Breaking the Gender Norms: Bilbo as the Feminine Hero in J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Hobbit

Att bryta könsnormerna: Bilbo som den feminina hjälten i J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Hobbit

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Abstract

This essay demonstrates how Bilbo, the main protagonist of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, is a feminine hero despite being male. The study builds on concepts of traditional gender norms which show men as strong, intelligent beings and overall superior to the weak and emotional women. Also included in the study is Carl Jung’s anima archetype (the hypothesized feminine side of the man) as well as conventional hero-types, comparing Bilbo to three other heroes of Tolkien’s creation (Aragorn, Frodo and Beorn) in order to categorize Bilbo and show what kind of a hero he is. The essay shows that Bilbo, based on his actions and personality, and in accordance with the traditional gender norms, classifies as a feminine hero.


Key words: Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, Bilbo, gender norms, femininity, heroism.
“A true hero isn’t measured by the size of his strength, but by the strength of his heart.”
- Disney’s Hercules

It is safe to say that there is no shortage of literary heroes and they usually possess similar traits: big muscular bodies, some kind of superhuman strength or power and a penis. It cannot be denied that the majority of these heroes are male, though there are exceptions, such as Wonder Woman and, in recent years, Katniss Everdeen, if you are looking at female characters who resemble the traditional idea of a hero. Heroes like Hercules, Achilles, Superman and Spider-Man. In other words: strong, masculine men who fight monsters and villains. That is our default image of a hero. J.R.R. Tolkien, one of the most famous authors of fantasy fiction, presents his own version of one such traditional hero in Aragorn from The Lord of the Rings. But there is another hero in Tolkien’s fantasy world who is easily overlooked: a hobbit named Bilbo Baggins. As a hero, Bilbo does not fall into the category of “traditional.” He is more of the unconventional kind in the sense that he does not possess the typical masculine heroic traits mentioned above. He is not physically strong, big or brave. This essay will explore how Bilbo represents femininity, even though he is male, based on traditional gender norms. I will primarily discuss the subject of gender in relation to heroism in J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Hobbit from 1937. The focal point of the discussion will be Bilbo, who is the main protagonist of the story, but, as points of comparison, several other characters will also be analysed. The general argument throughout this study is that Tolkien breaks the traditional gender norms and that, despite being a story dominated by male characters with a male main protagonist, The Hobbit shows Bilbo as feminine rather than masculine, but that this is what makes him a hero.

In my study, I will draw upon traditional gender roles and apply them to the characters. These roles show men as rational, strong, protective, decisive and overall superior to women who are painted as emotional, weak, nurturing and submissive (Tyson 81). This traditional view and idea of gender sets up men and women as binary opposites. If the masculine is one thing, then the feminine has to be the other. French feminist Hélène Cixous presented this binary gender structure by listing various characteristics in either a male or female category:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Man</th>
<th>Woman</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Passivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Nature</td>
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These contrasting characteristics suggest that men are active, logical thinkers while women are passive beings who act upon their feelings and emotions rather than intelligence.

Similarly, Carl Jung’s anima and animus archetype builds on this idea of the masculine as logos and the feminine as pathos or eros; the idea that men rely more on their intelligence and logic versus the women who rely more on their capability to feel things, where love is a strong motivator. The archetype can be described as the anima being the unconscious feminine side of the man and the animus being the unconscious masculine side of the woman (Mattoon pp. 84, 95), and there are certain images applied to each of them. This essay will only deal with images of the anima as there are no female characters to whom we can apply images of the animus.

Even though there is a shortage of female characters in Tolkien’s works, some interpretations provide a positive rather than negative view on this. In John Miller’s study “Mapping Gender in Middle-earth”, he claims that the different races of Tolkien’s creation are, in a way, representative of gender:

While Tolkien has been criticized for his apparent discomfort with or lack of interest in female characters, the very paucity of important female roles in the books helps draw the reader’s attention to the different ways of being masculine suggested by the characteristics of the different “races” of Middle-earth. Race thus becomes a way of inscribing gender. (136)

The different races in question, to name a few, are Hobbits, Elves, Dwarves and Men and their respective characteristics is something I will touch upon in this study. Firstly, I will discuss the different instances where Tolkien breaks the gender norms in his writing. Secondly, I will explore the patriarchal structure of the text and apply traditional gender norms and roles to the characters in the novel, explaining how Tolkien’s portrayal of Bilbo makes him feminine and, thirdly, how this makes Bilbo a hero. In this third section, I will include images of Jung’s anima archetype as well as make comparisons to other heroic characters of Tolkien’s creation, namely Aragorn, Frodo and Beorn. This means that not all of the information I address in this study concerning the characters (or other aspects) comes from The Hobbit alone, but also from Tolkien’s following works in cases where there are
illuminating passages to my points of discussion. These works are *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1954-55) and *The Silmarillion* (1977), which follow the continuity and canon of *The Hobbit*.

In spite of the great racial diversity of the characters in *The Hobbit*, there is one common denominator: all of the main characters are male. As quoted by Miller, Tolkien has been criticized for the lack of female characters in his works, but some argue that a female presence can still be found in *The Hobbit*. Susan Hancock says that the aspect of nature in the novel “mask[s] a deeper female presence” (49). Miller elaborates on this:

The woods and caves of Middle-earth, though populated primarily by male characters, are, through both conventional symbolism and specific features Tolkien attributes to them, gendered as feminine, or perhaps more accurately, in ways that challenge the gender norms of Men… Most of the action of *The Hobbit*… takes place in these hidden, mysterious, often mythic places (138).

Hancock, in agreement with Miller, notes that “nature and the earth are frequently personified in female terms” and that Middle-earth is the “archetypal mother image of Tolkien’s story” (49). In addition, the text has plenty of imagery of the female anatomy; in particular “the mothering function” (Hancock 49). One example would be Bilbo’s home which Hancock refers to as “womb-like” (49). Furthermore, the way the Elves are described highlights their feminine appearance. In comparison with the mortal men of Middle-earth, the Elves have a fairer visage and are depicted as slender and graceful (Măcineanu pp. 275, 277). In Jenni Bergman’s study on the literary history of elves, she states that in Tolkien’s world, “elven men cannot count on their appearance to be considered masculine, they have to act like it […] The problem with identifying the male Elves as men is that they are described as beautiful or fair in most cases” (pp. 134, 135). However, the femininity which this essay will focus on has to do with personality and actions rather than physical appearance and the first subject we will look at is the way Tolkien breaks the gender norms of the masculine and the feminine.

If we look at it closely, Tolkien’s portrayal of his characters seems to be playing with the conventional gender norms. In *The Hobbit*, we get a few depictions of reversed gender roles, starting with Bilbo’s mother and father. His mother is described as “the famous Belladonna Took” (14) and the Took-clan was known for having adventures unlike the rest of the hobbits. It was believed that “long ago one of the Took ancestors must have taken a fairy wife” (14) and that this was the explanation behind the family’s queer behaviour. Even so, Bilbo still “looked and behaved exactly like a second edition of his solid and comfortable father” (15).
and claims that he wants nothing to do with adventures: “We are plain quiet folk and I have no use for adventures. Nasty disturbing uncomfortable things” (16). Notice here Tolkien’s word use of comfortable and uncomfortable. Bilbo associates adventures (what his mother used to have) with being uncomfortable whereas his father is associated with comfortability because he preferred the domestic and quiet life of the home. Here, Tolkien plays with the binary opposites of activity (associated with men) and passivity (associated with women), and consequently, with father and mother. Activity (which in this context would be a substituting term for adventure) traditionally applies to men and therefore also father, but in The Hobbit, activity is, as we have seen, also applied to mother. Simultaneously, passivity (traditionally applied to women and mother) is applied to father. Because Bilbo is our main character, we understand that his thoughts and ideas are important to the story. The idea that staying at home is preferable to going on adventures means that what would traditionally be seen as the more manly and superior option is replaced by the more womanly option and made inferior. Less than five pages into the story, Tolkien has already given us a sample of atypical gender roles.

The same subversive pattern can be found in the gendering of the sun and the moon in Middle-earth. As seen in Cixous’s table above, traditionally, the sun is masculine and the moon is feminine, but that is not the case here. Tolkien drew inspiration for his fictional world from ancient Norse and Christian mythology (Laszkiewicz 21) as well as philology, the study of language in historical sources. Many Indo-European languages use grammatical gender for their nouns; Greek and Latin both refer to the sun as he and the moon as she, as does French, Italian and Spanish. But the Germanic languages (including Old Norse), which were the languages of Tolkien’s focus, refer to the sun as she and the moon as he. Old English did the same when grammatical gender was still used in the English language (Kisor). This reversed gendering of the moon and the sun is (to some extent) also used in Middle-earth. In Tolkien’s own words: “Elves (and Hobbits) always refer to the Sun as She” (Kisor). By remaining faithful to his source of inspiration, Tolkien once again breaks the traditional binary structure of the masculine and the feminine. The remainder of this essay will take a closer look at the exact definitions of masculinity and femininity in terms of the characters, starting off with a discussion of the text from a patriarchal point of view.

According to patriarchal ideology, a man is not a man if he is emotional, weak and nurturing; traits that are traditionally associated with women (Tyson). For the very same reason, a woman is not a woman if she is not any of the above-mentioned. With this in mind, we can say that Bilbo is neither male nor female as he is constantly torn between being like
his mother (the more masculine one) and his father (the more feminine one). Throughout the story, we find Bilbo more or less always complaining and dreaming of being back in his home: “he was not thinking much of the job, but of what lay beyond the blue distance, the quiet Western Land and the Hill and his hobbit-hole under it” (200). On the other hand, he can never be rid of his deep-rooted yearning for adventure either: “‘Don’t be a fool, Bilbo Baggins!’ he said to himself, ‘thinking of dragons and all that outlandish nonsense at your age!’” (37). This means that Bilbo is a complex character as he is neither truly masculine nor feminine; he is a bit of both.

The Elves of Tolkien’s world have their own gender roles as well. The following list shows some of the activities which Tolkien ascribed to each sex:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neri (male elves)</th>
<th>Nissi (female elves)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>War</td>
<td>Healing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting</td>
<td>Gardening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td>Baking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smithcraft and woodwork</td>
<td>Spinning, weaving and sewing</td>
</tr>
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</table>

(Bergman 130-131)

In Tolkien’s writing, these roles are applicable not only to the Elves, but also to Bilbo and the dwarves in *The Hobbit*. After having been rescued and provided fresh meat by the eagles, the dwarves are the ones taking care of the meat and cooking it (111), like the male elves would do. Bilbo on the other hand is not comfortable with skinning animals or cutting meat, but he does like to bake, like the female elves (19). From this, we can conclude that the dwarves (who do hunting and cooking) are more masculine whereas Bilbo is more feminine.

In accordance with patriarchal belief, “it is considered unmanly for men to show fear or pain or to express their sympathy for other men” (Tyson 83). If the novel was supporting the patriarchal ideology, then fear would be a forbidden factor for our main characters, all of whom are men. As it is however, most of the characters do express fear. Bilbo does it on several occasions: “Very soon Bilbo was laid down, trembling with fear” (110), “He dived under the blankets and hid his head, and fell asleep again at last in spite of his fears” (128). Gandalf is not always as bold as he may seem either: “Now you can understand why Gandalf… began to feel dreadfully afraid, wizard though he was” (104). When Bilbo shows signs of being afraid, the dwarves make fun of him for it:

> It is all very well for Gandalf to talk about this hobbit being fierce, but one shriek like that in a moment of excitement would be enough to wake the
dragon and all his relatives, and kill the lot of us. I think it sounded more like fright than excitement! […] As soon as I clapped my eyes on the little fellow bobbing and puffing on the mat, I had my doubts. He looks more like a grocer than a burglar! (28)

It is clear that they do not think fear is befitting a companion of their party. Based on Miller’s idea of race and gender in Middle-earth (that the characteristics of each race represents a different type of masculinity), the dwarves are, in a way, representing the patriarchy while Bilbo is the woman the dwarves (or the patriarchy) deems inferior. Hobbits are, no matter their sex, a “plain quiet folk” as Bilbo puts it and Dwarves are quite the opposite of that. As far as fear goes however, the dwarves, in spite of their supposed ideology and image, are not immune to the feeling. In fact, as the story progresses, their attitude alters with time: “Then the dwarves forgot their joy and their confident boasts of a moment before and cowered down in fright” (207 [my emphasis]). Nevertheless, the first half of the story has the dwarves doubting Bilbo because of his “feminine” traits. Whenever he is underperforming and not living up to their standards or expectations, they belittle him, saying he is not good enough: “He has been more trouble than use so far” (95). A great change in their opinion of the hobbit comes when Bilbo rescues them from the clutches of the giant spiders in Mirkwood forest: “Somehow the killing of the giant spider, all alone by himself in the dark without the help of the wizard or the dwarves or of anyone else, made a great difference to Mr Baggins. He felt a different person, and much fiercer and bolder” (152). This is a sign which shows that Bilbo has begun to grow as a character: that he has become more independent and is capable of much more than he thinks, proving himself to the doubting dwarves in the process. One could see this as a woman overcoming the assumptions and prejudices of patriarchy. The key to Bilbo’s success is the ring he found in Gollum’s cave, which makes him invisible and though some might call it cheating, the dwarves think no less of Bilbo’s efforts for it:

From which you can see that they had changed their opinion of Mr Baggins very much, and had begun to have a great respect for him […] They knew only too well that they would soon all have been dead, if it had not been for the hobbit; and they thanked him many times […] Knowing the truth about the vanishing did not lessen their opinion of Bilbo at all; for they saw that he had some wits, as well as luck and a magic ring – and all three are very useful possessions. (160-61)

They are starting to appreciate Bilbo for who he is and instead of criticizing him, they praise him. As the journey goes on and Bilbo grows in their eyes, they ultimately turn to him for
guidance and let him make the important decisions: “Already they had come to respect little Bilbo. Now he had become the real leader in their adventure. He had begun to have ideas and plans of his own” (211). So it seems the little hobbit can be of use after all. His character traits and his thoughts prove to be of great value, even though at first, they were not. Bilbo’s heroic deed is something you might expect of a typical hero, yet Bilbo himself is far from typical. The following part will compare Bilbo to three other hero-characters in Tolkien’s works and what sets him apart from them.

First of all there is Aragorn, who Verlyn Flieger classifies as the “epic/romance hero” (122). He is a king, born to be a leader, but also a warrior and a lover (Flieger 122). He represents the image of a medieval hero:

The conventional medieval story… most often focuses on one figure – the hero of the tale. If it is romance or epic the hero will be of great stature, a larger-than-life Beowulf, or Galahad, or Arthur, or Sigurd […] The medieval account of the hero frequently includes his compert, or conception. The conception episode almost always involves some element of magic or the supernatural. Precedent for this comes from classical myth, where the hero usually has one human and one divine or semidivine parent. Achilles, Heracles, Theseus… have divine heritage. (Flieger pp. 124, 126)

Flieger explains that because of Aragorn’s half-elven ancestry, he fits the image of this typically masculine medieval/mythical hero figure with an immortal or supernatural origin (127). What more distinguishes this type of hero is that he is a man “in quest of a kingdom and a princess”, and Aragorn ends up getting both (Flieger 122). Bilbo, on the other hand, does not classify as a medieval-type hero as he is no king or warrior who comes from a supernatural origin, nor does he set out to conquer a kingdom or win the heart of a princess. He has more in common with the next hero up for discussion, which happens to be Bilbo’s own nephew: Frodo.

Frodo, like his uncle, is a hobbit who comes from humble birth. If Aragorn is the medieval hero of an epic or a romance, Frodo is the hero of a fairy tale: “he is a little man both literally and figuratively… He has doubts, feels fear, falters [and] makes mistakes” (Flieger 124). A fairy tale hero is usually a common man and because of his humble origins, it is easier for the reader to relate to him. He is the “unlikely hero who stumbles into heroic adventure and does the best he can” (Flieger 124). This is what Bilbo shares with Frodo. They are both thrown into an adventurous tale and given important roles despite their small stature. The strength of hobbits, Miller says, lies in their innocence and their relationships with one another (144).
Innocence or virginity is a stereotypically female trait. The Shire, which is their home, “has known no war, no politics, and only the pettiest of jealousies” (Miller 144). At the beginning of their stories, neither Frodo nor Bilbo have experienced the world beyond the Shire and their lack of experience is what makes them innocent. As for their relationship with one another, from a patriarchal standpoint, having close relationships with other men, even if they are platonic, is completely out of bounds: “Expressing sympathy (or any loving feeling) for other men is especially taboo because patriarchy assumes that only the most mute and stoic (or boisterous and boyish) forms of male bonding are free of homosexual overtones” (Tyson 83). So while affectionate feelings between men is often seen as a sign of weakness in a man’s masculinity, Frodo and Bilbo find strength through their close bond with each other, which is seen more often between women.

Aragorn and Frodo represent two types of heroes: a warrior and a common man. Where Aragorn is a more masculine type of hero, Frodo leans toward a more feminine type. The last hero of this discussion happens to be a bit of both.

Through Beorn, we learn that heroism can come from a combination of qualities, both masculine and feminine. Although he represents the image of a stereotypical hero with big muscles, this skin-changer also has a softer side:

Beorn is presented as a metaphorical representation of a union of opposites, offering, as governing archetype, a godlike self that is capable of uniting the ideas of fighting, strength and violence, with loving, caring and nurturing, joining together roles more traditionally and stereotypically assigned to separated masculine and feminine spheres at the time of his creation.

(Hancock 54)

Beorn is the one who slays the Goblin King and takes out several enemies all on his own in his bear form in the Battle of the Five Armies, making him a warrior hero like Aragorn, yet at the same time he can be like Frodo; a common man who takes a dislike to war destruction and would rather have peace.

Beorn is connected with his anima, “the hypothesized largely unconscious feminine (eros) side of the man” (Mattoon 95). Mattoon mentions that “in general, when a man’s anima is well connected with his consciousness, he can be related, compassionate, and gentle” (96). A man’s anima is determined by archetypal images, whereof there are four, explained by Mattoon: _Eve, Helen, Mary_ and _Sophia_. These names represent one image each of a man’s anima. _Eve_ is the Earth Mother, _Helen_ (of Troy) is the seductress, _Mary_ (referring to the Virgin Mary) is the spiritual mother and _Sophia_ is “the figure of wisdom” (Mattoon 96). Each
image has its own positive and negative forms. The image of Eve can be “a farm woman who harvests grain, gathers eggs, cooks and cares for her children” and her positive form is described as nourishing and caring (Mattoon 96). This image fits Beorn’s personality as a mother-type caretaker of his animals that he loves “as his children” (135), but also because of the fact that he provides Bilbo and company with shelter and food on their journey (Hancock 53). As we established earlier with Aragorn, what sets Bilbo apart from him, and which applies also to Beorn, is the fact that Bilbo is no warrior. What he does have in common with Beorn is that they both have a feminine side to their respective personas, which can be represented by an archetypal anima image. Next, I will explain which of the four images apply to Bilbo.

Firstly, it is worth mentioning that the content of a man’s anima is determined, not only by an archetypal image, but also by his experiences with women, especially his mother (Mattoon 96). While we do not know much about Bilbo’s relationship with his mother, William Green argues that Bilbo’s story is about connecting with the feminine part of himself (his anima) through his mother. Even if Belladonna is only briefly mentioned in the book, she does have a hand in Bilbo’s character development. Green even goes so far as to say that the novel is about Belladonna as much as it is about her son, interpreting the story as the process of Bilbo’s maturation through his encounter with the buried feminine, the archetypal mother. Symbolically, she is manifest, not only at the head of the book, but throughout, so much that – after we have noted the obvious fact that it is the story of Bilbo Baggins – we can reasonably add that the book is about his mother. Moreover, Green argues that several of the characters in The Hobbit “could easily be rewritten as women.” Gandalf is one of these characters and his anima would be the image of Sophia who personifies wisdom. “She might appear as an elderly woman who is known as wise” (Mattoon 96) or in this case, an elderly wizard known to be wise. The image which best fits Bilbo’s anima would be Mary, “the pure virgin” and the spiritual mother who is “a person of integrity and independence, who knows her own values” (Mattoon 96). The innocence which characterizes Bilbo’s race is what makes him a “pure virgin” and he has a strong moral sense and knows his own values. The following section will discuss these morals and values in depth and reveal Bilbo as the feminine hero of the story.

While The Hobbit offers us a more obvious representation of a hero in Beorn, our main protagonist is more of an unexpected one. Bilbo lives a domestic and peaceful life all alone in his home until one day, a wizard and a company of dwarves come knocking at his front door.
They are looking for someone to share in an adventure; a dangerous quest to reclaim the treasure which the terrible and fearsome dragon Smaug once stole from the dwarves. Bilbo, who has long dwelled in his hobbit-hole, wants nothing to do with this quest, although a part of him longs for adventure and all the excitement which that entails. Ultimately, Bilbo changes his mind and joins Gandalf the wizard, Thorin Oakenshield and the other dwarves on this hero’s journey, a journey which is a coming-of-age story more than anything else. Indeed, upon his return, Bilbo is not the same person he was before. He has grown from a cowardly hobbit into a courageous hero, although, not the conventional type which one might expect. Not the kind who slays dragons or takes part in bloody battles. In lieu of the stereotypical masculine hero, Tolkien gives us a more feminine type, but no less a hero.

Using the table on binary opposites by Cixous, shown in the introduction, we can determine that the majority of the words applicable to Bilbo’s character go into the “woman” category. First of all, he is passive rather than active, especially when it comes to war: “But Bilbo’s heart fell, both at the song and the talk: they sounded much too warlike” (248). He does not like the idea of war and violence, both of which are closely connected with anger, the one emotion that men (according to the patriarchy) are permitted to have as it blocks out the prohibited emotions mentioned earlier, such as fear and pain (Tyson 83-84). Bilbo, however, does not share this masculine sentiment:

On all this Bilbo looked with misery. He had taken his stand on Ravenhill among the Elves – partly because there was more chance of escape from that point, and partly (with the more Tookish part of his mind) because if he was going to be in a last desperate stand, he preferred on the whole to defend the Elvenking. (267)

He would rather stay out of battle if he can help it, but should the occasion arise, he will not hesitate to give his all. An example of this would be when he saves his friends from the spiders. This is the only time he uses his sword, but only in self-defence. Additionally, Bilbo’s passivity is related to the love for his home and his (sometimes) antipathy toward adventures, as discussed earlier. His nurturing persona is also what makes him more like a mother than a father. He clearly cares about other people and the ones who are close to him. His loyalty is evidence of that: “I don’t think I ought to leave my friends like this, after all we have gone through together” (256). Like Beorn, this means that Bilbo’s anima can be represented, not just by the Virgin Mary, but also by the Earth Mother Eve.

What is more, Bilbo is a great example of someone who is more inclined to use their heart over their head. The arguably most affective example is when Bilbo faces Gollum. He is
wearing the ring, invisible to his enemy’s eyes, ready to strike with his sword when he realizes something:

He must stab the foul thing, put its eyes out, kill it. It meant to kill him. No, not a fair fight. He was invisible now. Gollum had no sword. Gollum had not actually threatened to kill him, or tried yet. And he was miserable, alone, lost. A sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror, welled up in Bilbo’s heart: a glimpse of endless unmarked days without light or hope of betterment. (90)

His head is telling him one thing, but his heart is telling another. If Bilbo were our traditional, masculine hero, he would have listened to his head and slain Gollum. Instead, he decides to listen to his heart and spares the pitiful creature. Bilbo’s choice of heart over head directly connects to sensitivity over intelligibility and pathos over logos, meaning that he chooses to trust his feelings and emotional intuition rather than logical facts and thinking which would be traditionally masculine (Cixous). The one time he does use his sword is against the giant spiders, who both intend and attempt to kill him. Slaying the spider is an act of self-defence and allows him to save his friends. From what we know of the characters at this point in time and with the conventional gender roles in mind, we might expect the dwarves to do the rescuing while Bilbo would be the one more likely to get captured. However, Bilbo is not your classic fairy-tale damsel in distress. Instead, he is the one taking action whilst the dwarves have been passivized. Even though Bilbo feels emboldened by this feat, it still does not change his opinion of violence and war. Therefore, he is never seen on the battlefield in the last fight. Nor does it change the fact that he values his home more than anything else: “I have absolutely no use of dragon-guarded treasures… if only I could wake up and find this beastly tunnel was my own front-hall at home!” (205). He did not sign on to be a part of the adventure because it would earn him a great reward. Bilbo does not care for riches. His motive is more selfless. The reason he signed on was not for what he would gain in the end, but for the experience itself. As Thorin lies on his deathbed, he realizes the error of his ways and admits to Bilbo that the real treasure in the world is not gold or gems, but something far more precious: “If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world” (271). He emphasizes the import of that which really matters and sets Bilbo as an example. The little hobbit’s values differ from those of the dwarves’ and they become visible to us as readers through Bilbo’s thoughts and actions, all of which are categorized as feminine.
In conclusion, *The Hobbit* is a novel which, despite its abundance of male characters, provides feminine aspects. As discussed by Miller and Hancock, symbols of the feminine can be found in nature and, as pointed out by Bergman, the Elves are a race with feminine appearance. Nevertheless, the subject of this essay has dealt with inner rather than outer femininity. To begin with, I argue that Tolkien plays with the conventional gender roles and attributes masculine qualities to the female characters (in this case, Belladonna) and feminine qualities to the male characters, such as Bilbo and his father and Beorn. With Bilbo’s father and mother, the male and female binary opposites are reversed so that the woman becomes more active (a traditionally male quality) and the man becomes more passive (a traditionally female quality). Gender is also reversed as the moon is referred to as *he* while the sun is referred to as *she*. We also discovered that while at first the novel appears to be degrading feminine traits (as represented by the patriarchal dwarves and their attitude towards Bilbo), it works to successively reverse this categorization to the point where they prove to be just as valuable as the masculine. Based on traditional concepts of gender, I propose that Bilbo, though he is male, fits more into the female category. The ways in which Bilbo and other characters (in particular Beorn) are portrayed draws away from masculinity. This becomes clearer when we put Jung’s archetypal anima images into context. Bilbo’s anima is the image of the pure Virgin Mary and the Earth Mother Eve; he is an independent person who knows his own values and who possesses a nurturing persona. As a hero, Bilbo differs from the likes of Hercules, Superman and Aragorn. He is not a warrior with a muscular body, nor does he rely on his wits as much as his heart. He is the common man of a fairytale, like his nephew Frodo. Beorn on the other hand, is a mixture of the two types; both a warrior and a common man. He is violent at the same time as he is sensitive and as these masculine and feminine traits are merged, gender roles become more atypical and the characters more three-dimensional. What is seen on the outside does not always reflect what is on the inside. One can argue that Beorn’s masculinity is what allows him to be a hero, but Bilbo serves as proof that a hero does not need to have a big, muscular body. Though he does take action when needed, Bilbo prefers the calm and quiet of passivity and he is more likely to use his heart over his head, but there is nothing wrong with that. In a story driven by male characters that takes place in a masculine world of violence and war, there are hidden female elements that come to the surface, showing us that they belong there and can have as great of an impact as the male ones. Bilbo’s journey of maturation and self-discovery results in a self-realization. He may not be a great warrior, but there are other qualities that make him a hero in his own right. Underappreciated and underestimated qualities such as kindness, generosity and
forgiveness; the ability to trust what your heart tells you and allowing yourself to be vulnerable. The lesson we learn from this is that heroism can come from a combination of qualities, both masculine and feminine – both of equal value. Once this is realized, once we stop looking upon feminine strengths as weaknesses, it will be a merrier world indeed.


Kisor, Yvette L. “‘Elves (and Hobbits) always refer to the Sun as She’: Some Notes on a Note in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*.” *Tolkien Studies*, vol. 4, 2007.


