



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 21 | Number 2 | Issue 80, Winter

Article 40

Winter 10-15-1996

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Recommended Citation

Crowe, Edith L. (1996) "Power in Arda: Sources, Uses and Misuses," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 21 : No. 2 , Article 40.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol21/iss2/40>

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Mythcon 50

Looking Back, Moving Forward

San Diego, California

August 2-5, 2019

Power in Arda: Sources, Uses and Misuses

Abstract

Power and renunciation of power has long been recognised as an important theme in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien. This paper will examine the issue of power with particular attention to Riane Eisler's dominator/partnership model of power relations and the power within/power over dichotomy. It will consider the sources of power: spiritual, political, physical; and how these are wielded by the various peoples and individuals of Middle-earth.

Additional Keywords

feminism; gender; The Lord of the Rings; power; Unfinished Tales

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A fine American cartoonist, Nicole Hollander, titled one of her collections *Ma, Can I Be a Feminist and Still Like Men?* Her punchline wasn't too encouraging: "Sure, just like you can be a vegetarian and like fried chicken." (We must remember humour often exaggerates for its effects.) The question I'm here to answer is a similar one: "Ma, can I be a feminist and still like Tolkien?" Obviously my answer is going to be a more positive one, since I am, and do. To be very practical about it, fantasy readers of my generation would have had precious little to read in the beginning if we had limited ourselves to works fully in tune with our feminist principles.

Females of a later generation are often less forgiving. The reaction of a friend's daughter, age five, upon hearing *The Hobbit* for the first time, was: "Mommy, aren't there any girls in this story?" Her mother was forced to admit that, by and large, there weren't. The most problematic aspect of Tolkien is indeed the disappointingly low percentage of females that appear in his best-known and best-loved works, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. I don't intend to castigate Tolkien for this, though I certainly regret it, since he was only reflecting his sources and his times. Neither am I going to claim he was a hidden feminist – not the man who, in 1943, viewed with such alarm the possibility of a postwar world overrun with such horrors as "American sanitation, morale-pep, feminism, and mass production" (Tolkien, 1981, p. 65).

I would dearly love to know what he had against American sanitation, and how he defined it. I would also like to know how he defined feminism, since my experience has been that no two people mean the same thing by that rather charged word. However, to say that Tolkien's work is completely incompatible with feminism is to accept not only too limited a view of Tolkien's writings, but too narrow a definition of feminism. Tolkien's work is much richer than that, particularly if we include *The Silmarillion*, *Unfinished Tales*, and his other posthumous works. There are many interpretations of feminism, and some aspects are more compatible with Tolkien than others.

For instance, there is difference of opinion between what

we might term "social constructionists" and "essentialists." The former claim that an individual's identity as "male" or "female" is almost purely a result of learning, of nurture if you will, both within the family and in the larger context of the world outside it. "Essentialists" feel that there is indeed a basic difference between men and women beyond the biologically obvious, and that the problem is that the natures of each sex are not equally valued. I suspect the truth, as it does in most things, lies somewhere in between.

At first, the main concern of feminists was to increase the participation and influence of women in society as it was – in politics, in professions historically closed to women, in education, etc. In a later stage, one begins to ask larger questions about the basic values of the society itself. A good example is the thorny question of women in the military – should one be working to increase the numbers of women in the military, or to change one's society in a more fundamental way and abolish or diminish the military?

We now come close to the place where Tolkien and feminism, while coming from very different places, grapple with some of the same issues. Many of those issues centre around power – where it comes from, who has it, the different ways in which it is utilized, and what constitutes legitimate or illegitimate use. It is my contention that in Middle-earth, Tolkien exhibits attitudes toward power that are quite compatible with, if not identical to, the attitudes of many who define themselves as feminists.

The first thing to look at is the ultimate source of power in Middle-earth. That source is theological, because it resides in Eru. Of all the beings that we meet in Tolkien's subcreated universe, only Eru is omnipotent. Only he possesses the Flame Imperishable, and is therefore capable of creation of the Ainur *ex nihilo*. And as he tells Melkor, "no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite." (Tolkien, 1977, p. 17). Although many other beings have the ability to alter Arda in major and minor ways, for good or ill, only Eru has the power to completely transcend it as he does when Númenor is destroyed and Valinor removed from the circles of the world. In addition, only Eru is omniscient: "to none but

himself has Ilúvatar revealed all that he has in store” (Tolkien, 1977, p. 18), not even to the Ainur.

Eru is also portrayed as male, in a manner very reminiscent of Yahweh, of “God the Father” in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In that tradition,

although the Hebrew word Elohim has both feminine and masculine roots (incidentally explaining how in the first creation story in Genesis both woman and man could be created in Elohim’s image), all the other appellations of the deity, such as King, Lord, Father, and Shepherd, are specifically male.

(Eisler, 1988, p. 94)

So Eru – or Ilúvatar, “Father of All” in Quenya – is firmly within a familiar patriarchal religious tradition. However, Eru seems to be much better at delegating authority than Yahweh, because, with the exception mentioned above, he does not interfere directly in the further creation and operation of Arda. Here we begin to part company with the Judeo-Christian model in ways that Tolkien found acceptable within his religious tradition but also give some satisfaction to the many within and without that tradition who hunger for a female conception of deity.

In his subcreation of the Valar, Tolkien has managed to incorporate female power at the penultimate level at least. At this point, he seems to reveal himself as an essentialist where male and female natures are concerned:

But when they desire to clothe themselves the Valar take upon them forms some as of male and some as of female; for that difference of temper they had even from their beginning, and it is but bodied forth in the choice of each, not made by the choice.

(Tolkien, 1977, p. 21)

Although he may give pride of place to the male, Tolkien has also given us a number of powerful female characters among the Valar. Varda, for example, although technically second to Manwë, actually has a greater presence in Middle-earth, especially in *The Lord of the Rings*, due to the reverence in which the Elves hold her and their tendency to call upon her. She is the closest thing Arda has to a goddess. Although Tolkien’s religious beliefs would not allow him to conceptualize her as such, her creation of the stars suggests the Queen of Heaven, an appellation not only of Mary, the mother of Jesus, but of Isis, the great goddess of the ancient world to whom Mary owes many of her attributes. A suggestion of her power and significance is the intriguing fact that Melkor “feared her more than all others whom Eru made” (Tolkien, 1977, p. 26).

If Varda suggests the Great Goddess, the goddess as Creatrix, the other female Valar – the Valier – encompass other aspects of the Goddess. Yavanna is very much the Earth Mother: her Eldarin surname, Kementári, means Queen of the Earth; her role as the source of growing things is suggestive of Ceres or Demeter. The maiden aspect of the Goddess (although neither are technically maidens) is found in Nessa, the sister of Oromë the hunter, who is fleet of foot and loves deer (like Artemis), and in Vána, younger sister of Yavanna, who causes flowers to open if she looks at them and birds to sing at her coming. She is like a Persephone who

need never fear that a Hades will carry her off.

The Valier associated with giving rest and healing to the hurt and weary (Estë) or with the Halls of Mandos where the dead wait (Nienna and Vairë) suggest the aspect of Goddess as Crone, that aspect associated with the end of life rather than its beginning. Therefore, although Eru is definitely portrayed as male, that is the only level of being at which a strong female presence is absent. Although one only familiar with *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* might be forgiven for concluding that Tolkien was lacking in recognition of the importance of the feminine, the Valier alone should contradict that conclusion. Although the ultimate deity is male, spiritual power, as embodied in the Valar, is almost equally the province of male and female.

Already this is an improvement over the Primary World, since its major religions are not oversupplied with images of female spiritual power. As we move to the level of the Children of Ilúvatar, Elves and Men, another significant difference appears. In Judeo-Christian (and to some extent Islamic) traditions, woman, in the person of Eve, “has been blamed for nothing less than our fall from paradise.” (Eisler, 1988, p. 190). Considering how often that belief has been used to justify the subordination and persecution of women, it is extremely refreshing to encounter a secondary world where the Fall of both Elves and Men is a male’s fault. Interestingly enough, in both cases the action which brings about the Fall is preceded by an insufficiency of the “feminine principle,” as in Fëanor’s case, or in active damage to it, as in Ar-Pharazôn’s.

In her excellent *Mythlore* article on “The Feminine Principle in Tolkien,” Melanie Rawls (1984, p. 5) points out that

Through *The Silmarillion* runs this theme: in Arda and in the Heavens, the Feminine and the Masculine are present; when they are in equilibrium and in harmony there is Good, but Evil is the result of an insufficiency or a disharmony of the attributes of one or the other of the genders.

Another important point she makes is that this equilibrium and harmony can be achieved either by the balance of masculine and feminine qualities within an individual, or by a less integrated being who has “access to the nature of the other gender, usually in the form of a spouse, a sibling, or a mentor” (Rawls, 1984, p. 5). Fëanor can hardly be blamed for the absence of his mother, but he is culpable for ignoring the advice of his wiser and more patient wife. Tolkien tells us that Nerdanel “restrained [Fëanor] when the fire of his heart grew too hot” (Tolkien, 1977, p. 64). This female restraint of male misuse of power has a precedent among the Maiar: Uinen, Lady of the Seas, not only “can lay calm upon the waves, restraining the wildness of Ossë” her spouse, but even kept Ossë from succumbing to the temptation of Melkor (Tolkien, 1977, p. 30). Fëanor, alas, was not so wise.

This theme permeates Tolkien’s work – the absolute necessity of both male and female elements, however defined, for the proper functioning of both individuals and societies. More importantly, he recognizes the interdependence of male and female, and suggests repeatedly

that to ignore one at the expense of the other is a grave mistake which at the very least diminishes the individual and at the worst can lead to disaster for both the individual and the society. Not only are Manwë and Varda the supreme powers among the Valar, but they enhance each other's power:

When Manwë . . . ascends his throne and looks forth, if Varda is beside him, he sees further than all other eyes . . . And if Manwë is with her, Varda hears more clearly than all other ears . . .

(Tolkien, 1977, p. 26)

Although the presence of the Valier and the absence of an Eve figure provide a strong sense of female spiritual power, Middle-earth still exhibits an almost invariably patriarchal and patrilineal political and social organization. Manwë clearly possesses the highest authority among the Valar, and among the peoples of Middle-earth, the norm in both government and the family is that the highest authority is male. This follows from the position of Eru, since in the primary world,

Religions in which the most powerful or only deity is male tend to reflect a social order in which descent is patrilinear . . . and domicile is patrilocal . . . religions in which the most powerful or sole deity is female tend to reflect a social order in which descent is matrilinear . . . and domicile is likewise matrilocal.

(Eisler, 1988, p. 24)

We now move to the level of temporal power, although among the Eldar and Edain, at least, spiritual and temporal power are to some extent interwoven. There are many varieties of temporal power, from many sources. Two of the more "outer-directed" are physical strength/skill; or power based in formal authority and/or the possession of tangible resources – that is, political/economic power. Power can also arise from "personal magnetism, attractiveness, or charisma" or from "access to information, particularly information that others do not have or cannot understand . . ." (Lips, 1985, pp. 5-6). Although the latter two types are more evenly distributed between men and women, physical and political power does seem to be associated rarely with women.

It does, however, exist, especially among the Eldar. Aredhel (Ar-Feiniel, the White Lady of the Noldor), "was tall and strong, and loved much to ride and hunt in the forests." (Tolkien, 1977, p. 60). The Galadriel that we see in *The Lord of the Rings* is clearly a great power, but in that work we see only the tip of the iceberg. Galadriel seemed to hold a particular fascination for Tolkien, since he continued to work on her character and history until the end of his life. In a letter written only a month before his death she is clearly much on his mind (Tolkien, 1981, p. 431).

After first meeting her in *The Lord of the Rings*, it is fascinating to read descriptions of her in the First Age which indicate a previously unstressed physical ability. We learn that her mother's name for her was Nerwen, or "man-maiden:" that "she grew to be tall beyond the measure even of the women of the Noldor; she was strong of body, mind, and will." Her depth of knowledge comes as no surprise, but we also learn that she was "a match for both the loremasters

and the athletes of the Eldar . . ." (Tolkien, 1980, p. 229).

Her physical strength and courage are not limited to athletics. In one version of the Noldorian rebellion, Galadriel was at Alqualondë considering departure from Middle-earth for her own reasons, and "fought fiercely against Fëanor in defence of her mother's kin" during the Kinslaying (Tolkien, 1980, p. 230). In such a context, one can only assume a fight of the physical sort. In another version of the revolt, Fëanor leaves Fingolfin's people stranded in the Northern Waste, and Galadriel is among the small band who lead their people overland to Middle-earth. "Few of the deeds of the Noldor thereafter surpassed that desperate crossing in hardihood or woe" (Tolkien, 1977, p. 90).

There are a enough women in Middle-earth who possess both physical courage and political leadership ability to suggest that Tolkien did not believe that lack of these qualities was an essential aspect of femaleness. Why then are examples not more frequent? Part of the reason is, as noted above, a patriarchal social structure derived from a spiritual hierarchy with Eru on top. Another part of the reason may be the fact that for so many of the peoples of Middle-earth, having to fight almost constant battles against Melkor, Sauron, or their minions, the political leader of the group was also the military leader. Although the women of the Eldar and Edain are certainly capable of fighting in many instances, it tends to be in last-ditch defence of their homes and children, rather than organized warfare taken outside their territory.

In an extensive cross-cultural study of Primary World societies, Peggy Sanday discovered that women seldom engage in warfare, not necessarily because their culture views them as incapable of it, but because this is seen as inappropriate or too risky. Even in cultures where women have power and authority, they may believe

. . . it is more efficient for women to delegate than to monopolize power. Since women are the potential bearers of new additions to the population, it would scarcely be expedient to place them on the front line at the hunt and in warfare . . ."

(Sanday, 1981, p. 115)

This common belief may explain the rarity of female political leaders in Middle-earth. On the other hand, it may be a result of the Primary World attitude, especially prevalent since the Industrial Revolution, that the woman's domain is the domestic and private sphere, and the public world of commerce and politics the man's – an attitude particularly pervasive in nineteenth-century Britain and America, and still influential in Tolkien's formative years.

There are actually a number of interesting examples of women warriors in Middle-earth who fit this model of defenders of the home. One of the most interesting women of the Edain is Haleth, "a woman of great heart and strength." When her father and brother were killed by Orcs, "Haleth held the people together, though they were without hope" for seven days, until rescued by a force led by the Elf Caranthir. She was not only valiant in arms, but must have been an exceptional political leader. The people "took Haleth for their chief" and they "were ever after known to Elves and

Men as the People of Haleth.” She kept her people moving west through difficult circumstances, “constraining them to go forward by the strength of her will” (Tolkien, 1977, p. 146).

In another description of the people of Haleth Tolkien states:

One of the strange practices spoken of was that many of their warriors were women, though few of these went abroad to fight in the great battles. This custom was evidently ancient; for their chieftainess Haleth was a renowned Amazon with a picked bodyguard of women. (Tolkien, 1980, p. 377)

Another rather Amazonian figure is Emeldir the Manhearted, wife of Barahir and mother of Beren. Although she would have preferred “to fight beside her son and her husband than to flee” she “gathered together all the women and children that were left, and gave arms to those that would bear them; and she led them into the mountains . . .” (Tolkien, 1977, p. 155). Clearly Beren inherited his heroism from both sides.

In the late 1800s of the Third Age, the Wainriders warred against Rohan and Gondor. Left behind to defend the home front were youths, old men – and young women “who in that people were also trained in arms and fought fiercely in defence of their homes and their children” (Tolkien, 1980, p. 290). Éowyn is also presumably trained in arms, although it is never explained in detail what being a shieldmaiden of the Rohirrim entails. She is a skilled enough rider to be part of the difficult ride to Gondor, and a sufficiently skilled fighter to acquit herself well in the Battle of the Pelennor fields even before she dispatches the greatest of the Ringwraiths – with a little help from prophecy and a halfling. She is also not without a measure of political power: the suggestion that Éowyn serve as “Lord” of the Eorlingas in the absence of Théoden and Éomer comes from her own people, and is another example of the woman warrior’s role as defender of the homestead. It is also an example of something we see in other peoples – that lineage and family are often more important than gender in legitimizing female political power. In Éowyn’s case, being a member of the House of Eorl is apparently more important than her sex. That also may be the explanation that the eldest child of the Númenórean monarch should wear the crown, not the eldest son (although Tolkien was inconsistent on this point) (Tolkien, 1967, p. 316; Tolkien, 1980, pp. 208-9, 225-6).

Women of the Eldar can be formidable in battle as well, but the nature of their power is harder to categorize. Lúthien certainly shows physical courage in her travels with Beren to confront Sauron and later Morgoth (not to mention considerable intelligence and initiative in getting away from her father, in a tale which reads like a feminist retelling of Rapunzel). But her greatest power is that of Elven “magic,” for lack of a better term, which is essentially a spiritual power:

Then Lúthien stood upon the bridge, and declared her power: and the spell was loosed that bound stone to stone, and the gates were thrown down, and the walls opened, and the pits laid bare . . .

(Tolkien, 1977, p. 15)

The recovery of the Silmaril utilizes this same “magic,” with a bit of that charismatic power of attractiveness thrown in. Morgoth makes the mistake of leaving Lúthien free at first so he can ogle her, giving her the opportunity to sing him and his entire court to sleep so Beren can take a Silmaril. Levelling fortresses is a talent possessed by Galadriel also; the appendix to *The Lord of the Rings* tells us that after the fall of Sauron, Celeborn leads the people of Lórien on an assault against Dol Guldur. When they were successful, “Galadriel threw down its walls and laid bare its pits . . .” (Tolkien, 1967, p. 375).

We have considered the source of power, and seen that it is primarily theological or spiritual. The creatures of Arda may be able to use that power directly, such as the Valar and Maiar; they may be capable of a “magic” that derives from it; or they may inherit political power that derives from it – the rulers of Númenor are priest-kings (and occasionally -queens) and their later descendants divine-right monarchs. All these types of power are available to both males and females, though not equally.

The power of males in Middle-earth is manifested more frequently in those areas which are more obvious and which the culture of our primary world considers more important: warfare, commerce, the holding of political office. However, although Arda is hardly a feminist utopia (whatever that might be) it has its share of powerful and renowned females, and a spiritual tradition which includes a strong female dimension.

There is one more aspect of power we need to consider, however: its use and misuse. Tolkien’s attitudes toward the proper and improper use of power permeate all his writings. More than anything else, his beliefs on this point toward a society which, in its ideal form, shares many traits with a society envisioned by some feminists.

Riane Eisler, in *The Chalice and the Blade* (1988), reviews a vast amount of archeological and other evidence which suggests that Neolithic societies that worshipped a female deity or deities were not matriarchies, as turn-of-the-century scholars mistakenly concluded, but egalitarian societies which were supplanted by Indo-European invaders who associated power with the ability to destroy rather than nurture. From her study of these various cultures, Eisler derives two basic models of society:

The first, which I call the *dominator model*, is what is popularly termed either patriarchy or matriarchy – the *ranking* of one half of humanity over the other. The second, in which social relations are primarily based on the principle of *linking* rather than ranking, may best be described as the *partnership model*. In this model – beginning with the most fundamental difference . . . between male and female – diversity is not equated with either inferiority or superiority.

(p. xvii)

In many ways, this could serve as a good description for Arda.

Although from Eru’s realm down to the humblest hobbit-hole this universe is hierarchically structured, Eisler does not

view hierarchy as automatically negative. She distinguishes “domination hierarchies, based on force or the express or implied threat of force” from “actualization hierarchies” which are “found in progressions from lower to higher orders of functioning” – like those in biological systems, for example (p. 106). Many of the hierarchies in Middle-earth arise not because Tolkien thinks one group is inherently better than another, but because peoples develop differently due to choices that were made.

Throughout *Splintered Light*, Verlyn Flieger seems to suggest a spiritual hierarchy in Arda based on a group’s distance from the light of Valinor, that is, from the spiritual. Thus the preeminent position of the Eldar among the Elves and the Númenóreans among Men is based on the choices they made to move closer to the light, the spiritual, and their long dwelling within its influence. Tolkien’s treatment of such groups as the Easterlings and the Southrons has unfortunate overtones of racism to the modern ear. I doubt Tolkien intended it that way; his ringing denunciation of German racial attitudes prior to World War II suggests otherwise (Tolkien, 1981, pp. 37-8), as does a letter sent to Christopher while he was serving in South Africa (p. 73). The evil of the Easterlings, Southrons, Wainriders, etc., lies not in any inherent quality, but in the fact that they succumbed to the temptations of the Shadow. Other Men not of the Edain (Woses, Dunlendings) are good but lesser beings who never went to Númenor, but did resist Melkor and Sauron.

Tolkien certainly seems to feel that men and women have different, and sometimes contradictory, talents, interests, and attitudes. By and large, women are associated with the domestic and family sphere rather than the outer world; with insight and wisdom rather than physical prowess; with nature, especially in its domesticated form, rather than crafts of the more technological sort. However, Tolkien is not consistent in this, and the more we learn of his work the less essentialist he appears.

For example, in such couples as Tom Bombadil and Goldberry, or the Ents and the Entwives, the females seem to be associated with domesticated nature and the males with nature “in the raw.” But is this really true? Tom and Fangorn are not hunters, but husbandmen. Their relationship to nature is not so different from their female counterparts as it first appears, indeed, more a difference in degree than in kind. And in the tale of “Aldarion and Erendis” from *Unfinished Tales*, it is Erendis who values the trees for themselves, in their natural state, and Aldarion who is more concerned with their “domestication” for human use. Whatever Tolkien’s personal feelings might have been – and in deference to his well-known dislike for criticism via biography I do not intend to address that – his work exhibits a more complicated attitude toward appropriate male and female roles than is immediately apparent.

The more important point is not the fixity of the boundaries between male and female spheres, but the fact that their relationship is one of linking, not ranking. To quote Melanie Rawls again:

There is no war between the sexes in Tolkien’s

subcreation. Complementary and mutually augmenting positive feminine and masculine qualities are set against enantiodromic, negative feminine and masculine qualities. Feminine and masculine are diverse – not subordinate or antagonistic to one another. (p. 13)

Not only is that a fair assessment of Tolkien’s work, it’s a good description of what Eisler would call a partnership society.

Another important characteristic of Tolkien’s universe is the refreshing absence of violence against women *as women*. In a dominator society, this a basic characteristic. Middle-earth certainly contains violence against women, but the perpetrators are those who are equally violent against everybody (Orcs, for example). Mutual violence and antagonism in Middle-earth depend on what people one belongs to, not which sex, and usually have their roots in some past event (such as the long-standing feud between Elves and Dwarves) or some action of Morgoth or Sauron (special hatred of Orcs for Elves explained by the possibility that the former were bred from the latter).

The most flagrant examples of violence against women are the two forced marriages of Númenórean kings in their spiritual decline – that of Gimilzôr to the Lady Inzilbêth, and later Ar-Pharazôn’s treatment of Tar-Míriel. Not only did he usurp her throne but forced her into an incestuous marriage which, under the circumstances, can be viewed as nothing less than rape. This terrible and uncharacteristic (for Númenóreans in general) treatment of a woman is symbolic of the magnitude of Ar-Pharazôn’s evil. Generally, men (or Elves) who treat women poorly come to a bad end. Eöl’s marriage to Aredhel results as much from deceit as from force, but he comes to a bad end as well.

An apparent example of oppressive behaviour toward women is the tendency of Elven fathers to restrict their daughters’ freedom to marry. Thingol is the most blatant example, since he actually resorts at one point to imprisoning Lúthien, but Elrond also forbids the marriage of Arwen and Aragorn, at least until certain demanding conditions are met. But is this type of behaviour only directed against women? Would an Elven father act the same way if his son wanted to make what he considered an inappropriate marriage? I don’t think there’s enough evidence to reach a judgement. Thingol aside, it’s possible such prohibitions owe their power more to the reverence and love Elven daughters (and sons) seem to have for their fathers than to any belief such prohibitions would be otherwise enforced.

Eisler describes the power she symbolizes by the blade as “[t]he power to dominate and destroy” as opposed to that of the chalice, “the view of power as the capacity to support and nurture life . . .” (p. 53), and points out that “many women and men are frontally challenging de/structive [sic] myths, such as the hero as killer” (pp. 188-9). I think Tolkien can be counted among them. One of the most pervasive themes in his work is the association of the dominating power of the blade with evil and the nurturing power of the chalice with good. The whole point of *The Lord of the Rings* is, after all, the renunciation of the power of domination, whereas “The

Enemy in successive forms is always 'naturally' concerned with sheer Domination" (Tolkien, 1981, p. 146).

Tolkien's heroes may kill, but they are by no means the hero as killer. When they kill without need, such as Fëanor did at the Kinslaying, this is portrayed as a great wrong, and its negative consequences reverberate throughout the ages in Middle-earth. There is a great deal of killing, particularly in *The Silmarillion*, but it is either in self-defence, or evil if it is not, and attributed to the baleful influence of Melkor or Sauron, a symptom of Arda Marred. The heroes of Middle-earth go to war reluctantly, and only when their only other choice is to succumb to the greater evil of domination by the Shadow.

In fact, some of the greatest heroes of Middle-earth are those whose decision not to kill proves to have important consequences: if Faramir had not stayed his hand against Frodo and Sam; if Aragorn and the Wood-elves and Frodo had not spared Gollum, Sauron would have been triumphant. One of the things that sets *The Lord of the Rings* apart from most other works of contemporary fantasy – besides its sheer quality and richness – is this theme of the renunciation of power. Those on the side of good in Middle-earth are certainly capable of wielding the Ring, but recognize in their wisdom that to use that power – the power of the blade – would lead to the destruction of their essential selves.

Creative, life-affirming and nurturing powers are those associated with good in Middle-earth, and are found in both male and female. For example, Lúthien and Aragorn are

healers. In fact, it is the ability to heal, rather than any military prowess, that marks Aragorn as the True King. Faramir, Gandalf, Galadriel, Bilbo and Frodo show reverence for the art and learning of the past; Bombadil, Goldberry, Ents and Entwives, Elves, Men and Hobbits reverence and care for the natural world in their different ways. Tolkien's ecological consciousness was ahead of its time, and in many ways worthy of a contemporary ecofeminist. The nurturing values of home and hearth may be more frequently ascribed to females, but they are given great importance and respect, not denigrated as they are so often in the Primary World.

This, then, is why I conclude that a person of feminist persuasion, while not necessarily agreeing with Tolkien's attitudes *in toto*, can find much to appreciate in his work. Arda is a world in which females share power in spiritual and temporal realms, although not always to the degree one might wish. More importantly, it is a world in which attitudes and values associated in the Primary World with the feminine are highly valued. Indeed, these "feminine" values triumph at the end of the Third Age, though not always incarnate in female bodies. Though Tolkien's road was his interpretation of Christianity, and Eisler's (and mine) our interpretation of feminism, the destination seems to have a great deal in common. Our mutual task in the Fourth Age is to resist the temptation to divide and dominate, whether we characterize this misuse of power as that of the Blade or the Ring. May Varda look with favour upon our efforts.

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