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Ecofeminism in J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings

Stephanie Kroneiss

State University of New York College at Buffalo - Buffalo State College, stephanieneiss@gmail.com

Advisor

Mark K. Fulk, Ph.D.

First Reader

Mark K. Fulk, Ph.D.

Second Reader

Angela B. Fulk, Ph.D.

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Ecofeminism in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

by

Stephanie Kroneiss

A Thesis Submitted to the English Faculty

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in Multidisciplinary Studies

The State University College at Buffalo

Buffalo, New York

December 2020

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College at Buffalo

Department of English

Approved by:

Mark K. Fulk, Ph.D.

Professor in English

Thesis Advisor

Kevin J. Miller, Ed.D.

Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract

Author: Stephanie Kroneiss

Title: Ecofeminism in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

Institution: The State University College at Buffalo

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Mark K. Fulk

Second Reader: Dr. Angela Fulk

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This thesis will examine the ecofeminist aspects present within J.R.R. Tolkien's epic fantasy series *The Lord of the Rings*. Through the examination of research in the fields of feminism, environmentalism, and ecofeminism, and by analysis of the primary texts, I will explore the connection between the feminine and ecological aspects of the novels, and determine whether or not their deviation from their subordinate positions within the traditional patriarchal social structure common to the medieval fantasy genre either advances or undermines an ecofeminist agenda.

Ecofeminism in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

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Ch. 1: Ecofeminism in History, Culture, and Literature

I. Introduction

Ecofiction (or ecological fiction) exhibits the impacts of humankind on the natural world and/or presents the non-human aspect of a story. This literary subgenre often encourages the respect and sustainability of the planet by emphasizing the autonomy of nature as well as the intimate relationship between humanity and the natural world. Feminist fiction explores issues that women have confronted throughout time, such as gender bias, inequitable rights and opportunities, as well as gender-based violence and discrimination. Ecofeminist fiction merges the principles of the two subgenres, not only linking the oppression of women and the natural world by patriarchal cultures, but furthering the notion that the future survival of the planet and of humanity can only be accomplished through remedying the inequitable and oppressive treatment of both. Although not all ecofeminist fiction directly advocates for this philosophy, the most effective tales are those which ultimately culminate in establishing within the reader an undeniable connection between humans and the natural world, as well as an understanding of the need for balance between the feminine and masculine aspects of the self. In *Ecocriticism*, Greg Garrard refers to radical ecofeminism as an approach which “reverses the patriarchal domination of man over woman and nature, ‘exalting nature’, the non-human, and the emotional” (24). Beyond solely relating to aspects of nature and the feminine, however, an ecofeminist philosophy essentially encompasses *all* universally oppressed groups. In her essay, “Healing the Wounds,” Ynestra King states, “Ecofeminism’s challenge of social domination extends beyond sex to social domination of all kinds, because the domination of sex, race, and class and the domination of nature are mutually reinforcing” (20). By this reasoning, endorsement of one aspect of the equation is akin to advocating for the others and, in ecofeminist literature, we often

discover such a reciprocally supportive system. One of the most effective means by which to convey progressive ideas in literature is through the use of fictional scenarios that allow unfamiliar or repudiated concepts to penetrate or eliminate reality's long-established boundaries. Fantasy fiction in particular allows for such unrestricted design. While the allure of fantasy is often attributed to the genre's escapist qualities, which allow readers a diversion from the issues and despondency of modern civilization, fantasy authors and enthusiasts argue that a major advantage of the genre is the creative freedom by which to promote progressive concepts, such as those associated with an advanced, egalitarian society. Due to the very nature of fantasy, unlimited exploration of otherworldly scenarios allows for fantastic ecofeminist literature to destabilize societal norms by challenging or completely disregarding conventional hierarchal allocations. Doing so, via an upending of a reality-based oppressive system or through the portrayal of a society impervious to negative real-world influences, allows traditionally subjugated groups (such as women and the natural world) an equal importance to those historically considered dominant. Furthermore, if it is conceivable for a particular literary genre to produce a "carry-over effect"—where the ideas contained therein result in a lingering influence over the reader—such transformational potential would necessitate an examination of the concepts that iconic and enduring stories convey, as well as an analysis of their possible impacts on audiences.

Utilizing research in the fields of ecofeminist study and criticism, and through the analysis of the primary texts, I will examine the ecofeminist aspects present within J.R.R. Tolkien's, *The Lord of the Rings*. By exploring the role of women and the natural world within this epic fantasy series, I will determine whether or not their association (or lack thereof), as well as their (potential) divergence from their subordinate positions within the patriarchal social

structure common to medieval fantasy, either advances or undermines an ecofeminist agenda. I argue that, although nature and the feminine are initially restricted to conventional roles within the historical framework of the novels, it is precisely owing to this allocation that any deviation from the prescribed characterizations allows for a more meaningful narrative arc and prompts readers to question the very foundation of humanity's hierarchal norms. As *The Lord of the Rings* (hereafter referred to in this paper as *LOTR*) has proven to resonate with generations of readers, it is important to illustrate the ecofeminist concepts contained therein, as well as to acknowledge the influential potential provided by such perspectives.

II. Methods

My theoretical approach will be divided into three sections of the first chapter. The first two sections will examine the concept and consequences of linking nature to the feminine by exploring the way in which both women and the natural world have been portrayed in patriarchal culture and literature, while the third section will discuss feminist and ecological literature, as well as the significance of an ecofeminist analysis of fantasy, due to the sub-genre's prospective pedagogical role. Chapter two will examine the principal ecological and feminist concepts present in *LOTR* and assess the way in which a progressive ecofeminist agenda is either achieved or unrealized in the highly acclaimed fantasy series.

III. Origins and Patriarchal Benefits of Female and Ecological Oppression:

i. Separation of the Masculine from the Feminine and Humanity from the Natural World

Duality rests at the core of all hierarchal systems. Akin to the differentiation between the body and the mind defined within Cartesian dualism, categorizations such as primal and

civilized, feminine and masculine, and nature and human, delineate the way in which humanity perceives the surrounding world. It is through separation and elevation that one segment of the population eventually gains the influence and authority to dominate the other. In her article, “Children’s Environmental Literature: From Ecocriticism to Ecopedagogy,” Greta Gaard defines the “logic of domination” in three sequential stages,

[F]irst, alienation (the belief in a separate selfidentity, individualism, autonomy), then hierarchy (elevating the self based on its unique characteristic), and finally, domination (justifying the subordination of others based on their inferiority and lack of the Self’s unique characteristics). (323)

True to Gaard’s theory, society has devised numerous methods of advancing the masculine agenda over that of the feminine and the desires of humankind over the requirements of the natural world. Modern patriarchal beliefs originated through a number of various sources (e.g., philosophy and religion) and have been deliberately maintained by society’s cultural leaders and dominant factions who most benefit from the continuation of these manufactured concepts. Abstract anthropocentric and androcentric notions become manifest through the implementation of systems that allow governing bodies to impose legal and economic ramifications on those who do not abide by their predetermined values. Although policies may evolve over time, a hierarchal mentality remains prevalent in most cultures, whose archaic traditions and prejudices are constantly reinforced through the powerful but seemingly innocuous practice of societal norms.

ii. Separation from the Feminine

Women have been discouraged or strictly prohibited from assuming leadership roles in religion, politics, and domestic matters, virtually guaranteeing them an inferior position within society and rendering them susceptible to a number of abuses. In “Is Female to Male as Nature Is

to Culture,” Sherry B. Ortner asserts that female inferiority in a given culture can be indicated by any one of the following points:

[F]emale exclusion from the most sacred rite or the highest political . . . explicit cultural ideology devaluing women (and their tasks, roles, products, etc.) . . . Symbolic indicators such as defilement . . . On any or all of these counts, then, I would flatly assert that we find women subordinated to men in every known society. (8)

With the establishment of agriculture (as opposed to humanity’s previous subsistence by means of hunting and gathering), women came to be regarded as property, to be owned and traded by men, as well as to be consigned to sexual, reproductive, and domestic duties. In *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Gerda Lerner states:

The sexuality of women, consisting of their sexual and their reproductive capacities and services, was commodified even prior to the creation of Western civilization. The development of agriculture in the Neolithic period fostered the inter-tribal ‘exchange of women,’ not only as a means of avoiding incessant warfare by the cementing of marriage alliances but also because societies with more women could produce more children. (212)

As time progressed, the increasingly dominant males established themselves as domestic patriarchs and patrilineal inheritance decreed that property be passed from father to son. Consequentially, women were obliged to assume their husband’s name, relocate to his property, and to reposition themselves within a new family and, at times, an entirely foreign culture. In, “The Origins of Sexism: How Men Came to Rule 12,000 Years Ago,” authors Anil Ananthaswamy and Kate Douglas explain that as humanity began settling down and explored

new ways of living, such as an agrarian lifestyle and homesteading, civilizations began to acquire “resources to defend, and power shifted to the physically stronger males . . . property was passed down the male line, and female autonomy was eroded. As a result . . . patriarchy emerged” (Ananthaswamy and Douglas).

The feminine roles considered to be the natural obligations of women within early patriarchal society continued with the gradual implementation of the modern capitalist system. Aside from the benefit of intergender noncompetition for employment opportunities, the preservation of non-financially compensated duties (e.g., cleaning, cooking, etc.) allowed for less monetary expenses for the working male, as well as an assuredness that the authority granted to male members of society would remain intact within this new economic system, regardless of socio-economic class. Patriarchal society designed this system for the long-term, equipped with the knowledge that, due to legal restrictions regarding employment, divorce, reproductive rights, etc., women lacked the voice with which to object to their roles as free laborers, as well as to better their individual or collective situation. Although this oppressive arrangement would eventually fall away to find women employed in almost every sector of business within much of the developed world, vestiges of this patriarchal system persist, causing women to battle for autonomy on two fronts—against the traditional feminine expectations regarding child rearing and domestic duties at home and the gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and gender wage gap within the work force. Additionally, although one cannot comprehensively examine gender inequality in modern capitalist society without considering the way in which socio-economics influences the relationship, women are often the worst treated within each category.

As opposed to feminist principles, which strengthen a culture through egalitarian values, patriarchal systems, which promote hierarchal division, ultimately serve to diminish a

considerable portion of the population. While both philosophies are aimed at affecting the cultural consciousness, one is particularly effective at pervading the mentality of even those which it aims to subjugate. This is especially true when these manipulations are multifaceted—supported by pseudoscience, accompanied by strategically targeted accolades, and compounded over time. Unfounded scientific concepts such as Patrick Geddes and John Arthur Thompson’s “Theory of Biological Determinism” which, among other points, argues that males are the naturally dominant sex and women the passive caregivers, serve to reinforce gender stereotypes by suggesting that they are a biological given and part of the natural order. The Victorian era “Angel in the House” concept is one which uses persuasive allusions to elicit desired behaviors. The concept—taken from Coventry Patmore’s 1854-1862 poem regarding his wife, Emily, who possessed the subordinate attributes Patmore considered not only consistent with the perfect wife, but with the perfect woman—“Angel in the House” is synonymous with a manner of woman who displays characteristics such as purity (a virgin before marriage), obedience (to male family members), and domestication (a devoted and proficient wife and mother). In Virginia Woolf’s 1931 speech to the National Society for Women’s Service, (later named, “Professions for Women”, in the posthumously published, *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*), the author attempts to explain the “Angel in the House” concept:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily . . . in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others.

(237)

In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Val Plumwood reaffirms the words of Simone de Beauvoir, stating, “the tragedy of being a woman consisted not only in having one’s life and choices impoverished and limited, but also in the fact that to be a good woman was to be a second-rate human being” (26).

However, during the “Fin de siècle” of the 19th century, as a rebuke to the constricting gender roles of the past, progressive feminist ideas emerged from a subset of the population. The movement, referred to as the *New Woman* by feminist writer, Sarah Grand, in 1894, challenged patriarchal norms by fighting for women’s equality, including suffragism and sexual freedom. In, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg states that the newfound abilities of the *New Woman* allowed her to:

[D]efy proprieties, pioneer new roles, and still insist upon a rightful place within the genteel world. Repudiating the Cult of True Womanhood in ways her mother—the new bourgeois matron—never could, she threatened men in ways her mother never did. (245)

However, the fight for political participation, reproductive rights, and domestic freedom brought with it an opposite and equal reaction. In response to this threat to the patriarchal establishment, conservative men *and women* pushed back against the notion of female autonomy by labeling such women as sexually promiscuous misandrists and by bolstering the idea of traditional femininity. Campaigns referred to as the *Culture of Domesticity* and the *True or Real Woman* sought to retain traditionally appointed gender roles by furthering the notion that passive servitude is not only the virtue of a wife, but the measure of a genuine woman. Astonishingly, these movements were, in large part, female driven efforts. In *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*, Susan Koppelman Cornillon states, “Women internalize the male idea of

the feminine and create themselves in the shape of that idea” (113). By applauding a woman’s acceptance of her patriarchally allocated position and by celebrating women as the transcendent force binding home and family together, conservative society disguised the obligatory role as an appealing (and voluntary) prospect for women. Manipulated by the deception that they would be eternally provided for and defended by their husbands, not to mention celebrated by society, many women resigned themselves to an existence as self-sacrificing, passionless, mother figures, akin to indentured servants—imprisoned in the homes they kept and frequently abused at the hands of their supposed protectors.

Rather than through the employment of brute force, cultural persuasion is often a more effective means by which to convince a portion of society to not only accept an inferior position, but (as demonstrated in the example above) to personally strive to achieve it. Over time, the resulting hierarchal mentality becomes difficult to alter. So long has a patriarchal mindset been a cultural mainstay that, even today, the convoluted mechanisms of an antiquated establishment retain a subtle stranglehold on the cultural psyche. Although modern-day society is well aware of explicit forms of oppression (such as minority voter suppression and religion-based discrimination against the LGBTQ community), many people remain oblivious to the psychological processes that continue to control their individual rationale. In *Internalized Oppression: The Psychology of Marginalized Groups*, E.J.R. David and Annie O. Derthick define the means by which this is possible:

Given that oppression today is not as overt or obvious as before, it is necessary to understand how more modern and subtle forms of oppression affect the psychological experiences of oppressed groups . . . modern forms of oppression occur at a subtle, often unconscious level . . . microaggressions often occur

outside of the conscious awareness of the victim . . . the victim often questions the reality of the oppression. (4-5)

Psychological manipulation tactics such as “gaslighting” (i.e., employing the temporal accumulation of falsehoods, criticism, and misdirection with the purpose of affecting a victim’s judgment) often take advantage of inequitable power structures, such as those existing within relationships between child and adult, subordinate and superior, or woman and man. In such cases, it is not uncommon for the victim to consciously or subconsciously look to the abuser for validity. Hence, even while rebelling against the prevalent misogyny, many women today continue to minimize their strengths so as to neither diminish the masculine nor be judged by conventional-minded society. By repressing passion so as to be considered modest, sacrificing their own needs to be regarded as selfless and non-materialistic, and by suppressing emotion and minimizing assertiveness so as to not appear irrational or aggressive, women essentially compromise their autonomy in order to conduct themselves in a manner least threatening to the patriarchy. When women intentionally limit or demonstrate particular qualities or behaviors—even when doing so in an attempt to invalidate the patriarchy’s most derogatory claims regarding their gender—women are nonetheless maneuvering themselves into the positions that male-controlled society has expressly designed for them.

Although the initial impression of a patriarchy may evoke images of a male population willfully striving to maintain its societal advantage by continually attempting the subjugation of women, this mentality also shapes the lives of men—particularly those that do not subscribe to traditional masculine ideals. Often in this hierarchal system, both men *and* women deride males who demonstrate traditionally feminine traits, such as those who display emotion or empathy, who stay home and care for their children while the woman of the family is employed, or who

assume career positions traditionally occupied by women, (e.g., nurse, receptionist, etc.). Furthermore, lingering misogynistic notions may cause even progressive members of both sexes to unwittingly ensure the continuation of gender bias in the future, (e.g., by considering women to be the vulnerable sex and in need of male protection, by holding their children to different personal and ethical standards depending on gender, etc.). In “Is Ecofeminism Feminist,” Victoria Davion states, “a truly feminist perspective cannot embrace either the feminine or the masculine uncritically, [but] requires a critique of gender roles, and this critique must include masculinity and femininity” (9).

The troublesome relationship acknowledged between the feminine and the masculine can also be observed in humanity’s relationship to the natural world—though on a much larger scale. If it is customary for a society to devalue and exploit members of its own kind, no matter the amount of protestation on the part of those being maltreated, it is not difficult to imagine the inferior ranking that a voiceless nature occupies within such a hierarchy.

iii. Separation from the Natural World

Although humans operate under the assumption of biological superiority and consider themselves the deciding force behind the salvation or destruction of the natural world, such presuppositions were attained using anthropocentric standards. In myriad ways, such as the survival instincts and sensory capabilities of the non-human animal, as well as the astonishing, raw power of the natural world, nature remains a force that eludes the absolute control and comprehension of humankind. However, for good or for ill, human intelligence has allowed them the ability to dominate the natural world. As if a measure of intellect and progress, humanity continues to develop uncultivated lands for habitation and industry (e.g., lumber, farms, plantations, etc.), obliterating flora, fauna, and delicate ecosystems in the process. Additionally,

they strip the earth of its natural resources, poison the environment, and irrevocably alter the intricate climate system of the planet—trading the continued survival of the natural world for humanity’s short-term economic gain.

In terms of the non-human animal, humans create weapons to slay them, traps to ensnare them, and prisons to enslave them—as laborers, for production and experimental purposes, as well as for their own entertainment. Humans dictate which animals should be protected and which are long for extinction, as well as which should remain wild, which will be domesticated as companions, and which should simply be regarded as product. Such distinctions are most often due to the cultural philosophies with which one is raised, as well as the hierarchal significance that a society assigns to particular beings. In *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows*, Melanie Joy discusses such influences, stating, “A schema is a psychological framework that shapes—and is shaped by—our beliefs, ideas, perceptions, and experiences, and it automatically interprets incoming information” (14). Joy continues:

Evidence strongly suggests that our lack of disgust [at eating certain animals] is largely, if not entirely learned. We are not born with our schemas. They are constructed. The system teaches us which animals are food and which are not . . .

The most obvious feeling we lose is disgust, yet beneath our disgust lies an emotion much more integral to our sense of self: our empathy. (18)

In *Affective Ecologies*, Alexa Weik von Mossner discusses this idea of “empathy inhibition” as, “the cognitive suppression of an affective empathetic response due to egotistical motives, cultural beliefs, or outright denial” (108).

At one time, both science and philosophy disputed the idea of animal sentience. With his 1637 ‘bête machine’ (‘animal machine’) theory, which demotes the hierarchal position of the

non-human animal by essentially reducing them to automatons, (i.e., purely physical beings, acting solely on instinct, deficient in emotion and consciousness), René Descartes applies his strict philosophy of dichotomy to his conceptual model of the human versus the non-human animal. Among other issue, he argues that the animal kingdom's lack of intellectually indicative attributes (such as a precise communicative language) is ultimately a symptom of a spiritual deficiency. According to Descartes, if the soul is the source which gives rise to consciousness and specific anthropocentric intellectual markers are considered an expression of such consciousness, then the absence of these characteristics in the non-human animal definitively denotes their non-sentient and, therefore, soulless status. Although Descartes acknowledges animal communication (e.g., visual cues, verbal displays, etc.), he asserts that that it is simply the execution of instinctual behaviors and that even the cries of pain from the non-human animal should be construed as mechanistic, automated responses, uncorrelated with genuine physical pain or emotional distress. Drawing from his limited knowledge of both ethology and zoosemiotics, the philosopher failed to comprehend what is commonly acknowledged today—that, although they may not commune in terms of human language, animals possess complex communication systems that are unique to each species and, at times, to specific populations or individuals. Behavioral research has continuously revealed self-awareness in the non-human animal, as well as an ability to nurture beings beyond their own offspring or even their own species (including humans), to solve complex problems and intentionally pursue goals that involve measured actions and delayed fruition (such as retribution), and, most importantly, to experience emotions such as joy, fear, and grief. Due to the overwhelming evidence and resulting moral obligation, scientists and animal rights activists have endeavored to transform conventional beliefs by attempting to bridge the long-standing chasm between the human and

non-human animal. In 2012, a diverse, international group of scientists released the results of comparative studies regarding sentience in the non-human animal. The “Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness” states, “Convergent evidence indicates that non-human animals have the neuroanatomical, neurochemical, and neurophysiological substrates of conscious states along with the capacity to exhibit intentional behaviors. Consequently, the weight of evidence indicates that humans are not unique in possessing the neurological substrates that generate consciousness” (Low). In *The Hidden Life of Trees*, Peter Wohlleben states that “[L]anguage is what people use when we talk to each other. Looked at it this way, we are the only beings who can use language, because the concept is limited to our species” (6). Wohlleben explains that even trees communicate, “by means of olfactory, visual, and electrical signals” (12) as well as, possibly, through sound. He states that not only are grain seedlings (in a laboratory setting) capable of emitting sound (or “speaking”), but that other nearby seedlings are able to orient (i.e., move) their root tips in the direction of the audible transmission, asserting that seedlings are essentially “registering this frequency, so it makes sense that they ‘heard’ it” (Wohlleben 12-13). This is to say nothing of the sounds likely emitted from tree saplings, let alone older trees. Once scientists are able to isolate the “voices” of trees in a natural setting, one can only imagine the knowledge that may be gained from, for example, elder trees within primordial, old growth habitats.

Just as one would not presume to discover exact behavioral expression throughout the animal kingdom—even among species sharing similar morphological or physiological composition—one should not expect the behavior of the non-human animal to bear any semblance to that of the human. Subsequently, an anthropocentric scale cannot be deemed a suitable indicator as to the degree of intelligence or sentience possessed by a particular non-

human animal species over another—or between the non-human animal and the human. As Plumwood asserts, we must acknowledge the characteristics of non-human nature without attempting “to reduce or assimilate them to the human sphere” (174). When highly regarded anthropocentric traits (such as higher intelligence) are the criteria upon which the sentience of the non-human animal is based, the non-human animal will eternally occupy an inferior position within the biological hierarchy. The belief in the supremacy of humanistic traits also holds true when it is the *non-human animal* that is in possession of the more advanced capabilities.

Although the highly developed senses and abilities of the non-human animal are most often superior to that of the human, these traits are considered primitive and, therefore, devalued by human estimation. Garrard addresses this biased hierarchal system of attributes by referring to the insight of Temple Grandin, who calls attention to the way in which the non-human animal (such as domestic canines) and persons with special needs (such as autistic individuals) are assigned particular societal or biological status based upon their disabilities, rather than on their abilities. Although both groups often possess capabilities that far surpass those of the neurotypical human—such as the superior perception and assimilation of minute details that are often undetectable, let alone exploitable, by the average person—such abilities are deemed irrelevant by normative standards. Garrard states that the issues raised by Grandin suggest a challenge to “the deficit model according to which animals and people are judged according to what they cannot (in some context) do, as in the term *disability* and . . . encourage us to dismantle imaginary, pernicious and simplistic hierarchies” (151). As we are only beginning to discover the inner workings of many species (especially those which are morphologically and physiologically dissimilar to humans), the intelligence, sentience, and the (possibly as yet unknown) natural capabilities of the non-human animal, as well as of any natural organism,

should not be so definitively devalued. In “Derrida and the Question of the Animal,” Jean Grondin states that the understanding and sensory abilities of the non-human animal “is often much more developed than our own” (36). Referring to the 300,000 people that were killed during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, Grondin states that very few deceased animals were found at the scene: “Many animals ran for higher ground when they sensed, as it appears (or ‘understood’), what was coming, more sensitively than all the scientific instruments of human beings” (36). By acknowledging the attributes of all living organisms, as well as by recognizing our own limited understanding of species outside our own, we can more judiciously determine by what measure to formulate judgments and decisions regarding the non-human animal.

If questions regarding the exploitation of human and non-human nature cannot be answered through comparative trait analysis, then another means by which to address such concerns is necessary. Many believe that the moral consideration of living beings should be influenced by factors more fundamental than those pertaining to advanced intellectual capabilities—such as the physical pain and emotional trauma undeniably suffered by the non-human animal. In, “Autonomy and the Value of Animal Life,” R.G. Frey states that in “infants, seriously defective humans, and animals . . . autonomy does not matter . . . the wrongness of the act has to do with the suffering it causes” (50). Regarding Peter Singer’s 1975 novel, *Animal Liberation*, Garrard states:

Singer draws upon arguments first put forward by Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham . . . who suggested that cruelty to animals was analogous to slavery and claimed that the capacity to feel pain, not the power of reason, entitled a being to moral consideration. Singer gives the label ‘speciesism’ to the irrational prejudice

that Bentham identifies as the basis of our different treatment of animals and humans. (146)

However, whether it be the fringe notion of animal autonomy (as it is largely considered), or the physiological reality of pain reception, skeptics continue to refute any such claims, choosing to regard as valid only evidence which serves to reinforce a conventional mentality regarding the non-human animal. This denial, which has impeded the implementation of more stringent animal cruelty and welfare regulations, conveniently absolves those with moral issues regarding the use and consumption of the non-human animal, which ultimately (and uncoincidentally) benefits those with a financial interest in animal-based industry.

Lastly, one must consider the intricacies of the natural world, possessing elements and mechanisms unacknowledged by or even imperceptible to the human mind. Does the absence of perceivable suffering in any aspect of the natural world render it non-sentient, or permit its unrestricted exploitation? Truly challenging the established hierarchy will require expanding the inherent right of existence to species beyond the human, as well as recognizing the intrinsic value of all living organisms—regardless of anthropocentric worth—and the significance of their collective contributions. This is the philosophy of deep ecology (founded by Arne Naess), which “recognizes an inherent worth in all living beings without privileging human life over other forms of life” (Weik von Mossner 217). Additionally, as we have yet to discover all interconnecting threads that entwine the biological web, the importance of *all* living species should be assumed. Consideration must accordingly be afforded to all non-living entities that comprise a particular habitat, (particularly within specialized and/or delicate ecosystems), due to their vital role in maintaining life within these regions. However, the philosophy of deep ecology

asserts that extending privileges to non-living entities is not solely owing to their functional purpose. In *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century*, George Sessions states:

Deep ecology is concerned with encouraging an egalitarian attitude on the part of humans not only toward all members of the ecosphere, but even toward all identifiable entities or forms in the ecosphere . . . this attitude is intended to extend . . . to such entities (or forms) as rivers, landscapes, and even species and social systems considered in their own right. (270)

The philosophy of deep ecology is not without its critics. Garrard argues that such extraordinary “even-handedness might well seem to empty deep ecology of any substantive content: if value resides everywhere, it resides nowhere, as it ceases to be a basis for making distinctions and decisions” (24-25). Additionally, rather than facilitating the unification of the human and natural worlds, some critics feel that deep ecology’s philosophy of homogenization may actually serve to strengthen the dividing boundary, as well as to support the instrumentalism of nature. Deep ecology’s beliefs regarding the *connection* of the human self (or oneness) *with* nature could essentially be interpreted as the *extension* of self *to* nature—identified by Plumwood as a form of self-realization—which fails to recognize the natural world as remarkable in its own right and, instead, serves to promote human exceptionalism should one choose to widen their consciousness to both access and assimilate nature’s wonders into oneself. Plumwood states:

The failure to affirm difference is characteristic of the colonising self which denies the other through the attempt to incorporate it into the empire of the self, and which is unable to experience sameness without erasing difference. Major forms of deep ecology have tended to focus exclusively on identification,

interconnectedness, sameness and the overcoming of separation, treating nature as a dimension of self. (174)

Although the physical symbiotic relationship between modern humanity and the natural world could accurately be described as one of parasitism, (as humanity gains all benefit, while nature sustains all injury), I assert that the interconnection promoted by this philosophy is of direct and indirect benefit to both parties, as such beliefs not only benefit humanity, but promote the respect and preservation of the natural world. Therefore, despite the validity of criticism regarding deep ecology, any philosophy which promotes an equitable relationship between the human and natural worlds ultimately serves to foster the dissolution of the human/nature dichotomy. Such concepts are especially significant during a time when global economic profits continue to take precedence over millions of lives—both human and non-human.

Rather than addressing the underlying causes of environmental crises, capitalist society (fearing revenue loss) largely chooses to mitigate individual disasters and often does so exclusively in terms of alleviating the adverse effects on the human population. In “Ecofeminism Meets Business,” Chris Crittenden states:

Captains of industry will refrain from exploiting nature only insofar as is necessary to maintain an optimal supply of goods and services. This impoverished concern for the nonhuman community leads to a human-selected optimal level of pollution; that is, there is no standard of pollution outside of what we decide is best for gorging our product-hungry appetite. (57)

Aside from the well-known human rights violations in exchange for cheap labor, global capitalism, with its private sectors extending business practices beyond state or country, further exacerbates environmental exploitation. Scarcely affected by the environmental cost of

production within their own “backyards,” these companies have discernably less concern for the environmental impacts on foreign soil, (e.g., toxins/pollutants as side effects of production, mismanagement of land/resource use, etc.). Additionally, with multinational corporations investing in agribusiness, animal experimentation, and the like, as well as an increase in the black market trade of wildlife species and parts, the worldwide exploitation of non-human nature has intensified through the infinite legal and illegal profit-making opportunities within the global economy. However, so too have the human repercussions—such as the widespread climate disasters and global pandemics (such as the COVID-19 virus) that have recently brought international capitalism to its knees. Most emerging human infectious diseases—such as the COVID-19 virus, which is directly linked to the harvesting and consumption of the non-human animal—have been introduced to the human population through the gross exploitation of the natural world. Beyond the innate “survival mode” of the non-human animal in response to organic stressors, added pressures such as increased rate of poaching (e.g., for food, Eastern medicines, trophy hunting, the exotic pet trade), mistreatment of production animals (e.g., non-human animals used in egg, dairy, and meat production), as well as habitat and resource loss (e.g., starvation and increased predation due to deforestation and land clearing for crops, environmental degradation due to toxins and pollutants, global warming), render the non-human animal more susceptible to illness and disease. In “COVID-19 Should Make Us Rethink Our Destructive Relationship with the Natural World,” preeminent primatologist, Jane Goodall, asserts, “Close proximity to wild animals, especially in ‘wet markets’ that sell live animals, can give rise to disease and viruses that cross the species barrier . . . We are now feeling the true cost of wildlife trafficking and the destruction of the natural world” (Slate.com). However, rather than responding to this herald of future catastrophe, capitalist establishments (such as the current U.S.

Administration) have—under the guise of increasing short-term job growth—exploited this crisis by not only decreasing environmental regulations, but by essentially removing them altogether, further exacerbating the growing ecological crisis.

Humankind's indifference to the harm they are causing the earth and fellow inhabitants, as well as the lack of concern displayed in the face of overwhelming scientific evidence that, at this rate, their choices will ultimately result in the planet's demise, seems to suggest that for most people, the natural world is simply not a priority. The psychology behind this apathetic ecological position may run deeper than the simplistic but often-ascribed human traits of indolence and materialism. Instead, this perspective may conceivably be rooted within the long-established hierarchal narrative regarding humanity and the natural world. The categorial façade regarding humanity's position outside the boundaries of the natural world has echoed relentlessly for countless generations, resulting in an almost fact-based acceptance of the contrived dichotomy. In, "Literary Fantasy and Ecological Comedy," Don Elgin states:

Strip mining and single-crop farming are not the causes of the [ecological] crisis; they are logical end results of the central attitudes western humanity has developed and propagated about the relationship between itself and its environment. (256)

This detached position also influences humanity's judgment regarding exploitation versus conservation and preservation. Plumwood states:

[T]he biosphere forms the taken-for-granted material substratum of human existence, always present, always functioning, always forgiving; its needs do not have to be considered, just as the needs of other species generally do not have to

be considered, except as they occasionally impinge upon or threaten the satisfaction of our own. (69)

This archaic perspective put us at odds with the survival of the natural world— and with our own. As the earth continues to undergo rapid climate change and other innumerable (and often associated) environmental crises, the belief that the planet will ultimately maintain equilibrium regardless of our destructive tendencies essentially lends credence to the homeostatic conditions upon which the patriarchal status quo is based. Consequential inaction due to a false belief that the earth will eternally compensate for the injuries inflicted upon it by humankind thrusts the planet further toward the brink of collapse and, possibly, the point of no return. Plumwood explains that few in modern day society would deny the interconnection between nature and humankind, insofar as humanity's dependence on the natural world. However, this conceptually recognized relationship does not necessarily translate into a genuine emotional connection.

Plumwood states:

In modern times, the denial of dependence only occasionally takes the form of denying that humans are essentially embodied or have links to (have evolved from) nature. But the failure to conceive ourselves as essentially or positively in nature leads easily into a failure to commit ourselves to the care of the planet and to encourage sustainable social institutions and values which can acknowledge deeply and fully our dependence on and ties to the earth. Modern world-views continue to treat links to nature as either negative or inessential constituents of the human. (71)

Perhaps the key to understanding humanity's failure to psychologically reconcile the human/nature dichotomy lies in the second portion of Plumwood's statement. The author

essentially asserts that, although most of humanity acknowledges its ancient, ancestral connection to the natural world, it fails to consider itself an equal component of the ecological web. I assert that it is due to the acceptance that humankind evolved *from* nature that humans consider themselves *apart from* nature—a primitive existence from which humanity long ago separated itself, prevailed over, and from which it ultimately severed its connections. This may provide the reasoning as to why, although most of humanity comprehends the scientific, fact-based evidence linking them to the natural world, there still lies an emotional disconnect between their intellectual perception of self and their biological reality, as well as—and most importantly—which aspect of that dichotomy reigns superior. In accordance with Gaard’s theory regarding the “logic of domination”, humanity’s certitude of evolutionary superiority leads to their misguided acceptance that nature exists purely for the benefit of humankind. Indeed, this persistent hierarchal mentality remains firmly rooted within the psyche of much of society, in which only a small percentage of the population is concerned with the earth and its natural inhabitants for ecocentric reasons, rather than in terms of their importance to humankind. Whether it be the tangible resource, itself, or simply the aesthetics with which it is associated, anthropocentric motivations often constitute the only instances by which humanity exerts a collective effort toward conservation. In order to positively alter future environmental and animal welfare policies, as well as the fate of the Earth and of humankind, humanity requires a fundamental shift in their perception of the natural world and of their inextricable position within it.

IV. Ecofeminism: The Association Between Nature and the Feminine

When considering the patriarchy’s disparaging and often violent conduct toward nature and the feminine, a starkly similar pattern emerges. The movement which recognizes this

association and parallels the oppression and exploitation of women to that of the natural world is known as ecofeminism (or ecological feminism)—a term coined by French author and feminist, Françoise d'Eaubonne in the 1974 book titled, *Le Féminisme ou la Mort (Feminism or Death)*.

In, *Feminism & Ecology*, Mary Mellor states:

Ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women . . . Ecofeminism brings together elements of the feminist and green movements, while at the same time offering a challenge to both. It takes from the green movement a concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit and oppress women. (1)

Ecofeminist philosophy asserts that there is a foundation from which the human/nature estrangement was formed and that this hierarchal relationship is not unique in its divisiveness—that this dichotomy stems from a common logic of domination. Garrard argues that environmental devaluation and abuse are not “caused by anthropocentric attitudes alone, but follow from systems of domination or exploitation of humans by other humans” (31).

Ecofeminism combines deep ecology’s respect and equal valuation of non-human nature with social ecology’s concerns regarding the intraspecies relationships of humans, thereby endeavoring to heal this universal illness by easing the symptoms (through the unification and equal advancement of all hierarchically oppressed forms of life), while simultaneously addressing the cause (reversing the dominant patriarchal mentality responsible for establishing this system of oppression in the first place).

i. Religious Justification for Ecofeminine Oppression

Ideas advanced by religious institutions often dictate cultural norms so definitively that the most dominant religious beliefs become law and countries suffer war to establish and maintain their particular doctrines. Regardless of claims regarding equality and inclusivity, a religion's true intentions can be gleaned from who is permitted to hold power within the organization, as well as the value that it assigns to the voiceless of the world—whether the term “voiceless” be metaphorical (women, children, the “other”) or literal (the natural world). As opposed to the division and dualistic concepts promoted within male-centric religions, feminine-based religions generally advocate for collaboration, as well as for the unification of dichotomous beliefs. This includes deeming the corporeal body and the physical realm—aspects of the physical versus spirit/mind duality that are commonly demoted by patriarchal religions—of equal significance to those of the metaphysical. In *The Once and Future Goddess*, Elinor Gadon states, “Goddess religion was earth-centered not heaven centered, of this world not otherworldly, body-affirming not denying, holistic not dualistic” (xii). In *Goddess and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History*, Rosemary Radford Ruether further elaborates on the fundamental distinctions between feminine and masculine religions:

[T]he Goddess symbolizes the imminent life process of the universe. This life principle is one of plurality in dynamic interconnection . . . In patriarchal religion and culture, dynamic plurality in interconnection is distorted into mutually exclusive dualities of ‘good’ and ‘evil.’ The body, the woman, and the earth are both subordinated and identified with the negative pole in male-dominated dualisms. (278-279)

Consequentially, patriarchal religious principles regarding gender and social order, sexual behavior and orientation, as well as the lesser role of nature and the non-human animal in a

system that allocates humans as the top of the hierarchy, often provide the basis for cultural sexism and animal cruelty. In both the Eastern and Western worlds, biased narratives such as those included within the Bible, the Torah, and the Quran (whether or not the meaning of each has been accurately interpreted) have provided the reasoning behind the establishment and preservation of the inferior status of women and the natural world.

Although a number of origin stories exist throughout cultural history, one of the most pervasive is that of the Judeo-Christian tale of Genesis, which credits a male god with the creation of the earth and of all its living inhabitants—including the first humans. Lerner asserts that there is an observable pattern between the rise of patriarchal rule and the use of religion to further its agenda. Lerner states:

[F]irst, the demotion of the Mother-Goddess figure and the ascendance and later dominance of her male consort/son; then his merging with a storm god into a male Creator-God, who heads the pantheon of gods and goddesses. Wherever such changes occur, the power of creation and of fertility is transferred from the Goddess to the God. (145)

By attributing the “birth” of every aspect of the world to a male god, the story of Genesis not only credits a paternal figure with the power of creation, but minimizes the importance of the life-giving ability of women and the natural world—essentially removing both from the equation. The deletion of the creative power of the ecofeminine can be found in other Catholic teachings, as well. In *Gyn/Ecology*, Mary Daly argues that Mary’s role in the “Immaculate Conception” and birth of her son, Jesus, is minimal. Daly states:

It should not be imagined that Mary had any real role in this conception and birth. Although some Christians like to call the ‘virgin birth’ a paradigm of

parthenogenesis, it is not that . . . a deliberate effort is being made to remove creativity from women and re-establish it in in the realm of male domination and control. (83)

Rather than portraying Mary as a goddess with the supernatural ability of self-conception (or virgin birth), or of even celebrating the creative potential naturally possessed by the female, Mary is reduced to a perfunctory vessel, with all miraculous, creative power attributed to a male god—the predictable result of which begets a male god.

The story of Genesis also emphasizes God’s formation of Eve (the first woman) from the rib of Adam (the first man). Although, Adam is created by and in the likeness of God, woman, on the other hand, is born of man and is, therefore, accountable to *him*—suggesting that women are secondary to men and that their primary purpose is to serve as male companions. Likewise, God informs Adam that he has dominion over the earth and creatures, which many have deciphered over time to mean that the non-human animal, as well as the entirety of the natural world, are inferior to humankind and exist only insofar as what they can offer to man—or, more precisely, what man can extort from them. In *Beyond God the Father*, Mary Daly states:

[I]f God is male, then the male is God. The divine patriarch castrates women as long as he is allowed to live on in the human imagination . . . those which in one way or another objectify ‘God’ as a being, thereby attempt in a self-contradictory way to envisage transcendent reality as finite. ‘God’ then functions to legitimate the existing social, economic, and political status quo, in which women and other victimised groups are subordinate. (19)

In the fall from grace, Eve is criticized for exhibiting stereotypical feminine naivety by being swayed, at the coaxing of the serpent, to taste of Eden’s forbidden fruit. She is, then,

paradoxically, blamed for employing the cunning temptress tendencies often allocated to women by persuading an innocent Adam to accompany her in this disgrace. This duplicitous act results in women, thereafter, experiencing pain in childbirth (which effectively devalues and usurps the powerful creative processes associated with the feminine) and which attests to women's need for male supervision. When God learns of Eve's sin, he states, "Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you" (The Holy Bible, New King James Version, Gen. 3:16). Adam's punishment, (to toil in the fields, etc.), is attributed not to the deed, itself, but to imprudently heeding the guidance of his wife, (i.e., foolishly listening to a woman)—a creature too naïve, yet, too calculating to be devoid of male guidance. Further, the serpent's "sin" provides a justification for the enmity between human and snake/beast, as well as the resulting punishment in the form of "belly walking"—an inconvenient and eternally servile existence. As patriarchal societies and religions logically elect to create and endorse narratives which coincide with their agenda, as well to suppress or quash those which defy it, it is no coincidence that the serpent (or snake), which is interpreted to be either an agent of the devil or Satan himself, is also a symbol of fertility, transformation, and the feminine in pagan religions—cultures that Christianity essentially eradicated by overtaking their people and appropriating their traditions. In *Women and Religion*, Marianne Ferguson states:

The Serpent—the prophetic symbol of the goddess, who was usually associated with wisdom in the neighboring Canaanite culture—would have previously been expected to give wise counsel. In accepting the counsel of the serpent, Eve accepted at the same time the advice of the mother goddess, who was associated with the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil . . . she chose

to return to the older religion of the mother goddess, rather than the new Hebrew religion of the male deity. (84)

The vilification and punishment of the serpent condemns earlier, polytheistic and/or goddess-based beliefs, leaving women with no other alternative but to accept a patriarchal religion. The condemnation of the serpent additionally disallows the sense of strength and community experienced within a matriarchal or egalitarian society, as well as serving to effectively estrange woman from her own feminine power. Moreover, by demonstrating women's continued devotion to the old ways (Eve's acceptance of the serpent's offer), the story is inculcating women for the destruction of feminine-based religions, as well as for the denunciation of feminine authority.

Ferguson states:

Yahweh's curse on the serpent actually alienated women from their old source of comfort in childbirth—the goddess in the form of the serpent. Women, who had looked to the goddess for strength and support, were made responsible for crushing her. The end of the goddess religions was thereby effected by women themselves, ensuring the demise of the female deities. (85)

This narrative has manipulated generations of women to accept the inferior status allocated by religion as divinely ordained. Daly asserts, "The myth has provided legitimation not only for the direction of the self-hatred of the male outward against women, but also for the direction of self-hatred inward on the part of women" (*Beyond* 48). By simultaneously portraying as evil the symbolism associated with nature, the feminine, and pagan religions, and by demonstrating culpability on the part of the woman and the natural world, Judeo-Christian religions effectively lay the blame for humanity's removal from paradise on their shoulders. This ultimately justifies

the inferior status of non-human nature and the feminine, as well as the elimination of non-Christian, polytheistic, and/or matriarchal religions.

As opposed to the oral traditions often employed by early matriarchal cultures and religions (so as to conceal tradition and allow for relevant narrative transformation throughout time), patriarchal religions often chose to transcribe their narratives, which allowed them to permanently solidify their teachings and impart their viewpoint to successive generations. Therefore, although the scriptures were set down by human hand—more specifically, conceived of and mainly recorded by male scribes—the Bible is believed by staunch Judeo-Christians to be the infallible word of God and, as such, to be accepted as fact. Ferguson states that societies “legitimate or justify their social patterns by attributing their origins to the time of creation. When creation myths are considered sacred scripture, as in monotheistic religions, the present social conditions appear justified because they are dictated by an all-powerful deity” (70). Granted that an alternate analysis of Genesis would suggest that the fortitude of the ecofeminine led humanity to truth and knowledge, this is not the interpretation furthered by most religious institutions. In choosing to promote a version of the narrative that specifies male superiority (in the form of god or human), as well as one which justifies the estrangement and secondary status of women and the natural world, the Judeo-Christian religion has taken an anti-ecofeminist position.

ii. Cultural and Societal Justification for Ecofeminine Oppression

As definitively as the lines of demarcation are drawn by the hetero-patriarchy in order to distinguish themselves from the rest of the world, they strategically homogenize women, nature, and the other into a single, opposing category to simplify and rationalize their devaluation and exploitation. Plumwood states that it is necessary to examine “the deep structures of oppression

in culture which help account for the persistence of domination through political and economic change” (5). Reduced to a nonentity by patriarchal culture, the natural world is especially subject to the exploitation of man. Even when respect is granted, or a higher distinction afforded, (e.g., non-human animals recognized as individuals, as in the case with companion animals) the stigma of their separateness often remains. This perspective—which cannot be solely attributed to the intellectual knowledge of biological dissimilarity and which may predominantly be influenced by the long-established philosophical narrative that resides within the psyche of much of humanity, including even progressive members of society—is essentially one in which the life of a non-human entity is of fundamentally less value than that of a human organism. In order to absolve themselves of the atrocities inflicted daily upon the environment and the non-human animal, a detached perspective may seem—if not moral—certainly understandable. However, such dissociation applies to the human, as well. So as to overlook the violence and oppression that they have inflicted upon the feminine, hetero-patriarchal societies have advanced the idea that women are emotionally and biologically closer to nature and, as such, are inferior to men and subject to their authority. Ortner theorizes that, in being associated with nature, woman is identified with “something that every culture devalues, something that every culture defines as being of a lower order of existence than itself. Now it seems that there is only one thing that would fit that description, and that is ‘nature’ in the most generalized sense” (10). As the subjectification of nature and the feminine did not, however, allow for males to be dominant over one another, a rationalization was also required in order for the dominant races and religions to conquer other civilizations. Native Americans, African aboriginals, etc., were, therefore, dehumanized—intentionally portrayed as primal or animalistic and intrinsically connected to nature, with the justification that, as Christian man is said to have been given dominion over the

ecofeminine, they should logically be granted control over all non-dominant factions of society, as well. Plumwood labels the allocation of a subject by its usage “instrumentalism”, stating:

The structures of self involved in human domination and colonization are reflected, repeated and confirmed in the reduction of non-human nature to an instrument. The domination of nature and the domination of human groups are linked not only by the logical structure of dualism and by the exclusions of rationalism, but by the dynamics of self-other relationship which flows from these. (142-3)

The modern capitalist system is essentially the commercial embodiment of patriarchal instrumentalism. Although financially profiting from all exploited entities, capitalism has benefitted most from the exploitation of the ecofeminine, while simultaneously disregarding the ecofeminist structure (labor, product, energy) upon which the world economy is based. In “Ecosocialism and Feminism,” Dordoy and Mellor state:

[A]cross history and cultures women's work has formed a central element of the ‘underlaboring’ work that makes human society possible. The link with environmental degradation is that to the extent that others bear the burden of their bodily and resource needs, transcendent social forms are disembedded from the knowledge and consequences of their actions . . . In this form, capitalism ‘harvests’ women's work as it harvests the productivity of nature in an original growth forest. (50)

This includes both products that can be commodified, as well as services that cannot. In “Ecofeminism Meets Business,” Chris Crittenden asserts that capitalism fosters a dysfunctional psychology, consisting of a combination of conditions such as dissociation, objectification, and

domination (58-59). The purpose of this psychological manipulation (strategically crafted and perpetuated by industry and political leaders) is to diminish the empathetic capacity of society, resulting in a subsequent lack of conscious awareness to human and non-human suffering and the desired suppression of dissidence from the exploited. Capitalism's flawed perception regarding society's "natural law" allows for the rationalization of the current environmental and humanitarian crises on a global scale and the denial of who and what is to blame.

iii. Psychological Motives for Ecofeminine Oppression

Although it is difficult to identify the psychological motivations behind the male desire to control or destroy anything possessing the ability to induce lack or to become more dominant than themselves, one can speculate that fear and envy may be contributing factors. In *Mother/Nature: Popular Culture and Environmental Ethics*, Catherine Roach states that the control or domination of nature "as conquered adversary—can be a powerful and attractive fantasy. It is the fantasy of the freedom from the limitation, vulnerability, and untimely death entailed by our human status as beings-in-nature" (83). However, although humans would understandably endeavor to protect themselves from potentially adverse environmental conditions, (e.g., animal attack, exposure, starvation, etc.), the issue goes beyond the logical, possibly delving into the emotional. The ability of the natural world and the feminine to bring forth life from the void and to provide the nourishment necessary to sustain that life, as well as the belief that that women and nature possess the capabilities to access strength and influence through some perceived mystical association would certainly qualify as powerful forces—which must be disparaged, controlled, or destroyed in order for a patriarchal system to function. In *Fairy Tales in the Postmodern World*, Daniela Carpi interprets Simone de Beauvoir's assertions regarding the way in which man represents woman: " [S]he is the wished-for intermediary

between nature, the stranger to man, the fellow being who is too closely identical,' and therefore competitive, perhaps even hostile" (15). In *Women and Sacrifice: Male Narcissism and the Psychology of Religion*, William Beers interprets Carl Jung's perspective on the conscious overcoming the subconscious, stating, "Because animals are somehow a part of nature (Mother nature) to kill one is to somehow overcome and possess some of the immense power of the mother., i.e., the unconscious" (82). As human males are biologically incapable of the creation and nurturance of life and cannot depend on women or the earth to provide it freely, the patriarchy employs strict parameters to assure the continual fulfillment of their needs and desires. A system that allows for the harnessing of productivity and output assures future abundance by leaving nothing to chance and alleviates the fear of loss of that which is imperative for life. However, control tactics such as the reproductive restrictions on women and the controlled breeding of animals reduce nature and the feminine to nothing more than vessels—acknowledged for birth and nurturance, but, again, only insofar as fulfilling a perfunctory biological role. In *Earthcare: Women and the Environment*, Caroline Merchant discusses the male-driven association between the ecological and the feminine, by comparing the land to Biblical Eve (or woman) and highlighting man's expectation of benefits and fear of denial of both. Merchant states:

As original Eve, nature is virgin, pure, and light—land that is pristine or barren, but having the potential for development. As fallen Eve, nature is disorderly and chaotic; a wilderness, wasteland, or desert requiring improvement . . . As mother Eve, nature is an improved garden; a nurturing earth bearing fruit; a ripened ovary; maturity. (32)

By failing to acknowledge the capabilities and contributions of the ecofeminine, and by considering themselves distinct from women and the natural world, androcentric societies essentially deny, as Plumwood asserts, any relationship with, dependency on, or obligation to this creative source (142). Therefore, rather than simply defending their egocentric behavior by declaring their interests to be more significant, through their refusal to so much as recognize the agency of the other, the patriarchy not only deems the violence that they have inflicted upon the ecofeminine as justified, but—worse—inconsequential.

The stringent control of nature and the feminine also assuages the patriarchal need for static conditions. Typically portrayed as the passive, inconsequential backdrop to male-controlled society, the only instances by which the patriarchy acknowledges the power of the ecofeminine appear to be upon demonstration of its seemingly illogical and uncontrollable wrath. Roach asserts that this is an innate fear, “not only of nature but also of the mother’s rage or the anger in general of a woman who has been crossed” (76). The patriarchal desire for consistency also runs in sharp contrast to the innate transformational processes that are often paralleled between women and the natural world—such as menstruation and childbirth corresponding with the phases of the moon, as well as the association of aging in females to the change of seasons in the natural world. This last analogy, in particular, is one which is often attributed to the feminine rather than the masculine, owing to male-centric society’s overt denial as to any loss of virility, so as to subconsciously reject their susceptibility to the physiological processes that lead to life’s inevitable demise—an eventuality even they cannot control. Radford Ruether states:

Maleness has its place within this female-centered plurality, as the expression of the dying and rising of life within the sustaining female life principle. Patriarchal

maleness, however, splits off this male function of dying and rising from its maternal matrix, distorting into death in a purely destructive sense. (279)

Hence, the patriarchy's eternal efforts to influence the unpredictable or chaotic circumstances often ascribed to women and the natural world.

iv. The Mother Nature/ Mother Earth Concept

The ultimate embodiment of the ecofeminine is the concept of Mother Nature or Mother Earth. From ancient mythology to present day imaginings, the feminine perception of the planet represents the long-established link between women and the natural world. Although the Mother Earth concept may not have originated with malign intent—as the association likely paid homage to the shared creative power and nourishing ability of both nature and the feminine—its perception has been distorted by patriarchal culture as a means to simultaneously diminish and exploit both women and the natural world. Roach states that the feminine allocation of the natural world or to the planet:

[D]raws on cultural meanings of 'nurturing' and 'life-giving' (the Good Mother), but also 'quixotic' and 'dangerous' (the Bad Mother), as well as 'frail' and 'in need of male protection' (the Hurt Mother) . . . Furthermore, this gendering of nature is not merely accidental or metaphorical, but it is central to how Western culture tends to understand both nature and women. (27)

The perception that women are innately closer to nature has often proved detrimental to both the natural world and to the feminine—as well as to the masculine and to humanity, in general.

Although there exist alternate and more empowering associations, such as the Gaia hypothesis (named for the earth mother goddess of ancient Greece, which essentially claims that the Earth is

a conscious, self-sustaining entity) and the Divine Feminine (the designation for the transcendent, connective flow of universal energy, as well as the ability to work in unison with this creative life force), these concepts are not devoid of complication. Although the Gaia hypothesis allows for the autonomy of the planet and of the natural world (a concept promoted in ancient Greece), because it essentially promotes the eternal compensating qualities of the earth, it ultimately removes human accountability from the equation. And while the idea of the Divine Feminine encourages unification (e.g., non-human nature and humanity, female and male), the feminine allocation of attributes such as empathy, nurturance, as well as instinctive communion with the natural world, may essentially contribute to feelings of duality—subconsciously severing, within the male, an association with the compassionate, nurturing tendencies innately attributed to the female, as well as any connection with or sense of responsibility toward the natural world.

Due to the negative impacts resulting from the Mother Nature/Mother Earth association, feminists, as well as environmentalists, have advocated for a detachment of these terms. However, to ignore the potential benefits of such an alliance would be a missed opportunity. In her article on author, Donna Haraway, “Cyborg and Ecofeminist Interventions: Challenges for an Environmental Feminism”, Stacy Alaimo asserts that, although “Mother Earth and ecofeminist glorifications of nature play into the pockets of patriarchal capitalism” portraying nature and the feminine “as agents in a mutual struggle . . . could strengthen environmental feminism's political impetus while opposing the appropriation of nature as passive resource” (133). Moreover, rather than dividing forces and leaving the natural world and the feminine to stand each on their own, it would be more beneficial to promote changes in the persistent, deceptive narratives that support the mutual oppression of both. Roach asserts:

[T]he problem lies not with the woman-nature association itself but with the patriarchal devaluation of both women and nature. Within an environmentalist, post-patriarchal value system in which nature and women were accorded high value . . . we could reclaim the association and promote it as enriching and empowering. (40-41)

While the patriarchy has clearly benefited from the analogous classification, it does not negate the reality that woman and the natural world (as well as the other) *are*, in fact, entangled in a mutual fight for justice and equality. Imagining otherwise by uncoupling the terms would not reverse this historical association, nor would it alleviate the current predicament in which both remain. Severing the common bonds between women and the natural world (whether they be inherently genuine or fictitiously devised) will not miraculously strengthen each side, but may, in fact, weaken the overall movement due to the dispersion of forces. Plumwood states that it is essential to recognize “a more complex dominator identity” so as not repeat the mistakes of reductionist programmes “which treats one form of domination as central and aims to reduce all others to subsidiary forms of it which will ‘wither away’ once the ‘fundamental’ form is overcome” (5).

Although, in order to understand the notions that have plagued the ecofeminine, we must redefine women and the natural world in relation to themselves (rather than as opposed to or in conjunction with the patriarchy), such an outcome would still be obtainable—and, perhaps, far more likely—from the foundation of a strong, unified position. In, “Women and the Environmental Movement,” Caroline Merchant asserts, “Despite the obvious need for new symbols and a new language, many feminists also recognize that without a simultaneous

revolution in the social, sexual, and economic structures that exploit both women and Nature, the symbolic revolution cannot succeed” (8). Plumwood states:

One essential feature of all ecological feminist positions is that they give positive value to a connection of women with nature which was previously, in the west, given negative cultural value and which was the main ground of women’s devaluation and oppression. Ecological feminists are involved in a great cultural revaluation of the status of women, the feminine and the natural, a revaluation which must recognise the way in which their historical connection in western culture has influenced the construction of feminine identity and . . . of both masculine and human identity. (8)

As opposed to the interconnective presence inherent in goddess or feminine-based cultures, Gadon asserts, “integration of the whole has never been achieved in monotheistic religions; rather they have led to an ever accelerating severance of nature from culture bringing us . . . to the brink of species and planet annihilation” (xiii). Redefining and reaffirming the connection between not only women and the natural world, but of the breadth of unifying philosophies that this association promotes, can manifest a twofold victory. Therefore, when appropriate in this thesis, I will regard the ecofeminine—whether it be in the unified personification of Mother Nature/Mother Earth or the Divine Feminine, or simply an implied correlation between the two—as a symbol of empowerment and an allocation of strength (when and if the work we examine justifies such commendation), rather than as the simultaneously disparaging and exploitative connotations assigned by the patriarchy.

v. An Ecofeminist Revolution

In attempting to maintain their societal advantage, as well as to retain the anti-environmental industries from which they have traditionally profited (e.g., oil, gas, coal), the existing social structure promotes conventional notions of the masculine, treating harshly those who choose to align themselves with what is considered an ecofeminist perspective. As previously discussed, such persecution includes women, men, as well as children. In *Green is the New Red*, Will Potter states, “The animal rights and environmental movements, more than any other social movements, directly threaten corporate interests” (241). He goes on to state that such interests (e.g., the American Medical Association, meat suppliers, etc.) have attempted to combat the release and promotion of factual information regarding animal welfare and environmental impacts through propaganda, lawsuits, etc., with the intention of categorizing activist organizations as militants and terrorists (244). Although these extreme classifications most often pertain to the preservation of capitalist society, which financially benefits from censoring and discrediting dissenting voices, the struggle to suppress information goes beyond maintaining corporate profits. Potter states, “[A]ctivists are often described as a threat to individual freedom and cultural traditions” (243). I assert that the freedoms and traditions whose loss are feared the most are those which benefit the white, patriarchal establishment.

Although ecofeminine oppression has undeniably afforded immeasurable benefit to male society, the patriarchy’s unrelenting attempts to maintain control cannot simply be attributed to its anxiety over losing the advantages reaped from the domination of nature, women, and the other. Their fear is not simply due to the promise of an egalitarian society, but to a world in which they must cope with the consequences of their maltreatment—where those that they have long oppressed will not only possess equal power, thereby losing the dominant members of society their advantages, but will gain the ability to *overpower* and unleash onto them as harsh a

treatment in the future as they have inflicted upon others in the past. Plumwood states that, in the wilderness, “those from the master culture must recognise that it is their turn to be acted upon, that they are in the domain of others who are . . . ‘not brethren . . . not underlings’” (164). In terms of the feminine, author Sally Kempton best epitomizes patriarchal anxiety: “When men imagine a female uprising, they imagine a world in which women rule men as men have ruled women” (Weiss).

Recently, there have been escalating, conservative attacks on the seventeen-year-old, Swedish environmental activist, Greta Thunberg. This young woman, who dares not only to question, but to demand change from the patriarchal establishment, has been derided by conventional society using the same language traditionally employed to dismiss women and to subdue those who could potentially ignite an irrepressible call to action, (e.g., hysterical, illogical, radical, extreme). In “Misogyny, Male Rage and the Words Men Use to Describe Greta Thunberg,” Camilla Nelson and Meg Vertigan explore the psychology behind the threat to and assault by the patriarchy. Nelson asserts that the denial of climate change is linked to:

[A] form of masculine identity predicated on modern industrial capitalism—specifically, the Promethean idea of the conquest of nature by man, in a world especially made for men. By attacking industrial capitalism . . . Thunberg is not only attacking the core beliefs and world view of certain sorts of men, but also their sense of masculine self-worth. Male rage is their knee-jerk response.

(Nelson)

It also seems that the entire notion of environmentalism (i.e., empathy and respect for the natural world, rather than indifference and exploitation) is viewed by patriarchal society to be a female

position. In “The Eco Gender Gap: Why is Saving the Planet Seen as Women’s Work?”, Ellen Hunt states that current research indicates that men are

[D]isinclined to carry a reusable shopping bag—or recycle, or any environmentally friendly activity that had been gendered as feminine—for fear of being perceived as gay or effeminate . . . ‘men may be motivated to avoid or even oppose green behaviours in order to safeguard their gender identity’. (Hunt)

Hunt goes on to clarify, as Nelson did, that, “Misogyny has been shown to be a factor in climate denial . . . ‘For climate sceptics, it was not the environment that was threatened; it was a certain kind of modern industrial society built and dominated by their form of masculinity’” (Hunt). As actions taken to ensure a sustainable existence are not only subconsciously viewed as a feminine undertaking, but as an affront to the entire patriarchal establishment, the conservative institution will not only ridicule and manipulate both genders to retain their societal hold, but will oppose a progressive environmental and egalitarian transformation with every available resource.

The subjugation of women and the natural world has benefitted the patriarchy for a number of obvious reasons—all of which amount to the unmitigated ability of dominant male members of society to exploit the ecofeminine without the need to temper their greed, without the obligation for reciprocation, and without the fear of retribution. Society’s anthropocentric perspectives have resulted in the suffering of countless sentient beings, enumerable species extinctions, vanishing natural landscapes, and the contamination of every life-giving medium that exists upon the earth. The ramifications of cultural androcentrism include multigenerational rape and violence (especially toward females and children), human enslavement, and global genocide of minority races, religions, and sexualities that do not conform to the idea of mainstream society. Combined, these actions have resulted in unrecoverable losses to our planet

and to humanity. The psychological reservations against implementing the reforms necessary to ensure the survival of the planet, as well as those that would advance a more egalitarian society, are due to humanity's belief in a false narrative that has persisted for far too long. The story needs to change. The dualistic constructs that define our present reality are not fixed, nor, as Lerner states, are they natural: "[P]atriarchy as a system is historical: it has a beginning in history. If that is so, it can be ended by historical process" (6). Crittenden asserts that ecofeminine conversely:

[P]roposes a much more dignified view of humanity, arguing that human nature is largely socially constructed and that humans are not inevitably egocentric but rather can aspire to a more enlightened perspective. Again, beliefs create realities . . . it would be . . . tragic and perhaps fatal not to take strides in this direction.

(61-62)

In order to initiate a widespread, fundamental transformation, however, humanity must examine the past patriarchal narratives that have contributed to the humanitarian and environmental crises in which we now find ourselves, and envision a more progressive society, define its criteria, and illustrate a world in which those ideas have been implemented. Most importantly, we need a means by which to convey such ideas to the minds of the people. One such delivery mechanism is literature. Referring to a 2016 study, Wojciech Malecki et al. states that a growing body of evidence indicates that the suffering of the non-human animal is similar to that of the human and asserts:

This research lends scientific support to calls from animal ethicists and activists alike to eliminate as unnecessarily cruel various widespread ways of treating other species . . . In practice, this goal cannot be achieved without first making the

public more concerned about animal welfare. It has been hypothesized that literary fiction might be of help here, and this option should be considered seriously. (1-2)

V. Ecofeminism in Literature

As patriarchal beliefs have dominated the mainstream since the beginning of recorded history, most existing narratives do not represent the planet, as a whole. They are not predominantly—nor equivalently—the stories of or by women or the “other”, are generally not in support of the autonomy of the non-human animal, and do not represent nature as a vital and equal participant in the world—they are the biased or fabricated versions of reality promoted by society’s dominant members. As Richard Slotkin explains in *Gunfighter Nation*, “Myths are stories drawn from a society’s history that have acquired through persistent usage the power of symbolizing that society’s ideology and of dramatizing its moral consciousness” (5) and that, although myths are produced by the overall culture, “the actual work of making and transmitting myths is done by particular classes of persons; myth-making processes are therefore responsive to the politics of class difference” (8). The fact that a mere portion of society is accountable for the majority of the world’s most prevalent narratives is a testament to the overwhelming ability of the patriarchy to suppress the historical accounts of the feminine in pursuance of advancing an exclusively androcentric version of history. Lerner states that from the ancient times until present, historians have chosen the events they felt should be recorded, as well as interpreting them in such a way so as to imbue them with purpose and significance. Lerner further asserts:

Until the most recent past, these historians have been men, and what they have recorded is what men have done and experienced and found significant. They have called this History and claimed universality for it. What women have done

and experienced has been left unrecorded, neglected, and ignored in interpretation. (4)

It is not only the feminine version of history that has been discounted, censured, or concealed by male-centric cultures, however, but most of the creative endeavors of women, as well—works such as literature. Although, this is certainly true of narratives by or about women, it also stands to reason that the egalitarian ideas regarding society and the natural world that are more often promoted by women are also conspicuously absent.

i. Feminist Fiction

From the gendered language and clichéd female stereotypes to the noticeable lack of women authors from the canon, the literary world is exceedingly deficient in the female perspective. In *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, Joanna Russ states, “If certain people are not supposed to have the ability to produce ‘great’ literature, and if this supposition is one of the means used to keep such people in their place, the ideal situation . . . is one in which such people are prevented from producing any literature at all. But a formal prohibition tends to give the game away” (2). Thus, while largely no legal restrictions were enacted to prevent the writing of women, other hindrances have more than contributed to the scarcity of recognized feminine works.

The eventual publication of female literature within a male-centric industry was largely due to society's blind confidence in a long-established patriarchal safety net—the rejection of feminine ideals and, subsequently, the devaluation of feminine literature. Lerner states:

Men are the judges of how women measure up, men grant or deny admission. They give preference to docile women and to those who fit their job-description accurately . . . [they] punish, by ridicule, exclusion, or ostracism, any woman who

assumes the right to interpret her own role or—worst of all sins—the right to rewrite the script. (13)

Women's writing was often viewed as not only inferior in quality, but trivial in content—regardless of whether the work related to the drawing room or the boardroom. If a woman devised a story that strictly reflected the feminine experience, the material was unimportant to the male reader and was thus regarded as inconsequential (as compared to the more noteworthy issues confronted by men). Conversely, if a woman created a work that was significant to the male perspective, the work was viewed as implausible (as such subjects would surely exist outside the realm of women) and the work was, once again, deemed inferior (Russ 49-52). Russ states, “Many feminists argue that the automatic devaluation of women's experience and consequent attitudes, values, and judgments springs from an automatic devaluation of women per se, the belief that manhood is ‘normative’ and womanhood somehow ‘deviant’ or ‘special’” (49).

Although early female writers often lacked the resources with which to purchase writing supplies and were customarily devoid of formal training and mentorships, the most psychologically affective deficiency could arguably have been the almost complete absence of female role models. This was not owing to a prior nonexistence of female writers, but because most previous literary works by women lingered in obscurity. The fact that male-authored literary works were often the only means by which an aspiring female author could educate herself on the craft only added insult to injury. In *Critical Theory Today*, Lois Tyson discusses the accepted use of “he” as inclusive pronoun—referring to both sexes—which coincides with the patriarchal logic asserting that the perception of men is “the standard by which the experience of both sexes is evaluated” (84). Tyson goes on to state:

[B]efore the centuries-old struggle for women's equality finally emerged in literary studies in the late 1960s, the literary works of (white) male authors describing experience from a (white) male point of view was considered the standard of universality—that is, representative of the experience of all readers—and universality was considered a major criterion of greatness. Because the works of (white) female authors (and of all authors of color) do not describe experience from a (white) male point of view, they were not considered universal and hence did not become part of the literary canon. (84)

Although the male-dominated writing industry often finds it implausible for women to comprehend and, therefore, depict the real-world experiences of men in their writing, many male authors find it perfectly acceptable to create female literary characters—albeit the triviality of the female experience rarely warrants extensive research (or even basic consideration) on the part of the author. Russ states, “The social invisibility of women's experience is not ‘a failure of human communication.’ It is a socially arranged bias persisted in long after the information about women's experience is available (sometimes even publicly insisted upon)” (57). The biased literary portrayal of the feminine remains a contentious argument. Male authors often create an idealized or villainous version of women, promoting their misconceptions and prejudices regarding the female gender, as well as freely proffering their presumed insight into the female psyche. This, Gadon asserts, “[H]as been one of the most grievous patriarchal sins, so deadening because women's culture has been rendered invisible and women know themselves only through the words of the male” (274-5). When the overwhelming majority of women's literary consumption is the patriarchally slanted stories of male authors, such perspectives tend to become internalized—particularly when a lack of female literature and the resulting feminist perspective fail to inform otherwise. This distorted influence can subconsciously affect women's

conception of self, as well as their confidence as writers. Continuing with her 1931 address, Woolf discusses the negative psychological impacts of misogynistic attitudes regarding the female writer:

And when I came to write I encountered her with the very first words . . . I took that pen in hand to review that novel by a famous man, she slipped behind me and whispered: ‘My dear, you are a young woman. You are writing about a book that has been written by a man. Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive . . . Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own . . . ’ And she made as if to guide my pen (237).

Woolf then offers valuable advice on how to manage such an ingrained and overwhelming influence:

I turned upon her and caught her by the throat. I did my best to kill her . . . Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing . . . Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer (238).

The previously employed patriarchal safeguards that had successfully sifted through progressive notions in the past and removed those which possessed the most transformational potential would gradually prove vulnerable once the ink started to flow and women began employing the same means to promote feminist philosophies that patriarchal society had traditionally used to suppress them. With pen in hand and the future feminists of a changing world as their audience, women began fighting back through their writing and working to transform the future narrative one story at a time.

While women comprise the majority of the authors and readership of feminist fiction, this classification pertains to the subject matter of the text, itself, rather than simply the gender of the audience and creators. In order to deem a work of fiction a “feminist” piece, the ideas contained

therein should not only be relevant to the female experience, but must also address progressive feminist concepts as a conscious break from past patriarchal oppression. In *Changing the Story*, Gayle Greene states: “Feminist fiction is not the same as ‘women's fiction’ . . . we may term a novel ‘feminist’ for its analysis of gender as socially constructed and its sense that what has been constructed may be reconstructed—for its understanding that change is possible and that narrative can play a part in it” (2). Although the rebellious concepts of the genre were initially subtle, feminist writers began calling attention to their seemingly eternal subordinate position in society and within their own homes. Strategies to explore topics such as gender bias, inequitable rights and opportunities, as well as gender-based abuse and sexual violence were more easily achievable within the fiction genre, where such subjects could be eluded to rather than outright expressed (e.g., narrative devices employed within the female gothic tradition). This allowed writers a murky platform on which to communicate feminist issues without alienating their readers, nor the publishing industry. The ideas contained within feminist fiction ultimately contributed to the public conversation regarding women’s rights, generating a cyclical effect between social feminist movements and feminist literature. Greene states that, in contemporary fiction, “Feminist fiction is the most revolutionary movement—revolutionary both in that it is formally innovative and in that it helped make a social revolution, playing a major role in the resurgence of feminism” (2).

ii. Ecological Fiction

Similar to the continuously changing portrayal of the feminine, the literary evolution of nature has mutated along with humanity’s shifting perceptions. The narrative depiction of nature often corresponds to key elements of humanity’s existence and the resulting societal perspectives within a historical framework, representing concepts such as humanity’s worst fears as a malign

and chaotic force (e.g., wilderness and frontier fiction), a place to escape into favorable solitude or be banished into imposed isolation, as a fulfillment of the nostalgic desire for a pre-industrial world and a respite from the disillusionment of modern society (e.g., Romanticism), and as an equitable creative partner or a powerful, autonomous source (e.g., ecofiction). In *In Our Nature*, Diane Ackerman states that, in fiction, nature has often “loomed as a monstrous character, an adversary dishing out retribution for moral slippage, or as a nightmare region of chaos and horror where fanged beasts crouch ready to attack. But sometimes it beckons as a zone of magic, mysticism, inspiration, and holy conversion” (3). Romanticism, a literary movement that takes into account the deeper significance of the natural world, instills nature with a soul or connective life force and parallels the immersion of oneself in the natural world to a religious experience. In *Nature's Economy*, Donald Worster states, “[T]his Romantic argument for holism and animism was prompted by the growing sense of man's isolation from the natural world, that rather sudden and painful side effect of the progress of industrialization in western nations” (82). Although Romanticism is often reduced to simplistic nostalgia, it frequently acknowledges and incorporates scientific understanding. Worster asserts, “The Romantic approach to nature was fundamentally ecological” (58) and that the Romantics found the field of biology and the study of the organic world “a modern approach to the old pagan intuition that all nature is alive and pulsing with energy or spirit” (82). Analogous to the practitioners of deep ecology, the Romantics valued the scientific discoveries of Naturalists such as Carl Linnaeus, but found their mechanistic descriptions of nature as devoid of essential substance as Naturalists seemingly considered the natural world. In “Literature and Environment,” Lawrence Buell asserts that certain ecocritics perceive science and technology to be the “root causes of ecological crisis, both in reducing nature to a mere object to be studied and manipulated by a detached observer, and in

amplifying people's ability to inflict damage on nature" (422). Naturalists' cold, factual approach may have increased the public's curiosity regarding nature's countless variations and intricate composition, but it lacked the emotional component required to dissipate long-standing dualistic perceptions between the human and natural worlds. Conversely, the Romantics imbued their literary work and artistic expression with the same connective, spiritual sensibilities that they attributed to nature. Worster asserts, "Romantic naturalists and artists placed their emphasis on the vital, creative power that flows through the material world like blood through the arteries of the body" (83). Comparable to analyses of deep ecology, critics have compared this Romantic notion of universal connectivity to patriarchal colonization. However, not only is this broad and reductionist view of Romanticism rather homogenizing in itself, the Romantic amalgamation of concepts regarding the natural world—including the scientific, the aesthetic, and the sacred—have served not only to promote the progressive notion of respect for nature and of the inherent connection between the human and natural worlds, but to inspire the progressive characterization of nature in successive literature (e.g., spiritual ecology, ecofiction, etc.). Worster states:

[A]t the very core of this Romantic view of nature was what later generations would come to call an ecological perspective: that is, a search for holistic or integrated perception, an emphasis on interdependence and relatedness in nature, and an intense desire to restore man to a place of intimate intercourse with the vast organism that constitutes the earth. (82)

This literary movement can be viewed as the predecessor to the relatively modern sub-genre of fiction, referred to as ecofiction.

As most writers were, at one time, men, their works were produced through a masculine perspective and were heavily influenced by patriarchal attitudes toward the natural world.

Plumwood states that earlier forms of ecological literature retained a profoundly

“masculine presence which has inhabited most accounts of environmental philosophy, including

those of many deep ecologists. Their accounts . . . often retain a dualistic dynamic, although

frequently this has appeared in subtle ways and in unlikely guises” (2). Differing from earlier

forms of ecological literature, ecofiction not only promotes the intimate relationship between

humanity and the natural world, but encourages the respect and sustainability of the planet by

emphasizing the autonomy of nature. In *Where the Wild Books Are*, Jim Dwyer states,

“Ecofiction is a composite subgenre made up of many styles, primarily modernism,

postmodernism, realism, and magic realism, and can be found in many genres, primarily

mainstream, westerns, mystery, romance, and speculative fiction” (3) and while ecofiction was

surely influenced by “[t]he focus on nature in Romanticism, traditional pastoralism, and

transcendentalism” (9), this literary sub-genre is considerably more ecologically progressive as

compared to its predecessors. Although the term was coined in the 1970s, fictional tales

classified within the ecofiction category can originate in any time period and be found within any

fictional genre, provided that they follow an ascribed set of qualifications. Although the

particulars tend to differ among critics, the criteria for the classification of ecofiction as

presented by Lawrence Buell in *The Environmental Imagination* are:

1. The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a

- presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history

- . . . 2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest . . .

3. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation

. . . 4. Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text. (7-8)

In *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv coins the term, “Nature-Deficit Disorder”, which essentially states that, due to the fascination of technology and a significant reduction in the amount of time spent outdoors, a critical disconnect has arisen between humanity and the natural world. Although it is difficult to replicate the fascination that arises from direct contact with nature, it is not always possible for individuals to discover the natural world in this way, nor is it probable to experience every habitat or species under consideration. Additionally, tangible ecological experiences are often not enough to rouse the passion of environmental activism, as such interactions do not always translate into meaningful connections—particularly when a preliminary lack of understanding is combined with negative associations regarding the natural world, thereby producing or exacerbating environmentally associated anxieties or phobias, (e.g., ecophobia: the fear of the natural world or its ecological problems). In “Help Your Child to Wonder,” Rachel Carson asserts that before we are presented with factual material, an emotional desire for that information must first be initiated. Carson states:

[I]t is not half so important to know as to feel. If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow. (46)

This assertion could equally apply to both children and adults. Ecofiction, as opposed to scientific study or more realistic forms of ecoliterature, possesses the ability to raise a person’s awareness of a subject, igniting their interest to inquire further into matters regarding the natural world. Dwyer states that the main distinction between fiction and non-fiction is “the degree to which the imagination is invoked” and further asserts:

‘The dream of deep ecology will never be realized upon the earth, but our survival as a species may be dependent on our capacity to dream it in the works of the imagination’ . . . Fiction is frequently less didactic and more nuanced than nonfiction, delivering its messages by implication. Personal engagement minus didacticism equals inspiration . . . Action springs from consciousness, sensitivity, concern, optimism, and inspiration. (7)

iii. Ecofeminist Fiction and Criticism

While literature possesses the ability to reinforce archaic perceptions, it can contrarily function as a means for progress—not only by raising awareness of the generally unrecognized struggles of women, nature, and the other, but by narratively constructing an egalitarian world as a blueprint toward a more progressive reality. Ecofeminist fiction merges the philosophies of both ecological and feminist fiction and promotes the equality of all oppressed entities. In “Through Ecofeminist Eyes,” Barbara Bennett states,

Ecofeminist storytelling takes various forms, from traditional fiction to memoir and autobiography and especially to science fiction and fantasy. But though the forms may change, the purpose remains essentially the same: challenging the ideology in practice that has put us in an ecological and humanitarian predicament. (68)

Although ecofeminist fiction simultaneously conveys concepts that promote environmental conservation, sexual equality, and social justice, most narrative works fall short of encompassing all such principles (particularly literature produced in less progressive historical eras). However, narratives that are deficient in one or more criteria do not need to be wholly disregarded for the sake of progress, as the deconstruction of such work can serve to promote the desired concepts,

as well to as highlight previously unacknowledged but objectionable notions—the unchallenged repetition of which serves to retain a patriarchal domination mindset. In “Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Classic Children's Literature, and the Imperial-Environmental Imagination in *The Chronicles of Narnia*,” Clare Echterling asserts the need for critical analysis of classic stories—the archaic notions of which often persist to the present day. Although Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia* promotes ecophilia and environmental protection, Echterling specifically argues against the idea of the novels being unquestioningly utilized as an eco-pedagogical tool, as the underlying narrative advances imperial ideologies, patriarchal concepts, and Christian theology. Echterling states:

Simply cultivating an appreciation for pastoral environments and pristine nature in our younger generations will not suffice, as it will not help our children understand the complicated relationships between lingering forms of imperialism, such as economic and cultural globalization, and the environmental degradation prompted all too often by the neocolonial workings of global capital. I am certainly not saying we should throw *The Chronicles of Narnia* aside, but we should be careful - in both our critical readings and in their pedagogical or personal use - not to treat them like innocent, ahistorical, and apolitical stories (20).

Ecofeminist criticism allows for the analysis of such tales in a manner that halts the routine echo of outdated perceptions and focuses on the concepts which promote the advancement of all life forms—both human and non-human nature. In “Feminist Ecocriticism: A Posthumanist Direction in Ecocritical Trajectory,” Serpil Oppermann states:

The current ecocritical exploration of such issues as global and local concepts of place, translocality and bioregionalism, human and animal subjectivities, environmental justice, and posthumanist reinterpretations of such concepts as ‘agency,’ ‘matter,’ and ‘body,’ as well as such issues as speciesism, ecophobia, biophilia, racism, and sexism within conceptions of the human and more-than-human world, have raised important questions . . . [t]hat is why the correlations between ecocriticism and ecofeminism . . . need to be re-articulated (19-20).

At the heart of many arguments against the deconstruction and critical analysis of classic works of literature, there lies an unconsciously motivated masculine ego attempting to defend the patriarchal traditions that define such narratives. Merchant states, "Ideology is a story told by people in power. Once we identify ideology as a story . . . [w]e recognize that all stories can and should be challenged" (*Earthcare* 55) and Plumwood states:

Since defenders of the western tradition (and even some nervous old guard critics of it) persistently and vociferously portray criticism of the dominant forms of reason as the rejection of all reason and the embrace of irrationality, it is still necessary to stress that critiquing the dominant forms of reason which embody the master identity and oppose themselves to the sphere of nature does not imply abandoning all forms of reason, science and individuality. Rather, it involves their redefinition or reconstruction in less oppositional and hierarchical ways. To uncover the political identity behind these dominant forms of reason is not to decrease, but rather greatly to increase, the scope and power of political analysis.

(3-4)

Such assertions are valid whether the work under consideration is a non-fiction historical text or a fictional narrative, as patriarchal influences can be found across literary tradition, regardless of their semblance to reality. However, ecofeminist oppression is most often prevalent within literary categories that are dominated by male authors and readership, where outdated patriarchal notions not only persist, but define the criteria of the genre. Such is the case with fantasy fiction.

A sub-genre of speculative fiction, fantasy pertains to fictional stories imbued with fantastical elements such as magic and the supernatural, and is often an amalgamation of fairytales, original stories, and narratives based on historical or mythological events. Although fantasy possesses the ability to grant the natural world sentience and, therefore, eligibility for reader empathy, thereby bridging the divide between the human and the natural worlds, as well as to allow for the equality, agency, and heroic characterizations of feminine protagonists, this is often not the situation. In an imagined realm in which there exists endless possibilities to create a world radically different from reality, both female characters and non-human nature (including those with supernatural abilities, such as Ents, or magical creatures, such as Elves) often fall into prescribed stereotypes, (e.g., maiden, damsel-in-distress, mother, and evil crone; creatures with unwarranted violent and chaotic tendencies, mythical beasts valued for their innocence and supernatural attributes). It is then the duty of a male protagonist to tame, slay, or rescue all such entities and to restore order—despite the oft superior abilities of females and non-human nature—thereby granting hero status to the male character and secondary status to all others, whose presence in the story essentially comprises the shadowy backdrop against which a male champion gains the incontestable ability to shine.

Such tropes are particularly true within medieval fantasy—fantastical literature which reflects European culture and customs during the middle ages. This would include a feudal system, with

royal blood lines, knights, and villagers, the Romantic notion of chivalrous males rescuing helpless damsels in distress, as well as architectural elements and geographic locations, such as castles and cottages within pristine forests and fields. Mimesis of this historical era is often a major argument against the departure from the conventional expectations of medieval fantasy literature and the transformation into progressive inclusivity. However, although fantasy narratives often mirror real-world environments, because they are normally situated within a mythical realm (e.g., Middle-earth), rather than a recognized geographical location upon the earth, historical facts need not apply. Authors have the ability to transform the existing tropes regarding women and non-human nature, even if (and especially when) the narrative initially begins within fantasy's predetermined parameters—such as the way in which the ecofeminine is portrayed within the *LOTR*. Although critics of Tolkien's work justifiably argue that the repetition (let alone praise) of the same oppressive tropes essentially perpetuates archaic stereotypes and hierarchies, it is imperative to examine the narrative arc given to the feminine and non-human characters, as well as the positive or negative outcome of such transformation. I argue that, although nature and the feminine are initially restricted to conventional roles within the historical framework of the novels, it is precisely owing to this allocation that any deviation from the prescribed characterizations allows for a more meaningful narrative arc and prompts readers to question the very foundation of humanity's hierarchal norms.

Ch. 2 *The Lord of the Rings*: An Ecofeminist Perspective

I. Introduction

J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is an epic high-fantasy series which follows Hobbit, Frodo Baggins and his nine companions on a quest to rescue Middle-earth from evil by destroying the One Ring in the fires of Mount Doom. The novels—published in three volumes

from 1954 through 1955 and titled, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*—have not only proven popular and enduring literature, but have become the foundation upon which modern fantasy is built. A work of such prestige is predisposed to becoming the repeated subject of literary analysis, as successive generations explore the narrative in search of progressive concepts relevant to modern audiences. In *Defending Middle Earth*, Patrick Curry states that while one of the positive aspects of *LOTR* is that, by granting audiences a view of this fantasy realm through an enchanted eye, it reflects back to the reader the wonder in their own world, it also, consequently, dooms the reader to recognize the severity of reality's impending threats. While this may prove an unfortunate consequence to audiences seeking to exchange their worldly cares for the untroubled bliss of a utopian fantasy, the newly enlightened and hopefully empathetic perspective gained by the reader may prove beneficial in alleviating the societal and environmental issues present in the earthly realm. Curry lists three crucial areas under threat in the novels: “community, including, but not limited to, the family . . . The non-human natural world (Middle-earth itself) . . . that dimension of life which cannot be quantified, controlled, or exploited . . . ‘spiritual’” (152-3). The concerns defined by Curry are not alleviated only by *LOTR*'s masculine heroes, but are equally remedied through the actions of female characters and those of non-human nature. Further, the ecofeminist concepts present in the narrative serve to act as the novels' guiding moral principles. It is by highlighting the inherent negative aspects of cultural and biological hierarchy that these issues are explored and the subjugated entities given the opportunity to rise up against their oppressors. Through the examination of these characters and concepts, as well as by linking Tolkien's well-established environmental agenda to the pro-feminist concepts presented therein, I will demonstrate the way

in which *LOTR*'s ecofeminist agenda promotes environmental justice, as well as gender and social equality.

II. Ecological Concepts

The mirror neuron system is the part of the brain that allows humans to experience genuine emotions from the stories contained within literary texts. Weik von Mossner explains that when humans perceive the grief or pain experienced by others, it “‘activates the same areas of the cerebral cortex that are involved when we experience these emotions ourselves’ . . . what we call empathy” and further asserts that we use “our own emotions to ‘give substance to the psychological lives of characters’” (23-24). In order to truly care for a literary character, however, readers must be able to put themselves in a character’s place—to not simply feel *for* the character (i.e., sympathy), but to feel *with* or *as* the character (i.e., empathy). The type of literature being read also plays a significant role in the arousal of genuine emotion. Weik von Mossner states that there are at least two features of narratives which allow the reader to experience ‘non-actual, mimetic perception’: one is a vivid account of sensory outcomes, the other the evocation of the material conditions that give rise to those outcomes” (25). Understandably, not all narratives elicit empathy and only a particular genre (or sub-genre) allows the human to share an emotional experience with non-human nature: fantasy.

Although most literary genres allow the reader to encounter circumstances outside the norm, and literature such as nature writing allows the reader to understand the senses and emotions related to human immersion in nature, fantasy goes a step further, allowing the reader to undergo something other than the human experience. In “The Critics, the Monsters, and the Fantasists,” Ursula K. Le Guin states, “realistic fiction is drawn towards anthropocentrism, fantasy away from it” (87). However, just as fiction written by or about women does not, in

itself, constitute feminist literature, fantasy narratives cannot be recognized as pro-ecological simply because non-human nature is granted, for example, communicative abilities (e.g., when an author bestows the non-human animal with anthropomorphic traits, but uses these characters to endorse an anti-environmental philosophy). Often, fantasy that is considered supportive of a pro-ecological agenda partakes “of realms in which humanity is not lord and master, is not central, is not even important” (Le Guin 87). Such assertions could not be more relevant than in the case of ecofantasy. This fantasy sub-genre assigns the natural world agency and grants nature an equal—or more significant—position to that of humankind. This not only assists readers in gaining knowledge about particular environments and the beings that live within them, but also allows audiences to become fully immersed in a shared experience with the natural world and, consequently, to relate to nature on a personal level.

In *Nature and the Numinous in Mythopoeic Fantasy Literature*, Chris Brawley asserts that “questioning the boundaries between the human and non-human does not mean that these boundaries don’t exist”, but that fantasy “‘blurs’ the distinctions between the two, allowing for the contemplation and challenge of our usual ways of perceiving” (23). Allowing flora and fauna the ability to speak, as well as through the use of elves, faeries, etc.—entities that straddle the cusp between the human and the non-human, as well as between reality and the fantastic—ecofantasy allows readers to address familiar issues from a new perspective. Brawley states, “Mythopoeic fantasy offers, especially with its functions of subverting normative categories of thought . . . and revising the way reality is perceived . . . a valid means whereby environmental perception may be addressed” (188). Although we can never truly experience the mind of the non-human, this type of narrative allows readers to reimagine the world and approach issues such as speciesism from a posthuman perspective. This builds a bridge between the

consciousness of the human and the non-human, helping to repair the biological divide that has long plagued our planet. By recognizing and empathizing with the plight of the natural world (the negative impacts of which almost exclusively originate with human activity), readers may come to an uncomfortable realization regarding humanity's destructive history, causing them to question not only the definition of "progress," but also the constructed dichotomy between ourselves and the natural world. In essence, such literature may unconsciously prompt readers to explore what it means to be human. Garrard states:

[T]he widest definition of the subject of ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself. (5)

Therefore, an ecological literary analysis not only examines the environmental aspects of a narrative, but investigates humanity's position, as well, in an attempt to unravel the contrived dualities that have separated humankind from the natural world.

In "Green Reading: Tolkien, Leopold and the Land Ethic," Lucas Niiler states, "*The Lord of the Rings* showcases fantasy writing as an apt vehicle for representing, discussing and resolving problems related to the relationship between nature and culture" (276). The heroic characters of *LOTR*—whether human, non-human, or a hybrid of both—not only align with an ecological perspective, but, in some cases, directly represent nature. In "Nature," Liam Campbell refers to both Bombadil and Treebeard stating, "Tolkien thus gives us voices of nature which have an authentically ageless perception; they speak with a deeper perspective: that of the Earth itself" (437). Characters in opposition to ecological preservation and conservation, (i.e., those who perceive nature as a commodity, wreaking environmental destruction in pursuit of capitalistic advantages), are the villains of Tolkien's world—as well as of our ecological

reality—and are justifiably eradicated before their insatiable desire for “progress” causes irreparable devastation to the entirety of Middle-earth.

1. Heroes of Environmental Advocacy and Villains of Ecological Oppression

i. Tom Bombadil and the Spirit of the Natural World

Tom Bombadil is one of the oldest and most enigmatic entities in Middle-earth. Elrond recalls a journey through the Old Forest, before the landscape was altered by time, where he was acquainted with all things wild and strange, but states that he had somehow, “[F]orgotten Bombadil, if indeed this was the same that walked the woods and hills long ago, and even then was older than the old” (*Fellowship* 265). Bombadil, himself, states, “Tom was here before the river and the trees; Tom remembers the first raindrop and the first acorn” (*Fellowship* 131). Akin to what would be experienced by the earth, itself, Tom not only recalls the history of the land regarding the topography and the settling of civilizations, but appears to have been present for the *biological formation* of that land— a memory to which only Middle-earth would be privy.

The being of Bombadil is never made fully clear to the reader, with complexities eluding even Tolkien, himself. When Frodo inquires as to the nature of Tom’s being, his wife, Goldberry, simply replies, “He is” (*Fellowship* 124). This may indicate that Bombadil is not only inherently a part to the natural world, but essentially *is* the natural world— or, at the very least, an all-encompassing universal essence occurring within this fragmentary, anthropomorphic form, so entirely inseparable from the whole of nature that he cannot even be described in relation to anything else—he simply “is.” Tom is essentially the physical embodiment of the primordial life-force of the natural world, which represented to Tolkien “the spirit of the (vanishing) Oxford and Berkshire countryside” (*Letters* 26). However, with even Elrond proclaiming Tom to be a “strange creature” (*Fellowship* 265), the non-concretization of this vague, mystical notion

produces a character that is strikingly bizarre and noticeably displaced from the more cohesiveness aspects of Middle-earth. However, whether due to the author's inability to descriptively articulate such overwhelming emotion or because such an expansive concept of nature simply defies reason, the ambiguousness of both origin and form surrounding this hybridized figure of human and non-human nature seems to have been intentional on the part of Tolkien. Brawley explains:

The difficulty in placing Bombadil is . . . understandable, especially given Tolkien's own admission . . . that Tom was an intentional enigma . . . 'He represents something that I feel very important, though I would not be prepared to analyze that feeling precisely' . . . Thus Tom embodies 'the feeling which remains where the concept fails'". (105)

Bombadil's communicative ability essentially allows the Hobbits to experience the world of the sentient beings of which he speaks:

He told them tales of bees and flowers, the ways of trees, and the strange creatures of the Forest, about the evil things and good things, things friendly and things unfriendly, cruel things and kind things, and secrets hidden under brambles. As they listened, they began to understand the lives of the Forests, apart from themselves, indeed to feel themselves as strangers where all other living things were at home. (*Fellowship* 130)

Niilsen states, "Through the power of Bombadil, the hobbits begin a paradigm shift of sorts. They begin the move from a conception of the natural world grounded in fear to an appreciation of nature: an appreciation from which that can construct a land ethic entailing stewardship" (282)

and further asserts that “Bombadil, in sum, serves as a lens through which the hobbits 'recover' a clear view of their relationship with the environment, and 'escape' middle-earth's dynamic of war, at least for a time” (284).

Akin to the interactions that exist between all aspects of the natural world, Bombadil not only possesses the ability to communicate with all life forms, but is capable of influencing natural phenomena, such as the weather. Upon his first meeting with the Hobbits, Tom rescues Merry and Pippin from the swallowing grasp of Old Man Willow by threatening him with the arousal of natural forces: “I’ll freeze his marrow cold . . . I’ll sing his roots off. I’ll sing a wind up and blow leaf and branch away” (*Fellowship* 120), as well as through the use of persuasions intended to lull the willow back into his normally restful state: “Old Man Willow . . . You should not be waking. Eat earth! Dig deep! Drink water! Go to sleep!” (*Fellowship* 120). Campbell states, “Bombadil . . . in the harmony of song, has command over the elemental powers of nature: he can summon frost, decay, wind – the very fact that Old Man Willow releases the Hobbits under this threat is testimony to the fact that this is no bluff” (*Nature* 437). Although Tom clearly possesses power over the natural world and Goldberry refers to Bombadil as the “Master of wood, water, and hill”, she also clarifies that Tom does not *own* the natural world, as not only would that “indeed be a burden”, but because “The trees and the grasses and all things growing or living in the land belong each to themselves” (*Fellowship* 124), lending autonomy to every individual aspect of the natural world. In *Ents, Elves, and Eriador*, Matthew Dickerson and Jonathan Evans state that, although the Old Forest is a collectively malevolent region, the area “is still worthy of preservation; though he is Master, Tom Bombadil makes no attempt to cultivate the forest or turn it from wild to tame. He even permits Old Man Willow—an undeniably dark-hearted being—to continue living” (133). Whether due to an unwillingness or

inability to influence situations outside of his immediate surroundings, Tom's function in the forest is akin to the role of the Ents—acting as a mediator and maintaining the status quo. Of Bombadil, Dickerson and Evans state, “As Tolkien wrote in 1954, ‘He is master in a peculiar way: he has no fear, and no desire of possession or domination at all’” (22). It is due to this lack of masculine desire for domination that it is Bombadil, more so than any other entity that comes into contact with the Ring, over which the temptation of material power holds no sway. Even with the Ring placed upon his finger, it influences him not. He exhibits no physical or emotional reaction to the Ring (other than his amusement at such an important and, yet, trivial trinket), all of which is illustrated in the fact that the Ring fails to cause his disappearance—an entirely appropriate detail, considering that he is the only being in Middle-earth not in danger of losing himself to the power of Sauron. As Tom is believed by some to possess a power over the Ring, it is suggested that the council summon Bombadil to assist with their efforts to conceal it. Gandalf clarifies, “Say rather that the Ring has no power over him. He is his own master”, and further explains that material concepts are of such little importance to Bombadil that he would no sooner accept the Ring for safekeeping than he would simply, “forget it, or most likely throw it away. Such things have no hold on his mind” (*Fellowship* 265). Comparable to the lack of desire for domination found within the natural world, Bombadil is an incorruptible force of which materialism is an irrelevant concept. However, also akin to the natural world, Tom is not invincible. Ending the discussion regarding entrusting the Ring to Tom's safe keeping, Gandalf states that Bombadil has “withdrawn into a little land, within bounds that he has set . . . waiting perhaps for a change of days, and he will not step beyond them” (265). Campbell asserts, “Gandalf's use of the word ‘withdrawn’ is certainly highly suggestive of a force in retreat . . . as

Sauron and servants ‘torture and destroy the very hills’ so too Bombadil, aligned with nature and the power of the Earth, faces attack” (*Nature* 437).

Dickerson and Evans assert that Tom, “can be seen as pure power—but if so, it is power without the will to dominate” (22). This characteristic is a double-edged sword. Although Bombadil’s complete lack of material greed seems an admirable quality, it is due to his apathy in exerting his potent influence to anything outside of his small circle of existence that he not only risks victimization by Sauron as much as any that is deficient in such power, but that he lacks the concern needed to assist in defeating this existential threat (in either an offensive or defensive capacity). Brawley states, “Thus, although Tom embodies the sense of nature without appropriation, he also distances himself from involvement in the world” (107). Tom, therefore, withdraws to await the outcome of a fight in which he actively chooses to play no part, entrusting the survival of the natural world to those with far less to lose by its destruction. However, not all of Middle-earth’s non-human characters remain committed to such a passive stance—especially those who have been awakened by the power of the Elves.

ii. Ents and the Ancient Forests

Forests have long been perceived as places of mystery and peril. In “Hobbits, Ents, and Dæmons” Gry Ulstein states, “The significance of trees and forests is introduced early in *The Fellowship of The Ring*, when Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin enter the Old Forest just outside the border of The Shire. ‘I thought all the trees were whispering to each other’, Merry tells the others. ‘They do say the trees do actually move, and can surround strangers and hem them in’” (11). Niiler states that, upon entering the Old Forest, “[T]he hobbits note that the Forest is ‘the center of all queerness’ in Middle-earth . . . ‘a place of danger and difficulty, where you take your own chances, depend on your own skills, and do not count on rescue’” (282). However,

forests also allow immersion into the primordial wild, permitting travelers the chance to reconnect with the true essence of the natural world and, therefore, with the quintessential self. Hence, the disorientation and trepidation that accompany a journey into such alien woodland may not be solely due to a fear of that which lurks amidst the outer environment, but of that which has long been concealed within. Niiler explains that, for the “sheltered” Hobbits, it is the remembrance of a connection their souls had long forgotten:

The Old Forest stands shadowed in the margins of their collective unconscious, hidden deep beneath generations that have practiced a ‘well-ordered business of living’ . . . In the interest of civilizing a wilderness, the hobbits have in fact repressed a wilderness within themselves . . . While the Old Forest does indeed terrify the hobbits, and while they are very much ‘strangers where all other things were at home,’ they have, in effect, come home. (282-283)

Forests and woodlands also play largely into the environmental theme of *LOTR*, where exploitation and rapid deforestation serve as bioindicators, reflecting the ecological health of the entirety of Middle-earth. Akin to human civilizations whose citizens enjoy similar benefits or endure the same misfortunes, Middle-earth’s forests have undergone many varied experiences over their long years in existence, resulting in the collective characteristics of specific areas. Whole forests (i.e., Mirkwood, Fangorn, etc.) are shown to possess a particular temperament, with those who have experienced greater trauma at the hand of outsiders developing an exceptionally aggressive disposition. Tolkien states:

Tom’s words laid bare the hearts of trees, and their thoughts which were often dark and strange, and filled with a hatred of things that go free upon the earth,

gnawing, breaking, biting, hacking, burning: destroyers and usurpers. (*Fellowship* 130).

Dickerson and Evans justify the animosity displayed by particular forests, asserting that, in light of the horrors visited upon these woodlands, such responses are warranted:

‘Greenwood the Great’ is refashioned as ‘Mirkwood’ only after Sauron enters it . . . Treebeard’s suspicion of outsiders is only the understandable result of Saruman’s and the Orcs’ malevolent treatment. (140)

The portrayal of highly dangerous fauna provide a less than utopian and, therefore, more realistic version of Middle-earth’s natural world, which—although it contains unexpected dangers from beings considered most innocuous in the real world (i.e., trees)—effectively captures the fear and apprehension one feels upon entering earth’s wild habitats. Brawley states, “As with all of Tolkien’s forest scenes . . . one must be on the constant alert. Tolkien never romanticizes nature, and this point is related to his expression of the numinous” (112).

The old growth forest of Fangorn is represented by creatures referred to as Ents, or Treeherders—Shepherds of the Trees, who were awakened by the Elves and taught to verbally communicate in the manner of human and Elf. In “The Silence of Trees,” Ike Reeder asserts that the Ents “represent an attempt to give power to and allow for a newly ordered literary ecology that forces the characters in the story, and thereby, through identification, the reader, to consider the trees as agents in Middle Earth” (114). So as to portray a non-homogenizing concept of forests, as well as to allow for more focused consideration (rather than utilizing a notion too broad for comprehension and, therefore, concern), Tolkien not only assigns differences between Ents and trees, but between the variety of Ents (e.g., Ents, Huorns, etc.), as well as among their

individual personas, essentially providing a “face” to a life form which, in our world, may seem dully familiar, entirely unexpressive, and, therefore, considerably easier to overlook. To further illustrate a realistic version of creatures that possess individual personalities and changeable emotions, Ents are shown to exhibit both positive and negative characteristics, such as beneficence, malevolence, patience, and wrath. The principal Ent, referred to as Treebeard, is not only essentially the leader of Fangorn, but is representative of all the trees and forests of Middle-earth. It is through the actions of Treebeard that the Merry and Pippen are rescued and that Saruman’s destructive reign culminates in ruin. At the time of our tale, Treebeard resides within Fangorn forest and it is here that he meets Hobbits, Merry and Pippen, of whom he becomes quite fond due to their curious and respectful manner, as well as their relationship with the natural world. Treebeard finds it fitting that such creatures build their homes within the earth, stating, “So you live in holes, eh? It sounds very right and proper” (*Towers* 465). Regarding his age and experience, Gandalf states that Treebeard is “the oldest of the Ents, the oldest living thing that still walks beneath the Sun upon this Middle-earth” (*Towers* 499), but when asked to explain the being of Treebeard Gandalf states, “Ah! Now you are asking much. The little that I know of his long slow story would make a tale for which we have no time now. Treebeard is Fangorn, the guardian of the forest” (*Towers* 499). Just as one could not easily summon the words to explain the entirety of planet earth, we find that a brief but sufficient explanation regarding the being of Treebeard cannot be provided. Pippen attempts to describe the magnitude of experience, emotion, and wonder behind the eyes of Middle-earth’s eldest being, stating:

One felt as if there was an enormous well behind them, filled up with ages of memory and long, slow, steady thinking; but their surface was sparkling with the present . . . it felt as if something that grew in the ground – asleep, you might say,

or just feeling itself as something between root-tip and leaf-tip, between earth and sky had suddenly waked up, and was considering you with the same slow care that it had given to its own inside affairs for endless years. (*Towers* 463)

Dickerson and Evans state, “The image here is one of deep and profound understanding. We see in Treebeard both wisdom and knowledge, both earth and sky, and both past and present” (127). Additionally, Reeder asserts that by instilling the Ents with such genuine depth, Tolkien not only encourages their believability, but forces the reader “to reconsider all the times trees have been used, abused, and walked past in his subcreated world” (118).

As opposed to Treebeard’s patience in thoroughly deciphering between those who respect the forest from those who wish it harm, we find the sentient but dangerous Huorns, as well as the mean-spirited Old Man Willow of the Old Forest, who display the more menacing aspects of Middle-earth’s woodlands, (though, even Treebeard and the Ents of Fangorn are admittedly not particularly trusting of outsiders and with good reason). Tolkien states, “The countless years had filled them with pride and rooted wisdom, and with malice. But none were more dangerous than the Great Willow: his heart was rotten, but his strength was green” (*Fellowship* 130). In “The Feminine Principle,” Melanie Rawls states, “A bad Ent or huorn is like Old Man Willow or Shelob—rooted to one place, voracious, and contending himself with corrupting the immediate environment and luring individuals to destruction” (12). As malevolent as such beings may appear, however, such aspects lie beyond black and white notions of good versus evil. Brawley asserts that both Treebeard and Tom Bombadil are characters associated with the numinous and, as such, are “beyond such moral categories . . . beyond the mere duality of good and evil” (112).

Their incomprehensibly lengthy lifespans have allowed Ents centuries’ worth of knowledge, which is reflected in their attitude toward the natural world, as well as in the manner

of their logic and speech. For example, as primary producers of Middle-earth, Ents do not consume flesh. This is not only a compassionate preference and a lifestyle often elected by those considered to be spiritually advanced, but a sensible choice, as well, as such enduring creatures would logically select the most nutritionally valuable substances for vigor and longevity. When the Ent draughts are consumed by the Hobbits, they not only revitalize their bodies, but augment their height. In “Middle Earth, Narnia, Hogwarts, and Animals,” Michael Morris states, “The immortal and environmentalist Ents of Fangorn forest provided vegetarian ‘Ent drafts’ to the hobbits, which certainly had strengthening properties” (12). When Gimli comments on the increased thickness and curl of Merry and Pippen’s hair, as well as the difference in their stature, Legolas confirms, “Gimli’s eyes do not deceive him. Strange songs have been sung of the draughts of Fangorn” (*TT* 562). Additionally, the Ents’ thoughtful, deliberate manner of logical analysis resulting from centuries of an unhurried existence is aptly reflected in their measured speech—an ideal explanation of which can be found in the reason that Treebeard declines to reveal his name. Aside from remaining guarded with such personal information, it is also a question that would take quite some time to answer. Treebeard states:

I am not going to tell you my name, not yet at any rate . . . For one thing it would take a long while: my name is growing all the time, and I’ve lived a very long, long time, so *my* name is like a story. Real names tell you the story of the things they belong to in my language, in the Old Entish as you might say. It is a lovely language, but it takes a very long time to say anything in it, because we do not say anything in it unless it is worth taking a long time to say, and listen to. (*Towers* 465)

Their long years have also provided the Ents with prudence in situations where other, much younger beings may impetuously rush in. As the environmental voice of our story, Treebeard describes the negative impacts of Saruman's greed upon Fangorn. While delivering his account of the ill-deeds of the White Wizard to the Hobbits, Treebeard begins to comprehend all that has been senselessly and eternally lost, as well as to recognize the assured continuation of such devastation should action not be taken to stop it. Treebeard states:

He and his foul folk are making havoc now. Down on the borders they are felling trees . . . Some of the trees they just cut down and leave to rot . . . There is always a smoke rising from Isengard these days . . . Many of those trees were my friends, creatures I had known from nut and acorn; many had voices of their own that are lost for ever now. And there are wastes of stump and bramble where once there were singing groves. I have been idle. I have let things slip. It must stop! (*Towers* 474)

In addition to associating the felling of Middle-earth's ancient trees (whether or not they are specifically Ents) to the destruction of earth's old growth forests—containing information, species, and entire ecosystems which can never be replaced—the reader also empathizes with Treebeard, feeling anger and grief for the senseless loss of the innocent and significant beings that Treebeard has known since their birth. Whether set in the earthly or fantasy realm, by allowing the reader to be privy to the thoughts and feelings of the non-human, such scenarios encourage compassion and understanding toward the non-human nature and it is this narrative empathy that may elicit feelings of connectivity with the natural world.

Although Treebeard deems Saruman's atrocities unforgivable and while he fully anticipates further destruction by Saruman's forces, he knows that—for many reasons—the Ents

will not be quick to take action against Isengard. First, the issues regarding other species are normally of little concern to the Ents. Due to the almost complete isolation of Fangorn's residents, Rawls states, "Ents like dwarves, are somewhat onesided. They remain in their forests and have little to do with other races—rather self-involved, as Treebeard admits to Merry and Pippin" (12). Concerning the position of the Ents in regard to the kingdoms of men, in particular, Gandalf states to Théoden, "[T]o them you are but the passing tale; all the years from Eorl the Young to Théoden the Old are of little count to them; and all the deeds of your house but a small matter" (*Towers* 549). Therefore, in regard to the Hobbits' question regarding on which side Treebeard stands, Treebeard responds, "I have not troubled about the Great Wars . . . they mostly concern Elves and Men . . . I am not altogether on anybody's *side*, because nobody is altogether on my *side* . . . nobody cares for the woods as I care for them" (*Towers* 472). Treebeard's apprehension goes beyond self-interest, however, as the benefit of experience has also revealed the harm that can result from impulsive, imprudent acts. Rawls states, "Don't be hasty," is a motto of the Ents – a warning against the masculine fault of rashness" (12). Therefore, the question of action against Saruman is laboriously deliberated during a gathering of Ents (or an Entmoot). Though desiring to safely and consistently remain above the fray, in the end, the Ents realize that the harm of inaction outweighs the cost of entering into battle, as there is no place in Middle-earth, no matter how isolated, that is safe from patriarchal domination and environmental destruction. Their decision is not made lightly, as, though seemingly immortal, the Ents are not invincible. Treebeard states, "[I]t is likely enough . . . that we are going to our doom: the last March of the Ents. But if we stayed at home and did nothing, doom would find us anyway, sooner or later" (*Towers* 486). However, the last race of Ents are not the only beings protected through their possible sacrifice, but all of Fangorn and, by extension, the entirety of the natural

world. Dickerson and Evans state that the influence of the Ents, “goes beyond trees and forests to include the whole concept of wilderness . . . The places they favor are the free domains of birds, beasts, and other creatures” (123). Treebeard reveals as much when he states, “Now at least the March of Ents may be worth a song . . . we may help the other peoples before we pass away” (*Towers* 486).

Despite the Ents’ immense physical proportions, Merry and Pippen are not confident in the giant creatures’ ability to overthrow Isengard. However, akin to the imperceptible energy that lies latent within the earth, the Ents are more powerful than they outwardly appear and less passive than their seemingly imperturbable nature would suggest. Unlike humans and certain hybrid creatures who separated themselves from nature long ago, the innate and continuous connection of the Ents (and Ent-like trees) allows them to expand their influence throughout all aspects of the natural world. Regarding the extent of Old Man Willow’s abilities, Tolkien states that he was:

[A] master of winds, and his song and thought ran through the woods on both sides of the river. His grey thirsty spirit drew power out of the earth and spread like fine root-threads through the ground, and invisible twig fingers through the air, till it had under its dominion nearly all the trees of the Forest from the Hedge to the Downs. (*Fellowship* 130)

Additionally, Treebeard clarifies for the Hobbits, “We are stronger than Trolls. We are made of the bones of the earth. We can split stone like the roots of trees, only quicker, far quicker” (*Towers* 486). Tolkien establishes the power of the Ents by merging the gradual damage that uncultivated flora can produce over time with the concentrated devastation that natural events

such as floods and earthquakes can inflict all at once. Pippin describes the Ents' attack upon Isengard:

It was staggering. They roared and boomed and trumpeted, until stones began to crack and fall at the mere noise of them . . . striding and storming like a howling gale, breaking pillars, hurling avalanches of boulders down the shafts, tossing up huge slabs of stone into the air like leaves. The tower was in the middle of a spinning whirlwind . . . I saw iron posts and blocks of masonry go rocketing up hundreds of feet, and smashing against the windows . . . the Ents broke the dams and poured all the gathered waters through a gap in the northern wall, down on Isengard. (*Towers* 568-571)

Rather than the chaotic destruction of natural disasters, however, Treebeard leads and maintains an organized attack upon Isengard, allowing both Ent and Huorn to halt the advancement of Saruman's destructive reign. This darkly powerful scene effectively illustrates that way in which nature is able to defend itself against forces that trigger instability within earth's delicate ecosystem (whether consciously, as in the example of the Ents' assault upon Isengard, or unintentionally, as is the case with natural phenomena in the real-world).

Although the overthrow of Isengard is successful, it is important to note a couple of points regarding this event. First, although Treebeard aligns with Gandalf and ultimately helps immeasurably in the battle against Saruman (and, therefore, Sauron), the Ents do not join the crusade for the benefit of human or hybrid civilizations, so much as to seek retribution for the slaughtering of trees and other Ents, as well as to halt further destruction of the natural world. Reeder clarifies, "The Ents are acting because dominion—and a cruel sort of hegemony—has been exerted over them . . . it is purely for the purpose of autonomy, not for some human

construct like the War for the Ring” (119). In this way, the narrative allows for non-human nature to take action for their own reasons, rather than to benefit or align with humankind, (regardless of the moral or ethical virtuousness of humanity’s motivations). Secondly, although the Ents’ destruction of Isengard is to be celebrated, there also remains the knowledge that, like most achievements regarding the preservation or conservation of the natural world, this victory will be short-lived. Akin to the disappearance of habitats and thousands of biological species in the real world, Brawley states that the Ents “are also a part of the fading of Middle-earth” and “will slowly diminish” (114). Campbell states that, because Bombadil and Treebeard represent the physical manifestation of the natural world, “it is reflective of the wider narrative that, despite the echoing timescale which contextualizes them, they are both under threat in the Third Age” (*Nature* 437).

In order to establish equitable conditions and a connection between human and non-human nature, as well as to communicate the emotions of non-human characters in a manner that is understandable to the reader, Tolkien ventures into the shifting perspectives of a posthumanist realm by endowing non-human nature with both human and non-human traits, creating characters that transcend the conventionally strict boundary between the two. First, Tolkien bestows nature with a voice. In “Tolkien’s Green Time: Environmental Themes in *The Lord of the Rings*” Andrew Light asserts that the Ents do “not simply care for the forest as much as they serve as a narrative device that allows part of nature to speak for itself” (154). By allowing for the expression of emotions by the natural entities with which humans have become exceedingly accustomed, it permits the reader to perceive an overly familiar world through fresh eyes and to consider that world with a new perspective. Brawley states that Tolkien’s human and arboreal amalgamations serve “to speak for the trees; thus, far from being an escape from reality,

Tolkien's creations are meant to recover a numinous perception of the world, one which has been lost or hidden due to linguistic appropriation" (30). Additionally, the communicative abilities of the Ents allow the natural world equal participation in decisions regarding the future of Middle-earth, promoting the notion that humankind should not be (and likely will not be) the only medium through which the fate of the world is decided. Although characters representing non-human nature must be anthropomorphized to a certain degree in order for their words and thoughts to be conveyed to human audiences, even narratives in which the non-human is strongly anthropomorphized have proven to positively affect the environmental mind of audiences. Weik von Mossner explains that although the extreme anthropomorphism of the animal mind may be "problematic from a critical animal studies perspective . . . heavily anthropomorphized animals can cue strong emotions as well as forms of moral allegiance that last beyond the immediate viewing experience" (130). Nevertheless, characters representing non-human nature in ecofantasy often exhibit real world biological and ecological traits, as well—even if they are of a fantastical nature. Maintaining a semblance of reality allows lessons embedded within the narrative to transcend the fantasy realm, encouraging reader association between the environmental issues altering Middle-earth (such as deforestation) and those that affect non-human nature within the real world. The melding of characteristics and behaviors of human and non-human nature within the fantasy genre allows for a non-anthropocentric and posthumanist perspective by which the reader is able to connect to and, therefore, empathize with the non-human "other." Brawley asserts, "Fantasy has the unique ability to subvert normal categories of thought, such as those between 'human' and 'non-human,' in order for a fusion of new possibilities which are not available in mimetic works" (103). In "Posthumanism in Literature and Ecocriticism," Serrenalla Iovino eloquently discusses these eternally shifting perceptions:

[S]ituated by definition in a mobile space of matter and meanings, the posthuman does not seem so prone to dwell. In fact, it moves, relentlessly shifting the boundaries of being and things, of ontology, epistemology, and even politics. And these boundaries, especially those between human and nonhuman, are not only shifting but also porous: based on the – biological, cultural, structural – combination of agencies flowing from, through, and alongside the human, the posthuman discloses a dimension in which ‘we’ and ‘they’ are caught together in an ontological dance. (11)

By incorporating within the natural world the fluidity of attributes traditionally restricted to either the human or the non-human, *LOTR* encourages the dissolution of the constructed dualities and imposed hierarchies that have long fortified the nature/human divide.

While the Ents—particularly the character of Treebeard—amuse and enchant readers, Brawley explains that they “are not meant for mere entertainment or to comfort the reader by providing an escape from the world of responsibility” asserting that their presence represents something much more significant: “These creations are ‘meditations’ on the natural world, so that once the fantasy is finished, trees are viewed (recovered, revised, subverted) in their divine originality” (14). Tolkien’s Ents are not only representations of the biological entities of the earth, but are the embodiment of environment philosophies. Reeder asserts that *LOTR* not only addresses “the ethical ramifications of sentient ethics and the environment, but also reconfigures the environment itself as a sign. This restructuring of signification through agency is most clearly represented in the Ents” (113-14). Contrary to the real world politicization of the conservation and preservation of nature versus the capitalistic benefits often gained through its exploitation, Dickerson and Evans assert, “Wilderness in general, and forests in particular, must

be cared for and preserved, and the necessity of doing so transcends all political boundaries, alliances, or ‘sides’” (119). In order to actively defend the Earth’s natural realm against the capitalist entities utilizing modern technology to rapidly and effectively destroy that world for profit, Tolkien posits that the conscious and decisive action of the Ents against the materialistic pursuit of power in the narrative should be something to which all of humanity aspires.

iii. Hobbits and the Shire

Hobbits—also referred to as Little Folk or Halflings—are an ancient race of Middle-earth. Although they are perceived as childlike in some respects (in terms of relative naivety, as well as due to their small stature, reaching heights of only between two to four feet), Tolkien bestows them with a deeper sort of intelligence—knowledge of the earth. Essentially a hybrid of human and non-human nature, Hobbits’ customs and habits not only reflect the human (e.g., residing within intricately constructed homes, living in communities, exhibiting an agrarian lifestyle, etc.), but the non-human animal, as well. In what can be compared to the senses and behaviors of wildlife, Tolkien states that Hobbits:

[A]re quick of hearing and sharp-eyed . . . nimble and deft in their movements.

They possessed from the first the art of disappearing swiftly and silently . . . their elusiveness is due solely to a professional skill that heredity and practice, and a close friendship with the earth, have rendered, inimitable by bigger and clumsier races. (*Fellowship* 1)

Additionally, by way of dwellings nestled within the ground, as well as their small stature and a predilection for barefoot travel which Brawley asserts “connect them to the earth” (115), Tolkien portrays the Hobbits as a species intimately connected with the natural world. Because of this,

Hobbits are more attuned than other humanistic forms to the primal potency of living flora and fauna. Tolkien states, “Frodo . . . laid his hand upon the tree beside the ladder: never before had he been so suddenly and so keenly aware of the feel and texture of a tree’s skin and of the life within” (*Fellowship* 366). Avoiding a homogeneous portrayal of non-human nature, however, Tolkien grants the Hobbits both positive and negative anthropomorphic traits such as generosity and compassion, as well as gluttony and even cruelty—though, for the most part, Hobbits are shown to be an intrinsically moral people who abhor the abuse and exploitation of the environment and the non-human animal. In *The Comedy of the Fantastic*, Don Elgin states “Hobbits know from the start of the novel about the relationship between themselves and nature, and they cannot rule over, dominate, or change it” (51).

The Shire—home to the races of Hobbits with which the novels are primarily concerned—is at the heart of our tale. A picturesque setting in a pristine state of being, the Shire represents a pre-industrial paradise—and one to which many readers long to return. In *Lord of the Rings: The Mythology of Power*, Jane Chance states that the Shire is:

[I]n some ways a mirror image of the pastoral England that Tolkien . . . idealized in opposition to the rise of late Victorian urban industrialization, the Shire within Middle-earth seemed to guarantee a near-utopian existence for its childlike Hobbit inhabitants—a group to which a part of us all, regardless of generation, nation, and age, desires to belong. (3)

The wonder and contentment the reader feels while “visiting” the Shire carries through to the other natural locations to which our characters journey. In regard to the ensuing effect of this rustic and idyllic location on the remainder of the narrative, Brawley states that the Shire:

[A]cts as a “foil” for other images of home in *The Lord of the Rings* . . . we feel the wonder of such places as Fangorn Forest or Lothlorien precisely because we have been introduced to the pastoralism of the Shire first. (115)

Contrary to the preservationist Ents, the agrarian lifestyle of Shire Hobbits demonstrates an approach more akin to the conservation mindset of the Entwines, for which nature is respected, but not permitted to naturally flourish, so as to allow for controllable and enhanced production. Yet, the Hobbits’ retention of non-industrialized, traditional agricultural nonetheless allows for their continued communion with the earth. Tolkien states that the Hobbits’ favorite places include “a well-ordered and well-farmed countryside” and asserts that they “do not and did not understand or like machines more complicated than forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom” (*Fellowship*¹). Their rejection of the unsustainable practices of modern agriculture is due to many generations of experiencing the effects of land exploitation versus nurturance. The resulting knowledge is that one, quite literally, reaps what they sow. Brawley states, “The Shire represents a closeness to nature, and the hobbits’ attitude is one of community, not commodity” (115). Dickerson and Evans assert:

Hobbits are willing to use simple devices to further their farming techniques, but they do not employ technological interventions that might endanger the quality of the soil, water, and air—the environmental sources on which their culture is directly dependent. In fact, they are willing to sacrifice short-term personal convenience for greater long-term good. (81)

Although Tolkien’s depiction of this far removed and pastoral way of life is a romanticized version of reality, he does address the provincialism of such a lifestyle, such as the Hobbits’ purposeful isolationism, which ventures beyond indifference into an avoidance and

mistrust of outsiders (which extends even to their own kind). The Hobbits were generally not concerned with the affairs of other races, nor with outside events, in general, and Tolkien states that they have remained “shy of ‘the Big Folk’” (*Fellowship* 1), quickly disappearing upon emergence of the human. The extreme social and geographic segregation of the Hobbits and the Shire instills the reader with a false sense of security, in which this seemingly protected region could never be affected by external forces. The infiltration of the Shire is, therefore, that much more disturbing. The initial intrusion of the Ringwraiths, as well as the devastating social and ecological impacts of Sharkey’s (Saruman’s) later reign not only shock the reader, but serve to accentuate the reality that no society or locale—no matter how seemingly innocent or remote—is safe from the dangers of materialistic persuasions and environmental destruction. In “The Scouring of the Shire,” the Hobbits’ excitement to return to a place of beauty and peace turns to disbelief when they discover that the Shire did not survive unscathed. Tolkien states:

Many of the houses they had known were missing. Some seemed to have been burned down. The pleasant row of old hobbit-holes in the bank . . . were deserted, and their little gardens . . . were rank with weeds. Worse, there was a whole line of the ugly new houses . . . An avenue of trees had stood there. They were all gone. And looking with dismay up the road towards Bag End they saw a tall chimney of brick in the distance. It was pouring out black smoke into the evening air. (*Return* 1004)

This ravaged depiction of the Shire, which could easily be compared to the effects of industrialization on the natural environment in Tolkien’s time, laments a squandered past magnificence and portends a dismal future existence. Campbell states that this description evokes “an industrial wasteland in the process of exploiting, polluting, and feeding off the

natural environment in which it operates” and further asserts that, despite the blighted landscapes observed upon their journey, it is in witnessing the Shire in this desolate state that “causes the Hobbits to reflect on what has been lost: ‘It was one of the saddest hours of their lives’” (*Nature* 438).

Utilizing the skills obtained during their journey, the Hobbits quickly take action against the responsible parties and eventually rebuild the Shire. Niiler states:

When Sam Gamgee, a gardener, sows magic seeds from Lothlorien throughout the Shire . . . Bushes, vines, and berries grow in rich profusion; and newborns are ‘fair to see and strong’ . . . it strongly affirms the continuation of life and the giving of birth . . . For Tolkien, the episode is heroism of a high order, as the deep ecological sensibility of ‘conservation’ is enacted. (281-282)

Rather than a dystopian narrative in which environmental disasters have negatively and irreversibly altered the entirety of the planet, the rescue and transformation of the Shire, with its encouraging promise of restoration, serves as a plea for humanity to actively halt the progression of environmental destruction and to reestablish a necessary connection with the natural world—while there is still time. Like our four Hobbits who employ their hard-earned knowledge toward the liberation and recovery of the Shire, Tolkien’s witnessing of the initial environmental impacts of industrialization informs a narrative in which he highlights the beauty, mystery, and significance of the natural world in order to implore humankind to return to a simpler, nature orientated way of living. Additionally, Tolkien asserts that that, in order for humanity to truly adhere to a more ecocentric existence, it must be an effort that involves all people, in all regions, for all time. In response to Frodo’s disbelief that such negative events could happen within his “own Shire”, Gildor informs him that it is not *his own* Shire: “Others dwelt here before hobbits

were; and others will dwell here again when hobbits are no more. The wide world is all about you: you can fence yourselves in, but you cannot for ever fence it out” (*Fellowship* 83).

Dickerson and Evans state that, although the Hobbits may consider it home, Gildor’s statement affirms that, “the Shire does not ‘belong’ in an absolute sense to any of them. This brings us back to the idea that a steward is not an owner but a caretaker of something that belongs to another” (91).

In order to become effective stewards to the natural world, humanity should endeavor to conjure the strength and selflessness exhibited by Frodo. When presented with the choice of remaining in his beloved Shire or protecting the land he loves by leaving it so as to draw evil away, Frodo chooses the latter. Although, in the end, the magic of the Shire—indeed, of all Middle-earth—is lost for Frodo, he derives true happiness from the knowledge that it will remain so for others. Dickerson and Evans state that, at times, environmental stewardship:

[R]equires people to relinquish certain claims—or to restrain themselves from certain kinds of behavior deriving from such claims—to ensure the transmission of the natural environment in a fertile and habitable condition to those who will come after. (81)

Akin the Rabindranath Tagore quote which asserts, “The one who plants trees, knowing that he will never sit in their shade, has at least understood the meaning of life”, many of us may never see the future results of our environmental efforts, but we are confident that, through our sacrifices (many of which are purely of matter of convenience), the living world will endure. Before leaving for the Grey Havens Frodo states, “I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so . . . when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them” (*Return* 1029).

iv. Saruman and the Appropriation and Destruction of Nature

As opposed to the heroic status granted to those whose eco-friendly philosophies allow for environmental sustainability, Tolkien reduces to villainous status all those who exploit and abuse the natural world. While Sauron is the source of evil that arises in Middle-earth, the Dark Lord remains an intangible figure whose malevolence can only be carried out through the living beings that assist in his crusade. However, Saruman, a knowledgeable and powerful wizard, is the physical embodiment of the ecological appropriation and ruin that the novels so greatly oppose. According to Ulstein, although the Ring can be seen as *the* symbol of materialism, “Saruman is the face of industry, modernity, and destruction of nature in *The Lord of The Rings*—perhaps more so than Sauron, who remains a more abstract, albeit ever-present, force of evil” (12). At one time, the wizard referred to as “Saruman the White” was considered virtuous and was intimately connected with the natural world. Treebeard states, “There was a time when he was always walking about my woods . . . I told him many things that he would never have found out by himself; but he never repaid me in like kind” (*Towers* 437). Like humanity’s parasitic-like exploitation of the natural world, Saruman takes from nature without gratitude or reciprocation. Although he has been privy to many secrets by way of a seemingly mutual relationship with the natural world, instead of aligning with or protecting that world, he uses the uncovered wisdom against those from whom it was so trustingly supplied. Thus, Treebeard proclaims that his anger is not solely due to the destruction of the forests, but also to “the treachery of a neighbor, who should have helped us. Wizards ought to know better: they do know better” (*Towers* 485-6).

Once Sauron gains all that he desires from the natural world, he determines the forest to be depleted of value and decides that more can be gained through its destruction than by its

continued existence. Brawley states, “This type of attitude is what leads to an appropriation of nature, a utilitarian mindset in which nature is viewed as property without intrinsic value in and of itself” (113). Exploring Aldo Leopold’s views on purported “nature lovers,” who view nature as a commodity while simultaneously claiming their superior attunement with the natural world, Niiler states, “The problem . . . is one of perception: if land is understood as property, commodity, prize, or ‘trophy,’ it must by extension be damaged in order to be enjoyed” (281). In his patriarchal pursuit of domination, Sauron initiates the destruction of the world of which he covertly seeks control, devastating even the lands surrounding his own home. Campbell states that Saruman “has been corrupted by the allure of power, and as a symbol of industrialized power, pollutes and exploits all natural life around him” (438). Though once trusting of Saruman’s intentions, Treebeard is no longer naïve as to the wizard’s future aspirations, stating that he, “is plotting to become a Power. He has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things, except as far as they can serve him for the moment” (*Towers* 473). This brief statement expresses the narrative’s condemnation of instrumentalist perspectives, as well as of modern industry’s swift and unmitigated destruction of the natural world. Likening Saruman to the cold, mechanistic technologies by which the rapid and total devastation of his beloved land is made possible, Tolkien demotes the wizard from a naturalistic being to that of an automaton, of which greed and corruption have essentially emptied the soul and replaced it with fragments of an artificial origin.

Comparable to the killing of animals purely for sport, Saruman and his Orcs, who once utilized the trees they felled, began chopping them down for sheer enjoyment. This goes beyond a utilitarian mindset or resource exploitation and into the senseless and malicious abuse of the natural world. In *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* Tom Shippey states that Saruman’s

desire, “starts as intellectual curiosity, develops as engineering skill, turns into greed and the desire to dominate, corrupts further into a hatred and contempt of the natural world which goes beyond any rational desire to use it” (171). The loathing that Shippey describes, in which one outwardly looks with disdain upon those considered inferior, is often internally born of jealousy toward the superior forces of which they are recognizably a substandard imitation. Although, at times, domination over the physical world satisfies the hyper-masculine’s need for consistent, tangible evidence of superiority, the creative ability of nature remains a force that humankind continuously strives to equal or surpass. Akin to modern genetic engineers, Saruman usurps the creative potential of nature by mixing Orcs with (possibly) Men in order to create the Urûk-hai. Treebeard contemplates Saruman’s misdeeds, stating that the wizard has done something dangerous to the Orcs, who, having once been consigned to the darkness, have gained the ability to function in the sunlight. However, contrasting the inferiority of the Enemy’s engineered version of biological beings to the power of those originally created by nature, Treebeard states, “Trolls are mighty strong. But trolls are only counterfeits, made by the Enemy . . . in mockery of Ents, as Orcs were of Elves. We are stronger than Trolls. We are made of the bones of the earth” (*Towers* 486). The fact that Sauron is aware of the Ents’ innate power, but unconcernedly assails them regardless, indicates that he relies on the passivity of nature to succeed with his plans and that he, like much of humanity, has overestimated his own abilities. As Saruman separated himself from the natural world long ago—from the “primitive” beings of that which he felt his intelligence and cunning had allowed him to surpass—he does not deem the Ents as an obstacle in his fight—an arrogant notion that is quickly put to rest after his insatiable desire for domination pushes nature too far. Pippin states, “[H]e did not understand them; and he made the

great mistake of leaving them out of his calculations. He had no plans for them, and there was no time to make any, once they had set to work” (*Towers* 567).

Although malevolent, supernatural forces are responsible for the destruction of Middle-earth’s natural world, real world environmental devastation due to industry and human habitation is no less catastrophic simply because their existence is not attributable to magical origins. Additionally, in both cases, it takes the participation of physical beings for such power to advance in the physical world—and the indifference of those who allow it to proceed unchallenged. Logically, the philosophies and lifestyles which allow for environmental sustainability would ultimately benefit the practicing species in the long run. However, the vices of Saruman are also true of real world capitalist societies—that short-term gain (economic or other) overpowers the desire for ecological health and long-term environmental stability. By such standards, every aspect of the natural world is deemed expendable and its exploitation simply a means to an end. Brawley states that the threat that Saruman presents to the Ents and to the Shire (in the form of Sharkey) are one in the same: “[I]t is a threat of appropriation, a sense of ownership or possession of nature, and it is that which dissociates one from a recovery of nature” (116).

2. Further Evidence of a Pro-Ecological Position

Further evidence of Tolkien’s pro-ecological agenda can be found within the condition of habitat as a reflection of the reigning species’ land use practices and philosophies. Campbell discusses the way in which Tolkien associates particular races with specific facets of Middle-earth, stating, “Dwarves with mountains, Hobbits with pastoral countryside, Elves with the woods and trees, and even Orcs with desolate places where nature is under siege” (*Nature* 436). Within these environments, we find the results of the residing species’ ecological priorities, or

lack thereof. As opposed to habitats where preservation or stewardship remain the norm, we find places in which the land is treated as a commodity or abused for the sake of an individual desire for dominance. Campbell states, “Of note . . . is the stark contrast between the shimmering beauty of passages which unfold naturally sustained lands, and the barren harshness and miasma which characterizes Tolkien’s industrialized wastelands” (*Nature* 438). The dwarves dug so deeply in the Mines of Moria that they disturbed an ancient force (and a possible ecological anti-hero) in the form of the Balrog, Mount Doom is depicted as a volatile, inhospitable landscape, not fit for human nor non-human, and the once thriving forest around Isengard was ravaged by an invading presence. Campbell states:

As the corrupted realm of Isengard is revealed to us we see that it mirrors Treebeard’s description of Saruman’s mind: ‘No green things grew there in the latter days of Saruman . . . Iron wheels revolved there endlessly, and hammers thudded. At night plumes of vapour steamed from the vents’. (438)

In pursuit of economic gain, as well as progress for the sake of progress, humanity, like Saruman and the Dwarves, strive for a “richer” existence while simultaneously destroying the world that provides them life. Shippey compares the influence of Saruman to that of real world capitalist persuasion, stating that both rule over their supporters through delusion, “with images of a technological paradise in the future, a modernist Utopia; but what one often gets . . . are the blasted landscapes of Eastern Europe, stripmined, polluted and even radioactive” (171). Habitats that are depicted as not only beautiful but thriving are areas in which species such as Ents and Hobbits are shown to exist in a harmonic union with the natural world, thereby allowing for an overall expansion of life. In “The Unique Representation of Trees in *The Lord of the Rings*,” Cynthia Cohen states, “Tolkien wrote that ‘Lothlórien is beautiful because there the trees [are]

loved,” (Cohen 104). Such comparisons do not suggest that adoration and nurturance by humans are vital to the flourishing of the natural world—on the contrary, a non-interventional approach is often the most beneficial. However, just as the effects of direct or indirect human activity influence the earthly realm, the physical environments of Middle-earth (even those which are protected and loved) are also subject to the injurious treatment of the residing or invading species. Brawley states, “[A]lthough Lothlorien is an earthly paradise, it too is subject to loss and final defeat” (111).

In their respective domains, habitat conditions may not exist solely as an outward portrayal of those who occupy them, but may additionally stand as a manifestation of and a justifiable response to the previous actions toward the natural world. Dickerson and Evans state, “[P]eople are not always friendly toward the environment . . . in response, the environment is not always friendly toward people” (140). Just as mutual relationships provide reciprocal benefits, parasitic associations eventually negatively affect all within the scenario, causing not only the death of the host, but the collapse of the overall system. Such long-term consequences are often overlooked or deemed irrelevant by those who drive such extinctions. Dickerson and Evans assert, “In Middle-earth, as in our world, mistreatment of the natural world results in an environment that is less hospitable to its inhabitants: Man, Hobbit, Dwarf, or Elf” (140). In fostering this perspective, the narrative seeks to establish a verifiable truth—that the earth will eventually reward us in kind.

3. Ecological Summary

Through the amalgamation of awe-inspiring fantastical elements, underlying anthropomorphic traits, and factual biological and ecological realities, non-human nature is portrayed in such way as to fully engage readers through a sense of the numinous, through the

encouragement of a connection with and empathy toward the non-human, and through an inspired engagement with the issues affecting their real world counterparts. Campbell states, “Middle-earth is much more than a backdrop against which a plot is played out: it is awake and sentient. Natural elements and features are given character, agency, and even personality” (440). Providing a voice to the natural world allows readers to psychologically disregard the invented dualities that have historically separated human and non-human nature and to empathize with species that, though biologically dissimilar, are of equal importance to humankind. Reeder asserts that the fantasy genre allows the exploration of, “what it is the environment would say to us if it could. Rather than settle with presence through absence, we can explore the possibilities of voice without the confines of realism to limit who can speak” (119). The result is a narrative in which the reader is not only educated about ecological issues, but is encouraged to take action and fight for—or, more accurately, *with*—the natural world. The fluidity of biological attributes also inspires a potential reexamination of the supposed fixed criteria that define the human species and that which supports the presumed biological inferiority of all others. Iovino states:

[T]he posthuman’s *house* is not only mobile and a bit shambolic, but also operationally open . . . to transformations and revolutions, ready to welcome the natures, matters, and cultural agents that determine the existence of the human and accompany it in its biological and historical adventures. (11-12)

By reversing or discarding the biological hierarchies between the human and non-human, *LOTR* is a wonderful example of a “cultural agent” by which such “transformations and revolutions” are able to occur.

Tolkien portrays as moral all characters whose intentions align with a pro-ecological perspective while depicting those who exploit the natural world (whether human or non-human)

as misguided or morally corrupt. Additionally, the thriving condition of the environments inhabited by species possessing a preservation/conservation mindset versus the blight lands as manifestations of the residing or invading species' patriarchal and capitalistic pursuits (e.g., the commodification of nature, the ecological impacts of industrialization, the quest for dominance and advancement of power) further illustrate Tolkien's anti-industrialist and anti-materialist point of view. As opposed to the instrumentalist position of Saruman, Brawley states, "Tolkien's book is a validation of life itself, a validation of the survival of nature" (302). We see this reflected in the replenishment of the natural landscape around Isengard—"All the stone-circle had been thrown down and removed, and the land within was made into a garden filled with orchards and trees, and a stream ran through it" (*Return* 978)—as well as in a restoration of the Shire that surpasses even its former idyllic and prosperous state. However, in a less than utopian conclusion, *LOTR* reminds the reader that there is never one environmental battle of which a victorious outcome results a permanent ecological solution. Middle-earth and humanity must remain vigilant to the continuous and escalating threats to our natural world and halt them before such forces can alter our realm beyond recognition—or repair. The fundamental ecological philosophy of *LOTR* is that humanity's innate and essential connection with the natural world is of the utmost importance. Regarding Tolkien's assertion that "[O]ne of the primal 'desires' that lie near the heart of Faerie [is] the desire of men to hold communion with other living things" (*On Fairy-Stories* 15), Ulstein states, "Tolkien strengthens the reader's response to this desire by threatening the very communion that has been glorified and fought for throughout the books. Herein clearly lies the groundwork for suggesting a more ecocentric way of thinking" (13).

III. Feminist Concepts

From a narrative that grants the natural world autonomy with an agenda independent of and equally important to that of humankind, to the positive way in which nature and all those who represent and defend it are portrayed, as well as through the vilification of characters who engage in environmental control and degradation, *LOTR* clearly possesses a pro-environmental agenda. What is not so apparent, however, is the novels' stance on feminism. Although novelists possess the ability to create original realms with cultures more progressive than their own, fantasy worlds nevertheless mirror reality. As Middle-earth mimics Medieval Europe in both physical description and a recognized social structure, *LOTR*'s female characters also exist within these predetermined hierarchal constraints. In "The International Relations of Middle-Earth: Learning from *The Lord of the Rings*," Abigail Ruane and Patrick James state:

[G]ender can be understood as a system of symbolic meaning that creates social hierarchies based on perceived associations with masculine and feminine characteristics . . . While gender most plainly institutionalizes inequalities between (dominant) men and (subordinate) women, it also supports inequalities between other groups (e.g., through the feminization of race, class, sexuality, and postcolonial position). (115)

While female characters are limited within this predominantly male adventure story, these characters are nonetheless integral to the narrative. In "Female Authority Figures in the Works of Tolkien, C.S. Lewis Charles Williams," Lisa Hopkins states:

[T]his small number of women have a range of parts to play whose importance is remarkably disproportionate to their numbers. Their very scarcity seems to invest them with an air of uniqueness and of almost talismanic status, and in some cases

their very femininity, seen as such a disadvantage in [C.S.] Lewis, is in Tolkien the very source of their strength. (365)

While Curry admits that *LOTR* would be “seriously impoverished” without its female characters, he asserts that Tolkien’s presentation of women represents a “paternalism if not patriarchy [that is] unmissable” (127). I assert that this patriarchal system is not utilized in order to perpetuate traditional gender norms, but to define the oppressive restraints from which the heroic feminine is able to eventually break free. Hopkins states:

While aspects of Tolkien’s vision of women may still remain within the realms of the conventional, in other ways his treatment of them shows a powerful clarity and novelty, unhampered by that crippling fear of femininity which besets the works of his fellow Inklings. (366)

1. Autonomy and Power in the Feminine

As opposed to traditional works in which the feminine is portrayed as the non-autonomous background against which the masculine performs, Tolkien imbues his female characters with an agenda independent of or in opposition to the males within the narrative. Hopkins states, “The traditional roles for women in epic narratives are very seriously limited: they can normally appear either to be wooed, to be rescued, or occasionally to be killed. In any of these events, their ultimate fate is decided entirely by the men around them” (365). Hopkins asserts, however, that female characters in Tolkien’s work are unique in that they “are not portrayed solely in the light of their relationships to men” (365) and that power “is often to be found in the hands of a woman” (365).

i. Galadriel

Although Galadriel, Elven queen of Lothlorien, is not extensively included in the text, her presence is significant to both the quest and the narrative. Utilizing not only magical abilities, but a superior intellect, emotional intelligence, and the ability to both possess and wield power sans the patriarchal desire for dominance, Galadriel bestows Frodo and the Fellowship with material gifts and spiritual insights that help ensure a successful journey to Mordor and beyond. When the Fellowship first encounters Lady Galadriel, she and her husband, Celeborn, are described as equal in both beauty and stature: “Very tall they were, and the Lady no less tall than the Lord” (*Fellowship* 354). Although, Galadriel remains quiet as Celeborn first welcomes Frodo and his companions to Lothlórien, the narrative specifically addresses the way in which Galadriel’s eyes scrutinize each member of the fellowship, suggesting an as yet unforeseen facet of this character. In “Galadriel and Morgan Le Fey” Susan Carter states:

[T]his rather oblique if not untruthful introduction is in accordance with Tolkien's . . . habit of allowing characters to sidle into the narrative in disguise . . . Galadriel is the Lady partnering her Lord in a royal hall. One might expect that he will wield the political force of the two, although this expectation is undermined immediately. (77-78)

When Celeborn inquires as to whether Gandalf’s absence in Lothlórien is attributable to a change in counsel, it is not the Fellowship that refutes Celeborn’s suggestion, but Galadriel— with knowledge not obtained through second sight, but through quiet observation and deduction. Unlike Celeborn, who hastily condemns Gimli and the greed of the Dwarves for awakening an ancient evil (the Balrog) in the mines of Moria and insinuates Gandalf’s culpability in his own demise, Galadriel observes and contemplates before reacting, enabling her to glean the unspoken

information buried within Aragorn's retelling of events. Galadriel quickly contradicts Celeborn's assertion, stating:

He would be rash indeed that said that thing. Needless were none of the deeds of Gandalf in life. Those that followed him knew not his mind and cannot report his full purpose . . . the followers are blameless. Do not repent of your welcome to the Dwarf. If our folk had been exiled long and far from and Lothlórien, who of the Galadhrim, even Celeborn the Wise, would pass nigh and would not wish to look upon their ancient home . . . ? (*Fellowship* 356)

By employing a sympathetic response to the plight of the Dwarves and to the entire Fellowship, as well as through her unapologetic opposition to Celeborn's assertions, Galadriel strikes a balance between strength and empathy. Hopkins states of Galadriel:

[I]t is sufficiently apparent that she and Celeborn are no conventional husband-and-wife team of the sort that would have been familiar to Tolkien's contemporary readers. She lives with him, but at their first meeting with what survives of the Company it is obvious that she has access to information which he has not, and that they are accustomed to reach decisions separately rather than together. (365)

Further, the dismissive manner in which Galadriel refutes her husband's estimation of events characterizes an atypical version of the medieval era queen who must assuage a male superior in order to assert her opinion or to plead for a change in his. Beyond even an equitable union, Galadriel appears to occupy a fundamentally higher-ranking position than her male counterpart—in both their marriage and in the ruling of Lothlórien. Hopkins states that Galadriel

“far eclipses her husband Celeborn. It is she, not he, who wears the Ring of Power, and who has access to the insight granted by the Mirror, and ultimately she even acts independently . . . when she leaves Middle-earth without him” (365).

From the initial mention of Lothlórien, it is Galadriel for whom the party possesses a respect and trepidation and it is her influence which is felt long before they stand in her presence. Upon their arrival in Cerin Amroth, Sam senses the infusion of this power in the air and earth around him, stating, “I feel as if I was *inside* a song, if you take me meaning” to which Elf, Haldir, responds, “You feel the power of the Lady of the Galadrim” (*Fellowship* 351). However, female power is often suspect in the medieval fantasy genre—especially in those who are magically inclined. Hopkins asserts:

It is notable that she is the only one of the leading characters opposed to Sauron, who suffers from a bad reputation: Boromir is reluctant even to enter Lothlorien, and Éomer is immediately suspicious of Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas on learning of their connection with it. (366)

Carter states, “[W]e get dark hints that her magic contains menace . . . Faramir implies that Galadriel's power to see into Boromir's soul has pushed Boromir towards his death” and that he fears “Galadriel's association with magic and her ability to see so deeply cause fateful changes in mortal men” (72). On the contrary, Galadriel simply illuminates for each individual the intent that lies dormant within their subconscious. Akin to Galadriel's mental and verbal exchanges which appeal to the moral compass of each member of the Company, the material gifts she later bestows to the Fellowship are provided in order to best guide each of them in their personal choices and in their journey, rather than to sway their decisions or to complete the quest for them. Morris states, “Although deities at times interfere in the affairs of sentient beings, they do

not override free will; the heroes always have the option to reject divine counsel” (353).

Although not elevated to the status of the divine, Galadriel’s ethereal existence as both an Elven Queen and as the keeper of Nenya suspends her in an undefined obscurity somewhere between human and goddess. Although she possesses a vested interest in the outcome of the war, her transcendental qualities allow her to unselfishly adopt a noninterventionist approach to the natural unfolding of fate. Unlike Sauron, Galadriel’s unwillingness to influence the Fellowship (indeed, she will not even advise Frodo whether or not to look upon her Mirror) demonstrates her disinclination to dominate the free will of others or to exploit them for personal gain. Instead, she tests the strength of their resolve and encourages moral fortitude in order to guide them toward selfless acts for the greater good, rather than to follow an egocentric course—a choice that Galadriel, herself, will ultimately be required to decide.

Galadriel is keeper to Nenya—one of the three elven rings of power. It not only requires a strong entity to bear such a ring, but a powerful force to wield it. Further, the ring appears to be powered by Galadriel, rather than the other way around. In “The Valkyrie Reflex in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*,” Leslie Donovan states, “Nenya responds to Galadriel’s will by intensifying the Lady’s own inherent light at moments of import” (114). The One Ring, however, cannot be controlled by anyone but Sauron and eventually bends all else who possess it to his will. As an Elf possessing both intellectual and emotional intelligence, Galadriel is entirely aware that the level of power already possessed by the person in custody of the Ring does nothing to lessen the sway of evil, but conversely exacerbates Sauron’s influence over the bearer. At a pivotal moment in the narrative, Frodo offers Galadriel the One Ring. As opposed to the enlightened way in which Tolkien has thus far portrayed Galadriel—as an uncorruptible, angelic being—she is shown to be as equally tempted by the offer as would be any human or non-human

entity, female or male. Donovan states that her longing to accept the Ring is highlighted by Nenia as a beacon of Galadriel's desire, stating, "Galadriel's consideration of Frodo's offer to her of the One Ring, Nenia 'issued a great light that illumined her alone and left all else dark'" (114). Contemplating the offer, Galadriel essentially runs through the inevitable transition were she to accept:

In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!
(*Fellowship* 366)

Carter states, "Galadriel's self-description poetically locates the . . . terrible and lovely nature of control . . . Galadriel briefly invokes this duality with a lyricism that includes aspect of time, cosmology and the foundations of earth" (82) and in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell states, "The Goddess encompasses opposites within herself—also creator / nurturer, giving birth—creator, preserver, destroyer" (115). Hopkins further states that Galadriel is not a "conventional heroine of romance: she is not innocent but experienced, and although she rejects Frodo's offer of the Ring, she is astute enough to be able to perceive its superficial attractiveness" (365-366). Knowing that the age of magic is coming to an end and that without such power she and her people will either willingly depart or eventually fade from Middle-earth, Galadriel nonetheless refuses the nearly irresistible draw of the Ring, recognizing the destruction that would come from merging Sauron's power with her own. Upon her refusal, Galadriel states, "I pass the test . . . I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel" (*Fellowship* 366). In "Two Faces of Eve," Peter Damien Goselin states that evidence of Galadriel's

compassion can be found “in all that she has done to forestall and defeat Sauron—not to benefit herself (indeed, the magic ring *Nenya* which she wears will be destroyed in Sauron's defeat) but to aid all of Middle-earth” (4). However, this is not the self-sacrificing martyr quality often assigned to women, nor is it an anti-feminist way of alluding to the idea that a woman should not hold such power—quite the opposite. Like Gandalf, Galadriel understands that the power of the Ring cannot be wielded by any living being other than the one who created it (i.e., Sauron). Therefore, accepting the ring—whether out of greed for power or a noble desire for world preservation—would have ultimately culminated in the annihilation of Middle-earth, as well as the surrender of both her power and her autonomy (as it is for all who bind themselves to Sauron). Roberts states, “Galadriel’s choice is not styled in terms of giving up masculine social roles and assuming feminine ones. It is, rather, an existential crisis that has been averted; Galadriel, by resisting temptation, is able to remain Galadriel” (481). It is due to her human-like, egocentric longing that her ultimate decision is significant and worthy of comparison with the decisions of male characters subjected to the same enticement.

As is often observed in real world patriarchal society, males within the narrative find comfort in the stereotypic idea of the feminine (e.g., exhibiting attributes such as beauty and beneficence), while finding unconventional aspects within the feminine (e.g., such as extreme power and intelligence) to be wholly unsettling—even when balanced with traditionally feminine characteristics. This prejudice is true even of those by whom Galadriel is loved and with whom she is personally acquainted. Carter asserts:

Sam Gamgee, a trenchant analyst, vocalizes suspicion of Galadriel, locating her threat in her strength: “But perhaps you could call her perilous, because she’s so

strong in herself. You, you could dash yourself to pieces on her, like a ship on a rock". (77)

One male who seems to endorse such strength within the feminine is, of course, Tolkien, who balances Galadriel's conventional characteristics with those that disrupt tradition. By doing so, Tolkien allows Galadriel to ultimately subvert the one-dimensional female character typical to the fantasy genre, which is reduced to either the passive "Angel in the House" who aids a male hero through her quiet benevolence, or the immoral temptress whose atypical strength and magical power is attributed to unnatural origins and who must, therefore, constitute an existential threat to the virtuous hero. In resisting the Ring's illusory power, even at great cost to herself and her people, Galadriel exhibits greater intellectual wisdom, emotional resolve, and heroic abilities than many of the masculine characters (e.g. Isildur, Boromir, etc.) who surrender to their greed and overestimate their ability to control (or dominate) the Ring. Rather than a feminine weakness, Galadriel's selfless compassion for the natural world and her empathy for the "other" is portrayed as a strength (signified in female and male characters throughout the novels). Combined, these aspects paint Galadriel as one of the most significant, virtuous, and heroic characters in the narrative. Carter states that Galadriel's character is carefully constructed so that:

[O]nly at the end of the story might the reader return to reconsider her role as more central than seems on first reading . . . only upon reflection, we might wonder how much of the action was her responsibility, and to what extent did she, even more than Gandalf, hold pre-knowledge of the epic events, and exert goddess-like influence. (76)

ii. Shelob

Due to the artistry and skill in their inherent weaving abilities, spiders are often cultural symbols of femininity and creativity, as well as of metamorphosis, spiritual growth, and the supernatural. In “Of Spiders and Elves,” Joyce Tally Lionarons states, “Both spinning and weaving are, of course, traditional occupations of women, and in Indo-European mythology, both are associated with magic, fate, and death” (8). In *LOTR*, these abilities are quite literally found in the spideresque creature of Shelob. Although Galadriel is also associated with weaving (e.g., spells, garments, etc.), Shelob essentially represents her polar opposite— whereas Galadriel uses her abilities to create that which generates light and life, Shelob utilizes her powers to extinguish them. Representing the antithesis of creation—contrary to the creative ability normally attributed to the feminine—Shelob possesses the power of death and destruction normally attributed to the male. Tolkien states, “[W]eaving webs of shadow; for all living things were her food, and her vomit darkness” (*Towers* 723). In the absence of all earthly light, Shelob not only exists in the shadows, but is described as essentially *producing* darkness, so much so that even Galadriel’s Phial proves ineffective. Tolkien describes the sensations of the Hobbits as they enter the blackness that she occupies:

Not since the lightless passages of Moria had Frodo or Sam known such darkness, and is possible here it was deeper and denser . . . They walked as it were in a black vapor wrought of veritable darkness itself that, as it was breathed, brought blindness not only to the eyes but to the mind, so that even the memory of colors and forms and of any light faded out of thought, Night always had been and always would be, and night was all. (*Towers* 717-718)

Although Shelob is associated with female sexuality and has said to have spawned many offspring, there is an emptiness to her method of reproduction just as there is in her mindless

appetite, (e.g., she has nothing to do with her broods until she eventually breeds with—then consumes—her male offspring). Although such comparisons may lend credence to Descartes' 'bête machine' theory of the non-human animal, this characterization seems to be more attributable to the monsterization of the feminine rather than the automaton concept of nature. In "Battling the Woman Warrior: Females and Combat in Tolkien and Lewis," Candice Frederick and Sam McBride refer to Shelob as "a bloated symbol of female lust" (141). The life and death struggle between Shelob and Samwise Gamgee has long been considered to possess sexual overtones, with some critics more extreme in their analysis than others. In her article, "No Sex Please—We're Hobbits," Brenda Partridge assigns a sexual characteristic to nearly every facet of the back and forth struggle and asserts that the scene symbolically represents Tolkien's fear of female sexuality (191). However, while Daniel Timmons in "Hobbit Sex and Sensuality in *The Lord of the Rings*" agrees with the sexual innuendos inherent within this scene, he argues that critics such as Partridge "ignore or neglect the clear difference between 'sex,' that is, carnal desire and intercourse, and 'sensuality,' physical attraction linked with psychological bonding" (70). In this way, one can infer that Tolkien does not fear female sexuality as much as he compares purely detached physical desire (in both sexes) with death and destruction, rather than the life-giving, creative abilities of sexual relationships born of romantic love and a spiritual connection. Rawls explains that the sexual activity of women supposedly liberated from male control in most fantasy and science fiction simply mimics the often sexually exploitative viewpoint of the masculine and, "has taken on some of the worst aspects of our macho male characters: unrelated to bonding or procreation, and exploitative, serial and random" (13). In this way, Tolkien may have been insinuating that such behavior does not make the feminine powerful, just as extreme violence in women does not make them strong—they are simply adhering to

(toxic) masculine philosophies regarding sex and power—characteristics which Tolkien appears to find unfavorable in both sexes.

Shelob is a powerful creature whose reputation (if not description and name) is known far and wide. Faramir states that, although he does not know for certain what evil resides in Cirith Ungol, “There is some dark terror that dwells in the passes above Minas Morgul. If Cirith Ungol is named, old men and masters of lore will blanch and fall silent . . . It is a place of sleepless malice, full of lidless eyes” (*Towers* 693). However, the issue with existing as a vessel for such power is that it necessitates an outlet for expression (more than simply biological reproduction), or the entity possessing such potential risks stagnation and decay. As Shelob chooses not to expand her dominion into the outer world, forever dwelling in her lair in Cirith Ungol, she increasingly focuses her power within, existing only for herself. In “The Valkyrie Reflex in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*,” Leslie Donovan states that while Galadriel “interacts extensively with her community of Lothlórien and serves as a responsible leader of her people, Shelob operates in isolation, devoid of community, ‘unabated in malice’” (119). Turning evermore inward, Shelob’s extreme self-centeredness erodes her inner being so completely that nothing can fill the void of the emptiness that she has created and her voracious hunger can never be satisfied. Donovan continues, “Her insatiable desire to continue her monstrous existence is . . . ‘the embodiment of the primordial desire for survival’” (119). However, Shelob’s hunger is shown to far surpass that which is required for the maintenance of existence. To a certain extent, she is even more isolated than Saruman or Sauron, who, though apathetic to the welfare of others, do, in fact, extend their aspirations outward, using their will to gain allies and raise armies, to conquer kingdoms, and to geographically extend their empire. Shelob could never accomplish this, as her aspirations do not extend farther than her own hunger—aside from

possibly utilizing Gollum to lure others, she simply consumes all those with whom she comes into contact. In this way, Shelob represents a polar opposite to the self-sacrificing characteristics often ascribed to the morally virtuous feminine, surpassing the egocentrism associated with even the most powerful of *LOTR*'s male villains. However, one could conversely assert that the magnitude of Shelob's malevolence is considerably less, as she does not seek to extend her influence beyond her strictly defined parameters, nor to conquer others (except for the unfortunate souls that wander into her lair). Shelob displays autonomy and a strength independent from the patriarchal competition for dominance. Even Sauron is of no concern to her. Tolkien states:

And as for Sauron: he knew where she lurked. It pleased him that she should dwell there hungry but unabated in malice, a more sure watch upon that ancient path into his land than any other that his skill could have devised . . . And sometimes as a man may cast a dainty to his cat (*his cat* he calls her, but she owns him not) Sauron would send her prisoners that he had no better uses for. (*Towers* 724)

This passage implies that, although Sauron was pleased by her existence, (as she was, inadvertently, an asset to him), he was essentially a non-entity in her eyes and she had no active part in the relationship—she did nothing for his sake and was not thankful for anything that he provided.

Critics often equate Shelob's stagnant position with extreme self-centeredness. Rawls states that "Shelob is what happens when the feminine concern with the individual and the inner life is taken to its extreme" (6). Although it is reasonable to assume that, by linking Shelob's excessive self-absorption to the repulsiveness of her character (illustrated in her physical and

psychological characteristics), Tolkien is allocating for the feminine adherence to the self-sacrificing qualities encouraged within a patriarchal system, the author appears to consider selflessness for the greater good an admirable quality in *both* sexes. Therefore, equivalent to Tolkien's condemnation of the outward broadening of dominance exhibited by the traditional male, Shelob may be an allegory for the stagnation and inwardly spiraling dissociation from the surrounding world that can be born of the severe—and socially learned—inaction of the feminine, (e.g., passively waiting upon outside persons or circumstances). The stagnation of Shelob's life is reflected in even the air that surrounds Cirith Ungol: "[T]he air was still, stagnant, heavy, and sound fell dead" (*Towers* 718). Roberts states, that "the black widow" effect produced by Shelob's consumption of her mates—or, essentially, of the *male*—is not only used to evoke fear in the male, but to also:

[R]eduplicate precisely the claustrophobic passivity of Shelob's evil. She breeds with herself, eats her own mates who are also her own offspring, and has no care for the outside world. This monstrous passivity, in other words, is death; the solipsistic death that swallows up all life. (477)

Tolkien states of Shelob:

Little she knew of or cared for towers, or rings, or anything devised by mind or hand, who only desired death for all others, mind and body, and for herself a glut of life, alone, swollen till the mountains could no longer hold her up and the darkness could not contain her. (*Towers* 723-724)

However, like the mortal, Arachne, whose hubris in her abilities and indifference to the concern of others angered the gods (Athena), Shelob's short sightedness and apathetic consideration to

the world around her leads to her eventual downfall, when she succumbs to death at the hands of a least threatening entity—a Hobbit. Although she is technically slain by a male character, the blame for Shelob’s death is essentially Shelob, herself. Tolkien states, “[A]nd so Shelob, with the driving force of her own cruel will, with strength greater than any warrior’s hand, thrust herself upon a bitter spike” (*Towers* 729). Further, Sam is essentially a form of non-human nature possessing qualities that oppose the traditionally domineering masculine, as well as an example of the innate moral goodness and respect for life that is encouraged within the narrative—contrary to everything that Shelob represents. Goselin states:

[T]he role of Galadriel and Shelob in Tolkien's mythology is to illuminate the two poles of the female principle . . . Galadriel and Shelob are the extremes in the wide spectrum of Spirit and Flesh, Selflessness and Selfishness, and Good and Evil. While one beckons us on to self-knowledge and Life, the other uses our own desires to lead us onto the first slippery and steep steps to a personal Death and Hell. (4)

Illustrating the stereotypical extremes that have long plagued the feminine reduces women to the benevolent angel (Madonna) or the malicious temptress (whore). However, this is not done in *LOTR*. Although negative clichéd characteristics of the feminine can be perceived in Shelob’s nature—such as the aggressive trapping of the masculine by female wiles, the extreme passivity in her unexpansive nature, as well as the indolent patience in idly awaiting for circumstances to happen upon her (i.e., the chance appearance of prey)—she also exhibits cunning and autonomy in her solitary lifestyle and an extreme self-confidence in her creative abilities (i.e., the weaving of webs to capture the sustenance required for her survival). Although Shelob is not the only female character capable of great destruction—In “Fear and Horror,” Jessica Burke argues that

Galadriel “is not above pride, anger, or the will to destroy” (23)—she *is* the only one who thwarts the self-sacrificing nature often imposed upon the female.

iii. Éowyn

LOTR's most important feminist character is arguably Éowyn—shieldmaiden of Rohan. Éowyn was born to Éomund of Eastfold and Théodwen—sister to King Théoden of Rohan. After losing both parents as children, Éowyn and her older brother, Éomer, are taken in by Théoden and raised (along with his son, Théodren) as his own. Although raised to fulfill the role of the genteel noblewoman, Éowyn has also been instructed as a shield-maiden—trained in physical battle in order to defend and protect her people. She is, therefore, not the manner of woman to sit idly by while she and her people are slaughtered or imprisoned by the enemy and does not feel it reasonable to burden others with her salvation when she possesses both the will and the ability to defend herself. Although Éowyn takes seriously her familial and societal obligations, she considers the passive servitude within Middle-earth's hierarchal society to be void of purpose. She increasingly yearns for the freedom and choices unavailable to her gender at the time and physically and psychologically prepares herself for the coming of such a day. Once Éowyn is relieved of the role as Théoden's caretaker, her domestic duties become especially unfulfilling and, as Sauron's evil moves across the land, she becomes increasingly aware that a separate set of skills could best be used elsewhere. Her strength and determination appear to be rewarded when, with most of the male Rohirrim riding to war, she is nominated to rule Rohan in Théoden's stead. In regard to Éowyn, Donovan asserts that her:

[P]ersonal courage, martial skill, innate virtue, and noble genealogy make her a suitable leader of the Rohirrim, illustrating that in Tolkien's world other factors

‘are often more important than gender in legitimizing female political power’.
(122)

Hama furthers a feminist opinion on leadership by reminding Théoden that men are not the last of the House of Eorl and by proposing that Éowyn lead the Rohirrim in their absence, asserting, “She is fearless and highhearted. All love her. Let her be as lord to the Eorlingas, while we are gone” (*Towers* 523). Théoden instantly agrees with Hama’s appeal, proclaims Éowyn Rohan’s ruler in his stead, and bequeaths her with tools of combat in the form of a sword and corslet.

Donovan states:

Éowyn’s female identity does not preclude her from wielding power, regardless of whether Tolkien presents her character gendered as a courtly princess or as an armored warrior. Gifts suitable for a warrior rather than a courtly woman, Éowyn’s arms are awarded to her by her king. (122)

However, while the appointment of interim ruler and the bestowment of tools of combat were not intentional conciliations on the part of Théoden, these acts are merely symbolic, as the offering (and assumed acceptance) of the position thwarts Éowyn’s efforts to participate in battle and ensures that she will, once again, remain on domestic duty far from war, where the bestowed materials of battle will hopefully serve no purpose.

Éowyn is not satisfied with the honor that accompanies an empty title, as she is fully aware that this temporary position will eventually (if the war is won) result in a familiar stagnation of life. The situation is akin to the international experience of women in World War II, who assumed career positions left vacant by the fighting men, and were not only less valued in their jobs than their male counterparts (earning only half the pay, etc.), but who would

ultimately prove expendable in the male-centric capitalist system. Upon the return of the male soldiers, despite the often superior job capabilities exhibited by the female, the workers were forced to relinquish their positions. These women lamented the sudden loss of purpose and sense of identity associated with a position outside the domestic sphere, as well as the independence that arose from earning an income. Like these women, Éowyn—who is permitted to fulfill an interim position due only to Rohan's lack of males within the House of Eorl and expected to surrender the position and the little freedom it provides upon the return of the king or a male heir—is essentially a pawn who is moved into and out of positions according to the desires of the patriarchy. Therefore, her new position does not dissuade Éowyn from pursuing a fate for which she has specifically trained and always aspired.

As Éowyn is prohibited from riding with the Rohirrim, she pleads with Aragorn to allow her to accompany him along the Paths of The Dead. This spark of hope is quickly extinguished, however, when Aragorn denies her request and leaves her with no possibility of return. Although Aragorn may not be outwardly prejudiced against women or doubtful of their abilities in battle, his reasons for denying Éowyn are consciously and subconsciously rooted in patriarchal rules and concepts. Aragorn suggests that Éowyn's disdain for her domestic role is due to its lack of accolades and proclaims that dying a hero in battle when there are none to remember such deeds can also be construed as meaningless, though it is nonetheless significant. However, Éowyn deciphers the meaning behind his rationalizations, which echo patriarchal sentiment regarding the manner of one's sacrifice being gender-dependent. Further, Aragorn declares that Éowyn has no place on the journey and that he would not wish for her life to be cast away on such a needless errand (echoing her sentiments toward his mission), implying that Éowyn undertakes the task rashly and with trivial motives. This is not only a comment on the stereotypical

irrationality of women, but is also a hypocritical statement, as he allows his two male companions, Legolas and Gimli, to follow him on this “fool’s errand” for no other reason than their company, as their fighting skills would be useless against the Dead Men of Dunharrow. However, Aragorn frames his most important argument around a common theme in *LOTR*—duty versus personal desire. Aragorn advises Éowyn that, just as his duty is to protect Middle-earth from Sauron’s armies rather than to follow his heart and remain in Rivendell, she, too, has a prior commitment to fulfill and that her duty is with her people. Éowyn argues:

Too often I have heard of duty . . . But am I not of the House of Eorl, a shieldmaiden and not a dry-nurse? I have waited on faltering feet long enough. Since they falter no longer, it seems, may I not spend my life as I will? (*Return* 784)

Aragorn then reminds her that the position of interim leader of Rohan is something that she freely accepted and that anyone who had done so would also be restricted from following their own agenda. However, the two situations are dissimilar, as in Aragorn’s case, male privilege allows for options. Just as Éowyn acted as caretaker to Théoden when it was required—a role which she did not choose but was naturally expected to assume—her appointment to temporarily lead her people was also not an option, but rather a role that she was essentially given no alternative but to accept. Éowyn—elucidating that women are never given a choice, but are simply assigned various duties depending on what patriarchal society requires from them at a particular time—states:

Shall I always be chosen . . . 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 . . . All your words are but to say: you are a woman, and your part is in the house. But when the men have died in battle and honour, you have leave to be burned in the house, for the men will need it no more. But I am the house of Eorl and not a serving woman. I can ride and wield blade, and I do not fear either pain or death. (*Return* 784)

The only thing which admittedly causes Éowyn fear is: “A cage . . . To stay behind bars, until use and old age accept them, and a chance of doing great deeds is gone beyond recall or desire” (*Return* 784). Finally, Aragorn states that, although he does deny her request, it is essentially not his decision—and he clarifies that nor is it hers: “For that I could not grant without leave of the king and of your brother” (*Return* 785). Based on adherence to patriarchal convention, Aragorn ultimately ranks the consent of male family members above Éowyn’s desires regarding her own life.

When Aragorn leaves for the Paths of the Dead, Éowyn falls into despair. Because her psychological motivations are buried within the narrative—concealed to even Éowyn, herself—it is certainly plausible for critics to assign unrequited love as the cause of her sorrow. This is particularly true given Éowyn’s protestations as to why Legolas and Gimli choose to follow Aragorn to certain death, asserting: “They go only because they will not be parted from thee — because they love thee” (*Return* 785). Éomer alleges the same when he explains that his sister’s descending gloom had taken hold so slowly that even he was unable to detect it—until he saw her shadow lift when she looked upon Aragorn. However, I suggest that Éowyn’s depression is attributable to other reasons altogether. First, I assert that Aragorn is essentially a symbol—a representation of Éowyn’s personal and societal aspirations. Donovan states, “In Aragorn, Éowyn recognizes the heroic potential to revive the health of her failing self and people” (126).

The idea that Éowyn possesses feelings *about* rather than *for* him is not lost on Aragorn, who later reveals to Éomer, “I say to you that she loves you more truly than me; for you she loves and knows; but in me she loves only a shadow and a thought: a hope of glory and great deeds, and lands far from the fields of Rohan” (*Return* 867). Secondly, as Middle-earth faces probable annihilation and as Éowyn is not permitted to ride into battle with the Rohirrim, she considers Aragorn’s mission her last opportunity to fulfill her purpose as shield-maiden and to fight freely or die trying. Although it is appropriate to assert that Éowyn suffers from a “broken heart,” her despair is not equivalent to the romantic notion of mental psychosis due to the loss of a love interest, but rather to a dark melancholy caused by a perceived betrayal and a sudden and complete removal of hope.

Éowyn eventually comes to the realization that requesting permission to fulfill her destiny within a male-centric culture is not only an implausible prospect but is essentially a contradiction to that which she truly desires—autonomy in deciding her fate. Additionally, just as she would not steer Aragorn away from peril, but toward a position in which his sacrifice would reap the greatest reward, she, too, wishes to lend her skill to a cause in which it would be of the most benefit—in battle. Donovan asserts that Éowyn’s heroic attributes have been foreshadowed throughout the narrative:

Éowyn has not only been trained for battle but also has martial abilities equal to those of the most heroic men . . . By showing Éowyn armed for battle several times in his text, Tolkien insists on her martial abilities as a major facet of her character’s identity . . . founded on the fact that she is ‘a shieldmaiden’ (121).

As Éowyn will not passively accept a fate in which she has no hand, she ultimately defies the patriarchy, transgressing conventions of both family and society, by disguising herself as a male

soldier by the name of Dernhelm and accompanying Théoden's army to the Battle of the Pelennor Fields. Frederick and McBride suggest sexist motivations behind this development, stating:

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. (35)

However, though Éowyn's gender concealment could be interpreted as an attempt to circumvent the patriarchy rather than to challenge it directly, there are both practical and narrative reasons for this. Éowyn must hide her identity—not simply as a woman, but as the Lady of Rohan—for the simple reason that Théoden forbade her from participating in the battle. As patriarchal feudality is the system governing Middle-earth, had Éowyn been detected, no amount of combat skill, intellectual ability, or demonstration of will would have prevented her physical removal. Historically, the barring of women in battle would have adhered to patriarchal rules governing the medieval period in Europe, with a real world example found in the story of Joan of Arc, who assumed a male identity in order to fight for France. More significantly, however, this is a major aspect of Éowyn's narrative journey—not only to enter into battle with the courage typically ascribed to the male, but to break patriarchal norms in order to do so. Donovan compares Éowyn to the female Valkyries of Norse mythology, who “participate in ambiguous definitions of their gender roles, which reject traditional binary definitions of gender” (121) stating:

Although Théoden and Aragorn attempt to thwart her desire to engage in physical battle, Éowyn fulfills this desire by clothing herself as Dernhelm, an act of her own volition and determination. As she whispers in Merry's ear, "Where will wants not, a way opens". (123)

By actively seizing the opportunity for herself, rather than passively awaiting or accepting patriarchal permission to join the battle, Éowyn achieves autonomy in deciding her fate—charting her future path and fulfilling a mission that no male warrior could ever achieve. At the battle of Pelennor Fields and with little hope of success, Éowyn challenges the Witch-King of Angmar. In "Finding Woman's Role in *The Lord of the Rings*," Melissa McCrory Hatcher states that the Ringwraith "flings his black mace on Éowyn, which can be seen as one last attempt to keep her in her place" (50). He then proceeds to belittle Dernhelm's (Éowyn's) efforts, stating "Thou fool. No living man may hinder me" (841). Before plunging her sword into the Nazgul and fulfilling a 1,000-year-old prophecy foretelling that the Witch-king would not fall by the hand of man, Éowyn removes her helmet, laughs, and reveals, "No living man am I! You look upon a woman!" (*Return* 841).

As Éowyn's actions were performed to protect Théoden from the Nazgul and his steed, the act could be interpreted as a defensive maneuver often associated with the feminine, rather than an offensive tactic commonly ascribed to the masculine. However, by reducing Éowyn's achievement to no more than the maternal response associated with the feminine, it deliberately attempts to diminish her courageous act as an innate and, therefore, involuntary reaction, rather than as an active, intentional response. Rawls explains, "Most of the weak or wicked feminines . . . are powerless to initiate any deed, much less halt an evil act" (9). Éowyn's direct challenge to the Wraith, therefore, cannot be viewed as a passive and ineffectual response. Moreover,

supposing that Éowyn's motivation *is* simply the defense of a family member, the deprecation of actions born of love rather than of duty is a patriarchal means of diminishing the emotional power assigned to the feminine and aggrandizing the detached mentality attributed to the male. In all likelihood, however, both aspects equally influence and strengthen Éowyn's motivations. Rawls states, "[O]n the battlefield, it is love, a feminine attribute which motivates her and gives her the power to act . . . an interplay of feminine and masculine attributes" (10). While it is common for many characters in *LOTR* to choose between love and duty, Éowyn essentially chooses both. A pro-feminist message is produced by not only allowing a female character to perform this heroic act, but by permitting her actions to ultimately prove effective and beneficial for both herself and for the overall community. Unlike Joan of Arc, who was tried for heresy and burned at the stake for essentially challenging conventional gender norms, Éowyn's act of rebellion not only results in a consequential victory, but is met with praise and presented with historical remembrance: "In that day, Éowyn also won renown, for she fought in that battle, riding in disguise; and was known after in the Mark as the Lady of the Shield-Arm" (*Return* 1070). Such recognition is quite significant to male-centric culture and is, therefore, perceived as an achievement within the narrative. This is an atypical storyline in traditional literary novels, where the rebellious acts of nonconforming women often culminate in "justifiably" disastrous ends.

Within the Houses of Healing, Aragorn discusses the grave injuries that Éowyn's body sustained from her battle with the Nazgul. Although Aragorn explains that she was "pitted against a foe beyond the strength of her mind or body", he then goes on to state, "[T]hose who will take a weapon to such an enemy must be sterner than steel, if the very shock shall not destroy him" (*Return* 866). As Éowyn did *not* perish instantly from such an ordeal, she *was*, in

effect, mentally and physically prepared for such a battle. Moreover, as brute force or mental strength, alone, could not have defeated this foe, Éowyn's power perhaps lies within the merging of the normally warring aspects of her persona, fortifying her in such a way that she was able to survive an experience that would have annihilated any other. Aragorn assesses her injuries, stating, "The arm that was broken has been tended with due skill, and it will mend in time, if she has the strength to live. It is the shield arm that is maimed; but the chief evil comes through the sword-arm. In that there now seems no life, although it is unbroken" (*Return* 866). This may symbolize that, although she will never lose the ability to defensively protect herself or those she loves, her previous fixation on combat, alone, no longer exists. In order to physically survive, now, she needs to balance her inner self—an issue that began many years before.

As Wormtongue possessed knowledge of Éowyn's aspirations and anxieties, he previously twisted her gender constraints like a vise, forcing the pendulum to swing too far in one direction and causing her to perceive traditionally feminine responsibility as nothing more than the gradually constricting walls of a prison cell. However, the seeds of this predicament had been sewn long before Wormtongue's deceit. While she languishes before them in the Houses of Healing, Aragorn, Éomer, and Gandalf discuss the origin of Éowyn's long-established darkness. As the realization dawns upon Éomer that the onset of his sister's melancholy arose long before the introduction of Wormtongue's manipulations, and Aragorn asserts that such intense emotional gravity likely required a significantly earlier inception, Gandalf clarifies the source of her despair. He reveals that the qualities seemingly inherent to the male members of the Rohirrim were equally shared by—but their expression denied to—Éowyn. He states, "My friend . . . you had horses, and the deeds of arms, and the free fields; but she, born in the body of a maid, had a spirit and courage at least the match of yours" (*Return* 867). The phrasing employed here is

significant. Gandalf does not state “*as a maid*”, but rather “*born in the body of a maid*”, asserting that, though societal norms may dictate one’s freedoms on the basis of sex, the spirit is not bound by gender. Furthermore, stating that Éowyn had *at least* the match of Éomer’s “spirit and courage” essentially implies that that her bravery and determination surpass even that of her brother, the Captain of Rohan’s Army, (while still framing it in such a way as to not detract from Éomer’s achievements). Gandalf also explains that Wormtongue’s influence would have simply exacerbated these unresolved issues and that his insults would have echoed Saruman’s sentiments regarding their house: “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?” (*Return* 867). This would have incited within Éowyn the need to restore her family’s glory, as much as it would any male member of her house—yet her desires were refused expression simply because she was a woman. The lifelong stifling of passion and freedom had taken its toll and, along with Wormtongue’s provocations, enflamed within Éowyn an extreme determination to thwart anything resembling her gender allocated role.

It is not only women who possess a biased mentality in the novels, however. The Master Warden in the Houses of Healing (a notable example of non-gender stereotyping), expresses his confusion regarding the qualities of warrior and healer co-existing within the same person of Aragorn: “A great lord is that, and a healer, and it is a thing passing strange to me that the healing hand should also wield the sword” (*Return* 958). Éowyn informs him that a combination of these qualities is required in a world at war: “And those who have not swords can still die upon them. Would you have the folk of Gondor gather you herbs only, when the Dark Lord gathers armies?” (*Return* 958-959). Both qualities exist within Éowyn, just as they do in Aragorn, the only difference being that due to Éowyn’s forced restraint in revealing her warrior

side (unlike Aragorn's freedom to exhibit both), she overcompensates by aspiring to demonstrate *only* her long-suppressed traits. Her psyche up until this point has been completely engrossed in expressing the aggressive aspects of self which are no longer required. Therefore, at this juncture it is unclear whether or not Éowyn will survive her injuries, as in order to mend her body she must first heal her mind by balancing the destructive masculine characteristics of her persona with her long-denied creative feminine aspects of self—essentially incorporating the energy of both the sword and the healer. In "Tolkien: Archetype and Word," Patrick Grant states that in *LOTR*, "the inner drama corresponds also with . . . the psychic process Jung calls 'individuation' . . . 'the realization of the whole man' achieved in a balanced and fulfilled life when consciousness and the unconscious are linked together in living relation" (168).

Éowyn's balance is eventually restored due to the influence of Faramir of Gondor, as he arouses Éowyn's long-suppressed loving and nurturing aspects. More of a gentle soul than a warrior, Faramir reflects back to Éowyn the tender and creative aspects of herself. During their time in the Houses of Healing, Faramir is able to empathize with Éowyn's domestic and societal plight. In "Tolkien's Females and the Defining of Power," Nancy Enright states:

Both wounded in the battle with the Nazgul, they have also been wounded by a culture that has devalued them, Éowyn . . . because she is a woman and Faramir because he is not the 'typical' warrior his brother Boromir was. Both need to understand that skill in battle, though they have it to a high degree, is not enough for peace and wholeness. Together, they must find healing. (104-105).

Donovan further states:

Until she meets Faramir, Éowyn's individual and cultural needs are confused; she wants to engage in physical combat, but she also desires Aragorn because of the hope he has inspired in her and her people. Although both needs are aspects of the same desire made manifest in different forms of her awareness, her dual nature wars against itself . . . Faramir loves the public and private aspects of Éowyn's identity, thereby enabling a resolution between her individual and cultural needs . . . with her marriage to Faramir, she commits her public and private selves to a union that satisfies both aspects of her nature. (126)

Faramir empathizes and falls in love with all aspects of Éowyn's persona and reveals to her something that, due to years of habitual yearning, she fails to realize, herself—that she had already accomplished what she had long strived to achieve: “For you are a lady high and valiant and have yourself won renown that shall not be forgotten” (*Return* 964). In “Women and the Inklings,” Fredrick and McBride denounce Éowyn's sudden transformation stating, “Éowyn's healing is a victory, not only for Faramir but for their civilization; an unruly impulse to transcend prescribed gender roles has been successfully thwarted” (113). However, this analysis not only suggests that notions of joy and freedom are assigned according to (or in spite of) gender, but also fails to take into account the healing of Faramir due to Éowyn's influence and the equitable relationship that develops between them. As opposed to other fictional romantic relationships that are described in more abstract form, there is an exploration of the psychological component that is key in the formation of the relationship between Éowyn and Faramir, as well as within Éowyn's transformation. McCrory Hatcher states:

The love of Faramir and Éowyn is not Courtly Love . . . because Éowyn takes an active role in the relationship. Faramir and Éowyn can be seen as more of a

modern ideal for marriage, the uniting of equal life partners . . . the love story and subsequent ‘healing’ process of Éowyn should be seen as an independent woman’s self-willed transformation. (52)

Roberts further states:

‘Where will wants not, a way opens,’ says Éowyn; and it is a sentiment that resonates in the largest sense through the whole novel. This then is the light in which we are invited to read her change of heart with respect to Faramir: her love for Aragorn had been an act of will. The change in her, from winter to summer, could perhaps be described as the motion of grace within her; and central to that motion is the subsuming of individual agency into something larger. (481)

Although Éowyn is still consigned to patriarchal rule and patrilineal inheritance at the end of the narrative, (i.e., Éomer’s rise to King of Rohan and Éowyn’s chosen relocation to Ithilien), this does not detract from her well-established autonomy. Donovan asserts that Éowyn’s decision to live in Ithilien with Faramir, “is not a rejection but an extension of Rohan . . . Éowyn’s future suggests her ruling side by side with Faramir through her personal volition and with cultural purpose, each individual completing the other. (127)

Just as feeding an addiction is not the equivalent of exercising one’s free will, Éowyn’s obsessive need to live life solely as a warrior had long-controlled and fractured her being. It is only in overcoming this addiction—by balancing her warring, destructive tendencies with her healing, creative nature—that she frees herself from the veiled cage that has thus far kept her confined. In “The Feminine Principle in Tolkien,” Rawls states that Éowyn, “[I]s no longer driven to rash acts, nor will she be consumed” (10). The freedom from the constraints that limit

the potential in both the feminine and the masculine is what ultimately allows for Éowyn to take the decisive actions that assist in charting a future for Middle-earth, as well as for her herself. In this way, Éowyn is a co-creator of her reality and the heroine of her own story.

2. Further Evidence of a Pro-Feminine Position

One of the strongest arguments in support of an anti-feminist analysis of *LOTR* is that, although female characters exhibit tremendous power and independence throughout the novels, by the conclusion of the tale, these characters relinquish their autonomy and the very structures that constitute their powerful personas, ultimately surrendering to a way of life consistent with traditional feminine norms. Such criticism, however, is essentially born of a misunderstanding regarding feminism, promoted through a radical feminist perspective. Frederick and McBride analyze Éowyn's renouncement of warrior tendencies (associated with the masculine) and newfound inclination toward the nurturing of life (associated with the feminine) stating, "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" (36). As characteristics of the masculine are often viewed through a patriarchal lens as more aggressive and, therefore, more potent than the feminine, masculine energy is perceived to overpower the feminine perspective within the psyche of female characters, effectively quashing the attributes normally associated with the feminine and abolishing all likelihood of maintaining the feminine/masculine dynamic in equilibrium. The patriarchally-informed perspective that is the basis of Frederick and McBride's analysis essentially implies that Tolkien considers females incapable of incorporating both the feminine and masculine aspects of self, resulting in their adherence to one extreme or the other. However, in an attempt to point out the anti-feminist sentiment in the novels, such critics (whose opinions may gravitate toward or wholly oppose patriarchal tradition) are

employing gender-dependent criteria by which to judge the narrative arc of female characters and essentially presenting a subjective analysis regarding Tolkien's allegedly biased beliefs. Countering Frederick and McBride's assessment, I assert that Tolkien attributes the cause of the imbalance within Éowyn's psyche not to the inability of the feminine to incorporate the masculine without the risk of annihilation, nor to the mental turmoil that derives from failing to adhere to the characteristics assigned to one's gender, but due to the crushing suppression of patriarchal society in regard to the expression of both feminine and masculine aspects that inherently reside within both genders. Rather than denoting a move from solely masculine to wholly feminine, Éowyn's situation is a comment on the imbalance that occurs in anyone of either gender that is denied even the possibility for self-expression, as well as the joy that is derived from finally achieving equilibrium through the rejection of patriarchal norms. Upon healing, Éowyn states, "I will be a shield maiden no longer, nor vie with the Great Riders, nor take joy only in the songs of slaying. I will be a healer and love all things that grow" (*Return* 965), implying that she will no longer *solely* concentrate on masculine pursuits, but will embrace a balance between the masculine and the feminine. In this way, Éowyn accepts the positive and life-giving aspects of herself—not as a woman to which such qualities are traditionally attributed, but as a being who has become whole. Donovan states that "the use here of the word 'only' insists that in the future she will not simply reject but transcend the limitations of her shield-maiden role" and that by not allowing the warrior role to dominate, "her transformation allows both to coexist and draw strength from each other" (126-127).

Frederick and McBride also assert that Galadriel "would certainly be a powerful combat adversary. Yet Tolkien depicts her strivings against the enemy as more mental and magical, rather than physical . . . she is not depicted in actual battle" (33). Here, again, analysis of the

feminine is based upon patriarchal ideas of power. Because Galadriel does not wield a blade or fight in battle, critics have insinuated that her power is inferior to that of the male. However, Tolkien makes clear the extreme power of Galadriel, which far surpasses the physical strength of a brutish warrior. Galadriel clarifies for Frodo, “[D]o not think that only by singing amid the trees, nor even by the slender arrows of elven-bows, is this land of Lothlórien maintained and defended against its Enemy” (*Fellowship* 364)—and, although Narya may allow for this protection, it is Galadriel who wields Narya. Additionally, the strength of Galadriel’s will is shown to be superior to that of even Sauron, as she possesses the ability to decipher his thoughts (at least as they pertain to her people) while he is denied access to hers: “I perceive the Dark Lord and know his mind, or all of his mind that concerns the Elves. And he gropes ever to see me and my thought. But still the door is closed” (*Fellowship* 364-365). However, steeped within patriarchal tradition, where true power has traditionally been associated with the masculine, power in the female is interpreted to be achieved solely via the incorporation and retention of masculine characteristics or, more specifically, expression of those related to the machismo stereotype, (e.g., physical strength, impulsive action, predilection for war). Rawls states:

[A]ll too often the heroines of modern fantasy and science fiction are simply males in drag. They are given swords and guns (phallic masculine implements of the hands) and sent out on warrior-sagas. They are no different in motivation, activity, reaction and basic character from the male warriors. (12)

As Tolkien was candid regarding his aversion to war, the lack of females in battle in *LOTR*, as well as their final repudiation of the variety of masculine traits to which the author is also averse, may not be indicative of Tolkien’s supposed statement on the inability of women to handle physical combat (which he has conversely demonstrated within Éowyn’s narrative), but rather a

comment on the inferiority of the warring tendencies of the masculine as compared with the superior peaceful and diplomatic aspects associated with the feminine. While the diminishment of the inherent power of the feminine and the promotion of “perspectives that masculinity is the norm” (Rawls 13) arise from narratives which equate strength and superiority to the embrace of the masculine and weakness and inferiority to the integration (or reintegration) of the feminine, critical analyses which assume the same criteria to be indicative of a power reversal within the feminine in *all* narratives essentially fall victim to the same gender bias that they are attempting to reveal in the first place. Moreover, by suggesting that it is solely through the complete and eternal embrace of the masculine that a heroine is able to achieve and maintain a status equal to that of a hero and that, without which, a female protagonists will forever be deemed inferior, it assures that, in their own right, female characters in all genres will be perceived as eternally lacking.

Further evidence of Tolkien’s pro-feminine agenda can be found in the way in which feminine expression in the male is considered admirable within the narrative. Although female characters are often required to assume masculine characteristics in order to render them more powerful in the eyes of a patriarchally influenced audience, narratives often omit the adoption of feminine roles or attributes by male characters for the same reason. In “Sissy Boy Mothering,” Danielle Bienvenue Bray states:

[S]tudies of ‘nonsexist’ children’s books tend to focus on girls performing stereotypically masculine behaviors without consideration of how boy characters perform gender . . . however, this narrow focus on girl figures in the identification of nonsexist works has two side-effects: appearing to devalue traits traditionally considered feminine and losing sight of male characters’ subversive gender

performances . . . the result of such studies is to privilege hegemonically masculine gender expression in all characters, male or female. (160-161)

However, this is not the situation in *LOTR*, of which Rawls states, “Attributes of the gender are not necessarily confined to the sex of the same gender” (5) and that strong, intimate relationships are experienced between Hobbits, Frodo Baggins and Samwise Gamgee, and among Meriadoc “Merry” Brandybuck and Peregrine “Pippin” Took, as well as in the unlikely bond that develops between Dwarf Gimli and Elf Legolas. Furthermore, male characters, many of which are accomplished warriors, display traditionally feminine attributes such as healing, intuition, and empathy, as well as engage in song and discussions of romance. This balance of feminine and masculine traits serves to strengthen a character’s moral standing in both genders. Rawls states:

According to Tolkien, Feminine and Masculine possess different characteristics which are meant to complement and augment one another. The Macho Man, with his paucity of finer feeling neglect of thought in favor of action is not admired in Middle-earth . . . [n]either is the Total Woman, with her wiles and dependence on males. (5)

The imbalance between feminine and masculine energies experienced by Éowyn is also suffered by Faramir, with equilibrium finally being achieved through his embrace of characteristics oppositional to those expected of his gender. Through Faramir’s struggle with his father’s disapproval of the aspects of his persona considered to be feminine (and, therefore, inferior), Tolkien addresses the way in which archaic patriarchal beliefs negatively affect the whole of society—including men. Bienvenue Bray states that, although mainstream society continues to scorn “behaviors not traditionally associated with hegemonic masculinity . . . the idea that these

behaviors are not necessarily determined by one's biological sex is becoming more widely accepted" (161).

3. Feminist Summary

Feminism argues for the equality of the sexes, where male and female are afforded the same privileges and freedoms, regardless of conventional norms. Therefore, it should not be assumed that women who exhibit stereotypical traits (e.g., empathy, compassion), or who fail to reject all patriarchally allocated roles (e.g., marrying, childbearing), signify a repudiation of feminism and an embrace of the subordinate roles to which they have been historically assigned. Nor should it be assumed that this was the author's intention. In "The 'Sub-Subcreation' of Galadriel, Arwen, and Éowyn," Maureen Thum states, "Contrary to those who see Tolkien as an anti-feminist writer . . . he subverts traditional views of gender roles throughout his writings" (235). Following Sauron's defeat, Aragorn assumes his place as the King of Gondor, marries Arwen, and becomes a peaceful ruler, husband, and father, as well as assuming his role as a healer. However, Aragorn is not considered emasculated because of his restorative abilities (a feminine attribute) or due to his transition from the role of a wandering warrior to a one of a familial existence—and neither are his journey and sacrifices to assist in Sauron's defeat deemed fruitless due to his refusal to eternally embrace a futile (though masculine) position. To imply that all prior acts of independence and heroism are nullified upon a female character's adherence to any aspect of the traditional feminine, or due to the slightest rejection of the criteria to which male-centric cultures attribute strength, simply demonstrates how deeply ingrained the patriarchal mindset lies within the human psyche—even within a pro-feminist analysis whose purpose is to reveal patriarchal bias within the narrative. Logically, Éowyn, Aragorn, and others do not continue on as warriors when there is no longer a war to fight—however, it appears that

the diminution in personal power applies only to female characters who abandon a rebellious role. Conversely, it is due to the refusal to accept their gender-dependent status that they achieve the ability to decide their own destinies—whatever they may be. We see the strength of resolve in Galadriel’s refusal of the One Ring and in Éowyn’s rejection of patriarchal tradition in order to claim her power and save her people—both of which contribute to the ultimate defeat of evil in Middle-earth. Even Shelob, though a malevolent force, is an example of the powerful and autonomous feminine, and ultimately serves as a warning—to *both* genders—against the dangers of stagnation and extreme egocentrism. The resistance of female characters to culturally-limiting philosophies and their intentional fracturing of a thus far stable patriarchal system reveals greater fortitude than the male characters of whom such achievements were already presumed. Further, while characteristics such as lust and greed are reduced to the lesser, “animal instincts” in the feminine (i.e., Shelob), *LOTR*’s male characters are accordingly judged as, regardless of gender or species, honor is afforded to all those who balance the feminine and masculine energies within their relationships and within themselves. Rawls states that within Tolkien’s world:

There is no war between the sexes . . . Complementary and mutually augmenting positive feminine and masculine qualities are set against enantiomorphic, negative feminine and masculine qualities. Feminine and Masculine are diverse—not subordinate nor antagonistic to one another. (13)

By allowing female characters the strength and fortitude often associated with the masculine in fantasy works, and by employing, within the male, the empathetic and nurturing aspects traditionally associated with the feminine, Tolkien balances the positive and negative attributes of both genders and promotes a pro-feminist position within the novels.

IV. Ecofeminist Concepts

Through the undervaluation of the natural world and the overestimation of humanity's position within it, as well through the denial of a need for balance between feminine and masculine perspectives, patriarchal society effectively severs its connections from the creative life forces of the ecofeminine and sews disharmony into the fabric of life. Yet, there remains much debate on the way in which to transform the conventional dualities of masculine versus feminine and human versus nature. Plumwood states, "There is the problem . . . of how to give a positive value to what has been traditionally devalued and excluded . . . without simply reversing values" (10-11). Ecofeminist fantasy attempts to create or reestablish within the reader a connection between humans and the environment, as well as to highlight the importance of balancing feminine and masculine energies. Tolkien discusses a similar need for balance when discussing the use of enchantment in fantasy literature, stating, "Uncorrupted, it does not seek delusion nor bewitchment and domination; it seeks shared enrichment, partners in making and delight, not slaves" (*On Fairy-Stories* 10). In *LOTR*, one can attempt to glean the novel's ecofeminist intentions by examining the connections between the ecological and feminist concepts within the narrative.

1. The Association between Nature and the Feminine

Due to the archaic patriarchal implications, the association between nature and the feminine is a contentious argument among feminists who seek to either abolish or strengthen the affiliation. Plumwood asserts that this presumed connection understandably seems a regressive and insulting concept to many, "summoning up images of women as earth mothers, as passive, reproductive animals, contented cows immersed in the body and in the unreflective experiencing of life" (20). As such, it would be simple enough to dismiss this association as "no more than an

instrument of oppression, a relic of patriarchy which should simply be allowed to wither away now that its roots in an oppressive tradition are exposed” (Plumwood 21). However, as we have previously considered, rather than rejecting their traditional affiliation with the natural world, women and those who embrace feminist ideals should seek not only to align themselves with the values required to stand in solidarity with the natural world, but, by working to assign power to the concepts of both nature and the feminine, should seek to transform their mutual patriarchal devaluation into an alliance of united strength—as Tolkien does. Whether due to an innate association between nature and the feminine, or through a conscious choice by female and non-human characters to combine their traditionally apportioned and unconventional attributes, both autonomy and power can be found within *LOTR*’s ecofeminist collaborations.

Although the Mother Nature archetype is associated with passivity and sacrifice, the term also conveys active strength, as well as humbling creative powers. With characteristics of the natural world reflected in both her costume and physical appearance, as well as in the way in which she is presented within each scene, Goldberry is the personification of Mother Nature. Tolkien states: “Her long yellow hair rippled down her shoulders; her gown was green, green as young reeds, shot with silver like beads of dew; and her belt was of gold, shaped like a chain of flag-lilies, wet with the pale-blue eyes of forget-me-nots” (*Fellowship* 123). Campbell points out that Goldberry “is virtually interchangeable with the ecology around her: ‘About her feet in wide vessels of green of green and brown earthenware, white water-lilies were floating, so that she seemed to be enthroned in the midst of a pool’” (*Nature* 436). Like the commonly applied comparisons between the changing of the seasons and the cyclical transformation of the feminine, Dickerson and Evans assert, ““This welter of imagery . . . serves to situate her, not in a timeless world, but in the cyclic time of the world of nature, where rippling streams and living

pools beget and nourish reeds and lilies according to the rhythm of the seasons” (20). Like Bombadil, Goldberry’s metaphysical powers are outwardly manifested through language and song—though her mere presence is sufficient enough to positively influence the world around her. Upon first hearing the song of Goldberry, the Hobbits are influenced by a power that is as potent and ageless as that of Bombadil. Tolkien states, “Then another clear voice, as young and as ancient as Spring . . . came falling like silver to meet them . . . And with that song the hobbits stood upon the threshold, and a golden light was all about them (*Fellowship* 122). Afterward, Frodo lyrically praises this nature goddess and equates the joy she elicits in his heart to the enchantment he first experiences upon hearing Elven-voices—though the emotions aroused by Goldberry were “deeper and nearer to mortal heart; marvellous and yet not strange” (*Fellowship* 123). This inherent familiarity of emotion—a profound connection that Frodo experiences on a primal level—indicates that Goldberry is fundamentally more a part of the natural world than even the Elves. Tolkien’s implied connection between nature and the feminine, illustrated in Goldberry’s seamless association with the spirit of the earth, cannot be construed as a devaluation of either, but—given her influence, as well as the broader allocations of power attributed to the ecofeminine throughout the remainder of the novels—should be perceived as a characterization of strength. Moreover, Tom Bombadil—a powerful figure in masculine form—is as innately connected to the natural world as Goldberry—the sole difference being in which sphere their strengths ultimately lie. Rawls states, “The concerns of the Feminine Principle . . . are inner directed . . . The Masculine Principle . . . active and outer-directed” (6). Although Goldberry is portrayed in a starkly feminine role in relation to Tom (relegated to domestic issues regarding home, while Tom is assumed to possess a greater knowledge of the outside world of which he is a regular visitor), Goldberry is depicted as a force of nature in her own right and,

together, Goldberry and Bombadil—like the green woman and green man of the forest—represent nature’s balance of feminine and masculine energies.

Galadriel is another female figure whose characteristics coincide with those of the Mother Nature archetype—especially when we examine her role in the revitalization of the Shire. Like the duality found in both the natural world and the human, Galadriel exhibits the chaotic and wrathful characteristics of the “bad mother” during her self-analysis regarding her possible acceptance of the ring, giving us a glimpse of the unbridled power that could be unleashed if she so chose. However, more often than not, Galadriel represents the benevolent, bountiful, and generous “good mother.” As previously mentioned, Galadriel grants the Fellowship gifts to assist in their mission regarding the ring, as well as in their journeys beyond. Cooperating with another being considered a representative or hybrid of non-human nature, Galadriel presents the Hobbit, Sam, with the gift of earth from her orchard, which he uses to restore the Shire to its former pastoral utopia. Roach states, “We frequently find ‘Mother Earth’ or ‘Mother Nature’ used as metaphor for this sense that nature attends to our needs and shares with us her riches” (29). Beyond the physical manifestation of this gift, the prospect of what could result from Galadriel’s offering produces an additional message of hope—the promise not only of an individual future for Sam (in that there is at least the possibility that he may survive the quest), but optimism for an ecological restoration, as well.

Although we have previously discussed Éowyn’s rise to action in the Battle of the Pelennor Fields, we have not yet discussed the role that the Hobbit, Merry, plays in her victory against the Witch King of Angmar. Tolkien states:

Merry’s sword had stabbed him from behind, shearing through the black mantle, and passing up beneath the hauberk had pierced the sinew behind his mighty knee

. . . with her last strength she drove her sword between crown and mantle, as the great shoulders bowed before her. (*Return* 842)

In this passage, we witness the collaboration of the feminine and non-human nature, as well as the rise in the hierarchal status of two marginalized entities (originally dismissed by other warriors as useless or a hindrance in battle). Though it can be argued that the ecofeminine lacks the power of the masculine as it takes both nature and the feminine to destroy the enemy, it can conversely be asserted that, in wielding their mutual strengths, the ecofeminine is able to accomplish a feat that no man ever could, which results in not only a victory for Rohan, but for all of Middle-earth. McCrory Hatcher states that Éowyn's relationship with Merry "is also important in illustrating her importance as a character: she is a hero in the same mold as hobbits because they all will come to realize the importance in fighting for preservation (49). Moreover, by recognizing that even the most marginalized in society can emerge as a beacon of hope and strength to the world, Tolkien promotes the recognition and empowerment of the "other."

Éowyn's association with the natural world is reflected in other aspects, as well. McCrory Hatcher points out that Éowyn's maternal aspects first appear when Dernhelm bears Merry under her cloak (49). This is due to both the obvious symbolic implications, as well as to Éowyn's deep capacity for empathy and nurturance. McCrory Hatcher asserts, "This shines a light on the love and nurturing that Éowyn will soon spread over Middle-earth; carrying Merry gives the reader a pregnancy image that foreshadows Éowyn giving birth to a new life on the battlefield" (49). Upon her transformation in the Houses of Healing, Éowyn is shown not only to accept the loving aspects of self traditionally associated with the feminine, but to embrace the natural world and to value their shared creative potential. Éowyn states, "I will be a healer, and love all things that grow and are not barren" (*Return* 965), highlighting her new focus of life, rather than death—

whether it be by working with the creative energies of the earth or through her reproductive abilities as a woman. Rather than promoting an innate connection to the natural world in order to lower Éowyn's hierarchal position within the narrative, Tolkien's transformation of a mortal who was once consumed solely by masculine destruction to a being who becomes whole through her inclusion of ecofeminist creation suggests a powerfully balanced persona and signifies extreme inner and outer strength. Moreover, as we have mentioned, Faramir, while still attributing an unseen power to the feminine, joins Éowyn in this celebration of nature and of life, stating, "[T]hen let us cross the River and in happier days let us dwell in fair Ithilien and there make a garden. All things will grow with joy there, if the White Lady comes" (*Return* 965).

As we have explored, critics have at times accused Tolkien of equating femininity to passivity, allowing the women of *LOTR* the choice to rebel only under the most grievous of circumstances. Plumwood states:

To be defined as 'nature' in this context is to be defined as passive, as non-agent . . . or invisible background conditions against which the 'foreground' achievements of reason or culture . . . take place. It is to be defined as a terra nullius, a resource empty of its own purposes or meanings . . . whose domination is simply 'natural', flowing from nature itself and the nature(s) of things. (4-5)

However, the same situation is reflected in Tolkien's portrayal of non-human nature—a world which he clearly respects and to which he attributes great power. Akin to the eventual uprising of the Ents and of even the Hobbits, *LOTR*'s female characters may appear initially passive as they exhibit the same restraint from violence and strife as the natural world. However, in either case, temperance and the consideration of outcome does not equate to fragility or inferiority. As women and non-human nature have been traditionally consigned to the background against

which the androcentric history of the world has occurred, this is the eclipsed position in which Tolkien initially places them in order to more brilliantly reveal their unexpected transformations. However, when action is required to rise up against the evils of Sauron, both nature and the feminine exhibit qualities normally associated with the masculine, including the ability to take physical action. Moreover, in opposition to the duality associated with the feminine and the natural world—that both are perpetually of one extreme or the other (i.e., passive and obedient or aggressive and chaotic)—*LOTR*'s ecofeminist characters possess a more rational approach to life and to war, which allows for their directed efforts to assist in Sauron's destruction. Strategic actions that illustrate the logic and temperance of the ecofeminine—such as the army of Ents that march upon Isengard, as well as Éowyn's covert plan to join Rohan's army—not only culminate in a beneficial outcome for Middle-earth, but serve to promote as superior the creative and regenerative power of the ecofeminine over the destructive aspects of the masculine. In regard to their ancient association with the natural world, Plumwood states that women within the patriarchal system have traditionally faced an unacceptable choice: “They either accept it (naturalism) or reject it (and endorse the dominant mastery model)” and asserts that “both men and women must challenge the dualised conception of human identity and develop an alternative culture which fully recognises human identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature” (36). In *LOTR*, the recognition of the significant contributions of the other (whether human or non-human nature), as well as the collaboration of not only nature and the feminine, but of all male characters whose roles are not strictly defined by archaic patriarchal notions of masculinity, allow for the dissolution of the nature/human dichotomy.

2. The Dissociation from the Ecofeminine: The Story of the Ents and Entwives

The story of the Ents and Entwives is perhaps the best example of the need for equitable relationships and of compromising for the greater good (between human and non-human nature, as well as between the feminine and masculine and their differing ecological perspectives). Over time, the Entwives (female) and Ents (male) grew physically and psychologically further apart. As eternal preservationists, the Ents' deep ecological perspective promoted the love of all things wild—they communicated with the trees and other wild vegetation and ate only of the fruit which had fallen naturally from the plant. Dickerson and Evans assert that the Ents value “unordered nature” and express their respect by allowing all flora to “grow according to the principles inherent in their nature, countenancing neither the conversion of these lands to civilized use nor the organized cultivation of growing things” (123). In contrast, the Entwives desire order. They enjoy maintaining their gardens and demand that the life contained within them grow according to their wishes, though they do not feel it necessary to commune with the plants in order to learn their requirements and desires in return. Dickerson and Evans state that, in this case, “[C]onservation might be called the management of the earth in an effort to preserve a balance among species and to control its use for the extraction of benefits without destroying it” (124). Therefore, although they do not abuse the natural world, the Entwives' land use policies condone the controlled conditions of natural processes in exchange for individual gain. While the Ents continue to wander the wild woods, the Entwives move further away, building and tending their gardens until they eventually they lose track of one another. After the Entwives' gardens are destroyed during the first Great War leaving the Ents to believe the worst, the two appear to be forever separated—effectively condemning their race to eventual extinction. Treebeard states, “Forests may grow . . . Woods may spread. But not Ents. There are no Entings” (*Towers* 981).

Although the depiction of the Entwives as stewards of nature highlights the conservation aspect of the tale, Tolkien also presents the preservationist viewpoint of the Ents as an especially useful approach when adhering to a deep ecological perspective or as a practical application in cases where humanity has pushed the finite survival capacity of the earth beyond its limitations. Dickerson and Evans state that, although Tolkien never expressly declares that either environmental viewpoint is “fundamentally right or wrong” (124-125), the message here is that “[e]nvironmental positions should be held with conviction, but divergent views should not be adhered to so fiercely as to threaten one’s very survival” (252). Aside from employing gender characteristics in the Ents and Entwives contrary to the manner in which they are stereotypically assigned in the human, (i.e., attributing to the Entwives the patriarchal desire for the submission, conformity, and increased production capacity of others, devoid of both gratitude for what they receive and empathy for those from whom they receive it), the story of the Ents and the Entwives highlights the very real-world consequences that arise from the refusal to honor both feminine and masculine perspectives, as well as from the failure to maintain a balance between preserving the natural world and accepting modern progress.

3. Ecofeminist Summary

Although *LOTR* suggests the possibility of a progressive future—an egalitarian society in which gender equality, acceptance of the “other,” and ecological stewardship are the norm—it also presents the reality that the struggle for social and ecological justice is a long and never ending journey, as well as the likelihood that humanity’s numinous perception of and intimate association with the ecofeminine may simply be a memory of a bygone era—a former way of life that has long since passed into mythology, never again to be universally experienced on earth. Diverging from a strictly utopian conclusion, *LOTR* affirms this truth by depicting the ultimate

defeat of most characters who represent or who are aligned with non-human nature. Analogous to the innumerable species and ecosystems that have vanished from the earth due to the domination of humanity and its governing patriarchal beliefs, Middle-earth experiences this loss in the departure of the Elves and in the anticipation of the future extinction of the Ents. As Gandalf explains to Aragorn (and as Tolkien clarifies for humankind) not all will be saved and it is up to humanity to preserve what is left: “The Third Age of the world has ended, and the new age has begun; and it is your task to order its beginnings and to preserve what must be preserved. For though much has been saved, much must now pass away” (*Return* 971). Brawley states that, although certain instances of ecological justice (such as the fall of Isengard) are important examples of Tolkien’s theory of recovery, “we also know that the age has come where these images of the close relationship to nature must give way to the Dominion of Man in the Fourth Age” (117). The fading of the Third Age can be equated to the historical fall of the ecofeminine, when peaceful ecocentric and female-centric cultures were eradicated—pushed from earthly existence by warring and oppressive masculine societies and religions. It is assumed that with the rise of man—or, more specifically, of patriarchal culture—a loss of alliance with and reverence toward nature would soon follow, prompting a fundamental separation of humanity from a world which not only supports the physical body, but which nourishes the ethereal soul. Although the intricacies of such a relationship cannot be fully understood much less articulated by human intellect, its loss (though indiscernible) can certainly be mourned by the human heart. Like the profound agony inflicted upon Frodo’s spirit which prompts his passage to the Grey Havens, the loss of a genuine connection to the world with which humanity is innately connected, as well as an unbalanced existence where destructive notions of the masculine eternally overshadow the

creative, life-giving potential of the feminine, leaves a void within the soul that no material attainment can ever fully satisfy. Le Guin states:

At the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, the non-human beings of Middle Earth are ‘dwindling’ away or passing into the West leaving the world to mankind alone. I think they too imply that modern humanity is in exile, shut out from a community, an intimacy, it once knew . . . The fields and forests, the villages and byroads, once did belong to us, when we belonged to them . . . It reminds us of what we have denied, what we have exiled ourselves from. (86)

V. *The Lord of the Rings* Conclusion

Due to a disregard for the historical accounts and creative endeavors of the feminine and, consequently, the repression of the significant cultural foundations that likely would have evolved from such perspectives (e.g., connectivity to and empathy for the natural world, social and sexual equality) the world has lingered in an increasingly polarized existence. The prevalent androcentric and anthropocentric hierarchal system which has been unconsciously accepted by society over time as a universal truth is, in reality, a distorted narrative specifically authored by the patriarchy and unchallenged due to lack of a substantial alternative. As patriarchal, imperialistic, and/or capitalist societies depend on the continued oppression of all life below the ruling class, they seek to halt ecofeminist progress by any means necessary—including discrediting and dishonoring all who do not subscribe to the prevailing hierarchal system. Fantasy fiction is a means by which readers can circumvent such reproach and imagine an alternative to this pervasive real-world oppression. In “Fantasy Literature” T. E. Apter states that fantasy “must be understood not as an escape from reality but as investigation of it” (2), clarifying that fantasy provides “a vantage point from which new possibilities can be realized”

(6). Curry states that whatever the agency of control, the most essential means by which to defy such predetermined allocations is through “[A] vision of alternative futures that defy the attempt to corral us all into the iron cage of modernity” and asserts:

The Lord of the Rings offers us one such vision of an alternative world, where enchantment—communal, natural, and spiritual—survives . . . the onslaught of modernity . . . And it comes in the form that we most naturally respond to: a story.
(153)

At a time when there are a growing number of environmental issues and an increasing sense of human detachment from the natural world, combined with a persistent division within hetero-patriarchal societies between the feminine, the masculine, and the “other,” it is imperative that humanity return to a genuine connection with the natural world and with each other. Ecofeminist fantasy is a valuable means by which to encourage empathy toward all life (human and non-human), to raise environmental awareness, and to foster a sense of unity between members of humankind and the natural world. *LOTR* recognizes the power of nature and the feminine and stresses the importance of humankind’s relationship to both, warning that a lack of empathy and appreciation may result in humanity’s extinction. At the conclusion of *LOTR*, with the fading of the age of magic and the dawn of the time of man, Tolkien expresses a hope that humanity will redeem itself by exhibiting the same divine qualities he attributes to the ecofeminine in order to create a future of equitable and sustainable partnerships, based on mutual understanding and respect.

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