

The Patriarchal Understanding of Women in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

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Abstract: Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* presents patriarchal norms and a patriarchal understanding of women through the portrayed differences of the sexes in terms of decision-making, rationality, authority and separated spheres, but also through Éowyn's uniqueness compared to the limited agency of other women. It presents female authority as an exception to the norm when Éowyn is left to manage Rohan. Additionally, the interaction of her and Aragorn demonstrates a patriarchal understanding of decision-making and rationality, presenting an emotional and irrational woman in contrast to the logical Aragorn. Through Éowyn's transformation and return to a patriarchal understanding of women, Tolkien's work portrays a society where the breaking of patriarchal gender norms is not only a rare event but also one that will be undone. Moreover, Éowyn embodies the beautiful female that men can gaze upon. That being said, she is presented as a unique female character. However, this marginalizes women and further strengthens a patriarchal understanding of them instead of representing them in general.

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The existence of the spin-off series *The Rings of Power*¹ and the 2024 movie *The War of the Rohirrim*² underlines *The Lord of the Rings*' continuous relevance in the fantasy landscape, even 70 years after the first book was published. Therefore, Tolkien's work, despite the great time gap, still reaches into our current pop culture. As a result, it is important to consider the underlying

1 *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* (Payne / McKay, 2022).

2 *The Lord of the Rings: The War of the Rohirrim* (Kamiyama, 2024).

ideologies that the book series conveys. As Éowyn is one of the few women we can find in *The Lord of the Rings*, analyzing her character should offer a better understanding of women's place in Tolkien's society. To argue about a patriarchal representation of women through Éowyn, it is important to first define aspects of patriarchy.

Walby defines patriarchy "as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (1990: 20). However, she emphasizes that "[t]he use of the term structure is important here, since it clearly implies rejection both of biological determinism, and the notion that every individual man is in a dominant position and every woman in a subordinate one" (ibid.). This is crucial because it shows that finding women in *The Lord of the Rings* in dominant positions does not automatically rule out the possibility of Tolkien's books presenting patriarchal norms.

In addition, to explore what patriarchy is, Johnson names several different aspects of it, including male dominance (2014: 6). He emphasizes that women, contrary to men, are normally not seen in authoritative positions, and if it happens that they inhabit a dominating role, they are exceptions and questioned if they are really in the right position (ibid.: 6). Johnson points out that leading in patriarchy is something seen as a male characteristic and stresses that women find "themselves reflected as women in a few narrow areas of life such as 'caring' occupations and personal relationships" (ibid.: 8). Moreover, control in the hands of men is another aspect that Johnson emphasizes (ibid.: 13):

Men are assumed (and expected) to be in control at all times, to be unemotional (expect for anger and rage), to present themselves as invulnerable, autonomous, independent, strong, rational, logical, dispassionate, knowledgeable, always right, and in command of every situation, especially those involving women. [...] Women, in contrast, are (and expected) to be just the opposite, especially in relation to men. (ibid.: 13)

Consequently, looking at what characters in Middle-earth present logic and rationality will help analyze *The Lord of the Rings*. What is more, he argues that patriarchy is "about standards of feminine beauty and masculine toughness, images of feminine vulnerability and masculine protectiveness [...] [and] about defining women and men as opposites, about the 'naturalness' of male aggression, competition, and dominance and of female caring, cooperation, and subordination" (ibid.: 37). Logically, according to him, men being the dominating protectors and aggressors, and women being beautiful and caring is a patriarchal understanding of the sexes. Furthermore, since "[p]atriarchal societies enshrine the assumptions that heads of states must be male and male voices rightfully dominate public/private spaces" (Code, 2000: 378),

such societies will tend to show men in positions that decide over the fate of many. Besides, in such societies, men are expected to be with a woman whose occupation is “making sure there is a safe, clean, comfortable haven for rest and recuperation from the stress of the competitive male-dominated world” (Johnson, 2014: 7). This highlights how women are expected to serve men.

I argue that Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* presents patriarchal norms and a patriarchal understanding of women through Éowyn, whose uniqueness marginalizes other women, while her character portrays a patriarchal understanding of women in Middle-earth.

Éowyn’s Uniqueness Marginalizes Other Women

Henderson claims that “Éowyn stands out and, as a result, represents the novel’s many missing women” (2023: 97). However, I argue that Éowyn does not present women in general but a unique female character – a character who is, none the less, shaped by patriarchy.

The Lord of the Rings presents Éowyn as a unique woman because she is portrayed to be the only woman warrior figure who desires and takes part in battle. Women are excluded from battle, one example for this is when Gandalf only urges to evacuate “the women and the children and the old” (*TT*³: 676) but does not list men. Besides, as Éowyn argues that she is left in Rohan because she is a woman (*RK*⁴: 1027) it emphasizes that the female sex is excluded from entering the fight, as she sees that as the reason for her exclusion. If women were not excluded, it would make no sense for her to believe that her sex restricts her from joining. What is more, Éowyn highlights that she “is of the House of Eorl and not a serving-woman” (*RK*: 1027) to make clear that her role should not be at home (*RK*: 1027). Since Éowyn is presented using her bloodline to justify joining them in the fight against Sauron, it implies a necessity to justify women in battle and that logically otherwise it is the norm to exclude them. Furthermore, throughout the books no other warrior women are introduced and it is revealed that Éowyn is the only woman of Rohan who joins the battle (*RK*: 1106). In contrast, one man after another is named who takes part in the fight, e.g. Aragorn, Legolas, Gimli, Gandalf, and Pippin, on their way to the Black Gate of Mordor (*RK*: 1156). Logically, one can conclude that no other woman except Éowyn takes part.⁵ However, Łaszkiewicz claims that it is possible that other women wish to fight as

3 Abbreviations for Tolkien: *The Lord of the Rings. The Two Towers*.

4 Abbreviation for Tolkien: *The Lord of the Rings. The Return of the King*.

5 I deliberately do not count Lobelia’s attempt to fight against one of Saruman’s men with her umbrella (*RK*: 1326) as an example of women in battle because her weapon and defeat present an old woman standing up against injustice directly in front of her eyes, but not somebody in armor entering a fight like the Battle of the Pelennor Fields.

well, but Tolkien does not focus on them because they are common figures (2015: 18). Nevertheless, when Pippin is shown around different places of Minas Tirith (RK: 996 ff.), Tolkien presents a more common figure, “a plain man of arms of the Third Company of the Citadel” (RK: 1004). Logically, the base of Łaszkiewicz’s argumentation that it is because of Tolkien’s focus on special characters is not credible, since there were opportunities to make one of the more common characters a woman and he could have included their wish to enter battle. However, the story only allows one woman to embody this desire.

What is more, I argue that through Éowyn’s uniqueness, *The Lord of the Rings* marginalizes women and further strengthens a patriarchal understanding of them instead of representing them in general. Until her sudden change (RK: 1264), she breaks patriarchal norms by riding into battle regardless of men telling her not to (RK: 1052) and defending Théoden and dominating the Witch-king (RK: 1100 ff.). Consequently, her warrior self does not fit a patriarchal understanding of women. Since Éowyn declares that she is a woman and not a man in her battle with the Nazgûl (RK: 1101), it makes the interpretation possible that this is where women are finally represented in battle, which would justify Henderson’s take that she “represents the novel’s many missing women” (Henderson, 2023: 97). However, her uniqueness does further emphasize a patriarchal understanding of women in general because the fact that she is unique shows that her character does not portray the norm for women. Heilbrun notes that “[e]xceptional women are the chief prisoners of nonexceptional women, simultaneously proving that any woman could do it and assuring, in their uniqueness among men, that no other woman will” (Heilbrun, 1997: 81). Likewise, the extraordinary Lady of Rohan marginalizes other women. Éowyn depicts the woman who can disobey and do as she pleases, making it seem like breaking the bonds of patriarchy is possible, while no other women seem to do the same. Therefore, Éowyn’s character presents the lack of alternative women figures, as she is the only one breaking patriarchal ideas. If she is able to, one should expect more women in the story of *The Lord of the Rings* to be present in battle. But as the reader does not find another woman joining the fight, it makes it seem natural that women are excluded, as they do not choose to. For instance, one could expect that Rose should also be presented in fighting for the liberation of the Shire, as her brother and father join the fight, but she does not accompany Sam after he stops by to see if they are alright (RK: 1319), it further underlines Éowyn’s uniqueness. While battle in *The Lord of the Rings* presents a place without women, Éowyn’s participation presents a woman not conforming to this social order, while her uniqueness highlights that this distinction holds true for most women. Of course, the Lady of Rohan is not just “any” (Heilbrun, 1997: 81) woman, and “given her royal status and skill in sword-figh-

ting, is better prepared to transgress social boundaries than peasant women” (Łaszkiewicz, 2015: 18). However, trying to formulate a feminist theory of freedom, Hirschmann emphasizes that while women’s freedom in patriarchy is impacted, it is not completely omitted (Hirschmann, 2002: 58). Only because something is harder, it does not mean that something is not possible at all (ibid.). Because of that, I argue that while others might face more, or at least different obstacles, Éowyn undermines women through her acts, showing that it is possible to break patriarchal standards but “no other woman will” (Heilbrun, 1997: 81). Consequently, she presents an exception from the norm in a patriarchal society, which further strengthens a patriarchal understanding of women through her unique actions.

Éowyn as Defined by Patriarchy

Decision-making, Authority and Rationality

The Lord of the Rings reveals patriarchal norms and a patriarchal understanding of women by presenting decision-making and leadership in Rohan as a male characteristic. After Saruman’s curse is lifted from Théoden, Éomer stands before him, men wish to be commanded by him, and Théoden asks for Gandalf’s advice. While Éowyn stands behind Théoden during their interaction, she is not involved in planning the next steps against Sauron or Saruman and, therefore, does not contribute anything to their discussion (*TT*: 669 ff). Thus, she is not completely excluded from this scene, but she does not have any say in it. Walby argued that public patriarchy “is segregationist and subordinating” (1990: 24), and this scene shows how a woman is present but is subordinated, as her opinion is not considered. Men are commanded by a man, and counsel is given from the male wizard to the male king. Notably, no female voices are present. As the king presents a male leader, this discussion depicts leadership and decision-making in Rohan in the hands of men. The fact that the planning and counseling include men exclusively shows that decision-making is typically male.

Furthermore, *The Lord of the Rings* presents a patriarchal portrayal of women by highlighting that a woman in an authoritative position is an exception to the norm. It is crucial to emphasize that Éowyn’s position, as she is left to manage Rohan while Théoden and Éomer are gone, is the result of the discussion of men, after Théoden argues that he cannot go without Éomer (*TT*: 683). Thus, Éowyn is not the King’s first choice and seems to remain subordinate to her brother in the ranking of the most suitable for this authoritative position. This shows that her male relative would be the more favorable choice, but the conditions force Théoden to choose otherwise. This indicates a patriarchal order, as it shows that putting the man in command is more likely than putting a woman in this position. In addition, when she

is presented standing alone while the men ride to war (*TT*: 685), it shows that elsewhere there is a greater need for important figures, as even the king must leave his kingdom in the hands of somebody else, making her position seem less relevant than Éomer's, as she is not needed. Consequently, she finds herself in this position because she is not as important as Éomer for their task. The possibility of including her in their mission away from Rohan is not discussed once; she is not meant to join Théoden and Éomer and, therefore, would probably stay in Rohan anyway. Moreover, Théoden declares that Éomer is his heir and states that Éowyn's position is only temporary while they are gone, and that somebody else will inhabit this role in the long run (*TT*: 683). What is more, Théoden asks, "[w]hich of you will stay?", this highlights that he does not directly think about Éowyn as the one to fill this position. He even says that Éomer "is the last of [the House of Eorl]" (*TT*: 683) and has to be reminded that this is incorrect, as Éowyn also exists. Not even thinking about her, a woman, possibly being the one to fill the position of the Lord of the Eorlingas emphasizes her inferiority to her brother and what sex is expected to be represented in leading positions. As she is Éomer's sister, if women were not subordinate to men, the king should not ignore her at first, as she should have the same social rank as him, considering their shared heritage. Thus, the comparison of Éomer and Éowyn's situation shows that normally only men inhabit leading positions.

In addition, the patriarchal understanding of women when it comes to decision-making and rationality is demonstrated through the interaction of Éowyn and Aragorn, presenting an emotional and irrational woman in contrast to a logical man. He turns down her request to join them in battle (*RK*: 1026), which results in a man deciding over the temporary fate of a woman. Besides, Johnson highlights that men, especially in interactions with women, are the ones in control (2014: 13). Thus, Aragorn controlling the whereabouts of Éowyn and deciding for her demonstrates a patriarchal order. Additionally, as already mentioned earlier, it is one of the characteristics of patriarchy that men's judgment is regarded more highly than women's (Code, 2000: 378) and patriarchal males are seen to portray rationality and logic (Johnson, 2014: 13). Therefore, it is noteworthy that a clear imbalance in rationality between them can be observed when Aragorn explains why it is only logical for her not to join them, as she must fulfill her task as the Lord of the Eorlingas (*RK*: 1026). Thus, Aragorn is portrayed reasoning and knowing why certain decisions must be taken, as he can explain why things must be this way (*RK*: 1026 f.). As a result, Éowyn, trying to follow her desires regardless of her responsibilities, contrasts Aragorn, who is portrayed to be logical as he considers different aspects for his decisions. It can be observed that she does not care for his elaboration when she rides into battle anyway (*RK*: 1052 ff.), which emphasizes her irrationality. Furthermore, her discussion with Aragorn

takes place after Théoden leaves her to manage the Eorlingas because another man lists reasons why the king should give her that task (*TT*: 683). Since the discussion of the men results in her position in Rohan, it shows that a man who has a reason to do so controlled her, while her decision to leave seems to be based on the fear of being confined (*RK*: 1027). Another example of her being portrayed as emotional is when she cries when the others leave Rohan (*RK*: 1028). Her reaction matches the patriarchal understanding of the sexes by portraying an irrational and emotional woman.

Additionally, her irrationality is emphasized through the differences between her and Théoden's actions before and during the Battle of the Pelennor Fields. Both face powerful opponents: Théoden confronts "the main force of the Haradrim" (*RK*: 1098) and Éowyn the Witch-king (*RK*: 1100). Her uncle seems to endanger himself when he rides ahead of his company (*RK*: 1097) because he rides alone at the front, which means that nobody is between him and the danger he rides to. However, before he reaches the enemies, he waits for others to come closer to him. Nevertheless, his facing peril does not stop there: After this fight, he also faces the Nazgûl and his flying beast. While facing "[a] creature of an older world [...] [which] grew beyond the measure of all other things that fly" (*RK*: 1099) seems reckless, his planning ahead makes up for this. Théoden has a plan for his temporary absence, as he installed Éowyn to watch over Rohan, for his possible death, he has Éomer as his heir; and in case Éomer also dies, he tells his people to choose somebody else as their leader (*TT*: 683). In contrast, Éowyn does not have this kind of backup plan for her people. Consequently, her mere presence in battle and absence in Rohan is irrational as Fredrick / McBride already noted: "It is irrational to leave her people leaderless, to go to war, and to face the chief Nazgûl in single combat" (2007: 36). While both face danger, only Théoden considers what his actions mean for others. Thus, her behavior seems thoughtless and aligns with the patriarchal understanding of women's emotionality and lack of rationality. Henderson even argues that Éowyn "has not simply rejected a social role that does not appeal to her: she has endangered lives so that she may revel in slaughter" (2023: 98). This interpretation seems valid considering that she leaves even though Théoden left her to look after the Eorlingas (*TT*: 683), meaning that she neglects her duty. While the king already anticipates that this is his "last riding" (*TT*: 683) and therefore portrays a rational older leader who knows that he will not live forever and arranges everything so he can go without causing too great a harm, Éowyn is a young woman who destroys these arrangements. In addition, "he had lived to full years and ended in honour no less than the greatest of his sires" (*RK*: 1279). Thus, for Théoden, his ending is fitting for a king who arranged everything, contrasting Éowyn, who is not at the end of her life. What is more, her youth is highlighted by Aragorn, who describes her "like a morning of pale spring that is not yet come to woman-

hood” (TT: 672), thus, unlike Théoden, she finds herself at the start of her life and not at the end.

All in all, through Aragorn’s rationality and control over the situation and Théoden’s forward thinking as opposed to Éowyn’s irrationality and emotional behavior, her actions portray a patriarchal understanding of women.

Public and Private Spheres and Domesticity

The Lord of the Rings presents patriarchal norms and a patriarchal understanding of women’s place in society by showcasing the separation of women from men via different spheres. As explored previously, Éowyn is left in her home while men ride to battle (TT: 683 ff.). While she finds herself in an authoritative position, as she is left to temporarily lead the Eorlingas, it depicts her bound to her family home. The men like Aragorn, Théoden, and even her brother Éomer leave Rohan to ride to battle to dominate the enemy and to protect others, while the only woman present in this scene is left at home. Consequently, only the woman is confined in Rohan and signals a separation of women from outside their home. Henderson’s criticism of Éowyn for abandoning her people (Henderson, 2023: 98) is attacked because, referring to a scene where riders sing during a fight (RK: 1097), men who like to fight are not met with the same criticism (Moore and Hagan, 2024: 228). However, it is true that Éowyn leaves her assigned position when she rides to battle because somebody else would have had to stay in Rohan as well if it were their task to look after Rohan (RK: 1026 f.). Therefore, unlike these men, she does not have the task to ride to battle, thus, comparing their actions is difficult. Her interest in battle has been indicated long before she chooses to enter it regardless of her task. Her yearning for battle can be seen in her reaction to their accounts when she hears their stories from the realm of fighting “[W]hen [Éowyn] hear[s] of the battle in Helm’s Deep and the great slaughter of their foes, and of the charge of Théoden and his knights, then her eyes [shine]” (RK: 1025). In her eyes, battle is the realm of men, as she herself points out that she thinks that them leaving her behind is the product of her sex:

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 man will need it no more. But I am of the House of Eorl and not a serving-woman. I can ride and wield blade, and I do not fear either pain or death. (RK: 1027)

Hatcher argues that this discussion “brings to light Éowyn’s challenge of a traditional woman’s role in Middle-earth, which closely mirrors the fight of women throughout the 20th Century” (2007: 47). When they return to her and tell her stories from where she could not be (RK: 1024), it shows how

the male main characters can explore the world, while she cannot do so. It symbolizes how she awaits them but is not expected to come. Éowyn even describes her position as “exile” (RK: 1025), which implies that she feels left out from their world. What is more, as she cares for their supper, at least she tends to them (RK: 1024 ff.), she is portrayed responsible for their welcome, which indicates a responsibility for domestic duties. Additionally, her inability to leave and her desire to go with them further underline her separation from the realm of men.

Again, while Éowyn is no housewife who cleans the house and watches the children while her husband is away, she reveals women’s removal from the sphere men inhabit. As the separation of the sexes into public and private spheres is typical for patriarchal societies (Green, 2000: 412), Éowyn portrays the struggle of wanting to escape women’s sphere but is held back. Her exclamation that she is “not a serving-woman”, implies that this is what she feels like to be left as. Moreover, as she previously declared that she fears “[a] cage” (RK: 1027), she emphasizes that she does not want to be confined. Consequently, Éowyn’s position in Rohan and her exclusion from battle symbolizes the exclusion of women from the sphere of men and portrays a patriarchal society where women are kept at home. As already indicated, she enters the battle anyway (RK: 1052) and slays the Witch-king (RK: 1102). However, after her stay in the Houses of Healing (RK: 1255) her character changes (RK: 1264). After Éowyn announces that she does not want to fight anymore, Faramir declares that she is healed (RK: 1264). As his expression implies that her character’s desires had to be cured, her desires present something unfavorable. As a result, her development and the world’s reaction to it present a patriarchal understanding of women by underlining that Middle-earth does not want women who do not conform to domesticity and want to join activities seemingly in contrast to patriarchal gender roles.

Defying Patriarchy Only Temporarily and Beautifully

The Lord of the Rings creates a patriarchal understanding of women by showing that defying patriarchal norms is nothing that can last. Myers argues that since *The Lord of the Rings* presents a fantasy world, Tolkien could have created a world with a completely new social system with a new understanding of the sexes (Myers, 1971: 13 f.). She emphasizes that Éowyn’s relationship with Faramir “deals with the hierarchical relationship between the sexes” (ibid.: 15), but Éowyn’s ending redeems the possibility of challenging women’s place in society and presents no development when the Lady of Rohan is brought back accepting her role at the end of the story. What is more, Éowyn’s ending counters her rebellious actions, as “Faramir tames Éowyn’s wild warrior impulse, simultaneously encouraging a satisfaction within the domestic sphere”

(Fredrick / McBride, 2007: 35). While Fredrick / McBride do not explicitly talk about patriarchy or patriarchal characteristics in *The Lord of the Rings*, this shows an acceptance of domesticity and Faramir's role in this development. The fact that Faramir is involved in her transformation at the end of the story, as he is the one who argues with her about her future (RK: 1263 f.), shows he is at least partly responsible for this development. This ultimately demonstrates – once again – how a woman's future is directed by a man. Therefore, her ending presents a patriarchal understanding of women's place in society since Éowyn is put back in the private sphere by a man. In addition, Fredrick / McBride point out what her ending means for her and the society she lives in:

Éowyn's healing comes from accepting the role her civilization demands from her as a woman: to be a beautiful, helpful, and cheerful companion to a man, essentially the same role she played as niece to the King of Rohan and her brother, the Third Mashall of the Mark [...]. Éowyn's healing is a victory, not only for Faramir, but also for Middle-earth's civilization; an unruly impulse to transcend prescribed gender roles has been successfully thwarted. (Fredrick / McBride, 2007: 35 f.)

The fact that the authors chose the words “the role her civilization demands from her as a woman” (Fredrick / McBride, 2007: 35) emphasizes that her position at the end of the story is the role this society wants women to fulfill. Besides, the things they list that come with this role are all patriarchal: Her task to be “helpful [...] [a] cheerful companion to a man” (Fredrick / McBride, 2007: 35) puts the male in the center, as her task is focused on a male she can serve. Focusing on men is discussed as a typical aspect of patriarchy by Johnson, who states that the “focus of attention is primarily on men and boys and what they do” (Johnson, 2014: 10). That Éowyn then serves Faramir as his partner can be seen when he says that “[he] will wed with the White Lady of Rohan” and people will describe him as “a lord that tamed a wild shieldmaiden” (RK: 1264), clarifying that she now belongs to him. Moreover, as Fredrick / McBride stress that Éowyn ends up in “essentially the same role she played as niece to the King of Rohan and her brother” (Fredrick / McBride: 35 f.), they stress the fact that she returns to the gender roles she broke before. This is important because Éowyn escapes the boundaries of her patriarchal feminine role in Rohan with men deciding for her and she having to care for them, e.g. when she cares for Théoden (TT: 672), only for her to find a man who puts her in a caring position again. Myers argues that Éowyn “resents being relegated to the feminine task of nursing Théoden, the aging king” (Myers, 1971: 15). This resentment of care-work can be seen in her declaration that she is “of the House of Eorl and not a serving-woman. [She] can ride and wield blade” (RK: 1027), as she presents herself as a warrior instead of somebody caring for others. However, she accepts being a

healer in the end and Faramir announces that “now she is healed” (RK: 1264) as if she needed to be cured of an illness. This creates the implication that her rebellious character needed fixing and further emphasizes that her anomaly is an unfavorable condition and that women who resent their role in life are not approved. This aspect is also evident in Fredrick and McBride’s analysis of her ending as “a victory, not only for Faramir, but also for Middle-earth’s civilization; an unruly impulse to transcend prescribed gender roles has been successfully thwarted” (Fredrick and McBride, 2007: 36) demonstrates that society wants her to be reduced to the patriarchal womanly role again. Countering her breaking of patriarchal norms means that this social order is not violated. Consequently, *The Lord of the Rings* portrays a society where the breaking of patriarchal gender norms is not only a rare event but also one that will be cured.

Furthermore, *The Lord of the Rings* creates a patriarchal understanding of women by calling attention to Éowyn’s beauty even when she finds herself in battle or is presumed dead. In the Houses of Healing, Faramir calls her beautiful (RK: 1258) and thinks of her as good-looking, before “he kisse[s] her brow” (RK: 1261). Thus, he shows her this physical attention only after it is stressed that he admires her looks. Considering that Johnson stresses how women suffer under “the impossible patriarchal standards of beauty” (Johnson, 2014: 176), this fixation on her appearance plays right into a patriarchal understanding of women. In addition, in patriarchal societies, “[w]omen are often prized for their beauty as objects of male sexual desire” (ibid.: 7). The repeated mention of her appearance creates the notion that her beauty also functions to make her a pleasing partner for Faramir. Therefore, the issue that Éowyn’s appearance is stressed before he shows her physical affection (RK: 1261) and before they are depicted as a couple when they “[stand] high upon the walls in the sights of many” (RK: 1264), is relevant, as it reveals the patriarchal expectations regarding women’s appearance in this male-dominated world. Besides, Éowyn already found herself as the object of male desire before her rebellion against orders in Rohan. As it is revealed that Éowyn is saved from Wormtongue, it highlights that Théoden’s former counsellor desired Éowyn (TT: 679). This displays her position through the issue that she needs protection from men that last after her. However, while Fredrick and McBride also list her beauty as a characteristic she fulfills at the end of the story (ibid.: 35), in *The Lord of the Rings* her beauty is not only brought up before and after her rebellion, but it has never stopped being emphasized. This is evident when she stands up against the Witch-king and even in dangerous situation her appearance is drawn attention to: “[H]er bright hair, released from its bonds, gleamed with pale gold upon her shoulders” (RK: 1101). Éowyn’s appearance, her beautiful hair, is stressed, even though she might face death; thus, Éowyn always fulfills a patriarchal role through the repeated description

of her looks even in battle. Similarly, even when she is thought dead, the text emphasizes her beauty when Imrahil finds her on the battlefield: “Then the prince seeing her beauty, though her face was pale and cold, touched her hand as he bent to look more closely on her” (RK: 1106). Therefore, when she lies in the battlefield, men continue to admire her appearance. As a result, despite disobeying Théoden, Éowyn never pauses embodying the beautiful female that men can gaze upon because the focus on her appearance never stops. Consequently, *The Lord of the Rings* portrays a society where the breaking of patriarchal gender norms is accompanied by conforming to them.

Conclusion

As has been demonstrated, Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* presents patriarchal norms and a patriarchal understanding of women through Éowyn, whose uniqueness not only marginalizes other women, but her character portrays the male-dominated worldview in Middle-earth. Éowyn’s story shows that the ones in charge are normally men, as her task to manage Rohan is only temporarily and an exception to the norm. In addition, she portrays the irrational and emotional woman who neglects her task, contrary to the logical men Aragorn and Théoden, who consider their circumstances. Moreover, Éowyn is not only decided for but also held away from the sphere of men, depicting the separation of women from the male-dominated public sphere symbolized through her struggle to enter battle. While she presents a woman breaking free from her separation from said sphere, she shows that breaking patriarchal norms is only temporarily when she abandons her previous desires and transforms into a woman conforming to patriarchal norms in the Houses of Healing. Furthermore, even during battle, she always fulfills the patriarchal expectation for women to be beautiful, which enables men to appreciate her beauty.

As explored in the beginning of this essay, Éowyn portrays a unique woman who enters battle and this uniqueness is the very reason she marginalizes other women, as she shows that it is possible to overcome patriarchal roles, making the interpretation possible that women are not kept from entering the male-dominated sphere but simply do not choose to. Consequently, Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* is full of patriarchal aspects that we should be aware of.

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