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Battling the Woman Warrior: Females and Combat in Tolkien and Lewis

Candice Fredrick

Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, CA

Sam McBride

DeVry University, Pomona, CA

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Abstract

Examines women in combat in a number of Tolkien's and Lewis's works, finding that their portrayals have one thing in common: battles are ugly when women fight.

Additional Keywords

Lewis, C.S.—Characters—Orual; Lewis, C.S. Chronicles of Narnia; Lewis, C.S. Till We Have Faces; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Éowyn; Tolkien, J.R.R. The Lord of the Rings; War; Women

BATTLING THE WOMAN WARRIOR: FEMALES AND COMBAT IN TOLKIEN AND LEWIS

CANDICE FREDRICK AND SAM MCBRIDE

“**B**ATTLES are ugly when women fight” (Lewis, *Lion* 105). With this statement Father Christmas makes a clear gender distinction for Narnian characters: while men’s natures make them suited to combat, women’s natures do not. Since Father Christmas is a Narnian character borrowed from this world, his assertion seems equally relevant to life on earth. While one should not confuse a fictional character’s statements with the beliefs of that character’s author, other evidence suggests C.S. Lewis’s hierarchical understanding of gender, grounded in a medieval worldview, identifies war as a man’s realm.

Yet women are often central to men’s battles, even when those women are conspicuously absent. Remember Helen, ostensibly the motivating object of the Trojan War, which is the subject of Lewis’s last incomplete fictional work, “After Ten Years.” The connection between women and warfare is equally apparent in medieval chivalry at moments when a knight fights to defend a lady’s honor; Lewis exemplified medieval chivalry when he pitted Ransom against Weston in *Perelandra*, as did J.R.R. Tolkien when he made Gimli the Dwarf belligerent against anyone questioning the primacy of Galadriel’s beauty. While not all fighting is over women, much of it is; to be more precise, fighting over women is specifically fighting over exceedingly beautiful women.

But, as a sentence written by Lewis, the statement “Battles are ugly when women fight” is somewhat disingenuous. Lewis, along with Tolkien, learned through both literature and first-hand experiences in the First World War that battles are ugly, period, even if only men are involved. Though neither author was a pacifist, neither desired war for war’s sake (a viewpoint that placed them at odds with many intellectuals and politicians of modern Europe). Though battle is central to many of their novels, it is a necessary evil, never glorified for its own sake.

Furthermore, history and literature record examples of women in combat, with which Lewis and Tolkien must have been at least somewhat familiar. The Amazons are the most obvious example of an entire culture both female and war-like. Greek and Roman history record specific female warriors and military leaders—Artemisia I, Arachidamia, and Triaria, for example—as well as female gladiators and chariot fighters. Similar female warrior figures can

be found in ancient African, Asian, and Middle-Eastern histories. Celtic and Anglo-Saxon civilizations produced Queen Boudicca and Aethelflaed, the eldest daughter of Alfred the Great, who died in battle. During the last few centuries of English history women occasionally took combat positions within the British military. While many women warriors disguised themselves as men in order to participate in battle, others went to war openly as women. In addition, while some men's reactions to these women in combat has often paralleled Father Christmas's view, other men have shown respect and admiration for women warriors and even willingly served under their commands. History is not uniform in finding women in combat particularly repugnant.

What, then, does Father Christmas mean by such a statement? Is he unaware of the true nature of battle? Does he hold different views on battle than Lewis? Why does Lewis, a few novels later, briefly position Lucy as an archer in combat, rather than in self-defense, which is the only type of fighting Father Christmas condones for females? Women's entrance into combat is contradictory, confusing, and itself a site of conflict within both Lewis's and Tolkien's fantasy fiction. The conjunction of women, battles and ugliness in their work is worth exploring.

Survey of Literature

Little has been written on this matter. Thirty years ago in an article titled "Brave New World: The Status of Women According to Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams," Doris Myers noted with disappointment that Tolkien and Lewis created men's worlds in their fiction, an unsurprising situation given the masculine orientation of the authors' scholarly and friendship communities. Her disappointment stems from the authors' emphasis on subcreation, which ostensibly should allow them to create "a world which operates on a set of assumptions different from the world as we know it" (13). Yet when it comes to gender, both Middle-earth and Narnia are "based on the traditional masculine-feminine stereotypes" (14). Myers touches on women and combat in a discussion of Eowyn's development, which we will refer to at greater length later. Myers implies battle is one of those spheres where Tolkien relies on traditional gender stereotypes.

Marion Zimmer Bradley, in her intriguing but infrequently referenced 1972 pamphlet *Men, Halflings and Hero Worship*, examines the five romantic attractions within *The Lord of the Rings*. She concludes, "in the best and most worthy masculine lives, women and the romantic emotions are irrelevant, to be taken and enjoyed, as it were, in the intervals of real life and real companionship" (17). Battle, one can conclude, is one of those elements of masculine "real life." About a decade later Brenda Partridge extended this perspective (in "No Sex Please—We're Hobbits: The Construction of Female

Sexuality in *The Lord of the Rings*"). Partridge suggests that male characters engage in battle in part because conventions of combat allow intimate contact between men; thus women are prohibited from battle because it would interfere with the latent homoeroticism war fosters.

Margaret Hannay authored two relevant articles in the mid-1970s (most notably "'Surprised by Joy': C. S. Lewis' Changing Attitudes Toward Women," which appeared in *Mythlore*). Hannay argues for a trajectory of progress in Lewis's career when it comes to depicting gender. Later in his life, under the influence of Joy Davidman, Lewis became less misogynistic, more realistic, and more willing to bend gender traditions (a trend we critique in our own *Women Among the Inklings*). She sees this trend in Orual from *Till We Have Faces*, who is depicted engaging in battle. Paul Ford, in his 1980 reference *Companion to Narnia*, follows Hannay's lead, finding a similar progress within the course of the Narnian novels. Jill, by the time of *The Last Battle*, is brave and eager in combat situations, combining earthly training as a British Girl Guide with a newfound freedom to fight and die for Narnia; Father Christmas makes no appearance to warn her against such an inclination. Writing in 1986 (and again in *Mythlore*), Karla Faust Jones in "Girls in Narnia: Hindered or Human?" finds the Narnian heroines excellent examples of female roles, unhindered by "familiar female stereotype[s]." Among other characteristics, Jones cites the girls' roles as soldiers and their "freedom [to] share danger and adventure with the boys" (19).

Several observations can be made from this brief survey. First, scholars interested in the issue of women and combat in Tolkien and Lewis tend themselves to be women. This tendency is equally borne out through a survey of articles addressing the more general issue of gender in Tolkien and Lewis; women, rather than men, are attracted to this topic. While male scholars and theologians will often cite Lewis to authorize the tradition of female subservience, they have, overall, paid little attention to Lewis's and Tolkien's depictions of women, including those in combat, even though women have been exploring the issue since the early 1970s.

Second, these women scholars disagree as to the meaning of these depictions. Do Lewis and Tolkien break gender role traditions when they allow women into combat? Or do they reinforce those traditions? Do Lewis and Tolkien create new and empowering role models of female fighters, or do they denigrate women in their depictions? While our paper is not likely to settle these questions, we believe a sustained analysis of females in combat will clarify future scholarly debate.

J.R.R. Tolkien

Many critics have noted that women do little of any importance in Middle-earth. Of course, contradicting examples immediately spring to mind:

Éowyn, Galadriel, Goldberry, even Lobelia Sackville-Baggins. Yet the total number of these female characters is significantly less than the total number of male characters. Even a figure such as Arwen Evenstar has a major impact on the Ring trilogy while only rarely appearing within it (a fact which Peter Jackson sought to remedy in his film versions of the novel). Tolkien was himself aware of this criticism of his books, as seen in a 1955 letter to the Houghton Mifflin Company: "The only criticism that annoyed me was one that it 'contained no religion' (and 'no Women', but that does not matter, and is not true anyway)" (*Letters* 220). Tolkien is technically correct: it is not true to say there are no women in *The Lord of the Rings*, but there certainly are few. What Tolkien means by his assertion that the criticism doesn't matter we will leave to your own speculation.

Only a few critics have sought to defend Tolkien on this issue, most notably Charles Moseley and Melanie Rawls. Moseley authored a 1997 study of Tolkien in which he suggests any gender bias Tolkien may exhibit is an inevitable consequence of the University system. In fact, he argues, the Ring trilogy shows "sympathy with [the] predicament" of women. But female characters are minor because the kind of story Tolkien sought to tell "precludes the sort of role for and depiction of women" that have become common in modern literature (16). In other words, few women appear within the Middle-earth books because of the kind of story those books are, not because of a bias against women characters on the part of the author. Yet what kind of story, then, is Tolkien trying to tell? According to Moseley, the Ring trilogy is a book about men united for a common purpose, and to fight against a common enemy. In other words, women are precluded from the story because it centers on war and the possibility of combat.

Rawls also acknowledges the limited number of female characters in Tolkien's work. But on examining the archetypes embedded within the stories, she finds gender balance as an important theme. Characters must have a harmonious balance of feminine and masculine qualities to be good and complete. Thus while there are few female characters, the male characters exhibit both masculine and feminine traits. For Rawls, love, healing, intuition, song, and impotence are all feminine traits, while law, crafts, reason, and of course aggression are all masculine (6). While the masculine and the feminine both abound in Tolkien's books, for Rawls war remains masculine. Even those critics defending the lack of female characters in Tolkien find an important link between war and masculinity.

Few women appear in combat in the Ring books and related writings. *The Silmarillion*, for example, briefly mentions Emeldir, mother of Beren. Emeldir is nick-named, interestingly enough, "the Manhearted." She arms women and children to fight along side the men of her tribe against Melkor (181); these masculine activities are, apparently, the qualifications behind her nickname.

More than this, we do not know. Haleth, too, is described as strong and valiant, though not actually depicted fighting (170-171). In his incomplete "Cirion and Eorl and the Friendship of Gondor and Rohan" (published in the *Unfinished Tales*), Tolkien briefly mentions an enemy people who train their young women in arms and allow them to fight solely in a defensive mode. Galadriel receives much greater attention from Tolkien and would certainly be a powerful combat adversary. Yet Tolkien depicts her strivings against the enemy as more mental and magical, rather than physical. She may or may not have been involved in the Kinslaying at Alqualondë, but she is not depicted in actual battle. Similarly the female Valar are not depicted in their strivings against Melkor. In Jackson's film version of *The Fellowship of the Rings*, Arwen is depicted placing a sword-point against the throat of Aragorn; apparently Jackson intended for the character to ride to war at Aragorn's side in the later films (but changed his mind after fans protested online).

Two female characters whom Tolkien *does* depict in combat are more-or-less giant spiders, and thus hideously ugly (and, since female spiders devour their mates, threatening to masculinity). In the First Age Ungoliant fights with Melkor over the Silmarils. She flees to the South and therefore out of the knowledge of Middle-earth historians, though *The Silmarillion* hints that she may have ultimately been consumed by her own desire and devoured herself. The second of these spider characters, Shelob, battles Sam and Frodo in the tunnels above Minas Morgul. Much has been made of Shelob, a descendant of Ungoliant, as a symbol of Tolkien's fear of female sexuality (see Partridge in particular). Both spider characters have this in common: in combat they lose. The cause of their defeat helps explain Lewis's (rather, Father Christmas's) assertion that "battles are ugly when women fight."

Ungoliant is defeated by Melkor, who is hierarchically superior to her; Melkor is a fallen Valar, while Ungoliant's origin is less clear. She is described as coming from "the darkness that lies about Arda," and she is probably a fallen Maia, the second rank of angelic beings. If so, neither Melkor nor Ungoliant is male or female in the biological sense of the word. Rather, the Valar (and presumably the Maiar) can take on physical forms that correspond to pre-existing, God-given gendered natures. Remember that Tolkien, in the Ainulindalë section of *The Silmarillion*, says that gender is a universal category that precedes physical existence, an idea Lewis further developed in *Perelandra*. Ungoliant, if a Maia, is fallen because Melkor corrupted her, a situation that parallels the Christian tradition of fallen angels corrupted through the influence of Satan. Yet Ungoliant did not maintain an allegiance to Melkor; instead, she rebelled against him while not returning to submission under Eru. These qualities of mystery and rebellion stem from Tolkien's earliest conception of the character, in "The Book of Lost Tales," dating from around World War I, in which

she is called "Mo'Ru." Ungoliant and Melkor form a temporary alliance against the Valar and attack and kill the Two Trees of Valinor. They flee to Middle-earth, where their quarrel over the Silmarils occurs: Melkor wants to possess them, while Ungoliant wants to eat them. Their quarrel wakens Melkor's servants, who rush to his aid. Ungoliant heads south.

Shelob, a less powerful creature than Ungoliant, is subject to a less powerful superior and defeated by an inferior creature. She is defenseless against Sauron and defeated by Sam Gamgee. As a descendant of Ungoliant, Shelob herself stems from the Maiar, but since her parentage is a mix between Ungoliant and spiders, she is less than a Maiar (just as Lúthien, daughter of Melian, is less than a Maiar, but more than an Elf). Sauron, a fallen Maiar, has been corrupted by evil, and has lost some of his power due to the loss of the One Ring, but he is still hierarchically superior to Shelob.

While both Shelob and Sauron are wholly evil, they exhibit a crucial difference, seen also in Melkor and Ungoliant. Melkor and Sauron retain rational thought, and therefore can plot, scheme, and lay plans to overthrow the good. Ungoliant and Shelob, in contrast, are wholly preoccupied with their own lusts; they operate on the pleasure principle. In Freudian terms, they represent pure id, with no overriding interference from ego or superego. Sauron and Melkor, in contrast, at least retain ego; they represent evil guided by rationality, while Ungoliant and Shelob are wholly irrational evil. Melkor and Sauron, though dedicated to destruction, recognize they must allow other life forms to survive, at least as servants, to achieve the greater end of total domination; Ungoliant and Shelob think only short-term, preferring instant gratification. Ungoliant is defeated by Melkor because she does not have subordinates who can rush to her aid at her beck and call; any potential subordinates she has already consumed. She is ultimately anti-social and isolated; how she is able to procreate remains a deep mystery. Her descendant, Shelob, is equally alone; her defeat by Sam stems from her preoccupation with her own pleasure, which causes her to lose track of her surroundings.

Given Tolkien's assertion that gender precedes embodiment, Ungoliant's and Shelob's irrationality necessitate their female gender. Their self-preoccupation, internalization of their surroundings, and inability to rationalize and build a network of supporters mark them as female. In contrast, Melkor's and Sauron's abilities to think analytically through the long term qualifies them as male. In other words, making these characters male or female was not simply a choice on the part of Tolkien; he was compelled to give each one his or her corresponding gender to coincide with the qualities he desired each to possess. This illuminates Father Christmas's assertion: a war governed by rationality may indeed look less ugly, to a rational mind, than one not governed at all; this difference is qualitatively similar to that between a boxing match and a catfight.

Thus if women tend toward the irrational, an argument that Lewis makes in *The Four Loves*, then by all means they should be kept out of combat. Still, such a perspective is worth questioning since Lewis's and Tolkien's experiences in the Great War must have shown a lack of rationality even in masculine combat.

Of course, Tolkien's most extensive representation of a woman in combat is Éowyn of Rohan, who is, in fact, Tolkien's most complex female character. She appeared early in Tolkien's drafts, though she was transformed in later stages: once she was the daughter of the king, though ultimately his niece. At one stage in the writing Tolkien revised her to be a man. At another point Tolkien intended her to ride to battle openly as an Amazon. In yet another draft Éowyn cites an historical precedent for women riding to battle, but Tolkien did not develop the idea.

For Éowyn to play the role of warrior, she must complicate her life in a variety of ways. She must directly disobey a command of her father figure and king, and perhaps endanger her people by leaving them leaderless. She must give up her identity as princess, becoming instead Dernhelm. She must don men's attire, thus not appearing as a female warrior, but simply as a warrior. And in renouncing herself in these ways, she must cut herself off from her companions and loved ones, and accept a fell mood of utter despair.

The contrast with Galadriel is most revealing. Galadriel apparently maintains her feminine qualities in those moments when she is actively engaged as leader; it is in some way appropriate for her nature and character. Yet Tolkien reveals this aspect of her indirectly and anecdotally. In contrast, to depict Éowyn as an actual warrior, Tolkien transforms her into a man. Even then he long considered allowing her to die in battle. Instead, of course, she slays the chief Nazgûl and reveals herself as a woman and beautiful. Subsequently, the story of Éowyn becomes one of renunciation of her role as warrior. Adding to Éowyn's despair is her unrequited love for Aragorn who, at early stages of the writing, Tolkien intended to marry Éowyn. Her rejection of the warrior role coincides with an acceptance that she is not destined for the glory of matrimony with Aragorn, whom she greatly admires. Tolkien depicts Éowyn's transformation as a healing, a recovery from a malady deeper than a mere physical ailment. She is sick in her soul due to unwillingness to accept her lot in life: living as a female who, as such, is barred from a life of glory on the battlefield. Had she not been so healed, one can infer, she would have died. Tolkien's choices for a would-be woman warrior: submit to your allotted role as wife, or die.

Faramir, warrior of Minas Tirith, leads her to healing. Faramir tames Éowyn's wild warrior impulse, simultaneously encouraging a satisfaction within the domestic sphere. Éowyn's healing comes from accepting the role her civilization demands from her as a woman: to be a beautiful, helpful, and cheerful companion to a man, essentially the same role she played as niece to the

King of Rohan and her brother, the Third Marshall of the Mark (and, by the way, essentially the role Tolkien expected of his own wife, an expectation which did not always promote her happiness). Éowyn's healing is a victory, not only for Faramir, but also for Middle-earth's civilization; an unruly impulse to transcend prescribed gender roles has been successfully thwarted. For Tolkien, the phrase "female warrior" is a conjunction of irreconcilable opposites; he can imagine one or the other, female or warrior, but not both simultaneously. Doris Myers, who says disparagingly that Éowyn's story is a "rather pallid version of *The Taming of the Shrew*," asserts that Tolkien offers women "nothing but the same old bouquet of medieval [and] renaissance attitudes" (15).

Tolkien's depictions of females in combat suggest women simply are not suited for the task of warfare. Both their natures and their thought processes prevent them from fighting effectively. This is not because they are innately good, else there would be no Shelob (though one of the few female characters in the Ring trilogy, Shelob is the only female enemy). From the perspective of the Inklings' views on gender, even Éowyn illustrates this point. Lewis, in *The Four Loves*, mentions that a husband is more likely to respond rationally than a wife if their child is, for example, attacked by a neighbor's dog; the wife, giving in to her natural impulse to protect, would likely act irrationally. Such is the case with Éowyn. It is irrational to leave her people leaderless, to go to war, and to face the chief Nazgûl in single combat; she was driven to this last act by her love for her uncle and King. From Tolkien's perspective, even if, like Éowyn, a woman is capable of fighting (perhaps even destined to fight), she should choose not to, except in the direst need. And then afterwards, she should cheerfully resume her domestic role, much as "Rosie the Riveter" was expected to return to managing the household in order to make room in the workforce for returning male veterans following World War II.

C. S. Lewis

Until "The Queen of Drum," Lewis did not depict detailed female characters at all. His earliest depictions divide women into two categories: innately good females who are essentially disembodied spirits, and innately bad females who serve primarily as temptations to men.

Reason in *The Pilgrim's Regress* exemplifies the first approach. She is a tall young woman on horseback, dressed as a knight in shining armor. John, the novel's protagonist, immediately assumes she is a goddess and a virgin. The first of these assumptions is easily understood: Reason appears powerful and emanates light, and therefore appears appropriately superhuman. She is, no doubt, influenced by the character of the same name in the medieval "Romance of the Rose" (which Lewis discusses in *The Allegory of Love*; see especially pages 132 and 138). The narrator of *The Pilgrim's Regress* gives no explanation, however,

as to why John assumes she is a virgin. After doing so, however, John and the narrator then forget altogether that Reason has the body of a woman, though the physical characteristics of women's bodies were of prime significance while John was among the brown girls and the Clevers (who, by the way, exemplify Lewis's second approach to characterizing women). Instead, John and the narrator remain focused on the realm of ideas as Reason explains the philosophical weaknesses of the Clevers and others he has encountered on his quest. Reason becomes an abstraction with gender arbitrarily attached. In fact, she possesses none of the characteristics Lewis elsewhere ascribes to femininity. Ultimately she coerces John to action at the point of a sword. Early in his career, for Lewis to show a woman capable of combat, he abstracted her to the point of disembodiment.

This changed by the time of Narnia and Father Christmas's injunction against women in battle. The Narnia books contain many strong and centrally important female characters, much more so than in Tolkien's Middle-earth books. Readers have often noted that Lewis shows a special fondness for Lucy, a central character in three of the books (and the only significant female character in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*); she also appears incidentally in two more volumes. Lucy is not the vague symbol or mysterious temptation of Lewis's earliest literary works. She is feisty and fun-loving, affectionate and active, willing to pursue adventure and danger as intensely as any Narnian male. Equally interesting, though diverse in personality, are Susan, Jill, Aravis, and Polly. In short, these females are enjoyable because they are realistic. They are actual girls, rather than adult female types. This achievement is a major step forward in Lewis's development as a writer.

Lucy appears somewhat resistant to Father Christmas's dictum. In *The Horse and His Boy* we learn that, while Susan stays home at Cair Paravel during the wars, Lucy accompanies the men into battle. Lewis does not explain exactly what Lucy does during a battle, though an observer mentions a woman, most likely Lucy, among the Narnian archers. Lewis allows a back-handed compliment on this subject: "She's [...] as good as a man" in battle, says Corin, a boy-prince of Archenland, "or at any rate as good as a boy" (176). Jill Pole in *The Last Battle* is even more overtly involved in the fight to preserve Narnia's freedom.

Yet, the types of arms allowed a girl differ from those given a boy. While swords are expected for the boys, girls are restricted to knives and the bow and arrow; on their return to Experiment House at the end of *The Silver Chair*, Caspian and Eustace are instructed to attack the priggish children with the flats of their swords, while Jill is given only a limp switch that transforms into a riding crop. If a sword can be seen as a phallic symbol, this difference does not simply result from gender, it is representative of gender.

We don't, however, wish to make any such argument regarding swords and phallic symbols (see David Holbrook's *The Skeleton in the Wardrobe* for analysis of that sort). We wish to avoid the charge of Freudianism that Lewis himself refuted, but also to emphasize that the heroes and heroines of the Narnian tales are indeed boys and girls. They are prepubescent, a fact that remains central to the nature of Narnia. Remember three points:

1. Aslan forbade return to Narnia when the children became too old;
2. To die in Narnia is to return to adolescence (as evidenced in the death of King Caspian toward the end of *The Silver Chair*); as Jill notes, in Aslan's country people seem to have no particular age, though Lewis's description makes them seem more young than old;
3. To die *outside* Narnia and then return there may also be a return to a childhood state; when the Kings and Queens appear toward the end of *The Last Battle*, Lewis emphasizes their nobility, but also their youthfulness.

Narnia's youthful orientation allowed Lewis to avoid the sexual aspects of life that intruded into Tolkien's work, as in the story of Éowyn. To view a *woman* in combat in the Narnia books one must turn to the evil queens, although, paralleling Tolkien's Galadriel, these queens rely more on magic than physical prowess.

Thus, for a detailed image of a woman facing physical combat within Lewis's work, one must turn to his final novel, *Till We Have Faces*. Much like Tolkien's depiction of Éowyn, Lewis's depiction of Orual, the heroine, is his most sympathetic, understanding, realistic, and detailed portrait of a woman. Much has been made of Joy Davidman's impact on Lewis in regard to this novel, and indeed the book shows transformation and growth in his ability to depict females; one is hard pressed to account for this growth without positing the influence of the woman who became his wife.

Yet to place the novel within its fullest context we must also recognize one of Lewis's objectives in writing this book, an achievement of which he was quite proud. In a letter to Mary Shelburne (published in *Letters to an American Lady*), Lewis claims that in *Till We Have Faces* he has done "what no mere male author has done before, [that is,] talked thro' the mouth of, and lived in the mind of, an *ugly* woman for a whole book" (50, Lewis's emphasis). Most of the short fictional writings of Lewis's later years are preoccupied with ugly women. In the short story "Forms of Things Unknown," which some claim is not by Lewis, spacemen visiting the moon are turned to stone on seeing a Gorgon. In "Ministering Angels," two ugly women disrupt the peaceful masculine environment of a space base on Mars when they are sent as prostitutes to relieve the men's stress. In the incomplete "After Ten Years" Lewis writes of the beautiful

Helen, *after* she has been transformed by age; no longer does she possess the face that launched a thousand ships. Even "The Shoddy Lands" describes a student's fiancée as unattractive, at least to Lewis. Orual from *Till We Have Faces* fits well into this pantheon of ugly women.

In fact, Orual's ugliness is central to her involvement in battle. While Tolkien's Éowyn must disguise her beauty in order to engage in combat, Orual's ugliness qualifies her for combat training. Orual learns that if a woman is sufficiently ugly, men will no longer think of her as a woman. In fact, Orual is not simply ugly; she is so in part because her facial features are more manly than womanly. Even Psyche comments at one point that Orual looks like their father (that, by the way, is not a compliment). While for Éowyn masculinity is only a disguise (and perhaps a fantasy), for Orual manliness is an affliction. "If I'm to be hard-featured as a man," she asks, "why shouldn't I fight like a man too?" (198).

Those masculine aspects are more than physical. Bardia, when first encountering her amateurish, untrained abilities with the sword, comments, "It's a thousand pities, Lady, that you weren't a man [...]. You've a man's reach and a quick eye" (65). Bardia suggests combat training as a means of assuaging Orual's grief; "I can make a swordsman of you" (91), he claims, and often declares that the gods should have made her male. As with Éowyn, clothing becomes an issue for a woman attempting combat. After praising her "man's reach," Bardia notes that Orual's dress hampers her movement; he thus recommends a more masculine, boyish outfit. Before long, Orual notes, he stops regarding her as a woman altogether. When Orual says she would rather die, Bardia scolds her for speaking "women's talk" (91). And Bardia is not the only man who treats Orual as a fellow male. After she has been educated by the Fox, even her father the king treats her more kindly, "as one man might to another" (30).

Orual even refers to herself in masculine terms; though in a "woman's rage" when she attempts to enter Psyche's room against Bardia's guard, she says she "had man enough about me" to warn Bardia before attacking him (64). After her subsequent estrangement from Psyche, she makes her life aim "to drive all the woman out of me" (184). She contrasts herself with Psyche in gendered terms: Psyche has never done "man's work" and never held a sword (200). Similarly Orual contrasts herself with Ansit, Bardia's wife. While she is jealous that Ansit has shared his bed and borne his children, Orual is proud to have shared battle with him; "I'm in his man's life," she tells herself (233).

It is one thing to prepare for combat and quite another to participate in it. As Queen of Glome, Orual does go to battle. In fact, her ability to lead in battle is a factor qualifying her to be Queen without a King. This becomes clear while Orual's father the king is dying at the same time as the priest of Ungit. Arnorn, who desires to succeed the dying priest, discusses the future of Glome with Bardia, the Fox, and Orual. When Bardia suggests Orual should become Queen,

Arnorn expresses disappointment that Orual is not married. "A woman cannot lead the armies of Glome in war." Bardia responds with vehemence, "This Queen can" (187).

To her people, the Queen in combat is an oddity; the entire kingdom of Glome turns out to watch her first dual, against Argan of Phars. As the battle begins, the vast majority of those present assume Argan will quickly win. Yet Orual holds her own, causing a slight wound to her opponent's knuckles early in the fight. She misses her first opportunity to capitalize on her opponent's mistake, but soon Argan makes the same mistake again and Orual gives him a mortal cut in the thigh. For Orual, this, her first "mankilling," is a transformation similar, she imagines, to a woman losing her virginity.

Yet Orual deflates the masculine qualities of her first combat experience. She minimizes the excitement and danger as she tells the story; in essence, she denies a climax to her narrative of the duel. Rather than detailing each move, each thrust of the sword, she tells the story in a roundabout fashion, allowing herself to veer off topic to distant areas, such as the nationality of her intended reader. Thus the narrative of combat is not an adventure story. Orual gives no more weight to describing this combat scene than she does to a more homely kitchen scene. And in fact, she notes that within minutes of killing Argan she, as a woman, is pushed back into the domestic sphere: making plans for the obligatory post-victory feast. Orual then feels out of place at the banquet since she is seeing men in a completely new way. "What vile things men are," she concludes on observing them drunken and feasting (223). Though born with masculine features and trained to the masculine task of combat, Orual expresses a sense of wonder and surprise at gender difference. This difference prevents her from experiencing masculinity from within. Orual, then, is ultimately a woman, though a mannish one; this is to say, she is not a man, yet not quite fully a woman.

Conclusion

Whether or not battles are ugly when women fight, this study of women and combat in Tolkien and Lewis suggests women must be ugly, or make themselves ugly, or at least distance themselves from femininity, in order to fight. For Reason in *The Pilgrim's Regress*, this involves becoming an abstraction. For Éowyn, and to a lesser extent Orual, this involves wearing men's attire and distancing herself from interaction with other women. For Orual, entrance to the combat arena is possible because of a curse of birth; rather than being born beautiful like her sisters, she is born ugly and masculine. Psyche and Redival, therefore, and Éowyn, more accurately represent what mature women should be: beautiful. The girls of Narnia have not yet arrived at the developmental stage

where they experience womanly beauty, although they sometimes fantasize about arriving at that state. A woman combatant is an anomaly, a freak of nature or of circumstance. Part of what makes battles ugly when women fight is that women, according to Tolkien and Lewis, must first be or become ugly as a prerequisite for fighting. Father Christmas's words, therefore, become self-reflexive: battles are ugly when women fight because when women fight they must be ugly. From this perspective, a non-ugly battle involving a woman is by definition inconceivable.

This augments an understanding of Father Christmas's injunction. The idea is not simply to protect women, as a weaker sex, from the ugliness of war, but to preserve them from their own possible ugliness, for the men's sake as much as the women's. The underlying attitude is: if women are made ugly by participation in combat, then by all means we (that is, we men) don't want to see that. Only Orual, however, shows the slightest inkling of an interest in whether men, too, are made ugly by combat.

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