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Shobha Ramaswamy, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate

The Lord of the Rings: Galadriel, the Light of Middle Earth

The Lord of The Rings : Galadriel, the Light of Middle-Earth

Shobha Ramaswamy, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate

J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is a fantasy novel of epic proportions and complexity. It has created a whole new world of Middle-earth, peopled with many races like Elves, Dwarves, Hobbits and Men.

Galadriel, a Central Figure

One of the most numinous of his characters is the Elf Queen Galadriel, who is endowed with feminine mystery and power. She is a 'Wise Woman' and a 'Shield Maiden' archetype, along the lines of the Greek goddess of wisdom and war, Athene, and the heroines of Norse legends which Tolkien loved.

Galadriel initiates action, gathering together the White Council to bring about the first defeat of the Dark Lord, Sauron. Galadriel retains the power to read Sauron's thoughts, and is able to hide herself effectively from his powerful Eye. It is with the power of the Elven ring, *Nenya*, that she keeps alive the beauty of the Golden Wood.

Thus, Galadriel represents the life-sustaining aspect of Earth Mother. Greater in conception than Spenser's Faerie Queene, Gloriana, or Shakespeare's Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Galadriel is the archetypal Magna Mater or Great Mother who presides over the idyllic woodland home of the Elves, Lothlórien.

Mother as a Symbol

Carl Jung regards the Mother as a symbol, whole in itself. "The Mother" is a symbolic personification of qualities like protection, care, sympathy, fertility and fruitfulness. "The qualities associated with it [Mother archetype] are maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason; any helpful instinct or impulses; all that is benign; all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility" (Jung 82).

A Figure of Great Power

Galadriel is a figure of great power. She seems wiser than her husband, Celebron and wins over Gimli the dwarf with her kindness. It is the power of the *Nenya* ring that she keeps alive the beauty of her woodland territory of Lothlórien. Thus, she represents the life-sustaining aspect of Earth Mother, fitting Northrop Frye's description of the archetype: "Commonly conceived as a nature goddess, the recurrent theme of nature and motherly care go hand and hand."

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This is further reinforced by her gift to Sam, Frodo's gardener, of the box of dirt from her orchard, which is capable of transforming a wasteland into a paradise. Sam uses this gift to restore fertility to the gardens of his beloved Shire after the deliberate destruction caused by the greed of the wicked wizard, Saruman.

Tiding Over the Dark Times Ahead

Galadriel's gifts to the Fellowship help them tide over the dark times ahead. Her gifts include the life-saving food, *lembas*, cloaks of invisibility, strong Elven ropes, are other gifts which Galadriel with her foresight is able to give them. These ensure that the quest is successful. Without their timely help, the fellowship would not have been able to complete the task of destroying the ring.

Personification in Fiction

Galadriel is also one of the greatest examples of the personification in fiction of the "anima" archetype, the image of the female in the psyche of the male, or the feminine aspect of the self. She is a striking representative of the anima, a figure which, Jung says, is often 'fairy like' or 'Elfin' (43) and Galadriel is indeed an Elf.

The 'meeting with the Goddess' is an overwhelming experience for the entire company and not only Frodo. Gimli, the gruff dwarf, when asked what gift he wants, replies with surprising gallantry, "Nothing, except to look upon the Lady Galadriel one last time, for she is more fair than all the jewels beneath the earth" (*LOTR* 366).

A Bridge to the Deeper Elements of the Psyche

Galadriel thus appears to be cast in the medieval tradition of pure and beautiful women who inspire knightly deeds. She is also a bridge to the deeper elements of the psyche, and can help the fellowship of the Ring come to terms with their secret desires.

This happens when she seems to communicate telepathically with each of them on their first meeting. The hobbits confess that she seemed to offer them their heart's longing in exchange for giving up their quest of the destruction of the Ring of Power. She appears to be the temptress on the road of the heroic quest, a stage mentioned by Joseph Campbell.

Her role as enchantress is further reinforced when she shows Frodo her "mirror," which is a basin filled with water from a forest spring. In it is revealed the past, present and future, but in a confused order which transcends time and encompasses eternity. But it soon becomes clear that she was testing the hobbits resolution by showing them the power of temptation, which they would have to face of their way. Further, she warns Frodo of the delusive power of the images he sees in the enchanted water. Therefore, her

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role is that of a “wise woman” rather than that of Campbell’s “woman as temptress,” a stage which is mentioned in his book, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*.

Also a “Terrible Mother”

Galadriel reveals that she is capable of being “The Terrible Mother,” the negative aspect of the anima. This is seen in the temptation scene where Frodo, overwhelmed by her personality, offers her the One Ring. Galadriel analyses her feelings:

I do not deny that my heart has greatly desired to ask what you offer
And now at last it comes. You will give me the Ring freely! In place of a Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! . . . Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair! (*LOTR* 356)

She then wisely decides to treat the hobbit’s rash act as a divinely ordained test and states her willingness to sacrifice her power in a scene dramatically described by Tolkien:

She lifted up her hand and from the ring that she wore there issued a great light that illuminated her alone and left all else dark. She stood before Frodo seeming now tall beyond measurement, and beautiful beyond enduring, terrible and worshipful. Then she let her hand fall, and the light faded and suddenly she laughed again, and lo! She was shrunken: a slender elf-woman, clad in simple white, whose gentle voice was soft and sad. ‘I pass the test’, she said. ‘I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel.’ (*LOTR* 356-57)

This is Galadriel’s encounter with the negative, or shadow aspect of her self. She is capable of being the fatal woman or terrible mother archetype but for the ultimate true Christian quality that Tolkien invests her with.

Christian Approach versus Psychoanalysis

While psychoanalysis advocates reconciliation with one’s negative self in order to attain self-realisation or individuation, Tolkien makes Galadriel make a more traditional, religious choice of rejecting the lower or shadow aspects of the personality. “She faces the shadow, becomes it for a few terrifying moments, and defeats it” (Skogeman).

Galadriel’s temptation is thus an instance of Tolkien’s combination of his Jungian influences with his Christian stand-point.

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Tolkien comments:

“I think it true that I wove much of this character [Galadriel] to Christian and Catholic teaching and imagination about Mary” (quoted in Caldecott).

Tolkien calls the Elf Queen “unstained,” a description of the Blessed Virgin by Catholics. Though he portrays her as a leader of the rebellion against the Valar, Tolkien absolves her of crime. “She had committed no evil deed” (quoted in Caldecott).

Growing in the Knowledge of the Ultimate Purpose and Redemption

Galadriel sacrifices not only the power and position implicit in the One Ring, but also the beauty and comfort of her land and people. These would all pass away, since the destruction of the Ring would mean the loss of power of her own Nenia and withdrawal to exile of the Elves.

The sacrifice she makes confirms her Christian archetypal aspect as Mother Mary, the Holy Mother aspect of the anima. Galadriel thus passes through the self-assertion of the “shield maiden” archetype to the passivity, self-abnegation and exclusion Britzolakis associates with the Marian archetype.

The Lady of Lothlórien is the mediator, through whose blessing alone the quest can be successfully completed. The Lothlórien stage is a step in the ascent from the earthiness of the hobbits towards realization of their higher selves. Her parting gift to Frodo on his quest to destroy the Ring is a phial containing the light of the Morning Star.

The pure light of the Morning Star captured in the phial gives clarity and protection against despair. (Here again is a spiritual declaration or testimony, as Jesus is the Morning Star in the Bible (Revelation 22:16)).

In this way, it is a manifestation of parental protection, similar to the white light of the *patronus charm* in Rowling’s *Harry Potter* books. For instance, in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry uses a *patronus charm* to protect his godfather, Sirius Black from the despair-creating Dementors.

Similarly, in times of extreme danger, the light of Galadriel’s phial not only shows Frodo the way, but also helps him overcome the enemy. The phial acts against the Ringwraiths, and most importantly, repels Shelob, the spider woman. Sam, too, uses the light of the star to rescue Frodo from the monstrous Orcs. More significantly, he gets a vision of Galadriel when he is in Shelob’s lair.

Symbolism of the Star

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Throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, Galadriel is associated with the symbolism of the star and of pure white light. It is the star suddenly appearing in the skies of Sauron's land of gloom that implants hope in the hearts of the hobbits and saves them from the sin of despair.

Galadriel's presence is implied through frequent reminders of her connection to the morning star. Gimli, in his dispute with Eómer of Rohan with regard to the beauty of Queen Arwen Evenstar and Lady Galadriel, says, "You have chosen the Evening. But my love is given to the Morning" (953). The morning star is associated with the pure, virginal quality of the celestial feminine. As Dellert points out, the five-pointed star or "pentall" symbolizes the Divine Mother.

It is significant that the fall of Sauron, which comes to mark the New Year in Middle-earth falls on the twenty-fifth of March, which is called "Lady Day" or "Feast of Annunciation" (Caldecott).

To Conclude

Through the creation of Galadriel, Tolkien reveals himself a true master of fantasy, who arrives at a learned and happy combination of mythic, psychoanalytic and Christian archetypes to appeal to the universalities in the human mind.

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