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Transformation and Actualization of the Feminine Models of the Literature of the Past, in *The Silmarillion*: Tolkien's Development

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Abstract

The topic of women in Tolkien's works has always been a troublesome one for many readers and scholars. The stories of Middle-earth are often described as lacking in women, perpetuating gender roles and depicting antifeminist tendencies. However, many scholars have claimed that Tolkien's depiction of female characters has been misunderstood, for in its core lies great power retrieved and transformed from the ancient feminine models his characters are based upon. *The Silmarillion* is Tolkien's most suitable work to analyse this affirmation because of the abundant female characters that take part in the story. In this dissertation I analyse how Tolkien transforms those ancient feminine models and offers his own contemporary response in *The Silmarillion*. For this purpose I compare seven mythological women from different literatures of the past, with seven women from *The Silmarillion*. I cover four different categories: Deities, Wisewomen, Victim Women and Evil Women, to give a wider and deeper understanding of the nature of Tolkien's women. My dissertation shows that Tolkien's development of the ancient feminine models aligns in many ways with contemporary feminist attitudes towards power, as The Feminine Principle lies always at the heart of the women of *The Silmarillion*.

Keywords:

Mythology; Gender in J.R.R. Tolkien; The Feminine Principle; Power; *The Silmarillion*;

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1. Introduction

The topic of women in Tolkien's works has always been a troublesome one for many readers and scholars. Often qualified as misogynistic and even chauvinist, Tolkien has been accused of either ignoring women or giving them a talismanic status and placing them in unattainable pedestals. Most critics and readers have described Tolkien's Middle-earth stories as "lacking in women, preserving cultural stereotypes of female roles, and reflecting antifeminist tendencies." (Croft and Donovan 1).

However, ever since the beginning of serious scholarship on Tolkien's works in the 1970's, female scholars have tried to disprove simplistic claims about women in Middle-earth by becoming fruitfully involved with the topic of the feminine and female power in Tolkien's narratives (Croft and Donovan 1). Scholar Laura Michel claimed in her 2006 article "Politically Incorrect: Tolkien, Women and Feminism", that "for years, Tolkien has been criticised, attacked, explained, forgiven, and mainly misunderstood when it comes to the matter of women." (56). In fact, according to Tolkien scholars Janet Brennan Croft and Leslie A. Donovan "although Tolkien's fiction undeniably contains many more male than female characters, women fulfil essential, rather than merely supportive, roles in Middle-earth" (3).

In *The Silmarillion*, female characters are abundant, making it Tolkien's most suitable work to acquire insight into his overall portrayal and view of women and the feminine. However, despite the abundance of female characters, the analysis of sources from ancient literature is usually applied to the characters from Tolkien's most popular work, *The Lord of the Rings*, while the women in *The Silmarillion* and their possible sources are still far from being analysed at the same level of depth. In this dissertation I will compare seven mythological women from different literatures of the past with seven women from *The Silmarillion*, with the aim of analysing how Tolkien transforms those ancient feminine models and offers his own contemporary response in *The Silmarillion*. With this study I intend to improve the reader's understanding of Tolkien's female characters in *The Silmarillion* by debunking the too-facile mainstream criticism that holds him as a misogynist. My selection of mythological and religious sources is based upon Tolkien's professional and literary interests as well as on his religious beliefs, which involve Norse, Classical and Finnish mythologies, and the Catholic religion. As an expert in language and literature and the way these two reveal cultural history, Tolkien was familiar not only with the British Arthurian legend but also with the Roman *Aeneid*, the Old Norse *Poetic Edda* and the Finnish *Kalevala*. The influence of the Greek and

Roman classic world is almost unexplored in Tolkien's works, but still the evident impact of these myths that he read during his boyhood is notorious in Tolkien's legendarium (Foster 222). As Tolkien grew older, he abandoned the South and found greater inspiration in the North. After reading Old English poem *Beowulf*, young Tolkien started to read the Old Norse *Volsunga Saga*, and when he began his studies at Oxford University, Old Norse became his "special subject" (St. Clair 63). According to Tolkien's Biographer Humphrey Carpenter, Old Norse literature "had a profound appeal to Tolkien's imagination" (qtd. St. Clair 63). Although the Finnish *Kalevala* is also set in the North, for Tolkien, reading it was "like crossing a gulf into a new world" (qtd. Foster 222), a world that would inspire his first Elvish language and that would push him to write *The Story of Kullervo* in 1914-1925, when he was still an undergraduate. *The Story of Kullervo* was in fact the source of inspiration for Tolkien's most tragic character: Túrin Turambar (Foster 222). Given the extensive knowledge Tolkien had of the different literatures of the past, it is not surprising that, as Scholar Marjorie Burns claims, "behind every setting and every character in J.R.R. Tolkien's writings on Middle-earth, lies a history of literary, mythological and linguistic complexity" (qtd. Donovan 223).

Out of the female characters in this work, I have identified four central categories: Deities, Wisewomen, Victim Women and Evil Women. For reasons of space, I cannot analyse the entire range of female characters in *The Silmarillion*, therefore, each category contains a different number of characters: three deities, two wisewomen, one victim woman and one evil woman. In the analysis of each character, I start by defining Tolkien's depiction of the character, focusing on the key characteristics, to give a general understanding of his creation. Then, I introduce the ancient source and I contrast it with Tolkien's character's description providing the similarities I found between them. Lastly, in the third section, after having analysed both characters, I reach my own conclusion on how Tolkien transforms the ancient feminine model by focusing on how his models derive and depart from the ancient ones. I will be using MLA style, the 9th edition.

2. Theoretical Framework

In order to support the interpretation of Tolkien's women as strong and powerful characters who have crucial narrative importance, many scholars place Tolkien's work within the context of classic sources such as Old Norse, Greek, Roman, Celtic or Finno-Ugric mythologies (Donovan 223). Burns finds echoes of the Celtic Corrigán in Vairë as well as strong similarities

between Arthurian enchantress Morgan le Fay and Melian the Maia, whilst Edith L. Crow compares Lúthien to the Old Norse Valkyries, Goddess Yavanna to Greek Goddess Demeter, Nessa to Artemis and Vaná to Persephone. According to Croft and Donovan, “any study of Tolkien’s works and life would be seriously flawed without discussion of his medieval and Renaissance literary sources” (6), essentially because to understand the feminine power portrayed in *The Silmarillion*, it is crucial to analyse the source’s expression of that same power.

Early in *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien addresses gender by distinguishing it from sex, claiming that the Masculine and Feminine are conditions of the universe that go further and deeper than sex and the female and male need of reproduction (Rawls 99). In order to contextualize my analysis theoretically, I use Melanie L. Rawls’ study on women in Tolkien’s works, “The Feminine Principle in Tolkien”. Unlike in *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings*, where few women appear and none of them are pivotal characters, in *The Silmarillion* the feminine presence is abundant. Making the “Feminine Principle” in Tolkien easier to grasp and analyse (Rawls 99). According to Rawls:

Through *The Silmarillion* runs this theme: in Arda and in the Heavens, the Feminine and the Masculine are present; when they are in equilibrium and in harmony, there is Good, but Evil is the result of an insufficiency or a disharmony of the attributes of one or the other of the genders. Concepts of the Feminine and the Masculine and their attributes and roles are thus tied to concepts of Good and Evil, and therefore near the centre of Tolkien’s tale which is, after all, a tale of the struggle between Good and Evil. (99)

In my analysis, I will attempt to verify to what extent this complementary integration of opposites is valid throughout the representation of female characters in *The Silmarillion*.

3. Deities

3.1 Varda

3.1.1. *The lady of the stars*

Among all the female characters in Tolkien’s mythology, Varda is the most revered one and the one who embodies the most ideal female figure (Burns 152). Varda is the creator and

arranger of the stars, and her joy and power resides in light. Her beauty is indescribable and “the light of Illúvatar” himself “lives still in her face” (*Silmarillion* 16). She is also the Vala who is most connected to and praised by the Elves:

Of all the Great Ones who dwell in this world the Elves hold Varda most in reverence and love. Elbereth they name her, and they call upon her name out of the shadows of Middle-earth, and uplift it in song at the rising of the stars. (*Silmarillion* 16)

Elbereth means Queen of the Stars in *Sindarin*, *êl* meaning “star” and *bereth* meaning queen or spouse of a king. In *Quenya* Varda takes the name of *Elentári*, changing the suffix but not the root. The shared root *êl* or *elen* derives, according to Elvish legend, from the primitive exclamation made by the elves when they “beheld first of all things the stars of heaven” (*Silmarillion* 45). For it was by the light of Varda’s great creation, which was “the greatest of all the works of the Valar since their coming into Arda” (*Silmarillion* 44), that the Firstborn of Illúvatar awoke.

Varda laboured arduously creating the stars to save the Elves from the darkness caused by Melkor, the embodiment of evil, and bring them to life. Varda hears “the sound of voices that cry from east to west” (*Silmarillion* 16) and responds to the needs of the Firstborn Children of Illúvatar. Of all the fourteen Valar, “she is the one who is most compassionate and the one who seems most concerned” (Burns 152). In fact, Varda came down from Eä specifically “to aid Manwë”, her spouse (*Silmarillion* 16).

3.1.2. *Stella Maris*

In the Roman Catholic Church, the most popular and ancient of titles for the Virgin Mary is “Stella Maris”, Latin for “Star of the Sea”. It is hypothesized that in the time of Jesus Christ (AD 1- AD 33) the name of the Virgin Mary in the Aramaic language was a synonym of guide or leader, referring to someone who could navigate perilous lands by the stars, and lead people to safety (“Stella Maris”). The light of the stars is a guide to new life and shelter, the sea is a symbol of the people of earth, and according to the Roman Catholic Church, the “Stella Maris”, “Our Lady Star of the Sea”, is the guiding light for the people and even for Jesus Christ himself. The image of the “Stella Maris” is portrayed in the context of night and darkness, depicting both the difficult times of life as well as the dark night of the souls, and the guidance she offers in those times (“Stella Maris”).

The descriptions of “The Queen of the Stars” and the “Star of the Sea” coincide in their core attributes: they are both symbolised by a star, they both source power from light and they both use it to guide the children of God and those who call upon them out of darkness, out of peril, to safety. In fact, even if both deities are of a lower rank, both Jesus Christ and Manwë, son and spouse of each divinity respectively, need the light and guidance of the two star-ladies. Many are the Marian representations in Tolkien’s legendarium, but Varda may be the clearest one of all (Măcineanu 69). As a matter of fact, Tolkien confirmed the existence of a connection between the Roman Catholic Virgin Mary and the Lady of the Stars of Valinor in his 1965 BBC interview: Obviously, many people have noticed the appeal to the Lady, the Queen of the Stars, is just like Roman Catholic invocations to Our Lady (qtd. in Burns 153).

The invocations of the Elves to Varda often take the form of hymns and chants such as “The Hymn of Elbereth”, which can be connected to the Marian hymn “Hail, Queen of Heaven, the Ocean Star” written by Father John Lingard which in turn was inspired by the medieval Latin plainchant “Ave Maris Stella” (Burns 251):

John Lingard’s “Hail, Queen of Heaven, the Ocean Star”:

Hail, Queen of heaven, the ocean star,
Guide of the wanderer here below,
Thrown on life’s surge, we claim thy care,
Save us from peril and from woe.
Mother of Christ, Star of the sea
Pray for the wanderer, pray for me. (“Hail, Queen of Heaven” 112)

J. R. R. Tolkien’s “The Hymn of Elbereth”:

O stars that in the Sunless Year
With shining hand by her were sown,
In windy fields now bright and clear
We see your silver blossom blown!

O Elbereth! Gilthoniel!
We still remember, we who dwell
In this far land beneath the trees,
Thy starlight on the Western Sea. (“The Hymn of Elbereth” 79)

Prayers to both divinities are characterized by the praising of their purity and guidance, represented by the element of the light exuded by the unattainable stars, the symbol assigned to both. The hymns appeal in essence, for the custody and safety of *Stella Maris* and *The Lady of the Stars*.

3.1.3 *Feminine Light facing Masculine Darkness*

Tolkien however does not reproduce a mere Marian archetype. The static, charitable Christian female role attributed to Varda, harshly contrasts with the Norse-God inspired, active, male Valar who “hunt, battle, and hold sovereignty over land and sea” (Burns 153). Nevertheless, Tolkien emphasises the great power that resides in the prime female characteristics of Arda: understanding, which derives consequently in counselling and overall guidance (Rawls 101). In the origins of Middle-earth, Varda descended to Valinor “out of the deeps of Eä [...] to the aid of Manwë; for Melkor she knew from before the making of the Music and rejected him, and he hated her, and feared her more than all others who Eru made.” (*Silmarillion* 16). The clarity of Varda’s understanding is, at the same time, what frightens Melkor¹ and what aids Manwë. According to Rawls “Evil is the result of an insufficiency or a disharmony of the attributes of one or the other of the genders” (99), and is the balance between the two genders that creates Good, “those beings in Arda who are able to achieve good either embody both the Feminine and Masculine within themselves or have access to the nature of the other gender, usually in the form of a spouse, a sibling or a mentor” (Rawls 100). Melkor arises from the imbalance of the feminine gender, which results in an overly masculine entity that is lacking crucial feminine attributes.

Varda sits in Oiolossë facing eastward, in the direction of Middle-earth, where the cries and prayers she answers come from. In this position she is also facing the Dark Lord’s Tower, even if Melkor’s focus remains in the west. Scholars like O’Neil observe here “a balance of forces, with Varda (the White) serving as the feminine symbol, as a “distillation of what is benevolent in the divinity” while Sauron, the Dark Lord, is “the masculine symbol, the essence of evil” (qtd. in Burns 154).

1. Melkor, also known as Morgoth, is the first “Dark Lord” in Tolkien’s legendarium and the source of Evil in Arda. Originally he was the most powerful out of the children of Illúvatar, but he was proud and corrupt and rebelled against Illúvatar’s creation.

Aside from being a crucial element for the defeat of Evil and the prevalence of Good, Varda is also, far from being purely static and passive, a creator of her own. Varda's power and creativity are not inferior to Manwë's or the other male Valar, they are in fact equal or can sometimes even be superior. Varda's stars are, hand in hand with Yavanna's Two Trees, one of the greatest works of Eä.

3.2. Yavanna

3.2.1. *Queen of the Earth*

Yavanna, "The Giver of Fruits" (*Silmarillion* 18), is the embodiment of nature and is second to Varda amongst the Valier. Scholar Edith L. Crow argues that "If Varda suggests the Great Goddess –the goddess as Creatix– [and] the other female Valar (the Valier) encompass other aspects of the Goddess, Yavanna is very much the Earth Mother" (Crow 138). Yavanna is the source and lover of all growing things, and she remembers the forms of each of them, "from the trees like towers in forests long ago, to the moss upon stones or the small and secret things in the mould." (*Silmarillion* 18). She cares deeply for her creations, for if we conceive her as the Earth Mother, all her creations are in fact, her children. As it can be seen for instance when Tolkien says: "As yet no flower had bloomed nor any bird had sung, for these things waited still their time in the bosom of Yavanna.", a clear reference to the mother's womb (*Silmarillion* 28). When Melkor destroys all the Valar's work, Yavanna descends to the darkened lands and mourns and attempts to heal her creations:

And in that time of dark Yavanna also was unwilling utterly to forsake the Outer Lands; for all things that grow are dear to her, and she mourned for the works that she had begun in Middle-earth but Melkor had marred. Therefore leaving the house of Aulë and the flowering meads of Valinor she would come at times and heal the hurts of Melkor; (*Silmarillion* 34)

Yavanna also has the power of changing shapes, and "some there are who have seen her standing like a tree under heaven, crowned with the Sun; and from all its branches there spilled a golden dew upon the barren earth, and it grew green with corn; but the roots of the tree were in the waters of Ulmo, and the winds of Manwë spoke in its leaves." (*Silmarillion* 18).

The Queen of Earth is also the creator of one of the greatest works of Eä: The Two Trees of Valinor, Laurelin and Telperion, which she brought to life by means of song, for as told in the “Ainulindalë”, “all creation comes to being because of the power of song” (Rawls 105).

3.2.2. Goddess Freyja

The Earth Mother, the mother who gives birth to all, who bestows humankind with food and wealth, who is present in many different mythologies, often develops into The Great Goddess of vegetation, harvest and fertility (Davidson 21). In Norse mythology, this fertility deity is called Freyja, and just as Yavanna is said to “encompass other aspects” (Crow 138) of Varda, Freyja and her higher-ranked counterpart Frigg are also strongly connected. According to scholar Hilda Ellis Davidson they “suggest two aspects of the same divinity” (123) as well as different aspects associated with womanhood: mother and chaste virgin, the same aspects that Varda and Yavanna embody. Goddess Freyja, like Yavanna, has the ability to transform into a bird by means of a feathered cloak. (Davidson 117).

Freyja’s husband is Odr, the one “who left her to weep tears of red gold at his disappearance” (Davidson 30) and the one for whom she wanders the countryside in hopes of finding him. According to Davidson this grieving and search for her husband refers to the death of the male god of fertility, who according to Norse myth, has to die whilst the female counterpart lives and weeps for him with the intention of reviving him (116). Freyja cries and looks for the lost fertility, just as Yavanna cries and looks for the remains of her creation, for the fertility of Arda, in the lands devastated by Melkor. Thus, both deities mourn the loss of fertility while they also try to revive it.

Freyja gives birth to two daughters whose names are *Hnoss* and *Gersimi*, the first meaning ‘jewel’ and the latter ‘treasure’ (Flavelle 25). Yavanna’s silver tree Telperion, stands for ‘silver wreath’, whilst the golden tree Laurelin stands for ‘song of gold’. The two children of Freyja and the two trees of Yavanna, all four main creations of the two goddesses, are clearly etymologically related as they all have connotations of wealth and valuable elements. We could also argue that as the light of The Trees of Valinor later resides in the treasured jewels of *The Silmarillion*, the relation is even stronger.

3.2.3 The Feminine Principle at the Core of Creation

In Arda all creativity of the Feminine Principle resides in the body or the Self. Weaving is the only form of creativity of The Feminine Principle that requires manipulation of objects, every other one only involves action of the body, which according to Rawls, is “no bad description of childbirth” (105). This furthers the connection between The Two Trees of Valinor, created by means of song; and the two daughters of Frejya, created by means of childbirth. Song however is a mode not only of creativity but also of power, and as stated before, “it lies in the heart of all creation” (Rawls 105), which implies that the Feminine Principle is at the very heart of the cosmology of Middle-earth. In fact, from Yavanna’s “song of power” (*Silmarillion* 31), the two trees that brought life and light to Valinor were created, the trees that “of all things which Yavanna made they have most renown, and about their fate all the tales of the Elder Days are woven.” (*Silmarillion* 31). In this way, Tolkien places The Feminine Principle, women’s creation by means of their own body, at the very heart of powerful creations, from where we could conclude that he is depicting childbirth as an essential form of creation and even a highly powerful one.

In this metaphor for childbirth, even if Yavanna’s spouse Aulë indirectly takes part in the creation of the trees because he holds sovereignty “over all the substances of which Arda is made” (*Silmarillion* 17), he is not part of the creative process. This also happens with Frejya, for even if her daughters are born from childbirth, there is no specification of who the father is. In this way, in both Norse and Tolkien’s mythologies, the deities’ embodiment of the almighty power of creation that nature holds is emphasized; stressing that both Frejya and Yavanna are clear representations of the Earth Mother. Tolkien however does use the connection between Aulë and Yavanna as a demonstration of “what happens when the masculine and feminine creative powers, while not in opposition, are, nevertheless, not quite in step” (Rawls 114). This clash is reflected in the creation of Dwarves and Ents. As a consequence of being created only by Aulë, the Dwarf race is overly masculine, whilst the Ent race, as a consequence of being created only by Yavanna, is overly feminine. Therefore, in *The Silmarillion* the Feminine Principle does lie in the heart of many powerful creations, but once again, Tolkien emphasizes the fact that balance and harmony between both genders is needed.

The importance that Tolkien concedes to the body in terms of female power is also present in the transformative aspect of Yavanna, who unlike Frejya, who transforms by means of an object, turns into a tree without needing any other object or tool other than her body. Frejya’s feathered cloak aligns with the Masculine Principle while Yavanna’s body-transformation is a clear example of the creative form of the Feminine Principle.

The Earth Mother Yavanna, creator of all growing things, taking the form of a tree may resonate with Norse mythology World Tree Yggdrasil (Davidson 26). This ash tree is at the centre of the universe. It connects the different realms of the world, and beneath one of the roots “was the spring of Mimir, whose waters contained wisdom and understanding” (Davidson 26) whilst “on the topmost bough sat an eagle”, “the same eagle perhaps, of whom it is said that the flapping of its wings caused the winds in the world of men.” (Davidson 27). Yavanna as a tree connects with the waters of Ulmo who “moves as he will in all the deep waters about the Earth” and “speaks to those who dwell in Middle-earth with voices that are heard only as the music of water” imparting wisdom to the Elves (*Silmarillion* 17). Through her highest branches she also connects with the winds of Manwë, “Lord of the Breath of Arda” who had “spirits in the shape of hawks and eagles” who “brought word to him” (*Silmarillion* 16). According to Davidson, Yggdrasil “was continually threatened, even as it grew and flourished, by the living creatures that preyed upon it” (27). This threat caused by beings that want to profit from nature without reflecting on the damage caused is a major worry of Arda’s Mother Earth:

‘Because my heart is anxious, thinking of the days to come. All my works are dear to me. Is it not enough that Melkor should have marred so many? Shall nothing that I have devised be free from the dominion of others?’ (*Silmarillion* 40)

Tolkien’s Queen of Earth, takes Old Norse goddess Freyja to a higher level. Making her embody great feminine power sourced through the Feminine Principle, whilst also connecting her to Yggdrasil, the creator and mother of all, by means of the body-transforming quality.

3.3 Vairë

3.3.1 Weaver of fate

Vairë the Weaver is third amongst the Queens of Valinor. She is the one “who weaves all things that have ever been in Time into her storied webs, and the halls of Mandos that ever widen as the ages pass are clothed with them.” (*Silmarillion* 19). Unlike Varda and Yavanna, Vairë is not that present throughout the cosmology of Middle-earth, and she does not display her creative powers by creating one of the greatest works of Arda. She is known as the spouse of Námo, as the one who dwells with her husband in the halls of Mandos, therefore, she can be perceived as a rather passive, static or as a minor character. However, as Burns claims “By granting the power of weaving to Vairë [...], Tolkien is borrowing from the long-standing tradition of female

spinning and weaving and the magic and danger these activities suggest” (120). In Indo-European mythology, weaving is closely related to fate (Lionarons 7); Vairë weaves the history of the universe, meaning she decides on the fate of the universe itself.

3.3.2 The Norns

In Norse mythology, next to the spring of fate, beneath Yggdrasil, dwell the Norns; the three maidens who decide on the fate of men (Davidson 27). Also known as the *Dísirs*, these maidens choose the destiny of each human by weaving “the tapestried fates” (Croft & Donovan 236). They were named *Urðr*, meaning Fate, *Verdandi*, meaning Being, and *Skuld*, meaning Necessity; and each one of them is related to a moment in time (Davidson 112). *Urðr* would be the past, *Verdandi* the present and *Skuld* would be the future (Davidson 116). In ancient north-western Europe, Norns were related to the birth of children, for they were said to determine at that moment what their destiny would be. Vairë is also related to the beginning of life, of history, for she is “The Weaver” and therefore the creator of “all that has ever been in Time” (*Silmarillion* 19). However, both Norns and Vairë are at the same time related to the end of life through their connection to Yggdrasil and Námo. According to some Finno-Ugric beliefs, the leaves of the tree represent the lives and fates of men, thus when a leaf falls, a man dies (Davidson 195). Námo, “the keeper of the House of the Dead” (*Silmarillion* 19), like Yggdrasil, is directly related with death as he is the “Doomsman of the Valar” and “the summoner of the spirits of the slain” (*Silmarillion* 19). Therefore, both Norns and Vairë are weavers of fate and are connected with both the beginning and the ending of the story of each human.

3.3.3 Weaver of Death

In Tolkien’s mythology, the Norse deities *Urðr*, *Verdandi* and *Skuld*, —past, present and future times— are compressed into Vairë, meaning that she controls history in all three moments in time. According to scholar Joyce Tally Lionarons, “both spinning and weaving are, of course, traditional occupations of women, and in Indo-European mythology, both are associated with magic, fate” and also with “death” (7). In this Indo-European tradition of women weavers, darkness and death prevail, and according to Burns, Vairë having Námo as her spouse is no exception (Burns 112). In fact, between Vairë and Námo exists not only the harmonious balance between the Feminine and Masculine Principles, which creates Good, but a balance between life

and death. As seen before, weaving is the only form of creativity of The Feminine Principle that requires manipulation of objects. Just as Vairë gets far from the Feminine Principle of creating by means of one's body, she also gets far from the idea of creation and light by being closely related to darkness and death. Vairë can be seen as a representation of a femininity that differs from the one seen in Varda and Yavanna. She is a powerful creator inside Tolkien's mythology with the significant task of deciding on Arda's history, but aside of being a creator by means of the Feminine Principle of weaving in Tolkien's universe, she is also part of the feminine tradition of spinning and weaving, and consequently related to death and the end of light.

4. Wise women

4.1. Lúthien

4.1.1. *Lúthien Tinúviel*

Lúthien is the daughter of powerful Maia Melian, the most beautiful, wise and skilled in songs of enchantment amongst her kin, and of Thingol, a mighty king of the Eldar. Her mother being of the race of the Valar, Lúthien inherits this powerful godlike quality as well as the nobility of her father, becoming the “fairest of all the Children of Ilúvatar that was or shall ever be” (*Silmarillion* 55). Her divinity is contrasted by her lover Beren, the mortal man whose doom changes and joins Lúthien's after seeing how she “danced upon the unfading grass in the glades beside Esgalduin. Then all memory of his pain departed from him, and he fell into an enchantment;” (*Silmarillion* 193). As seen in the passage, Lúthien's power resides in healing, and dance, as well as in song and weaving — all four forms of creativity of the Feminine Principle (Rawls 105).

Lúthien's song is of “surpassing loveliness” and “of blinding power” (*Silmarillion* 213), and it is one of the reasons that lies behind Beren's choice of calling her *Tinúviel*, which means Nightingale, daughter of twilight in the Grey-elven tongue. This name, given by her lover, also refers to the contrast that her dark hair and her bright eyes create, evoking an image of light in darkness. When it comes to the creative power of weaving, Lúthien's threads are like those of the Norns, for she consciously and actively chooses and changes the fate of her lover as well as hers. For instance, a reference to this weaving as the building of fate can be found when Lúthien asks for his lover's life back in the halls of Mandos, and she is said to sing “the song most fair that ever in words was woven”, a song that “wove two themes of words, of the sorrow of the

Eldar and the grief of Men” (*Silmarillion* 2020). The use of the verb “weave” in the most explicit fate-choosing moment in Beren and Lúthien’s story is no coincidence. Lúthien is also heroic, brave and wise, and uses all these qualities to aid and save her lover. She is not afraid when fighting against Melkor, in fact she shows great power, wit and wisdom by singing Melkor to sleep so her and her lover’s quest could be completed:

Then Lúthien catching up her winged robe sprang into the air, and her voice came dropping down like rain into pools, profound and dark. She cast her cloak before his eyes, and set upon him a dream, dark as the Outer Void where once he walked alone. Suddenly he fell, as a hill sliding in avalanche, and hurled like thunder from his throne lay prone upon the floors of hell. The iron crown rolled echoing from his head. All things were still. (*Silmarillion* 213).

Aside from the physical portrayal of her power, Lúthien also shows great courage and strength when she sacrifices her immortality and her loyalty to her family and kin, to be true to her love and to choose her desire, to stay with Beren. Fair, delicate and benevolent Lúthien is therefore also perilous, a characteristic that in earlier literature was usually attributed to evil, monstrous or villainous women (Croft & Donovan 3).

4.1.2. The Valkyries: Radiant and Terrible

In Norse mythology, the Valkyries are female spirits who link Odin with the slain, the world of the living with the world of the dead (Davidson 61). In earlier Norse literature, Valkyries could be both evil and good. According to scholar Leslie A. Donovan, “stereotypical attributes of benevolent valkyrie figures” generally include: “1) divine or semi divine origins or ancestry, 2) noble social status, 3) superior wisdom intellect or acumen; and 4) exceeding beauty” (228). Lúthien fits in this description with extreme exactitude, as she inherits her mother’s divinity and wisdom, as well as her father’s status. She also possesses a beauty that is highlighted throughout the story, being often described as “the most beautiful of all the children of Ilúvatar” (*Silmarillion* 193). Her physical appearance is also connected with some more specific qualities of the Valkyries related to light and radiance. More precisely a light and shine that are derived from the metallic armours, necklaces and arm rings that Old Norse Valkyries used to carry (Donovan 231). The Valkyries’ “otherworldly radiance”, for instance, can be found in the “shining light” in Lúthien’s face (*Silmarillion* 193), and the Valkyrie topos

of “shining light residing in the eyes” (Donovan 231) can be seen in the description of Lúthien’s eyes which “were grey as the starlit evening” (*Silmarillion* 193). This topos can be seen in the skaldic poem *Hrafnsmál*, where the eyes of a Valkyrie are described as “gloegghavarmr”, meaning “gleaming eyes” (Donovan 233). This association with stars also connects with the Valkyrie motif of being a light in the dark, of serving as a source of guidance and power in times of need, such as in battle. In fact, the Valkyries share with Lúthien, the overall use of light as an important element of their own personal power (Donovan 251). The contrast between the beautiful and divine feminine model and the great power she possesses, can be seen along with the motif of light as the source of her power, in Lúthien’s battle against the hound of Angband Carcharoth:

But suddenly some power, descended from of old from divine race, possessed Lúthien and casting back her foul raiment she stood forth, small before the might of Carcharoth, but radiant and terrible. Lifting up her hand she commanded him to sleep, saying: ‘O woe-begotten spirit, fall now into dark oblivion, and forget for a while the dreadful doom of life.’ And Carcharoth was felled, as though lightning had smitten him. (*Silmarillion* 212)

“Radiant and terrible”. This combination of powerful deity and dangerous warrior qualities, is the essence of the Valkyrie. In both Old English and Old Norse literature, Valkyries are armed, powerful and also priestly (Donovan 229). This priestly quality is related to their connection with the dead as well as with fate, in fact, in Old Norse, the word *valkyrja* meant “battle determiner” or “chooser of the slain” (Donovan 229). In medieval literature, Valkyries embroidered and wove special garments for the warrior with the aim of assisting or inciting the hero’s quest. This fate-choosing along with the connection they have to weaving and embroidering, make Valkyries strongly resonate with the Norns, just like Lúthien does. However, unlike the traditional Norn, Lúthien’s fate is tied to her lover’s. Moreover, when it comes to choosing her own fate, she sacrifices her immortality and the eternal blissful life in the Heavens to live and die beside Beren. The sacrifice of mortality due to a strong grief related to the loss of something precious and central to her life, is also a recurrent theme in the Valkyrie tradition (Donovan 238). In fact, in her sacrifice of her divine heritage, Lúthien resembles the Germanic Valkyrie-brides, who rejected their divinity for the love of a human hero. This rejection of familiar and cultural heritage transcends the personal level, and becomes something that has societal implications. Just like the common Valkyrie theme dictates, Lúthien’s loss “involves conflicting loyalties to herself and her society” (Donovan 249), and her choice changes history:

So it was that alone of the Eldalië she has died indeed, and left the world long ago. Yet in her choice the Two Kindreds Have been joined; and she is the forerunner of many whom the Eldar see yet, though all the world is changed, the likeness of Lúthien the beloved, whom they have lost (*Silmarillion* 221)

4.1.3 The Idealized Valkyrie

Tolkien's version of the Valkyrie focuses of course on the benevolent side of this mythological figure, suppressing all characteristics he perceived as negative or perverted such as the vengeance for kin, the role of the female inciter and any sort of personal insult. Tolkien's version of the Valkyrie, Lúthien, is moulded and idealized. Lúthien is a representative of moral good, she is both heroic and noble, and she shows leadership and power through her female identity (Donovan 225). However, despite this idealized female figure that Lúthien embodies, her fate is tragic. According to Overing, this tragic ending is the result of a clash between the "death-centred masculine desire" and the role of the "female as life-giver" (qtd. in Donovan 245), a clash between the Feminine and Masculine Principles. Action is part of the Masculine Principle whilst the equivalent Feminine way of influencing history in Middle-earth is through counsel after observation. Nonetheless, this alleged imbalance of the Feminine Principle does not determine Lúthien's character, for Lúthien and Beren's love joins them just like their fate does and "Lúthien achieves feats of greatness for love of Beren, just as he is inspired to deeds far beyond the power of mortal men for love of her" (Rawls 114). It is not the desire or greed for the Silmarils but the love for each other what makes them fight against evil.

Unlike Old Norse female figures who would disarm themselves after falling in love with a hero, Lúthien takes up the arms to defend her love (Donovan 234). Nevertheless, Lúthien's weapons are not the Traditional Valkyries' armours, swords, shields and axes; but her song, radiance, wisdom and essentially, her spells. Even if she participates in battle, which falls in the realm of the Masculine Principle, she does so by sourcing her power from the feminine forms of creation. Far from being a "hero in drag" (Rawls 117), Tolkien rejects the idea of all valuable things belonging to The Male Principle and the need for female characters to adopt those masculine characteristics in order to be equals (Rawls 117). Even if Lúthien's actions are masculine, her methods are not, and with her feminine methods she "outperforms in courage, daring, resourcefulness, adventure and sheer power most of our weapon-brandishing heroes and heroines" (Rawls 117).

4.2 Idril

4.2.1. *Saviour of Gondolin*

Idril Celebrindal, ‘Silver-foot’ in the Elven tongue, is the daughter of King Turgon, the King of Gondolin, and of Elwë, one of the High Elves of the Vanyar. Idril inherited from her mother attributes of great beauty, like her golden hair which was “as the gold of Laurelin before the coming of Melkor” (*Silmarillion* 146). She also possesses powerful and valuable qualities that are shown in Idril’s most memorable deed, one that requires great wisdom, cunning and power. Idril, aware of the dangerous threat that Melkor meant to Gondolin, and untrusting of Maeglin’s intentions — her Dark-Elf cousin and suitor — she arranged a plan that would aid the people of the city in times of great need:

Idril Celebrindal was wise and far-seeing, and her heart misgave her, and foreboding crept upon her spirit as a cloud. Therefore, in that time she let prepare a secret way, that should lead down from the city and passing out beneath the surface of the plain issue far beyond the walls, northward of Amon Gwareth; and she contrived it that the work was known but to few and no whisper of it came to Maeglin’s ears. (*Silmarillion* 290)

Maeglin’s treachery unchained Melkor’s evil wrath and the day of the fall of Gondolin arrived upon a time of Elven festival. After witnessing the death of King Turgon and the hellish landscape that the fair city of Gondolin had become, Idril and her husband Tuor led the citizens of Gondolin through Idril’s secret tunnel, and escaped with their son Eärendil. Thus, the Elven Idril and her human mortal husband Tuor escape together with their Halfelven son Eärendil, the representation of both their love and their future. In fact, the lovers’ escape together with Eärendil will mark the beginning of a journey that will lead to a new possibility for love between mortals and immortals. Idril’s radiance, wisdom, power and love for a mortal man directly connect her with Lúthien, and consequently to the Valkyries. However, the resemblance between the fall of the city of Gondolin and the fall of Troy, connects Idril to a Trojan female figure rather than an Old Norse one.

4.1.2. *Creusa*

Creusa, also known as Euridice in more ancient epopees, is the daughter of King Priam and of Queen Hecuba. Similar to Idril, aside from being the daughter of a king, Creusa's mother is the descendant of the River-god Sangarius and the nymph Evagora (Grimal 227). But Creusa shares with Idril not only this noble heritage, but also the love for a hero, for Creusa is the first wife of the lead character in Virgil's *Aeneid* Aeneas, the Trojan hero. Creusa and Aeneas, just like Idril and Tuor, also have a child who they want to protect when the great city of Troy, just like Gondolin, is subject to an attack after a treacherous act. Their child's name is Ascanio. However, unlike Idril, Creusa does not survive the attack of the Greeks (Grimal 227). Creusa and Aeneas start to flee the city together rushing through secret paths along with Ascanio. Suddenly Creusa disappears as they run, and when Aeneas comes back to Troy to find her, he finds only her ghost who prophesizes his great travels. Like in Idril's story, there is a travel that results from the escape, but only Aeneas and Ascanio survive, meaning that there is a future, but that future lacks balance.

4.1.3. Balance Survives

As scholar Alexander M. Bruce argues, even if Idril's and Creusa's stories are quite similar in some ways, "in his work, Tolkien presents us with his own decidedly non-Roman perspectives" (Bruce 109). Balance is at the core of Tolkien's version. The balance between the Feminine and Masculine principles determines Idril's and Tuor's fates. According to Rawls, all female and male characters ought to embody the nature of both genders, and in this case, the nature of the opposite gender is accessed by means of the spouse (100). Tuor needs Idril's intuition, wisdom and understanding just as much as Idril needs Tuor's reason and will to act. Being the immortal one, Idril also embodies the spiritual, a characteristic that, as seen in previous characters, is often embodied and more highlighted in the female characters of Tolkien's mythology. Tuor being the mortal one, he embodies the physical form instead, which aligns with the Masculine principle of action, something Tuor uses, for instance, to save Idril and his son Eärendil from Maeglin. Idril and Tuor represent the spiritual and the physical, the feminine and the masculine, and most importantly balance, the crucial attribute for the prevalence of Good (Bruce 110). Eärendil, the result of the love union between Idril and Tuor, is the embodiment of the balance between the two Principles as well as between the earthly and the spiritual. That is why it will be Eärendil, alongside with his wife Elwing, grand-daughter of Beren and Lúthien, the one that "sought back one more to Valinor with Elwing at his side" (*Silmarillion* 297) to establish the balance and

therefore peace and good that exists within themselves amongst the different kins and races. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, the balance between the Masculine and Feminine principles is non-existent; Creusa's death is the result. Instead, they embody negative qualities of each of the genders, Creusa being powerless and Aeneas being aggressive (Rawls 101). In fact, just as the first line of the *Aeneid* dictates, Aeneas' song is one of "arms and the man", "arma virumque cano". Therefore, Aeneas could survive without his wife Creusa because his deed was of purely masculine nature. It is this imbalance between the Masculine and Feminine Principles that leads to Creusa's powerlessness and consequently her death. Therefore, "the fact that Tuor and Idril escape together is not a case of Tolkien's sentimentality. It is an essential trope in his greater story of love and reconciliation" (Bruce 114), as well as an example of the need for a balance between the two genders.

5. Victim Women

5.1 Nienor

5.1.1 Tear Maiden

Túrin Turambar, whose name ironically means 'Master of Doom' in High Elven-speech, is the most hapless character in *The Silmarillion* due to his cursed fate; and around him, the biggest tragedy in Tolkien's mythology is constructed: the tragedy of the children of Húrin. Nienor, Túrin's younger sister, is one of the many characters whose doom is tragically affected by that of Turin's. 'Nie' meaning tear, the name Nienor means 'mourning' in Quenya, one of the two main Elven languages, which can be interpreted as an omen of her sorrowful and catastrophic fate. After being separated from her brother 20 years earlier, in the time of the Nirnaeth Arnoediad ("The Battle of Unnumbered Tears"), Nienor and Túrin meet again in the forest, where Nienor lies naked and confused "like a wild beast that is dying" (*Silmarillion* 262) after having all her memory erased by Glaurung the Urulóki, "the Worm of Morgoth" (*Silmarillion* 266). Being found in this vulnerable state and not remembering who she is, Túrin renames Nienor and calls her "Níniel, Tear Maiden" (*Silmarillion* 262), which aligns with the connotations of sorrow in her first given name, and takes her in. After some time living with Túrin and the woodsmen, Túrin's "heart turned to Níniel" (*Silmarillion* 263), and his love being corresponded, they wed and conceive a child. The tragic end comes again with Glaurung the Urulóki. After being slain by Túrin, the dragon poisons his killer leaving Túrin laying "as

one dead” (*Silmarillion* 266) to which Níniel answers by running towards her allegedly dead husband without fear of the dragon. The bravery that the love for her husband gives her brings Níniel to mourn her husband’s “death” next to the dragon, who speaks with his last breath:

‘Hail, Nienor, daughter of Húrin. We meet again ere the end. I give thee joy that thou hast found thy brother at last. And now thou shalt know him: a stabber in the dark, treacherous to foes, faithless to friends, and curse to his kin, Túrin son of Húrin! But the worst of all his deeds thou shalt feel thyself.’ (*Silmarillion* 267)

With Glaurung’s death Níniel remembers her life as Nienor and “looking down upon Túrin she cried: ‘Farewell, O twice beloved! *A Túrin Turambar turun ambartanen*: master of doom by doom mastered! O happy to be dead!’” (*Silmarillion* 267). Nienor, unable to bear the pain “with horror and anguish, and coming to the brink of Cabed-en-Aras she cast herself over, and was lost in the wild water” (*Silmarillion* 268). Finally, it is above that same cliff that Túrin Turambar takes his life after learning the news of his incestuous relationship.

5.1.2. *Wanōna*

In the *Kalevala*, the Finno-Ugric book of epic poetry, Túrin takes the name of Kullervo, the most hapless character in the whole *Kalevala* and the lead character in the biggest Tragedy of Finnish mythology. Wanōna, whose name means “weeping”, the long-lost sister of Kullervo, is Nienor’s equivalent. However, many elements deviate from the tragedy of the sons of Húrin to the tragedy of Kullervo. Kullervo, far from being Heroic and noble as Túrin, he is referred to as the “wicked wizard of Northland” (Crawford 545), and it is not a heroic salvation and marriage that unites Kullervo and Wanōna, but rape and assault, as seen in the Rune XXXV of the *Kalevala*:

Golden belts with silver buckles,
Jewelry that dims the vision,
Blunts the conscience of the virgin.
Silver leads one to destruction,
Gold entices from uprightness.
Kullerwoinen, wicked wizard,
Flatters lovingly the maiden,
One hand on the reins of leather,

One upon the maiden's shoulder;
Thus they journey through the evening,
Pass the night in merry-making. (Crawford 545)

Once the crime is committed, Wanōna addresses Kullervo, and questions “thus the wicked wizard”: “Of what tribe art thou descended / Of what race thy hero-father? / Tell thy lineage and kindred.” (Crawford 546)

Kullervo answers truthfully, and Wanōna recognizes his rapist as her long-lost brother. This leads to the tragic ending that resembles Túrin's and Nienor's. Wanōna casts herself to “the sacred stream of Mana”, “to her own destruction” (Crawford 547-548). Then, “The wicked Kullerwoinen fell to weeping, sorely troubled” (Crawford 548) and finally claims: “I can never hide from sorrow / Cannot flee from my misconduct; / To the jaws of death I hasten, [...] (Crawford 551)

Therefore, the Maiden of Tears Nienor and the “Weeping Maiden” Wanōna share their tragic destiny. However, the different deeds and personas of Túrin Turambar and Kullervo the Wicked Wizard completely change the tragic story's tone and overall meaning, because even if they are both ill-fated and both commit incest, the wicked wizard rapes Wanōna, whilst Túrin loves Nienor. For Nienor Túrin is her “twice beloved” brother, whilst for Wanōna Kullervo is his rapist who she wished he never met for all he brought was suffering. Her last words express the wish of being dead:

If this wretched maid had perished,
In the summer of the third year,
She had fed earth's vegetation,
She had blossomed as a flower,
Knowing neither pain nor sorrow. (Crawford 547)

5.1.3 Tolkien's Victim Women

In Tolkien's mythology, violence against women can take the form of forced marriages, such as the one of Númenórean king Ar-Gimilzôr to the Lady Inzilbêth, or of oppressive and controlling behaviours of Elven Kings towards their daughters, such as Thingol's towards Lúthien (Crowe 147). However, as scholar Edith L. Crowe underlines, “[one] important characteristic of Tolkien's universe is the refreshing absence of violence against women *as*

women. In a dominator society, this is a basic characteristic. Middle-earth certainly contains violence against women, but the perpetrators are those who are equally violent against everybody (Orcs for example).” (Crowe, 147). Violence in the *Silmarillion* is not based on sex but on kin, past events and on Melkor’s or Sauron’s actions. Unlike Middle-earth, Northland (where Wanōna’s and Kullervo’s tale takes place) does reflect a dominator society, a patriarchal society of which the outcome is rape: violence based on gender, violence against women *as women*.

Kullervo falls into the negative side of the Masculine Principle, for he is rash, aggressive and self-aggrandizing. Being the epitome of the Negative Masculine Principle, his crime can be related to Melkor’s intentions when he sees Lúthien, who feels “an evil lust, and a design more dark than any that had yet come into his heart since he fled from Valinor.” (*Silmarillion* 212). Therefore, rape in Tolkien’s work is only imaginable in the mind of the embodiment of evil and the negative Masculine Principle. Wanōna and Nienor, despite being victims, show bravery and resistance in times of danger. When captured by her evil brother Wanōna commands him to leave her free and threatens him with tearing his “sledge to pieces” and “throwing the fur-robies to the north-winds” (*Kalevala* XXXV). Nienor shows her bravery when she approaches Glaurung to try and save her husband. Therefore, these women are not inherently passive or victims, but become victims. Even if incest connects both tragic stories, in *The Silmarillion*, it is doom and love what determines Nienor’s victimhood whilst in the *Kalevala* it is sexual violence that determines Wanōna’s. In Tolkien’s tragedy, Nienor is a victim of doom just like Túrin is, which brings a sufferance that has nothing to do with sex or gender and everything to do with fate.

6. Monstrous Women

6.1. Ungoliant

6.1.1 Weaver of Darkness

Ungoliant, which means “spider” in Sindarin, is the “spider of monstrous form” that according to some people of the Eldar was a spirit that “descended from the darkness that lies about Arda, when Melkor first looked down in envy upon the Kingdom of Manwë” (*Silmarillion* 76-77). In fact, at first Ungoliant was one of Melkor’s servants, but “she had disowned her Master, desiring to be mistress of her own lust, taking all things to herself to feed her

emptiness” (*Silmarillion* 76). She lives in Avathar, where “the shadows were deepest and thickest in the world” and there she skilfully weaves her dark webs as she devours all light that reaches her and transforms it into the “Unlight, in which eyes could not pierce, for it was void.” Even if Ungoliant is selfish and greedy and does not work for anyone but herself, her hunger for light forces her to ally with his old master Melkor, with whom she brings “the great darkness to Valinor” by poisoning Laurelin and Telperion, the two trees of Valinor. After consuming them Ungoliant becomes even more monstrous, so much that even Melkor is afraid, and the darkness that she brings was more than a lack of light, it was a darkness that “was made of malice out of Light, and it had power to pierce the eye” (*Silmarillion* 80). After condemning the world to her great darkness, Ungoliant is betrayed by Melkor and she goes back to a dark hiding place in the Valley of Dreadful Death still hungry for more light until “in her uttermost famine she devoured herself” (*Silmarillion* 86). Ungoliant never had a male partner, in fact she devoured those who she mated with. She is one of the most horrible creatures that has ever inhabited Middle-earth; the powerful, cunning, evil and ever insatiable Ungoliant (Alonso 4).

6.1.2. Arachne

According to Greek mythology, Arachne was a young maid from the Kingdom of Lydia who was known to be one of the best weavers and embroiderers of the land. Her talent was so great that she became known to be a disciple of Goddess Athene, the goddess of weavers and embroiderers (Grimal 44). But Arachne did not want to owe her talent to anyone but herself, because just like Ungoliant, she was very much avaricious and self-involved, and so she defied the goddess to a contest. Athena warned Arachne of the outcomes of her wrath, but Arachne’s pride and greed led her to weave against the goddess. Athena wove in her tapestry, aside from the Gods of the Olimpo, four warning images of scenes where mortals had been defeated by deities. Meanwhile, malicious Arachne wove scenes of Zeus with his not so honourable “love” relationships of the past like Zeus and Europe, in order to irritate her rival. Her job was perfect, but Athene, infuriated, broke Arachne’s tapestry and hit her with her shuttle (Grimal 44). Resembling Ungoliant’s retreat to the shadows when attacked by Melkor, overwhelmed by desperation Arachne hanged herself, but Athene did not let her die and she turned her into a spider that would wave and wave until she died. Ungoliant, like Arachne, is not said to be a spider from the beginning, but she “took shape as a spider” (*Silmarillion* 77). Therefore, aside

from their greed, cunning and skill to weave, Arachne and Ungoliant share the essential element of metamorphosing into spiders.

6.1.3. Tolkien's Evil Women

As the only villainous female figure or monstrous woman in *The Silmarillion*, Ungoliant embodies all the negative characteristics of the Feminine Principle. According to scholar Melanie A. Rawls “we may accept that Ungoliant is the inverse of Melkor: he totally out-directed, she completely inward-oriented” (Rawls 109). Ungoliant’s excessive involvement with herself leads her to be passive, as she only gets involved in as little action as possible and if she does so, she does it to satiate her hunger for light like she does in the Darkening of Valinor. Her eternal hunger makes her impotent and finally self-consuming as it leads her to literally devour herself. When it comes to creation, even if weaving is a creative form of the Feminine Principle, Ungoliant weaves to destroy, she is the weaver of the void, making her creation completely contrary to what the Principle dictates. Her creation is destruction, her light is the Un-light.

Tolkien represents with the monstrous spider-woman the antithesis of all his other female characters who are often symbols of light and therefore of good and have positive characteristics of the Feminine Principle as well as a balance with the Masculine Principle. Ungoliant is overly feminine, that is her flaw, and we could argue, that is even the reason why she becomes a spider. Comparing her metamorphosis to Arachne’s, even if they both share qualities, Arachne is punished by Athena and that is why she transforms into a spider, whilst in Tolkien’s universe, it is her own corruption, the outcome of an overly feminine character what lies at the core of Ungoliant’s transformation.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, Tolkien’s portrayal of women in *The Silmarillion*, far from being superficial and misogynistic, is very much complex and even contemporary at its core. By analysing the possible feminine model sources, we get a better understanding of the power and nature of the women in *The Silmarillion*, and most importantly, of the way in which Tolkien elevates and transforms them. With Tolkien’s development we can conclude that even if his sources are ancient, his

attitudes towards female power are quite aligned with contemporary feminist attitudes towards power.

Varda and Yavanna are the two greatest creators of Arda. Varda preserves the charitable qualities of her Christian source with the addition of being an active creator, the highest symbol of Good and a key element to fight Evil. Tolkien's development of the Old Norse Frejya Yavanna, is also taken to the next level; as rather than a fertility deity, she is the creator and protector of all living creatures. Vairë is also a creator that inherits the fate choosing quality from the Norns by means of weaving. Lúthien and Idril are both heroic characters that by means of wisdom and power change the history of Middle-earth. And finally, Tolkien breaks with the talismanic status that scholars often associate to his women characters by adding Nienor and Ungoliant, victim and evil women.

In all seven characters, Tolkien places the Feminine Principle at the very heart of their power, distinguishing it from the Male Principle, portraying both genders not as opposites but as complementary elements of equal importance. Through his updated feminine models, Tolkien rejects the contemporary tendency of depicting women as "heroes in drag" (Rawls 117); a tendency that places the masculine as the norm we should all acquire in order to be equals. He breaks with the idea of the genders being contrary to each other, of femininity being inferior to masculinity by vindicating that for his transformed and actualized versions of the ancient feminine models, "their very femininity is the "very source of their strength" (qtd. in Larsen 190). In this area further research is required to determine whether these findings apply to the rest of the female characters of *The Silmarillion*, as well as Tolkien's other works.

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