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Galadriel, The Ring, and the Elvish Language—Will the Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary Woman Please Stand: Analyzing J. R. R. Tolkien’s Three Unique Representations of the “Woman” in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* with Lacan’s Human Psyche Tripartite of Order Meshed with French Feminism and Kristeva’s Chora of the Matriarchal Discourse

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Abstract

J. R. R. Tolkien’s critics consider him a misogynist. However, a psychoanalytical approach using Jacques Lacan’s tripartite of the *Real*, *Symbolic*, and *Imaginary* meshed with the French Feminist Julia Kristeva and her Chora theory, an elevated and prominent representation of “woman” is established in Galadriel, the One Ring, and the Elvish Language.

In Tolkien’s world, women are often considered to be secondary and lacking character development thus having no literary substance and only act as *filler* in the novels. Some critics even take it to the extreme and suggest that Tolkien is extremely prejudiced, even misogynistic giving female characters the charge of uselessness in *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*.

Moreover, the representation of these Middle-earth women is a very controversial topic specifically in the mythological constructs because it is well known that Tolkien is a renowned scholar proficient in Norse Mythology, and in Norse myths there are some dynamic female characters, but in comparison to male characters who litter the entire Norse canon, those few female characters that can be found are rather limited in character development. Therefore, because Tolkien is linked to Norse mythology, his representation of women should mirror Norse influence suggesting that even though women are found in his texts, they are expected to be surfaced, insubstantial, and shallow basically signifying nothing but *filler* and supporting what the critics presume.

To that end, many critics claim that the women in Tolkien’s imaginary world are few, and those that he did create struggle to be recognized beyond flat, trivial characters. However, a closer examination shows that there are nearly 80 female characters in Tolkien’s mythos, and of those characters only 4 are notable, but critics still consider those 4 to be shallow and inconsequential: Arwen, Eowyn, Galadriel, Luthien. Interestingly, in Tolkien’s mythological cycles, no evil woman, or in the vernacular of evil, no witch, exists. Where are the female characters that could be analogous with Lady Macbeth or Bellatrix or Goneril and Regan? Tolkien did not believe that women were as closely correlated with evil as men, so the females that are correlated with evil do not even have a physical body comparable to a woman but rather resembling a spider.

To understand the representation of women in Tolkien, Lacanian theory will be used redefining the woman as it applies to the *female*. Applying Lacan’s tripartite representation of order in the human psyche (real, symbolic, imaginary), the first representation of woman will be examined through the analysis of good and evil females applying the function of the *Real*, the second representation of woman will be examined through the analysis of the Ring as female applying the function of the *Symbolic*, and the third representation of woman will be examined through the analysis of the Elvish Language as female applying the function of the *Imaginary*; moreover, the third representation of woman will be deconstructed even further by applying Julia Kristeva’s French Feminist theory of the Split-Text and chora to the Elvish Language showing how the Elvish Language not only represents the female but is also symbolic of the woman’s body.

In the study of psychoanalysis, many believe that Freud and Lacan are very similar in the depiction of the unconscious. True, they both believe that the unconscious greatly affects people's conscious behavior. Freud says that the unconscious is unstructured and a boiling pot of dark passions and hidden desires. However, this is where Lacan and Freud begin to differ which causes one to start the development and understanding of what is known as *self-identity*. Lacan asserts that the unconscious is structured by language which shapes and structures one's unconscious and conscious minds which results in the self-identity at a very young age. Granted, Freud's tripartite (which is one of the main driving theories of psychoanalysis) of the Super-Ego, Ego, and Id has no similar aspects of unconscious structuring to Lacan's tripartite of the Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary. The only similar aspect between these two is that they are a tripartite that helps in the interpretation, analysis, synthesis, and eventual understanding of the conscious and subconscious mind. Lacan was a great pupil of Freud's, but Lacan developed his own personalized theory thus establishing him as an expert in his own right.

To further identify what Tolkien wanted his 20th Century audience to understand concerning the representation of women, he created many female characters with varying degree of power. The women in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* are often misrepresented and tend to be recognized as lesser or subservient. Often critics dismiss Tolkien's representation of women as weak—the silent sex. When in actuality, Tolkien has very powerful women and many of them from various races and cultures. For example, there is the mighty Goddess Varda who is arguably the most powerful character in the entire cosmos and mythos of Tolkien. Another mighty female is the Goddess Yavanna who, with permission from the God of all gods, created the Ents. Other women of significance are Eowyn, the mighty heroine who slayed the Witch-King of Angbar in a great battle on the Pelinor Fields; Galadriel who is the mightiest and fairest of all the Elves and often considered the greatest of elven women to walk in the Golden Wood; Goldberry, the wife of the mysterious Tom Bombadil who are considered the Mother-Earth and Father-Time of Middle-earth respectfully; Arwen, the Half-Elven daughter of Elrond who eventually marries the great warrior king Aragorn; even the race of the hobbits have a renowned female who fought bravely, with an umbrella, standing up to the men who served the powerful white wizard Saruman. To that end, it has clearly been established that Tolkien has many women who are powerful, mighty characters that are so much more than just the silent sex.

Granted, Tolkien has many women of power and might in his tales, but it is the representation of the female, not just the visual or actions of a woman character, that enlightens the reader into further understanding what Tolkien intended femininity to truly epitomize. Nevertheless, the first order of Lacan's tripartite, the Real, will be applied to the character Galadriel demonstrating the actual world of matter implying a material or a concept of biology—thus the body in its physicality. For example, the Real mother is the biological mother, the human form of a woman that functions as a nurturer or caregiver. In the simplest terms, the Real is the actual female character and how the female is represented. As mentioned above, the Real of Galadriel is the mightiest and fairest of all the Elves. She is physically seen as fair but has qualities of might and power ever being feared by those who do not know her intent. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Galadriel's "Real" is explained in a poem: "An Elven-maid there was of old,/ A shining star by day:/ Her mantle white was hemmed with gold/ Her shoes of silver-grey" (193). In Letter 347 from *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, Galadriel is defined by the author himself as a "Maiden crowned with gleaming hair" (271). She is a high elf, born in the first age and eventually exiled from the land of Aman for her rebellion. Many know her as a tall, dangerous sorceress with hair of deep gold. Yet others perceive her as beauty with a voice clear, musical, yet "deeper than woman's wont" (327). When Frodo and company arrive at Lothlorien, she knows each person's mind of desire and heart of truth as she examines all members of the company. What is known as the Temptation scene where Frodo offers the Ring to Galadriel and the temptation to take it from him is overwhelming as she becomes beautiful and terrible, and to take the Ring is to become like Sauron; however, she overcomes the temptation and becomes simple again. Her refusing the Ring allows her to go back, and at the end of the tale she sails off to the West and remains Galadriel. Therefore, this is Tolkien's representation of the female applying Lacan's first order of his tripartite: the Real.

Interestingly, Tolkien's representation of the female when it is applied to evil women is much different. He doesn't have a female character that is actually a woman in the traditional portrayal. When Tolkien created his evil woman, he didn't imagine a Lady Macbeth or Belletrix who is 6'1" with long black flowing hair with sinister eyes and long pointed fingernails.

Tolkien didn't portray an evil woman with a pointy hat holding a broomstick with a black cat standing next to her, thus a traditional witch. Instead, Tolkien portrays his evil female characters in the actual sense as a spider—and a rather large spider at that.

The description of the spider Shelob in *The Lord of the Rings* is in direct opposition to the description of Galadriel who lives in a sanctuary of light in the Golden Wood. Shelob, like Galadriel, lives in a sanctuary, but Shelob's cavern is the nastiest hole filled with cobwebs and stink, a foul reek steams from utter darkness as webs of imprisonment and death await any trespasser. Her predecessor, Ungoliant, who is also a spider, is swollen and bloated and has malice for light as she easily shrinks before it until she is defeated, as is Shelob, by their own actions. Her cave is a yonic symbol of female power as opposed to the phallic symbol of male power. Tolkien preferred a spider to represent evil female characters because after a black widow spider mates with the male black widow, she immediately kills him; thus, the spider is a symbol of female dominance and power.

The symbol of female power for Tolkien moves beyond Lacan's Real and starts to evolve from Lacan's Symbolic order of differentiating. The symbolic is characterized precisely by the absence of any fixed relations between signifier and signified. Therefore, the Symbolic is that of the *signifier*—that is, a facet in which components have no sure existence but which are established by the feature of their related differences or *lack*. In Tolkien's world, a sure example of the Symbolic can be established with the One Ring of Power, and the *power* that is realized is feminine power by constructing the "O"Phallus.

What is the "O"Phallus? For the One Ring to be symbolic of female power, a very important attribute needs to be determined which is that the One Ring is an actual character. Not an inanimate object that is personified (human characteristics), but rather an object that is essentially not an object but a moving, breathing, thinking character. The One Ring to rule them all is a ring that moves, shrinks, corrupts, and tempts. When Isildur is wearing the Ring in the river Anduin, the Ring takes on a mind of its own and enlarges itself thus falling off Isildur's finger and sinking deep in the river. Moreover, at the Council of Elrond, the Ring is placed on a stone table in the center of all those present at the meeting. While the council is arguing what to do with the Ring, the Ring begins to taunt and persuade those around it.

The Ring has a will of its own and wants nothing more than to return to its master, Sauron. To that end, the Ring is a character, and if a character, then what gender? Is the Ring a female, a male, or is the Ring androgynous or hermaphroditic? Because Tolkien's Ring is Symbolic (meaning one of Lacan's three orders) and is that of the signifier (a dimension which constitutes the *lack* thereof) then the Ring *lacks* the phallus and becomes the "O"Phallus and constructing feminine power.

For Lacan, a phallic symbol or phallus is the ultimate symbol of male power represented by any image whose length exceeds its diameter and often associated with the penis. The yonic symbol is the ultimate symbol of female power represented by any image shaped like a cave or flower or ring. Thus, the One Ring would be a yonic symbol representing female power; however, because the female must accept her lack of the phallus because, according to Freud, she has experienced castration by not being a man and lacks the phallus. A woman is then the figuration of a phallic *lack*: she is a hole, a ring.

The Dark Lord of Mordor, Sauron, at one time possessed the One Ring and wore it on his finger. In a great battle, Prince Isildur cut (castrated) the One Ring from Sauron and took it for himself. Later, the One Ring, after yearning for many years to return to its master, decides to begin the long tedious undertaking of journeying back to Sauron to be reunited as an entity of one. This castration of the One Ring from Sauron's hand is a simile of a husband and wife who have been forcefully separated and who long to be reunited thus creating a unity of one then again.

Therefore, the One Ring becomes the transcendental signified, the object that gives meaning to everything else. To emphasize, the One Ring is an O-Phallus which is the ultimate symbol of female power, and by applying Lacan's second order of representation, Symbolic, one can understand that the One Ring is a female character who possesses great power, supremacy, and dominance.

According to Jacques Lacan's theory, a third order in psychoanalysis representation is the Imaginary which comprises a linguistic component that involves language. As been previously examined, the basis for the Symbolic order is the *signifier*; however, the Imaginary's foundation is the *signified*. The unification of these two elements creates a concept declaring that meaning in language is determined by a systematized combination of sounds. In other words, the Imaginary is the field of images and rooted in the subject's relationship with his or her image of the body.

To fully understand and exemplify the application of the Imaginary to Tolkien's Elvish Language as a representation of woman or the feminine, the theory of the *split-text* as defined by the French Feminist Julia Kristeva will be meshed with Lacan's Imaginary to create a more absolute application to the concept of woman found in Tolkien's Elvish Language.

Kristeva suggests that language has two functioning stems. First, the masculine representation of discourse that exist in the modern patriarchal society which the culture of the Western World is shaped, and the feminine representation of words that exists in the margins of society or in other words, in the secondary or subservient gloss. Therefore, Kristeva advocates that the blending of the Imaginary which is rooted in the physical representation of language (the word) with the phonological application of the language (the sound) creates a continuous flow of fluidity which she calls the *chora* and is closely related to the female body. Kristeva says that this fluidity found in feminine discourse will transform the cultural structures by freeing women from the dominated patriarchal order of society's masculine discourse known as phallocentrism.

In Kristeva's text *Stabat Mater*, she gives an example of the split-text showing the matriarchal language that has been forced to exist in the margin thus secondary to the patriarchal language that dominates the discourse—split-text.

Below is an excerpt of *Stabat Mater* showing the split-text and the diction that represents femininity and masculinity. The text on the left side of the page in **bold** represents the feminine language, the woman; the text on the right side of the page that is not in bold represents the masculine language, the man. Interestingly, the feminine text has what Kristeva calls the *Chora* which is a language that is fluid and has sounds that when analyzed from the manner of articulation has sounds associated with fluidity, liquid sounds that flow, are moist, and have no sense of being ridged. In sharp contrast, the masculine text has a language that is very strict, flush on both sides of the text, lacking any movement or flow—the text literally interrupts the left side inserting its domineering language—pushing the text into the margin, the gloss.

**FLASH—instant of time or of
Dream without time; in-
ordinately swollen atoms of a
bond, a vision, a shiver, a yet
formless, unnamable embryo.
Epiphanies. Photos of what is
not yet visible and that
language necessarily skims
over from afar, allusively.
Words, that are always too
distant, too abstract for this
underground swarming of
seconds, folding in
unimaginable spaces. Writing
them down in an ordeal of
discourse, like love. What is
loving, for a woman, the same
thing as writing. Laugh.
Impossible. Flash on the un-
nameable, weavings of abstract-
tions to be torn. Let a body**

ambivalent principle that is bound
to the species, on the one hand,
and on the other stems from an
identity catastrophe that causes the
Name to topple over into the un-
nameable that one imagines as
femininity, non-language or body.
Thus Christ, the Son of man, when
all is said and done is 'human' only
through his mother—as if Christly
or Christian humanism could only
be a materialism (this is, besides,
what some secularizing trends
within its orbit do not cease
claiming in their esotericism). And
yet, the humanity of the Virgin
mother is not always obvious, and
we shall see how, in her being
cleared of sin, for instance, Mary
distinguishes herself from
mankind. But at the same time the

venture at last out of its shelter, take a chance with meaning under a veil of words. WORD FLESH. From one to the other, eternally, broken up visions, metaphors of the invisible.

most intense revelation of God, which occurs in mysticism, is given only to a person who assumes himself as 'maternal.' Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Meister Eckhart, to mention but a few played the part of the Father's virgin spouses, or even, like

Bernard, received drops of virginal milk directly on their lips. Freedom with respect to the maternal territory then becomes the pedestal upon which love of God is erected. As a consequence, mystics, those 'happy Schrebers' (Sollers) throw a bizarre light on the psychotic sore of modernity: it appears as the incapability of contemporary codes to tame the maternal, that is, primary narcissism. Uncommon and 'literary,' their present-day counterparts are always somewhat oriental, if not tragical—Henry Miller who says he is pregnant, Artaud who sees himself as 'his daughters' or 'his mother' . . . It is the orthodox constituent of Christianity, through John Chrysostom's golden mouth, among others.

(Kristeva 162)

A phonological application of the sounds of the words in **bold** shows that certain letters that make particular sounds are closely related to the fluid functions of the female; therefore, the language is a representation of the female body. According to Kristeva, the female discourse is built on the phonetic application of the manner of articulation analyzing the use of liquids /l/, /r/, glides /w/, /y/, voiceless alveolar /t/, /s/, and a high frontal vowel /i/. Assessment of these sounds, thus the manner of articulation, in the matriarchal words in **bold** used in *Stabat Mater* that are marginalized, demonstrate as Kristeva suggests fluidity and glide which correlates to the female body.

Similarly, Tolkien's Elvish Language is also built on the phonetic application of the manner of articulation using liquids, glides, voiceless alveolar, and high frontal vowel. The following is an example from *The Lord of the Rings* of the Elvish Language as feminine, or more specifically, woman:

*Ai! laurië lantar lassí súrinen,
yéni únótimë ve rámar aldaron!
Yéni ve lintë yuldar avánier
mi oromardi lisse-miruvóreva
Andúnë pella, Vardo tellumar
nu luini yassen tintilar i eleni
ómaryo airetári-lírinen.*

Sí man i yulma nin enquantuva?

*An sí Tintallë Varda Oíolossëo
ve fanyar máryat Elentári ortanë,
ar ilyë tier undulávë lumbulë;
ar sindanóriello caita mornië
i falmalinnar imbë met, ar hísië
untúpa Calaciryó míri oialë.
Sí vanwa ná, Rómello vanwa, Valimar!
Namárië! Nai hiruvalyë Valimar.
Nai elyë hiruva. Namárië! (Tolkien 368)*

From this example, the fluidity of the language corresponds with the female discourse, but in Tolkien's world, instead of the Elvish Language being placed in the marginalia or gloss of society, the language is elevated and used by the most powerful and authoritative race in Middle-earth, the elves; consequently, the Elvish Language is considered to possess feminine attributes. Hence the representation of women, again for Tolkien, is that of power, might, and supremacy.

In summary, J. R. R. Tolkien is often considered to be sexist in his representation of women. However, he is far from being a misogynist because of his multi-faceted portrayal of women in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*. By applying the psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan and his tripartite order of the human psyche meshed with the French Feminist Julia Kristeva and her theory of the fluidity of a matriarchal discourse represented in the female body, Tolkien's representation of women is a positive depiction and can be found beyond typical and traditional characters. Instead of using traditional means of representing women through conventional characterization, Tolkien constructs various innovative modes of female representation to support his reverence and respect for women. Tolkien positively re-appropriates female characters away from subservient expectations and places the representation of the woman in a dominant feuding elf queen, in a powerful ring, and in the fluid language of the foremost elvish race. Each of these three distinct non-traditional representations of the woman is freeing Tolkien from the critics and commentators who label him as a sexist chauvinistic bigot.

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