interpersonal contact), membership identity and social integration (includes filling an accepted social position), social and emotional identification with the new country, and conformity to group norms (233-35). By marrying Faramir, conforming to Gondorian ways, filling an accepted and highly visible social and political role, and even receiving the blessing of the king himself, Éowyn can be said to be well on her way to complete assimilation.

²⁴ Though niece to Théoden, Éowyn was raised in the court of her uncle after her mother, Théodwyn, died, and Tolkien provides evidence, to the keen eye, of Éowyn's royal eligibility. Taking leave of Faramir in the Houses of Healing, for instance, she "[does] him a courtesy" (*LotR* VI:5 939). She also bears a filled cup to Éomer (955) during the burial feast (a move prefigured by *Wealtheow* in *Beowulf*). Both indicate her gentility and training in the ways of the court.

prominently in their society,²⁵ Faramir and Éowyn's marriage, like many wartime marriages, is viewed as the positive unification of two cultures. "Thus [...] is the friendship of the Mark and of Gondor bound with a new bond, and the more do I rejoice," (VI:6 955) exclaims Éomer upon the couple's betrothal. Similar sentiments were later expressed by those commending the value of the intercultural marriages inspired by wartime activities: "Thomas O. W. Brevner, New Zealand Consul in New York, told a *New York Times* reporter, 'It's a jolly good thing. It brings us all closer together. There's nothing like a baby or two to break down international barriers'" (Shukert & Scibetta 20).

The analogy or comparison of Éowyn to the war brides of Tolkien's time adds further proof to the influence of the World Wars on Tolkien's works. However, the promotion of the idea that the women men leave behind can only cope by defeminizing themselves and abandoning their traditional roles (and necessitating the introduction of foreigners in order to restabilize society), as supported by Éowyn's failure to fulfill the role of war bride-left-behind, is a very unsettling one to all but the most ardent feminists—unless one reads it as a subtle condemnation, on Tolkien's part, of war as a disturber of a valuable social equilibrium. It certainly reveals, however, his sympathies with the difficulty of the role that war imposes upon women, striking down the theory that Tolkien is simply a narrow-minded misogynist who dooms the women in his work to weakness and failure. Knowing from experience that the war would defeat the women's attempts to maintain the status quo despite their best efforts, he diminishes Éowyn's original role, focusing instead on her potential to rebuild and renew. His heavy focus on Éowyn's success as a foreign war bride thereby magnifies Éowyn's courage in taking up a new life in a new culture, perhaps symbolizing the way in which the women of his time aided the reorganizing of society after the war, and the bravery with which they and their husbands faced a new post-war culture, determined to look forward and heal the ravages that war had wreaked upon their way of life. It is this same spirit that would make the White Tree flower again.

²⁵ The Prince of Ithilien would be the greatest noble after Dol Amroth in the new Gondorian state, and would bear many responsibilities. Faramir also remains the Steward, who acts as chief counselor in the Council of Gondor during the king's absence. See *Letters* 323.

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