# RACE, LANGUAGE, AND MORALITY: DOES TOLKIEN'S MIDDLE-EARTH PROMOTE A RACIAL MYTH?

by

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**Race, Language, and Morality: Does Tolkien's Middle-earth Promote a Racial Myth?**

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Why has popular culture, right-wing political groups, and numerous editorialists assumed that J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth promotes a racialized universe? Did Tolkien, by situating his various characters as "races," indicate that within Middle-earth he had created an essentialized structure of difference between peoples? Decoding the ideology of Tolkien's Middle-earth is the work of this paper, and untangling this discourse will supply us with an understanding of the impact and importance of race as it resonates with readers.

This paper treats the literary landscape of Middle-earth as analytical space, and this literary analysis is informed by anthropological concepts and methods complimented by the context of Tolkien's historical moment. Discovering these ethnographic representations of the various humanoid characters in Middle-earth allows me to establish the degree to which these depictions contribute to a racialized and racist understanding of Middle-earth. As the greatest impact of Tolkien's work has resulted predominantly from the popularity of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, these are the texts used to question Tolkien's racial message.

Tolkien did not ostensibly implant in Middle-earth a racist microcosm of the world. Through close readings, this paper reads the hierarchical structure of Middle-earth as a dialogic space, where even as Tolkien uses racial generalizations he undercuts these assumptions through the plasticity of his characters and their interactions. Middle-earth's characters dialogize such

racial issues as miscegenation, literary representations of "blackness," colonization, and pluralism as its actors explore the tensions inherent in these issues. Thus, while initially Tolkien seems to engage "race" only as a descriptive tool, he does not freeze these descriptions of difference. Rather, Tolkien uses his characters' own flawed racial assumptions to highlight the illogicity of such conjectures. By providing a dialogic racial space, Middle-earth is especially valid for demonstrating the work needed for understanding and respecting cultural difference.

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# PREFACE

The abbreviations found in this thesis refer to various texts written by J.R.R. Tolkien. These abbreviations are as follows:

*FR*          The Fellowship of the Ring

*Letters*     The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien

*Monsters*    The Monsters and the Critics

*Peoples*     The Peoples of Middle-earth

*RK*          Return of the King

*Silmarillion*  The Silmarillion

*TT*          The Two Towers

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# 1.0     INTRODUCTION

The concept of race, although discarded by anthropologists as a biological farce, has an insidious half-life. Its modernized redefinition is apparent in the concept's omnipresent relevance as an implicit social force used to construct meaning and divisions within societies. Although "race" has been overturned as an acceptable biological identifier within western society, race still functions as an invisible method for differentiation between groups. It operates as a primary form of assigned identification, and this assignment has structural consequences within society such as stigmatized labor, forced exclusion, social segregation, and economic inequality (Harrison 48). This invisible application of race, rarely verbalized, works to divide people along essentialized lines of innate capabilities and experiential dispositions (Hartigan 548).

Critics in the mass media have tried to tag this essentialized form of bigotry to J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth novels. Journalists such as David Ibata, Michael Moorcock, Jennifer Murray, Leanne Potts, and John Yatt have charged *The Lord of the Rings* especially with making bigotry acceptable and heroic ("Racism" 558). John Yatt, possibly the originator of the most recent media maelstrom, claimed in his December 2002 editorial that the recent *Two Towers* film and the original text were built on a racist core:

> This genetic determinism drives the plot in the most brutal manner. White men are good, "dark" men are bad, orcs are worst of all. While 10,000 orcs are massacred with a kind of Dungeons and Dragons version of biological warfare, the wild men left standing at the end of the battle are packed off back to their homes with nothing more than slapped wrists…. the Lord of the Rings is racist. It is soaked in the logic that race determines behaviour. Orcs are bred to be bad, they have no choice.

Italian fascists, the neo-Nazi British National party (BNP), and the Aryan Nation all use and support this reading of Middle-earth (Potts). Leanne Potts quotes the national director of the Aryan Nation as extolling the recent movies as "'entertaining to the average Aryan citizen,'" and she states that reading the *Lord of the Rings* series is an essential task for the BNP.

How valid is this racial reading of Middle-earth? Tolkien does in fact use the word "race" in conjunction with the characters he creates, just as he uses "peoples" or "kindreds" (*FR* 330; *TT* 26). Evidently, Tolkien did not shy away from using this term, although he applied it inconsistently. The question remains, however, if Tolkien, a man raised in the racial and racializing atmosphere of the Edwardian period, implanted the same racialism into his life's work, Middle-earth. Did Tolkien, by situating his various characters as "races," indicate that within Middle-earth he had created an essentialized structure of difference between peoples? The simple answer is no; Tolkien's peoples are not meant to have any racial overtones nor are they divided by essentialized features. This does not deny, however, the literal presence of these "races," and Tolkien expresses each race through the limited number of characters on his narrative's stage. This continues to problematize "race" as Tolkien uses it, because even if race was a "much-misused" term for Tolkien, its use still maps meaning onto Middle-earth. Even as Tolkien did not use race as a deliberate technique to make value statements about his different characters, racism operates on a broader scale than simply individuals' *intentions*. Rather, Essed explains that racism is a semi-coherent "'ideology, structure, and process in which inequalities inherent in the wider social structure are related, in a deterministic way, to biological and cultural factors attributed to those who are seen as different "race" or "ethnic group'" (qtd. in Wodak and Reisigl 179). The racial "Other" is evidenced by its treatment: "dominance, differentiation, distance, diffusion, diversion, depersonalization or destruction, and daily discrimination"

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([Wodak and Reisigl 184](#)). With this definition in mind, the nuanced difference between racial and racist may be overlooked, but for Tolkien, *racial* related to the existence of races and *racism* ascribed these races to specific social statuses. As race operates on many levels, how can we determine to what extent it operates within Middle-earth?

Despite the many voices in popular culture accusing Tolkien of implanting a racist message in Middle-earth, the academic response has been surprisingly tepid and cursory. Most of the responses have focused on determining whether among the elves, dwarves, men, and hobbits there are racial categories (thereby disregarding the Orcs), and most of this critical work has been based solely on *The Lord of the Rings* novels. However, broadening this examination is of critical importance, not simply because Tolkien's books have sold over two hundred million copies worldwide, but also because the cultural impact of Tolkien's work cannot be overstated ([CBC News](#)). If the idea that Tolkien implanted a racist ideology into Middle-earth is plausible, that would indicate that the many millions of people who have read the books, seen the movies or animated series, or enjoyed the many cultural artifacts inspired by Middle-earth (from *Dungeon and Dragons* to *Star Wars*) may have been exposed to and possibly inculcated with racist, mono-cultural expectations. To decode the implicit ideology of Tolkien's Middle-earth is to supply us with an understanding of the impact and importance of race as it resonates with readers.

Thus, it is important what Tolkien *meant* to do with the Middle-earth "races," but it is also important to examine what impact the existence of these races *has* on readers. Ideology is never stagnant and static, and by studying its presence in Tolkien's work, we can discover patterns of mediation and internal tensions related race and to characterization. Determining if and how this dialogue problematizes the normal system of representations can be used to

evaluate the impact of Tolkien's racial discourse. Discovering this discourse is important for understanding how it equips readers to determine meaning and how it allows readers to confront structures of power within and without Middle-earth. Thus, should some sort of racial subversion be discovered within Middle-earth, this discourse should be evaluated not just in terms of its presence, but what tools it offers readers to work within the discourse on race.

The way to disentangle the ideology of race and the "Other" is manifested in how we are to treat the text of Middle-earth. Chism suggests that critics have either worked according to the supposition that Middle-earth is an "autonomous diagetic [sic] space" that allows us to ask "how each race or ethnicity functions within its total cosmography," or that the text is a space of Tolkien's "literary inventions [where] he investigated issues important to him" ("Race and Ethnicity" 555). The fault of these methodological approaches is that the questions they pose are not truly dialectically opposite. Treating Middle-earth as an autonomous space does not mean that Middle-earth was not Tolkien's personally controlled literary invention; to assume otherwise is to disregard an author's creative impulses. But to totally concentrate on an author's control would belie the creeping infiltration of subtle ideology that works within every individual providing him or her with "a fundamental framework of assumptions that defines the parameters of the real and the self" (Kavanagh 310). It is imperative to remember that "language, culture, and meaning have inextricably contaminated each other" within the concentrated artistic creation of Middle-earth (Hill and Mannheim 383).

Even Tolkien's wish to create a mythology for England is predicated by an uniquely English ideology that treated England as a sovereign nation separate from Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. Recognizing this buried ideological assumption not only allows us to begin to understand the creative impulse behind Middle-earth, but also allows readers to recognize that

the source of this impulse is more than just a characteristic of Tolkien's personality. That this English space was so unique from its neighbors yet has no independent mythology—as separate from existing Celtic, Norman, or Germanic myths—was particularly galling to the proudly English Tolkien. Recognizing such forces is the work that must be done to understand the ideological world in which Tolkien existed, and how as a member of it, he was contributing to both its maintenance and evolution. Nevertheless, while Tolkien was working within this ideological matrix as he was developing Middle-earth, outside his literary world Tolkien was actively engaging his fellow academics in conversations on language, race, and humanity.

What is less obvious than the flexible nature of ideology is the flexibility with which readers must treat Middle-earth. Not only does the published Middle-earth legendarium cover a length of history longer than the written history of humankind, but its histories, peoples, maps, and environments also remain in a state of flux. This is often the most frustrating aspect of reading Tolkien's works beyond the two-year glimpse provided in *The Lord of the Rings*—the scope of Middle-earth and the vastness of its creations overwhelm even the most earnest reader. More frustrating is the form in which readers and scholars can access Tolkien's legendarium. Tolkien barely ceased working on Middle-earth from 1917 to his death in 1973; much of his writings have now been painstakingly pieced together and published by his son, Christopher Tolkien (henceforth referred to as "Christopher"). The most sweeping history of Middle-earth is recorded in *The Silmarillion*, which attempts to seamlessly cover the vast First and Second Ages of Middle-earth, with just the shortest chapter accorded to the Third Age. Yet some critics have questioned "how much *The Silmarillion* was Tolkien's own work and how much had been written afterwards by his son" (Fimi 3). What followed *The Silmarillion*'s publication was the immense twelve-volume *The History of Middle-earth*. The series covers every phase of

Tolkien's writing, showing the various development periods, his editing process, and his constant reevaluation of his own sub-creation. (*The Children of Hurin* dovetails into the *History* but is supposedly a complete, standalone story and not counted as a part of the *History of Middle-earth*.)

Thus, the mythopoeic text of Middle-earth is necessarily without absolute internal consistency throughout the entire legendarium. As frustrating as this may be to a casual reader or proponent of strict readings, for our purposes it indicates the degree to which Tolkien continued questioning even his most basic assumptions throughout his literary and academic career. It also signals to readers the "multi-faceted interpretable nature of history, of personality, and of drama" ([Hollindale x](#)). Like J.M. Barrie, author of the many iterations of *Peter Pan*, Tolkien's unceasing tinkering was not bothersome over-editing, but a manifestation of a more coherent philosophical attitude "convinced of relativity, of circumstantial change, seeing life and art alike as fluid and provisional" ([Hollindale xi](#)). Christopher explains rather, "As is often the case when comparing varying texts of my father's one may feel unsure whether the differences do not lie more in differing emphasis than in real contradiction" (*[Peoples](#)* 65). This concept of relativity is especially relevant to understanding Tolkien's various applications of the term "race," and should also make us hyper-aware to the moments where Tolkien remains constant in his descriptions.

Like the shaky internal consistency any society has in reference to its myths, folklore, and ideology, Middle-earth mimics this instability. This instability is generated in part by Tolkien's personal revisions, and also the dialogue he maintained with his editors, readers, publishers, and fellow Inklings (he never got much chance to respond to academic criticism, dying before the greatest critical work had accumulated). One example of the evolving shape of Middle-earth

becomes apparent in an informed reading of *The Hobbit*. This was Tolkien's first published book, and it was "originally quite unconnected" from legendarium of Middle-earth (*Letters* 215). In fact, many of the legends eventually published in *The Silmarillion* were already in a somewhat consistent form by this publication date, so this forced Tolkien to flip the normal progression of writing. He had to go backwards to determine how to reconcile *The Hobbit*'s "inconsistent elements"—most particularly the highly formal Scandinavian dwarvish names—with the internal workings of the Middle-earth environ. Tolkien discusses this incongruency, and many others, in his letters, arriving at the clarification that "[the Dwarves] have been given Scandinavian names, it is true; but that is an editorial concession. Too many names in the tongues proper to the period might have been alarming" (*Letters* 31).

Although critics now recognize the overall instability of Tolkien's work, the greatest impact of his work has resulted predominantly from the popularity of *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit*, and to a lesser degree, *The Silmarillion*. These are the books that are most familiar to the average reader; for example, one avid fan, Yvan Strelzyk, owns copies of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* published in fifty-five countries (*Tolkien Library*). Pietr Collier, creator of the *Tolkien Library*, lists forty-seven translations available for *The Lord of the Rings*. However, the multilingual volumes of *The History of Middle-earth* books are not so readily available: the Bulgarian Tolkien Society tracks sixty-five available translations of *The Hobbit*'s compared to only thirty-seven available translations of *Unfinished Tales* (*Endorion.org*). Because *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* have been the more available titles, I will focus on them. *The Peoples of Middle-earth* text is a collection of essays that help chronicle the Second and Third Ages as they were prepared for publication in the Appendices of *The Return of the King*, and I will use this text to compliment my thesis. Christopher compiled the text from Tolkien's late

efforts in the 1950-1960s to streamline his vast collection of myths and legends in response to readers' wishes for more Middle-earth stories after the publication of *The Return of the King*. The shorter narrative found in *The Lord of the Rings* allows for more concentrated descriptions of fewer characters, and the broad narrative of *The Silmarillion* offers more sweeping generalization about the various Middle-earth peoples. Juxtaposing these two titles effectively covers the breadth of humanoid characters in Middle-earth. I acknowledge that this paper is not nearly expansive enough to address the entirety of the Middle-earth world, nor will I talk about all humanoid characters Tolkien created, the critical aim of this paper to develop questions that previous critical work has neglected. The vastness of *The History of Middle-earth* cannot be dealt with efficiently or fairly within the confines of this paper, so only *The Peoples of the Middle-earth* is used when it directly addresses the very concentrated narrative in *The Lord of the Rings*. This paper treats the literary landscape of Middle-earth as analytical fodder, and this literary analysis is informed by anthropological concepts and methods.

The focus, then, of this paper is determining the ethnographic representations of the various humanoid characters within Middle-earth and then establishing the degree to which these depictions contribute to a racialized and racist understanding of Middle-earth. By addressing the world of Middle-earth as an autonomous space birthed through Tolkien's creative impulses and ideological framework, we can determine that Tolkien did not deliberately implant in Middle-earth a racist microcosm of the world. Using this critical perspective, this paper will recognize both Tolkien's aims in his work and the work it does for modern readers equipped with modern notions of race. Through close readings, this paper moves to read the hierarchical structure of Middle-earth as a dialogic racial space where even as Tolkien uses racial generalizations he undercuts these assumptions through the plasticity of his characters and their interactions.

Middle-earth's characters dialogize such racial issues as miscegenation, literary representations of "blackness," colonization, and pluralism as its actors explore the tensions inherent in these issues. Thus, while initially Tolkien seems to engage "race" only as a descriptive tool, he does not freeze these descriptions of difference. Rather, Tolkien uses his characters' own flawed racial assumptions to highlight the illogicity of such conjectures. By providing a mediated racial space, Middle-earth is especially valid for demonstrating the work needed for understanding and respecting cultural difference.

## 2.0     TOLKIEN'S RACIAL CONTEXT – EUROPE'S RACIAL MYTH

The concept of race for Western Europeans originally arose simply as a division between "us" and "other" in the rather homogeneous European communities of the Middle Ages. People were predominantly Catholic, white, and kept within a twenty-five mile radius of home their entire lives. Anyone outside this establishment was considered "Other" and often degraded for being so—Jews, Muslims, Celts, and Africans were common victims of this tradition. Even those who today are peaceful neighbors could receive the full blunt attack of such ostracism, as this popular story from the sixteenth century demonstrates:

> I find written among old stories how God made Saint Peter porter of Heaven, and how God, in his goodness soon after his suffering on the cross allowed many men to come to the kingdom of heaven who very little deserved it. So at this time there was in heaven a lot of Welshmen, who troubled all the rest with their boasting and chatter. So God said to Saint Peter that he was fed up with them, and that he'd be very glad to have them out of heaven. Saint Peter replied to him,
> "Good Lord, I guarantee that it will be done in no time." So Saint Peter went outside the gates of heaven and shouted in a loud voice,
> "Cause bobe!" which is as much as to say, "Roasted cheese." When they heard this the Welshmen ran out of heaven at great speed. And when Saint Peter saw that they were all outside, he quickly went in to heaven and locked the door, and so he barred all the Welshmen out." ([Richard 55](#)).

Somehow even the Welsh were categorically less fit than Englishmen if they were to be kept from Christian heavenly redemption. This religious hierarchy was just one part of a growing attitude of "natural" greatness imbued in the English people. Other myths supported English greatness: the English kings were descended directly from Brutus, grandson of Aeneas, and St. Joseph of Arimathea brought the Holy Grail to England—these myths coupled to initiate a

lasting superiority complex (updated to suit each political and religious body in power) and served to maintain social cohesion of "us versus them."

In the Renaissance and the Age of Exploration, more of these "outsiders" began appearing in the courts of European rulers as spectacles and sources of diversion. In the court of James I, one repugnant example occurred during his marriage party to Anne of Denmark: he had four young Africans dance naked in the snow, little more than animal performers—and they later died from overexposure (Briggs 95). It is obvious from this example what little regard the English had for different peoples. The earliest written information about such cultures as the Iroquois, Mayans, and Aztecs began to be published in this period, as well, by such men as Richard Hakluyt and John Mandeville, yet these writers painted a wholly inaccurate picture. Europeans treated these peoples as "children to be tricked, bullied, or cajoled, or else as rebellious adults to be coerced by captivity, torture, or execution" (81).

Within this period of first contacts, the conceptions of blackness and fairness began to be applied in terms of skin color (the Bible was an early source of the equation of black with shadows and evil; see Job, Psalms, and Thessalonians). The concept was used as a continuing theme in Shakespeare's Othello, Ben Jonson's *Masque of Blackness,* John Marston's *The Tragedy of Sophonisba*, John Webster's *The White Devil*, Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, and many others (97-98). Black characters within these works were threatening, lascivious, treacherous, morally crooked, villainous, and scheming, to name but a few common characteristics. Briggs summarizes this characterization,

> Blackness was associated with the devil, evil-doing, and death, and from the mid-sixteenth century it reflected a new awareness of visible difference by acquiring aesthetic overtones, as the antithesis of 'fair'… This new concept of 'fairness' brought together racial and class prejudice… only the privileged could afford to avoid sunburn and the darkening of skin. (96)

Elizabeth I was the first English monarch to publish edicts that discriminated on the basis of skin color (96).

Nonetheless, the encompassing concept of humanity was still a Christian one: all groups had sprung from Adam and Eve. Physical and territorial differences arouse through the three sons of Noah: Shem became the father of the Semitic peoples, Japheth became the father of the European peoples, and Ham became the father of the Afro-asiatic peoples. Science generally assumed a similar attitude, viewing the universe as ultimately organized and united in a hierarchical design with God at top, followed by his angels, then his creations (humans, lesser animals, plants, and inanimate objects). Yet within this design there was room for categorical ordering of peoples: the monarch, for example, already had true divine right to rule. Contemporary science did not expand much beyond astronomy (with Copernican's new heliocentric universe and Galileo's telescope lenses); philosophy and religion were still the leading determinant of theories on man's behavior, origins, and psychology.

However, history and philology were beginning to be applied in earnest to find more specific origins, such as William Camden's study of the Anglo-Saxons at the Westminster School in 1593–1597—he was the first to isolate "Anglo-Saxons" as a scholastic term. He utterly praised the Anglo-Saxon invaders at the expense of the original Britons, lauding the invaders for their courage and valor (MacDougall 46). This was the concrete form the racial superiority myth was assuming. By the English Civil War era, the myth was being summed up in even more blatant racial terms as lead by John Hare's *St. Edward's Ghost* which told the English nation that they "should glory in the racial purity they, the most noble of the Germanic tribes, retained" (59). Publications like these were little more than dramatic calls-to-action and emotional declarations, however beneficial they were to maintaining racial pride as English ships began to colonize lands

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and peoples throughout the world. The "barbarity of native men" compared to Englishmen became a "major justification for imperial rule" ([Loomba 154](#)).

Philosophy could do little in the face of this onslaught. Even as philosophers continued to emphasize the basic unity of humanity, new venues opened to delineate racial categories and supremacy. As empirical science flourished, philosophy moved away from medieval Catholic scholasticism, and both disciplines developed new threads lacking Christian overtones. Rousseau, Hobbes, and Locke all wrote about the inherent unity of humankind; yet this concept could easily be disregarded as nothing more than equality existing solely in the original state of nature that the English people had long left behind in their achievements. Tract after tract was written emphasizing the supposed longevity of Anglo-Saxons: they were honorable, manly, born leaders, and the originators of liberty ([MacDougall 66](#)). These qualities were applied with rigor to both the restored monarchy and the empowered parliamentary rule. As a result, "by mid-century [of the 1700s] belief in the inherited genius of an English people essentially Germanic in origin had become so pervasive that it was seldom if ever seriously questioned" even by firmly rational thinkers ([81](#)). The racial order served its purpose of securing a glorious destiny for England.

As the political and religious climate in England stabilized in the eighteenth century, science continued to open the doors to intellectual curiosity, especially the wide variety of human appearances. Into this theoretical void, Romantic idealism and nationalism combined to emphasize the uniqueness and individuality within nation-states, and each had an unique national spirit, its *Volkgeist*. This was accompanied by a swell in interest about the history of the whole Germanic people, and the answers amplified the cultural assumption on the ideal Germanic type ([Horsman 26](#)). As part of the Romantic movement, a linguistic trend developed with the

publications of Gottfried von Herder's work; while this linguist continued to stress the unity of humanity, he also proposed that language was the basic unit of a nation (27). Rather than arising from a divine source or human invention, language derived from humanity's innate capacity for organized speech (Edwards 23). Herder posited that the diversity of speech arose from various social environments and these "speech communities survive[d] as discrete entities as long as they preserve[d] their language as a collective inheritance" (23). Other authors continued this association. Johann Gottlieb Fichte applied this linguistic nationalism more succinctly to a broader sociopolitical position, suggesting that "men are formed by language far more than language is formed by men" (qtd. in Edwards 25). This linguistic nationalism predominantly defined itself and cohered through a reviled out-group—the Other (who were the French to Fichte).

By the nineteenth century, European nationalists were looking for clearer justifications of national solidarity and for excluding the Other. Sentimental and sensational texts no longer provided credible proof for the increasingly science-driven society. The natural sciences were elicited to answer the basic question of "What makes these people different?" Answering this sort of question were of pressing importance, as the British Empire had reached its territorial height and needed justification for controlling its indigenous peoples. Taxonomy, anthropometry, phrenology, craniology, psychology, and ethnology all proved quite capable of providing this (increasingly) racial proof, drawing very rigid racial boundaries. Either through the work of amateurs with rather impressionistic studies or more in depth "empirical" studies (with techniques such as skull measuring), by mid-century, biological races had the full support of scientific proof.

Attempts at scientific classifications of human races did not start with these studies in the nineteenth century. In the seventeenth century François Bernier's divided humanity into Asiatic, African, Lapp, and European, similar to Linnaeus's eighteenth century system of albus, rubeus, fuscus, and niger types, and later Johann Friedrich Blumenbach supplied the term "Caucasian" (Horsman 46-47). By the nineteenth century, scientists defined these racial categories by physical traits such as "skin and hair color, shape of skull or pelvis, stature, form of nose"—even eye color (MacDougall 122-123). Physical characteristics were being linked to intellectual and cultural traits. One infamous example of this physical categorization is the two categories of the roundheaded Brachycephalics and longheaded Doliochocephalics (Horsman 56). It was in this form that the Irish were likened to apes, orangutans, and gorillas, as similarly were Africans. The infamous cephalic index was applied to determine "human potential" through the ratio of the length and width of the human skull (MacDougall 122). Phrenology "provided inherent, physical reasons for racial differences" (Horsman 56).

With the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, the genetic roots of humanity began to be questioned. Some theorists asserted that the ample "proof" of categorical racial differences was the result of polygenetic development, and thereby Africans must be separate species from Caucasians. Others suggested that Africans were lesser forms of humans, links in the genetic trail from gibbering monkeys to highly evolved Anglo-Saxons (Curtis 2). Armchair anthropologists were shifting through secondhand information about the many "primitive" cultures still being "discovered" by imperialist explorers, and their publications provided further "evidence" for the idea of differentiated inherent traits and unilineal evolution theory. Even as academia began to disregard these concepts, the public still avidly believed in ranking different peoples in terms of culture, historical development, and physical types (59).

Concurrent with the developing theories of biological and cultural evolution, racial studies took on a particularly linguistic guise with the study of an Indo-Germanic prehistory. The studies connected the Germanic tribes back millennia to a supposed super-group called the Aryans or Indo-Europeans. Supposedly "following the sun," the Indo-Europeans spread from India westward and brought the light of civilization and language to Europe (Horsman 33). Max Müller, the "most successful publicist for the Aryan myth," provided "evidence" of the actual Aryan people:

> The Aryan languages together point to an earlier period of language, when the first ancestors of the Indians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Slavs, the Celts, and the Germans were living together within the same the same enclosures, nay under the same roof…. Before the ancestors of the Greek, Roman, Celtic, Teutonic, and Slavonic colonies marched towards the shores of Europe there was a small clan of Aryans, settled probably on the highest elevation of Central Asia, speaking a language, not yet Sanskrit or Greek or German, but containing the dialectical germs of all; a clan that had advanced to a state of agricultural civilization; that had recognized the bonds of blood, and sanctioned the bonds of marriage, and that invoked the Giver of Light and Life in heaven by the same name which you may still hear in the temples of Benares, in the Basilicas of Rome, and in our own churches and cathedrals. (MacDougall 120-121)

Even though Müller did later retract this identification of race with language, the linguistic nationalist movement already held powerful sway—Englishmen especially took immense pride in their assumed long racial heritage and purity. The long cultural legacy of a glorious English past was assured. Ultimately, despite Müller's moderate tone and later retraction, the movement extended its reach to highlight the inferiority of some European groups such as the Gauls and the Celts for "it quickly became apparent that many of the proponents of the Germanic peoples were not content with general praise of the population of Europe" (Horsman 31).

Historians also continued to find support for the magnificent past of the Anglo-Saxons, and this laundry list of names included the likes of Thomas Carylyle, Williams Stubbs, Lord Macaulay, Charles Kingsley, James Anthony Froude, and many others (MacDougall 91). Froude went especially far in establishing that the Irish were inferior to the triumphant Anglo-Saxon

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descendents, the English. Simply put, to Froude the Irish were "the ignorant and the selfish…

And are justly compelled … to obey a rule which rescues them from their natural weakness"

(qtd. in MacDougall 99). Poets and writers joined this dialogue and applied racial physical traits

to their characters with gusto. Charles Dickens was in this group applying "physiognomical"

characteristics; for example *Hard Times* opens with this description of a man: "'square wall of a

forehead, which had his eyebrows for a base, while his eyes found commodious cellarage in two

dark caves, overshadowed by the wall'" rather than a more standard literary description (Curtis

4). The poet Martin F. Tupper lends another excellent example:

> Stretch forth! stretch forth! from the south to the north,
> From the east to the west,—stretch forth! stretch forth!
> Strengthen thy stakes and length thy cords,--
> The world is a tent for the world's true lords!
> Break forth and spread over every place
> The world is a world for the Saxon race. (MacDougall 97)

Popular culture also scapegoated particular groups using visually-arresting imagery. The

numbers of political cartoons stereotyping the Irish number in the thousands; these cartoons

depict the Irish as everything from buffoons, whores, and dupes, to Negroes and apes—England

in contrast is depicted as a beautiful goddess accompanied by an upstanding, well-dressed

Englishmen (Curtis 23). These common literary and visual devices continued well into Tolkien's

time and are present in many of his contemporaries' works.

Thus the nineteenth century closed with the machinery of racial ordering still humming,

supported by the natural sciences, anthropology, Social Darwinism, literature, and the popular

press. Even as contemporary scientists declared phrenology and the cephalic index invalid forms

of scientific proof, racialism still permeated their work. Dr. John Beddoe, President of the

Anthropology Society of England, took a cautionary position when he said that the only

difference between Celts and Teutons was in their languages, yet he still maintained that racial

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differences could be determined through hair color and eye color without (MacDougall 123).

Even as Teutonic superiority increasingly was discredited scientifically, race was still an all-pervading concept as a way to classify, distinguish, and situate people within the world order.

**3.0    CULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND INWARD SEEKING GAZE**

This was the cultural consciousness into which Tolkien was born, in the year of 1892. Yet series of circumstances throughout his life made him question many of the institutions and assumptions that swirled about him. He was born in South Africa, and from this early age was exposed to life experiences very different from the average Englishmen—ones that he remembered vividly if not in great detail (Doughan). In South Africa, Mabel Tolkien taught her sons lessons of tolerance in the apartheid society and later her "early death canonized her opinions" for young Tolkien (Rearick 866). Tolkien returned to England with his mother and brother in 1903, and the small family converted to Roman Catholicism. Again, this is an unusual experience for the average Englishman, an experience that would have given him a unique view on the common stereotypes against "Papists." Tolkien had already discovered his love of languages, and when mastering Greek and Latin proved no challenge, the young boy moved onto languages not common to the English curriculum (Doughan) He discovered Finnish, which became the inspiration to the Elvish language Quenya and a likely root for the entire Middle-earth project (Fimi 53). Tolkien in several lectures explained that at this early age he had already created several fictional languages. Tolkien was an unusual child with a voracious mind and intense intellectual curiosity. Can we then assume he believed *all* his society's cultural assumptions on race? As Rearick points out, "living in a racist society does not predestine one to be racist" (866).

Another experience, however, began the educational journey that culminated in his creating Middle-earth: he was orphaned, and at the age of nineteen was sent to Exeter College. At the university, he studied Classics, Old English, Germanic languages, Welsh, Finnish, and English language and literature. The kernel of Middle-earth languages blossomed with these linguistic contacts, especially the heroic myths of Old English, which seemed to him to evoke a genuine and unique English quality. It was here also that his fascination with the "North" began, which readers must remember in reading his tales—they are not written on the world stage, but rather are confined to a northwestern region of it. With the advent of the Great War, Tolkien stayed at school before being drafted. Tolkien's experiences in the trenches were formative, and he lost all but one of his friends in the war. From these atrocities and horrors, Tolkien grew greatly disgusted with the modern movement of states and the hypocritical expansionist policies they advocated—"One War is enough for any man" he told his son years later (*Letters* 54). It should be no surprise that the bulk of *The Silmarillion*'s tales, tales of cyclic conflict and tragedy, were conceived in this period. After the war ended, he returned to academia to work on the Oxford English Dictionary and the University of Leeds.

Would these academic and wartime experiences necessarily mean Tolkien questioned or understood the racial myth? No—many intelligent and educated European individuals at this time nevertheless still assumed racial superiority. Yet there is plenty of evidence within Tolkien's letters, publications, and lectures that he was explicitly aware of racial conceptions. For example, during the prelude to World War II and the German translation of *The Hobbit*, the publishers expressly asked if Tolkien was of "arish" (Aryan) descent. To his English publisher, Tolkien wrote that he would rather just let the translation go instead of "any such declaration appearing in the print. I do not regard the (probable) absence of all Jewish blood as necessarily

honourable… and should regret giving any colour to the notion that I subscribed to the wholly pernicious and unscientific race-doctrine" (*Letters* 37). Then in the letter sent directly to Rütten and Loening Verlag, the German publishers, Tolkien's answer is entirely tongue in cheek, "I regret that I am not clear as to what you intend by *arish*. I am not of *Aryan* extraction: this is Indo-iranian; as far as I am aware none of my ancestors spoke Hindustani, Persian, Gypsy, or any related dialects. But if I am to understand that you are enquiring whether I am of *Jewish* origin, I can only reply that I regret that I appear to have *no* ancestors of that gifted people" (*Letters* 37). In this succinct letter, Tolkien utterly dismisses the "toward the sun" racial superiority theory of Indo-Europeans.

This matches Franz Boas' theoretical U-turn, when in 1932 he stated that "race and character are not correlated" (Boas 191-105). Boas introduced the ideas of relativism, both for cultural and historical development—and these revolutionary ideas forced anthropologists to research different cultures at the individual level instead of assuming biological hierarchy (Columbia Encyclopedia). Boas' concept was revolutionary because it disregarded the unilineal progression of man from savage to civilized; as a result of Boas' work, each society of humankind is view by modern anthropologists as having its own power and merit. Both Tolkien and Boas were linguists, and Boas pioneered linguistic fieldwork with his studies in the American Northwest. Through these studies, Boas came to reject the prevailing assumptions on race, and showed "even the profoundest differences in language and culture found among the world's peoples … do not affect the fundamental sameness and equality of human beings" (Kemmer). Connected to this was his unlinking of race and innate capabilities, a controversial move that Tolkien echoes in his own lectures. Boas stated, "If we were to select the most intelligent, imaginative, energetic, and emotionally stable third of mankind, all races would be

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present," and Tolkien shows the merit of all his Middle-earth denizens through similar individuation (Columbia University). Like Boas, Tolkien came to highlight language as a product of common humanity and as a form of cultural creativity unrelated to race.

In another letter, Tolkien admits to loathing the term "Nordic," again dismissing the association of Nordic, Middle-earth, and racial superiority (*Letters* 375). Later in an address to the University of Oxford in 1959, Tolkien stated that he had "the hatred of apartheid in [his] bones" as a result of the system of racial dominance he witnessed in his early years in South Africa (*Monsters* 238). In fact, Tolkien makes his position clear on race in his 1955 lecture: it is a "much-misused word" (*Monsters* 166). However, philology blurred the lines between notions on language, race, and people (Fimi 138). Tolkien was influenced by these assumptions, but by the period of a 1955 lecture (which was given as the volumes of *The Lord of the Rings* were being published), Tolkien had dissolved the link between a people, their language, and their race. Tolkien's view is that which actually distinguishes peoples is not some set of inherited racial traits. Rather he explains,

> For though cultural and other traditions may accompany a difference of language, they are chiefly maintained and preserved by language. Language is the prime differentiator of peoples – not of "races", whatever that much-misused word may mean in the long-blended history of western Europe…. Languages are the chief distinguishing marks of peoples. No people in fact comes into being until it speaks a language of its own; let the languages perish and the peoples perish too, or become different peoples. But that never happens except as a result of oppression and distress. This is all that I have to say at this time about the confusion between language (and nomenclature) and "race." (*Monsters* 161, 173)

This is similar to Herder's theory, and is absolutely essential in the creation of the different beings in Tolkien's sub-created world, all who are intimately connected through language linkages.

Although a blanket statement such as this carries its share of complications, Tolkien himself contributed to the ambiguity of the debate on language in the "translation" required to

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write the text of Middle-earth. Although the different languages of the elves, humans, and Dwarves differentiate between groups and within them, these languages rarely appear in the text (Khuzdul, the Dwarfish language, appears two times in *The Lord of the Rings*). Rather, all characters speak "Westron" which is "translated" into English:

> The language represented in this history by English was the Westron or "Common Speech" of the West-lands of Middle-earth in the Third Age. In the course of that age it had become the native language of nearly all the speaking-peoples (save the Elves). (*RK 467*)

Westron is the common tongue that all "speaking-peoples" share, confusing the very idea that language works as a divider among peoples. As a result, the various peoples still maintain their cultures and traditions through the maintenance of their historical languages, yet are more obviously connected as one shared humanity through their ability to speak Westron. Tolkien defends this translation project because he did not want to obscure the experiences of the Hobbits to his readers, "contrast[ing] between a wide-spread language, to them as ordinary and habitual as English is to us, and the living remains of far older and more reverend tongues" (*RK 476*).

Without a doubt, Tolkien recognized the variety of humanity, but saw it as just that: the numerous expressions of the one humankind. He neatly sums that up in the same lecture from 1955, stressing the possibilities of human cohesiveness and uniqueness: "I will at any rate say that language – and more so as expression than as communication – is a natural product of our humanity. But it is therefore also a product of our individuality" (*Monsters 190*). This assurance connects intimately with what he had created in Middle-earth (*Lord of the Rings* was published in this same period) but also with his devout Catholic faith. That his faith served as an inspiration is evidenced in some of his earlier letters. Although he believes that humanity is fallen and "special dangers" are inherent for all humanity, he explained to his son Christopher that "God is (so to speak) also behind us, supporting, nourishing us (as being creatures)" (*Letters 66*). This is

a basic tenet of Christianity: an eternal optimism in the absolute love and mercy of God, and one of the central-most themes of Middle-earth. Acknowledging Tolkien's faith becomes essential once we begin questioning his aesthetic and thematic choices in Middle-earth.

Another complaint often made against Tolkien's Middle-earth is that it is overly "European." Tolkien does not shirk from admitting that the predominance of his myths and stories concentrate on the north of Europe. Yet this is simply an expression of his deep love for those languages and his intense interest in the myths of the region. One of the first catalysts to his linguistics pursuits was the Finnish *Kalevala*, "an obligatory part of school curriculum [for the Finnish] and … a national symbol" ([Fimi 53](#)). Throughout his writing, Tolkien maintained that his original motivation for creating the Middle-earth myths was to make them accompany the languages he created. Yet more than devotion to his linguistic creations motivated Tolkien. Rather, the creation of Middle-earth *and* its languages became a project closely related to Tolkien's nationalist English pride. This was not a nationalist pride akin to the fascist nationalism in Italy or the Nazism in Germany, but sprung from Tolkien's view that the genius of a people was intrinsically linked to its language. Remember, however, that the idea of an essential link between nationalism and language has been rejected, as the "emphasis upon language *follows* the growth of nationalistic fervour; it does not create it" ([Edwards 26](#)).

For Tolkien, the Arthurian tales were just French implants and the glorious Anglo-Saxon work of *Beowulf* was not enough to feed his appetite or that of his children and friends. That is all the work started out as—an entertaining yarn to spin with the Inklings, his students, and his children. Tolkien hoped to create a mythology for England that was otherwise lacking, but this "England" was irrevocably tied to its Anglo-Saxon heritage for Tolkien. In particular, *The Hobbit* was a tale he told his children. It was not initiated as something to be published. In fact,

Tolkien felt some embarrassment at first in his interest in "fairy-stories," believing those were supposedly only for children. Unwin and Allen's discovery of *The Hobbit* can even be considered a fluke. As the manuscript was passed among Tolkien's friends and students, it made its way to an employee at the publishing firm. She asked Tolkien to complete it, and then delivered that manuscript to her bosses. However, just because this book was published, there was no assurance that any of the other myths Tolkien had constructed would be published, and it was almost two decades before the *Lord of the Rings* was in finally published. Even then, the vast majority of Middle-earth's long history was deemed unpublishable.

If Tolkien had been interested in making a *racial* myth for England, he would have focused it in English prehistory, presented it in a definite pre-English dialect or language, would have used more clearly "English" archetypes, and interspersed it with clearly "black" or other racially degraded peoples. Instead, these assumptions never definitively arise in Middle-earth. The world is not a historical England, but some other-history detached from the movements of current and ancient states. The inspiration for these peoples was derived from numerous prehistorical sources from Egyptian to Anglo-Saxon. Furthermore, as already explained, the English language is only given as a "translation" of something far older and wholly unrelated. Lastly, the "black" characters are creatures corrupted by an evil power that originally come from the same source as the "good" characters (the West) and never quite assumed the necessary racial attributes attached to the concept of "blackness." The world of Middle-earth belies easy categorization, further troubling the racial assignation. Middle-earth is varied and complicated: the society of the Hobbits is pastoral, Rohan is early medieval, Orthanc is proto-industrial, and Gondor is Egyptian-Greco-Indo-European. In fact, one reader complained that *The Lord of the Rings* was too Celtic and not very English, which insulted Tolkien worse (*Letters* 25).

However, the question about the representations of black and white remains to problematize Tolkien's stated intentions. Does he follow the common Western trope of making black equal to evilness and white to goodness? Again, the answer is not so simple as "yes" or "no." Reading the tale without any previous knowledge the Tolkien's historical climate would lead to the easy assumption that it exhibits a "mono-cultural ideal of a society that prefers not to ask questions about its past involvement in ethnic oppression'" as University of Warwick lecturer Stephen Shapiro claims ([Murray](#)). In this lecture, Shapiro claimed that Tolkien's epic is rooted in bigotry, racism, and racial war ([Murray](#)).

Yet Tolkien was never attempting to write about the modern meeting of worlds that was occurring in his contemporary moment, as decolonization and immigration threatened the racial imperialist project. Middle-earth, many fans are unaware, is just the northwestern tip of a much broader world known as "Arda." Instead, the characters of Middle-earth are dealing with a massive evil that arose over subsequent centuries from within their own territory and allies, not one that ignited by immigration or decolonization. Middle-earth is also by no means a mono-cultural situation despite its small territorial size—the Hobbits' culture is incredibly different from that of Gondor, from that of the elves, from that of the Rohirrim, and from that of the Dwarves. Working with this awareness of the limited literary geographic landscape is important because the Middle-earth landscape serves at times as another plot-driving character (see [Brisbois](#) and [Sabo](#) for more on the landscape of Middle-earth).

Middle-earth's landscape is married to the morality of Middle-earth, an element of Tolkien's theology to which I have only hinted. This moral centering explains much of the scope of Tolkien's project: the entire breadth of Middle-earth history explains evil—how it entered the world, how it unceasingly manifests, and how rational creatures have the means to abandon evil

for good. Tolkien never accepted allegorical readings of *The Lord of the Rings*, yet willingly accepted reading the text with a religious focus. He wrote his friend Father Robert Murray to explain this focus,

> *The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically any references to anything like 'religion', to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed in the story and the symbolism. (*Letters* 172)

Furthermore, although "verisimilitude of reality" imbues Middle-earth, it serves a moral function. Tolkien admits that for him, "myth and story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error) but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary 'real' world" (*Silmarillion* xii). The forms evil takes within his texts is a Christian one predicated on personal choice, separate from the racial specter of blackness.

If Tolkien was interested in promoting the doctrine of racism, *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien's good characters should demonstrate the racially superior characteristics imputed to Englishmen, or at least white Western Europeans. As already discussed, these characteristics would have includes courage, valor, love of liberty, respect, lordliness, racial purity, and cultural superiority. A glance at Tolkien's characters demonstrates that these attributes are spread across all his characters, even those that are villains. Even the Hobbits, supposedly an "ethnically pure clan" by Shapiro's claim (when their true blame is in isolating themselves) become touched by elvishness: children are born with blond hair after the War of the Ring (*RK* 339). Each individual and collective people in Middle-earth fails and disputes the supposed racial hierarchy; the denizens of Middle-earth are a motley crew.

## 4.0    SPECIES, HUMANS, OR RACES

The first problem with investigating the question of a Middle-earth racial myth is determining what to call the "kindreds" in Tolkien's work. How different are elves from men, or the men of Gondor from the men of Rohan? Ascertaining the exact meaning of race has already proven problematic, but we must also recognize that because Tolkien affixed this word to his characters, it still remains a valid entity to address. He used race interchangeably in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* with "kindred" and "people," applying it to Men, Elves, and Dwarves. Recognizing the racial paradigm within the verisimilitude of the very word "race" forces us to confront the "other" in Middle-earth. The "other" in Middle-earth does not remain static throughout the entirety of the legendarium because the "centrality" of each tale shifts from the exploits of the Elves in *The Silmarillion* to Hobbits and Men in *Lord of the Rings*. In this way, the Other, as what is most alien, begins with Men—those second children of Ilúvatar that elves simply cannot understand. The alterity of Men subtly situates humans as the strange, and makes the elves the more value-neutral characters, significantly contradicting the normal assumption of identity. *The Lord of the Rings* places the centrality upon the characters of the Hobbits, and their "othering" of any creatures beside themselves epitomize this process of self-interested construction of the self. The most alien and "other" creation in Middle-earth is clearly the Orcs, as a force of violence and evil. However, are these "others" used for self-affirmation? Are these categories inviolate, contributing to a racist and hierarchized context for Middle-earth?

## 4.1    HOBBITS

> [The One ring] passed into a far distant country, even to the land of the Periannath, the Little People, the Halflings, who dwelt in the west of Eriador. And ere that day they had been held of small account by elves and by men, and neither Sauron nor any of the Wise save Mithrandir had in all their counsels given thought to them. (*Silmarillion* 303)

A single page from the end of *The Silmarillion*, Hobbits walk onto the face of Middle-earth, but in *The Lord of the Rings*, they dominate the text as the trilogy's truest hero and most fallen sinner—Samwise Gamgee and Frodo Baggins. Hobbits remain perpetually overlooked, a theme that Tolkien develops throughout the text of Middle-earth, how "help oft shall come from the hands of the weak when the Wise falter" (*Silmarillion* 301). That the Hobbits are a misleading people Gandalf explains in *The Fellowship* of the Ring, "'And as far as I know there is no Power in the world that knows all about hobbits… soft as butter they can be, and yet sometimes as tough as old tree-roots'" (73).  Tolkien's characters again and again misjudge one another on the basis of assumed characteristics, and the Hobbits prove the hardiest metaphor for surprising even the most substantiated racial expectation.

The Hobbits vary as much as any people within Middle-earth, with three distinct variations or "breeds" as Tolkien calls them: Harfoots are browner, smaller, shorter, beardless, with nimble hands and feet and they live in highlands and hills; Stoors are broader, heavier, with larger hands and feet, and live in flatlands/riversides; and lastly Fallohides who have fairer skin and hair, are taller and slimmer, and live near trees and woodlands (21-22). Yet despite these differences, no group rules, there is no proscription against intermarriage, and the Hobbits live merrily together. Moreover, Tolkien never fully separates the hobbits as a distinct species from humans: "Hobbits are "far nearer to us [Men] than Elves, or even than Dwarves. Of old they spoke the languages of Men, after their own fashion, and like and disliked much the same things

as Man did" ([21](#)). This is a radical proposition that despite great physical disparity between Men and hobbits, they are still potentially within the same species, like the physical disparity between the Pygmies and Hadza in Africa. However, despite Tolkien's personal love for these little people he had created, they are not sinless—their isolationism and fear of the outside endangers them.

Hobbits were merry folk who love bright colors, are good-natured, love food and drink, but mistrust strangers. Hobbit society is a peaceable one and is at odds with the racking destruction of Sauron's forces. This is not to say, however, that Hobbits were living in an idyllic region free of "foreign" or "dark" forces: they simply ignore and keep out these entities. This isolationism, as a version of racialism, allows the infiltration of Saruman, who successfully exploits the insular nature of Hobbit society. The Hobbits are more concerned with maintaining their borders than with being culturally open. As an external force, it would seem Saruman proves the Hobbits' isolationist fear true, but Tolkien complicates this reading: he has Gandalf tell the Hobbits: "'I am not coming to the Shire. You must settle its affairs yourselves; that is what you have been trained for. ... And as for you, my dear friends, you will need no help'" (*[RK](#) [307](#)*). "Trained for" what exactly? The four Hobbits have trained in warfare after their two years of fighting, but that is not enough to overthrow Saruman—violence begets violence, as Saruman's horrible death by Wormtongue's hand should show. Rather, these Hobbits have learned through their multicultural journey the validity of difference and change, and it is through this education that they challenge the hegemony of the Shire—its corruption, exploitation, isolationism, and racialism ([Gehl 252](#)). It should come as no surprise that the character least willing to leave home and most in awe of elves, Sam, becomes the mayor of the Shire and his daughter is graced with Elvish blonde hair. This blending of elf and hobbit is not a

threat, but a gift, demonstrating the merit of Sam's selfless actions that saved not just Frodo and the Shire, but all of Middle-earth. The mark of blonde hair is not so much a racial mark of superiority that Sam's family assumes, but a reflection of Sam's dedication to all of Middle-earth, signified by his final words of the epic, "'Well, I'm back'" (*RK* 347).

The closed-off Shire juxtaposes with the more open Bree, although even these outland Hobbits are cautiously regarded as peculiar. Bree is a place of free "race mixing" and peace. However, the inhabitants of Bree exhibit the awkward mix of fascination and mistrust of anything unusual commonly found in such racially charged mixed settings (Gehl 256). The gatekeeper's reaction to the four Hobbits neatly demonstrates this, as he both watches them suspiciously and genially opens the gate to them: "He stared at them darkly for a moment, and then slowly opened the gate and let them ride through" (*FR* 190). Nevertheless, the Prancing Pony Inn serves as an open space for a more freeform mixture of strangers and townspeople, and it is here that songs and poems provide the best basis for racial mediation and cultural exchange. The inhabitants of Bree are somewhat ignorant and fearful, yet forever fascinated with strangers and find means within the inn to overcome the alienness of others through song. In comparison to Hobbiton, the openness of Bree protects it and it is untouched by Saruman's corruption.

## 4.2    MEN

The Second Children of Ilúvatar are Men, a bewildering people to the elves in *The Silmarillion*, for they are doomed to die: "Men should seek beyond the world and should find no rest herein" (*Silmarillion* 41). This is indeed a gift to mankind, and is the greatest difference between the First Children (Elves) and Men, as both arise as kindreds within Ilúvatar's divine music. Men

and elves were very much alike is stature and strength, and they began building alliances as well as divisions (104). To the Elves, the Men came as a surprise from the east in Hildórien, and those that settled in the Northwest with the elves were uncorrupted, ignorant, living in a "simple 'Homeric' state of patriarchal and tribal life" (xxi).

However, this is not an utopic proto-state as already humans were beginning to form competitive groups, settling various regions of the world, of which only those in or near the Northeast are known: the Haleth settled in woodlands, the Edain formed close ties with the elves, and the Easterlings remained near in the East. Like the three breeds of the Hobbits, these three divisions of Men varied Phenotypically, but the moral quality of Tolkien work becomes especially evident in *The Silmarillion*. The phenotypic relationship is directly tandem to each group's place within Arda's moral order. Humans would "stray often" from Ilúvatar, yet they nevertheless kept their gift of mortal doom and were promised a part in the "Second Music of Ainur" (42). The Edain learned art and knowledge from the Eldar (the Elves), and through this learning became superior to the other groups of Men and their years lengthened and heights increased to somewhat match the timeless elves. The Haleth were of lesser stature, used few words, delighted in solitude, wandered freely in the woods, but in the West "their time was brief and their days unhappy" (148). Last were the Easterlings, sometimes called Swarthy Men, who were largely unfamiliar to the inhabitants of the West. These men were short, broad, long and strong of arm, with sallow skin, and dark hair and eyes; they made alliances with the Dwarves more than with elves but had alliances with other men (157). Readers know the least about the Easterlings except for their reoccurring place as corrupted agents of Morgoth, but their alliance with him was politically legitimate: they sought lands farther west in Beleriand and Morgoth

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offered it ([195](#)). That the Easterlings did not realize Morgoth was evil before their alliance is part

of the tragedy of *The Silmarillion* but this was the design of Morgoth:

> His design was accomplished in a manner after his own heart; for Men took the lives of Men, and betrayed the Eldar, and fear and hatred were aroused among those that should have been united against him. From that day the hearts of the Elves were estranged from Men, save only those of the Three Houses of the Edain. ([195](#))

Thus, the continuing use of the Easterlings is not a moral statement on inbred evil, but rather the

result of the debilitating force of an external evil for the Christian Tolkien.

Evil develops from Morgoth over the entirety of Middle-earth, within the peoples of the

Easterlings *and* the Edain, and even those who ignored the summons of the Valar and of

Morgoth eventually were exploited and overpowered by evil men ([259](#)). The Easterlings are not,

however, presented as soulless thralls of Morgoth. Although they predominantly appear as

hordes, there is one example of intermarriage between an Easterling and an Edain woman ([198](#)).

This union should be compared to the incestuous one between Túrin and Níniel, members of the

Edain, which results in the destruction of that entire family.

The scope of *The Silmarillion* situates it firmly in the West, where the Edain become the

dominant characters of Men, and this people breaks down into three more "houses:" the House of

Beor, House of Marach, and House of Haleth. From these houses come the greatest human

members of *The Silmarillion*: Hador Goldenhead, Túrin, and Eärendil Halfelven. Hador, the

grandson of Marach, exemplifies the characteristics of his house—he is great of strength and

stature, quick-witted, bold and steadfast, quick to anger and laughter, yellow-haired, and blue-

eyed ([148](#)). Túrin is Hador's composite opposite, with dark hair and grey eyes (his appearance is

most like the elves), moved sooner to pity than to laughter, shrewd, and long-sighted ([148](#)).

Eärendil is of great beauty, strong and hardy, and the "light was in his face as the light of

heaven," but more astounding, he marries the elf Elwing, the granddaughter of Beren and Lúthien, the first union of Man and Elf (241).

From Eärendil arose the Númenóreans, the great kings of the eastern island, and this people had long years, little sickness, great height, and bright eyes (261). These biological characteristics differentiated them from other Men, such that their traits made them "hardly distinguishable from the Elves" (*Letters* 154). Despite the seeming racial superiority of their attributes, they fall to the same corrupted fate as do many of Easterlings and the Elves. The Númenóreans start a death cult like that of Egypt, worshipped Morgoth, and grew increasingly materialistic, despite all their skills in farming, crafting, and bureaucracy (*Silmarillion* 266). This corruption begins to decrease their lifetimes from the moment they begin to long for immortality. The moral lords of Arda, the Valar, withdraw their favor: "Their reward is the Númenóreans undoing – or the means of their temptation. Their long life aids their achievements in art and wisdom, but breeds a possessive attitude to the things, and desire awakes for more *time* for their enjoyment" (xxii). The fault of these people is their desire to possess and dominate their world. Hoiem shows their colonial abuses, "refreshingly unconnected to contact with colonial Other," but rather result in the moral corruption I described (77). She suggests the main antagonist of this colonial project is Aldarion, who goes to sea because he foresaw days when Men would need more room and wealth (77). The moral corruption that result from this colonial project is a form of idolatry, whereby Aldarion situates himself and his work about the Valar's rule of Arda (80). Aldarion is the first of the Black Númenóreans to elevate a narcissistic interest in wealth and death above Ilúvatar's mortal gift.

Although this division of three houses echoes the "three races of Europe" idea that circulated in England in the 1930s, Fimi has to admit the division is "not consistently applied in

all texts of the legendarium" (145). Tolkien seems to use racial stereotypes from the turn of the century to ground his characters in a familiar ethos, but he does not use these descriptive stereotypes as the determining factor for superiority or inferiority of each group. Instead, this racial typing fails to deterministically link these phenotypic characteristics with inherent, unchangeable inequalities. The social structure of Middle-earth is determined by behavior and the individual choice to do evil or good—and even that is not clear-cut as Sauron "[began] with fair motives" (*Silmarillion* xviii). The ability of humans to fall to evil ways is a theme within each of these houses, as it is with the Easterlings, the Elves, the Dwarves, and all humanoid creatures Tolkien creates. Yet Tolkien remains optimistic about the natural goodness of humankind; even within these fallen groups, heroes still arise, such as Elendil of Numenor. As the concept of evil derives from Tolkien's Christianity, and within the moral universe of Morgoth is the source of this evil, embedding evil within groups of people through his influence and control, yet there is a chance for escape from his dominance. The moral hierarchy that underpins Middle-earth is based on choices between good and evil. Although Fimi notes that Tolkien wrote a "hierarchical reordering of the seven categories of beings" like that of the Christian Great Chain of Being, the true nature of this chain is shaped by moral decisions (141).

Although the basis of Tolkien's hierarchy is moral decisions, does he still revile all the Easterlings and praise the Men of the West along a racial east-west axis? In both *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* our glimpse of the Easterlings and Southrons (introduced in *Two Towers*) is a very limited one. These peoples are the human fighters of Morgoth, later Sauron, from an area tainted by his evil for millennia, and they serve as the regiments in his expedient army. The most we learn of the physical attributes of these people occurs in *Two Towers*: they are differentiated by their body markings, black eyes, long black hair, gold rings in their ears, red

paint on their cheeks, swarthy, with brown skin, were bold and grim, and fierce in despair (317).

Despite the possible reaction of readers to isolate the brownness of their skin as a racist demarcation, the Southrons share this with the Breelanders, and their grim faces could well match the Númenóreans'. Readers, however, can only witness the Southrons and Easterlings as peoples threatening to our heroes. Sam ponders the motivations of his enemies in an especially poignant monologue in *Two Towers*:

> For a moment he caught a glimpse of swarthy men in red running down the slope …
> Then suddenly straight over the rim of their sheltering bank, a man fell, crashing through
> the slender trees, nearly on top of them. He came to rest in the fern a few feet away, face
> downward, green arrow-feathers sticking from his neck below a golden collar. His scarlet
> robes were tattered, his corslet of overlapping brazen plates was rent and hewn, his black
> plaits of hair braided with gold were drenched with blood. His brown hand still clutched
> the hilt of a broken sword.
>     It was Sam's first view of a battle of Men against Men, and he did not like it
> much. He was glad that he could not see the dead face. He wondered what the man's
> name was and where he came from; and if he was really evil of heart, or what lies or
> threats had led him on the long march from his home; and if he would not really rather
> have stayed there in peace. (317)

This is not a glamorized, sensationalized version of the enemy, and Sam is right to wonder the motivation for this man. Sam's visceral response to the fighting of Man and Man is an important evaluative moment in Tolkien's anti-evil message, as is the sad state of this man's armor. In fact, the Southrons and Corsairs may have as valid a motivation to attack Gondor as Gondor has to defend itself: "the Southrons and the Corsairs of Umbar ally with Sauron against Gondor in revenge for Gondor's former expansionist attacks on their kingdoms" ("Race and Ethnicity" 556). It is, again, the limitation of authorial scope that readers cannot get into the lives of these peoples. This does not mean that Tolkien was supporting racial prejudice, just reaching his limits as narrator. This is a conception oft misunderstood—not everything a character says or does can be read as the author's own ideology. If this was so, then the Declaration of Independence would demonstrate that Jefferson did not have slaves, or Shakespeare's works would demonstrate that

he thought Africans were violent, caring, beautiful, and courageous all at the same time. Tolkien may differentiate peoples by territory, physical nature, and political alliances, but he makes no overreaching value statements about these characters. Significantly, at the beginning of the Fourth Age, the new kings of Gondor and Rohan do not seek to racially exterminate these foreign groups. Rather, the Southrons and Easterlings are left to contribute their own worth to Middle-earth and Arda.

Tolkien provides other examples of Middle-earth phenotypes from Bree, Dunland, Rohan, Gondor, and Dunedain, each demonstrating a different cultural system without assigned value statements. Breelanders are brown-haired, broad, rather short, cheerful, quite independent, and friendly with hobbits, dwarves, and elves, quite unlike many of the other Middle-earth peoples (*FR* 188). The Rohirrim of Rohan are tall, long-limbed, with flaxen-pale hair, and stern, keen faces (*TT* 39). The men of Gondor have sad and proud faces, pale skin, dark hair and grey eyes, archaic, and they speak Common Speech and Elven tongues (Tolkien likens them most to the Egyptians in his *Letters* 281) (*RK* 27-43). The Dunedain rangers are even more impassive and mysterious, with increased sight and hearing, understanding of languages of beasts and birds, and are viewed as mysterious wanderers from wild lands, with origins unknown, taller and darker, stout and lordly, and weathered as rock (*FR* 196 and 205, *RK* 55).

The Wild Men most unusual among the known Men in Middle-earth. They have flat faces, dark eyes, short-legs, and thick arms, and have been hunted as beast and persecuted by the men of Rohan (*RK* 116-117). The Wild Men again signify Tolkien's moral stance on the freedom of choice within each person as the defining attribute of good or evil. Nothing of their behavior in *The Lord of the Rings* suggests they deserve persecution; rather, they side with the Rohirrim as foes of the Orcs. The fault for this heedless persecution rests squarely with the Rohirrim, who

made no attempt to understand this strange people until is of benefit to them. Despite this unsympathetic political maneuvering by Rohan, Theoden's willingness to treat with the Wild Men indicates their political autonomy. The Wild Men are recognized as a politically independent group at the end of the text of *The Lord of the Rings* ([Sabo 18](#)). Sabo suggests this points to an important message in Middle-earth: "all groups, even those which seem most backward, primitive, and insignificant, have the right of self-determination and the potential to contribute something important to the fullness of the world" ([108](#)). The Wild Men are the most foreign, savage "Other," yet as Sabo specifies, their ancient heritage presented by the Pukel-Men statues carries the great potential of power "if only we take heed to preserve it" ([107](#)). Tolkien uses the Pukel-Men to depict the illogicity of the Rohirrim's intolerance. In *[The Return of the King](#)*, Merry first sees these timeless statues and "gazed at [the Pukel-Men] with wonder and a feeling almost of pity," while the Riders pay no heed to them ([73](#)). The cultural insensitivity exhibited by the Rohirrim is neither romantic nor respectable, and it is Tolkien, through Merry, that is bringing attention to the ignored worth of the Wose culture. As with the dead Easterling, Tolkien allows his characters to form judgments, yet forces readers to recognize these characters' intolerance and insolence.

In another racialized moment in *[Two Towers](#)*, Faramir explains to Frodo and Sam the Gondor classification of Men:

> "For so we reckon Men in our lore, calling them the High, or Men of the West, which were Númenóreans; and the Middle Peoples, Men of the Twilight, such as are the Rohirrim and their kin that dwell still far in the North, and the Wild, the Men of Darkness." ([339](#))

This is coldly racist language of the high, superior Númenóreans and their descendents the Gondorians, yet Tolkien has already problematized Faramir's assumptions of superiority. Even as Faramir presumes the superiority of his ancestry, Gondor is a faltering civilization, especially

epitomized by the madness of his father, Denethor and Boromir's inability to withstands the Ring's power. The technologically limited Woses quietly thrive, and the Rohirrim seems to be outstripping Gondor. Thus, Tolkien's Men are made to realize the flaws of their assumptions as the members of the Fellowship join into a broader human membership in the Fourth Age. Tolkien's use of racial language indicates the logical fallacy of assuming a racial hierarchy and instead promotes respect for the Other.

## 4.3     ELVES

Tolkien created the Elves as the eldest "race" on Middle-earth, the "First Born of Ilúvatar," and the most respected of the humanoid creatures of Middle-earth. Yet Rearick indicates that more than just age forms the basis for this universal respect: "And as the eldest of races they demand a level of honored respect. Meanwhile the other races do stay true to themselves…. A bond is created that is not physical but emotional and spiritual" (869). Although this last sentence refers expressly to the bond created between the Elf-queen Galadriel and the Dwarf Gimli, it indicates the degree of "respect" between Elves and the other peoples—a respect not informed by racial superiority, but a moral superiority that is not necessarily innate for Elves.

Elves are creatures of almost matchless physical beauty, undying, and are the culture-bearers for the other peoples of Middle-earth. The Elves spread across Middle-earth from the West—unlike Men—spreading the gifts of language and crafts that they learned directly from the Ainur (angels). Again, however, Elves are more similar to Men than different—in Tolkien's cosmology, both Elves and Men were created as Ilúvatar's children, and the distinct gift given to Elves is their longevity and reincarnation. The Children are irrevocably linked as both rational,

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self-determining creatures, and Tolkien spends a long time in his personal correspondence discussing their biological link:

> I suppose the chief difficulties I have involved myself in are scientific and biological – which worry me just as much as the theological and metaphysical (though you do not seem to mind them so much). Elves and Men are evidently in biological terms one race, or they could not breed and produce fertile offspring … But since some have held that the rate of longevity is a biological characteristic, within limits of variation, you could not have Elves in a sense 'immortal' – not eternal, but not dying by 'old age'– and Men mortal, more or less as they now seem to be in this Primary World – and yet sufficiently akin. I might answer that the 'biology' is only a theory, that modern 'gerontology', or whatever they call it, finds 'ageing' rather more mysterious, and less clearly inevitable in bodies of human structure…. Elves and Men are represented as biologically akin in this 'history,' because Elves are certain aspects of Men and their talents and desires, incarnated in my little world. (*Letters* 189)

While it is easy to assume that their immortality elevates Elves to inherent goodness, this is their very fault: they want to freeze and preserve their world. This is why the mortality of Men so confuses them; it was a gift they envied (*Silmarillion* xv). The Elves' error was that "they were 'embalmers'. They wanted … to live in the mortal historical Middle-earth and so tried to stop its change and history, stop its growth, where they could be 'artists' – and they were overburdened with sadness and nostalgic regret" (197). The Elves *appear* to be superior to all other Middle-earth inhabitants, yet they are just as plagued with problems.

The apparent racial supremacy of the Elves is problematized by the Elves' own assumptions of racial supremacy. These assumptions become apparent in the translations of their names for humans. These new creatures appeared elusive and strange to the Elves, and the Elves called their siblings "Hildor, the Followers, Apanónar, the After-born, Engwar, Sickly, Fírimar, the Mortals… the Usurpers, the Strangers, the Inscrutable, the Self-cursed, the Heavy-handed, the Night-fearers, the Children of the Sun" (*Silmarillion* 103). These names range from the romantic, "Children of the Sun," to the cruel, "Night-fearers" and "Engwar." However, by the end of the Third Age, it is apparent that the houses of Elves are failing and that it is Men's time

to rule. Yet during the first two ages of Middle-earth, the Elves did not attempt to enslave or colonize Men. Rather, very quickly the Elf-kings recognized the need for autonomy for humans and set aside land "where Men could live their own lives" (*Silmarillion* 147). This is not an isolationist tactic that cuts Men off from Elves; both peoples begin to form close bonds of political, cultural, and later, romantic links.

The Elves teach the Men of the West language and writing, irrevocably linking original genius of the Children. In fact, all knowledge is fascinating to the Elves, and this becomes the source of the degradation that occurs within some Elves. This is the case for Fëanor, the creator of the Silmaril jewels for which *The Silmarillion* is named. Fëanor is the "most subtle of mind," yet this supreme talents leads to the pride and arrogance that results in the Doom of Noldor and the first Kinslaying (64). After Morgoth stole the Silmarils, Fëanor swears this oath,

> An oath which none shall break, and none should take, by the name even of Ilúvatar, calling the Everlasting Dark upon them if they kept it not… vowing to pursue with vengeance and hatred to the ends of the World Vala, Demon, Elf or Man as yet unborn or any creature, great or small, good or evil, that time should bring forth unto the end of days, whoso should hold or take or keep a Silmaril from their possession. (83)

However, this oath becomes a curse: the Kinslaying is a result of Fëanor blind desire to wreck destruction on Morgoth even by defying the Valar. When the Teleri elves refuse to help this rebellion, the Noldor murder them. This is only one of numerous examples of rebellion, betrayal, murder, lust, and corruption that mark the Elves as just as troubled as any of the other races of Middle-earth. The supremacy of the Elves within the moral hierarchy of Middle-earth is only sustained so long as the Elves deserve that place through their maintenance of the beauty in Arda without attempting to control and arrest the world's growth.

The story of the Kinslaying begins to demonstrate the numerous branches of Tolkien's ethnic Elvish family. The first split arose when the Valar summoned the Elves to Valinor—those that went became the Calaquendi (Elves of Light) and those that did not became the Moriquendi

(Unwilling). However, these titles do not indicate inborn value differences between these branches. Rather, within the Moriquendi, for example, the Nandor have the greatest knowledge of living things and the Sindar were extremely talented in music and singing ([52](#)). Similarly, the Calaquendi break into three great branches: the Noldor, Teleri, and Vanyar, but these are not strict racial boundaries. The Noldor specialize in quarrying and smithing, but after the Doom of Noldor they blended with the Nandor. The Teleri were the greatest singers and mariners, and despite the almost total extermination of this branch by the Noldor, eventually both came to live in peace again. The last branch, the Vanyar were the "Fair Elves," referring to their blond hair, but they disappear from the pages of *The Silmarillion* after sailing to the lands of the Valar. These are not value statements on "better" Elves, kept racially pure—the blending and mixing of these families is one of the most complicated aspects of Middle-earth. The phenotypic qualities vary among all the Elves with no clear pattern—they have fair faces, dark hair, light hair, dark eyes, bright eyes.

The greatest failing of the Elves, however, is their obsession with "fading"—or how they perceived change, the passage of time, and their inability to accept it ([xix](#)). Although concerned with healing the hurts of the world and embodying its beauty, their art became "antiquarian" ([xix](#)). They did not understand change, and this allowed Morgoth to manipulate them, as he did with Fëanor. Sauron, Morgoth's successor, crafted the "rings of power" through similarly crafted manipulation. Power is particularly "ominous" within Middle-earth: it is almost a sort of "magic," and is easily corrupted into a "lust for domination" ([xix](#)). The destruction of the One Ring in *The Lord of the Rings* is part of the Elves' redemption but it ultimately comes too late to save them from the destructive force of its corrupting power.

Middle-earth has a hierarchical shape situating Elves above Men, which is both a manifestation of Tolkien's desire for a story "not being anthropomorphic" and an acknowledgement of Tolkien's understanding of the Christian moral order where good turns to greater good. However, this ordering does not remain constant: the moral differences between the First and Second Children of Ilúvatar quickly disappear. The elves are no more innocent of moral corruption and racial misapplications, and as a result their own greatness begins to fade, just as the long lives of the Númenóreans fade. This widespread moral degradation results in the "Twilight Age," the Third Age, where the world is "broken and changed" (xxi). The world of Middle-earth is obviously fallen, one where "there is not now upon Earth any place aiding where the memory of a time without evil is preserved" (279). The resurrection of a Golden Age that begins the Fourth Age only results for the cooperation of hobbits, men, elves, and dwarves.

## 4.4 DWARVES

Dwarves are an unique Middle-earth speaking people because they are rational creatures with a distinct culture and language but were not sculpted by Ilúvatar. However, they were given life and true rationality by Ilúvatar, and thus share that with the other beings of Middle-earth. Readers only get small glimpses into their lives, and their language is even a greater secret. The Dwarves do not speak their language to others, preferring to learn others' languages. They are described in *The Silmarillion* as "strong to endure… stone-hard, stubborn, fast in friendship and enmity, and they suffer toil and hunger and hurt of body more hardily of any other speaking peoples," and they live longer than men though still mortal (45). They arose from the Vala Aulë the Smith's desire to create something like Ilúvatar's children, but Aulë was unable to mimic the

truly creative power of the omniscient Ilúvatar. What follows is Tolkien's rewriting of the Biblical Abraham and Isaac moment: Ilúvatar says these enslaved, will-less creatures must be destroyed, and in despair, Aulë goes to destroy them. Yet Ilúvatar calls back Aulë's hand, instead gifting to them the free will Aulë could not give them. Thus, the merit of life for the creatures of Ilúvatar (and Tolkien) is that they have free will.

Through their unusual creation, the Dwarves exist as strange external elements to other peoples in Middle-earth. It is in this sense that Tolkien describes the Dwarves in a 1955 letter: "I do think of the 'Dwarves' like Jews: at once native and alien in their habitations, speaking the languages of the country, but with an accent due to their own private tongue" (*Letters* 229). This statement is not anti-Semitic, but realistically explains the place Dwarves have in Middle-earth, where they are mostly isolated from its other inhabitants:

> The dwarves are a different case. They are a hard thrawn folk for the most part, secretive, acquisitive, laborious, retentive of the memory of injuries (and of benefits), lovers of stone, of metals, of gems, of things that grow and take shape under the hands of craft rather than of things that live by their own life. But they are not and were not ever among the workers of willful evil in the world nor servants of the Enemy, whatever the tales of Men may later have said of them; for Men have lusted after the works of their hands, and there has been enmity between the races. But it is according to the nature of the Dwarves that travelling, and labouring, and trading about the world they should use ever openly the languages of the Men among whom they dwell; and yet in secret (a secret which unlike the Elves they are unwilling to unlock even to those whom they know are friends and desire learning not power) they use a strange slow-changing tongue…." (*Peoples* 21-22)

The dwarves are like the Diasporic Jews in their attempt to return to their ancestral home ("Race and Ethnicity" 556).

However, as this quote shows, there is no true dwarvish love of gold—instead they love smithcraft and their creations as any artist would. The Dwarves dearly lovely smithcraft and mining, and in the ancient ages of Middle-earth they loved best to work with copper and iron (*Silmarillion* 92). Rather than delighting in the material means of this pursuit, they delighted in

the toil and products of the work. When called on to work for the Elves, such as crafting the great necklace the Silmarils were set in, Nauglamír, they desired payment in toil and delight (92). Rather, the hoarders of gold are the dragons. But like Elves and Men, the Dwarves forget their joy and seek to control their creations. They are secret and "quick to resentment," and the Dwarves lusted for the Silmarils, set in the dwarf-crafted necklace Nauglamír, which by rights they felt they owned. They killed Thingol, the High Elven King, as he went amongst them (232-233). Yet, despite ongoing enmity between the Elves and Dwarves, there was some friendship in the Second Age as the two peoples shared their skills in smithcraft in the realms of Moria and Eregion (xix).

The site of their greatest tragedy is in Khazad-dûm, the site of their failed imperial project. They attempted to subdue it, and as Gloin laments, "Too deep we delved there, and woke the nameless fear. Long has its vast mansions lain empty since the children of Durin fled. But now we speak of it again with longing, yet with dread" (*FR* 290).

> Their deep mining in the wilderness is something like a colonial project, where to exploit hitherto hidden resources, they must go into *terra incognita* and fight the unwelcoming autochthonous people already there. Seeking too much wealth is avarice, which recalls Sauron's imperial agenda. (Obertino 128)

The Dwarves' attempt to subdue nature backfires, their imperial project fails, and Khazad-dûm becomes Moria, the "Black Chasm." The Dwarves in Moria are massacred and "their bones mark the end of Dwarfish colonization there" (129). This is another display of a failed project for domination and control in Middle-earth, like Aldarion's flawed earlier conquests. The Dwarves treated Moria as their own uncontested territory, unbeknownst awakening the Balrogs.

Yet hope remains for the Dwarves. In *The Lord of the Rings* the greatest bond is forged between Elves and Dwarves, set by the love and companionship between Gimli and Galadriel and between Legolas and Gimli. At the start of the trilogy, Gimli and the Elves barely have any

dealings with one another, and Gimli is a very quiet voice for this most of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Yet when he meets Galadriel, he is caught not only by her beauty, but by her emotional and spiritual grace: "He looked into the heart of an enemy and saw there love and understanding" (*FR* 423). Curiously, Fëanor had requested strands of Galadriel's hair in a past age but she denied him, and she instead gives this kindness to Gimli. Similarly, at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, Gimli's bond with Legolas is built on love and understanding—they travels the world and rebuild the Glittering Caves together. These relationships set the tenor for the interactions in the Fourth Age between dwarf and elf, where mutual respect and love override past grudges.

## 4.5    ORCS

What of the Orcs? Are they the racially degraded underclass of Tolkien's text? Is their darkness as reflection of innate blackness and evilness? Peter Jackson's movies (2001-2003) certainly went far in depicting Orcs as black-skinned creatures, although earlier animated movies made them even more alien looking by using non-human skin colors like mold green or ghost white. However, in Tolkien's written work, Orcs are not necessarily dark-skinned; this trait is never provided as a generalization for this "race." In *The Lord of the Rings* readers are never provided with an abundance of information on these creatures, again limited by Tolkien's plot-driven focus and scope. Readers are told that Orcs seem to differ by geographical zones, similar to other humanoid peoples of Middle-earth. Aragorn is unfamiliar with new Orcs that appear in *Two Towers*, "'Here lie many that are not folk of Mordor. Some are from the North, from the Misty Mountains, if I know anything of Orcs and their kinds. And here are others strange to me'" (20). Some of the Orcs in *The Lord of the Rings* are of greater stature, beaten, slant-eyed, thick legs,

large hands, while others are a smaller breed, black-skinned, with wide, snuffling noses, and some are entirely disproportionate with short crooked legs and very broad long arms that hang almost to the ground (*TT* 58-59, *RK* 223). Blackness does not appear to be a racial characteristic attributed to all Orcs. Only once in *The Silmarillion* does Tolkien qualify a description of the Orcs with the word black: "the black armies of the Orcs" (151). This adjective is ambiguous enough that readers cannot assume that the Orcs are black themselves, that they are not massed together so that they appear shadowed, that they do not wear black armor, or that they are not metaphorically black because of their allegiance with the Dark Lord. However, this ambiguity indicates that readers cannot presuppose that Orcs are "unmistakably negroid" as Rearick tries to suggest (861).

In Tolkien's letters, he questioned the origins of the Orcs several times because his concept of them was troubling—were they "created" by Morgoth, corruptions of Elves or Men, or something incurably hideous and insidious. Fimi notes that Tolkien was still debating these questions in the late 1950s and 1960s:

> Tolkien's views wavered between different 'solutions' for the Orcs: sticking to his original idea of the Orcs as corrupted Elves, changing to Orcs as corrupted forms of Men or even corruptions of fallen Maia in one version. He even considered the possibility of the Orcs as automata created by Sauron with only echoic speech like parrots. (155)

In *The Silmarillion*, the narrator admits "but of those unhappy ones who were ensnared by Melkor [Morgoth] little is known of certainty" (50). A letter from 1958 clarifies Tolkien's thoughts on the physical nature of the Orcs: "Orcs are definitely stated to be corruptions of the 'human' forms seen in Elves and Men. They are (or were) squat, broad, flat-nosed, sallow-skinned, with wide mouths and slant eyes; in fact degraded and repulsive versions of the (to Europeans) least lovely Mongol-types" (*Letters* 274). This final comment is initially a stumbling block. Is Tolkien saying that the Mongol-types are evil like Orcs? Tolkien is using the visual

imagery imparted by the racial stereotype of the brutal, warring Mongols as the building block for the physical depiction of the Orcs. Tolkien is not, however, degrading the Mongols' rich culture and history in Asia as he nuances that statement with the parenthetical which subtly questions the conflating of Mongols with the European idea of "least lovely." Fimi also suggests "this statement is important from an anthropological point of view, as it seems to reflect popular ideas of the traditional hierarchy of the three extreme human racial types: the Caucasoid, the Mongoloid, and the Negroid… [Tolkien] chooses for his villains the physical characteristics in extreme of the so-called Mongoloid race, traditionally seen as inferior from a western European perspective" (156). Yet we cannot be sure that Tolkien accepts this racial hierarchy wholesale, or rather employs it as a familiar trope. Furthermore, the possibility that the Orcs were created through an eugenic program clearly is a critique of the eugenics movement. Tolkien takes the idea of perfectly bred humans to its metaphoric limits—these creatures *are* perfect for Morgoth's cause, yet these creatures hardly seem humanoid after his manipulative breeding.

It seems possible, however, that through horrific experiences, intense fear and torture, that any individual can become orc-like. This is most clearly demonstrated by Gollum, and in one terrible instance, by Sam. The One Ring enslaved Sméagol, turning the hobbit into the groping Gollum, and this ring is the physical manifestation of Sauron's dominating will. This is the probable process by which Morgoth corrupted and enslaved the original Orcs and that Saruman uses to eugenically breed the Uruk-hai. As the Orcs "lust for ruin and death," Gollum lusts after the ring with a single-minded dedication and fury. It is only through the presence and influence of the ring that this process occurs—before the Ring appeared Sméagol lived peaceably with the Stoorish Hobbits. Gollum's evil is not an essentialized aspect of his self, but rather the result of the Ring's power to twist mind and body through dread and despair (*RK* 106).

Gollum's physical attributes are similarly strange: he is described at various moments in the text as bone-white, sallow, or dark, even as Frodo suggests Gollum's hearing is "as keen as Elves" (*TT* 259). Faramir's men even mistake him for a tailless black squirrel (335).

Sam, in his brief moment as Ring-bearer, undergoes both the temptation of the ring and, to the eyes of Frodo, the terrible mutation of the ring's power:

> As Sam stood there, even though the Ring was not on him but hanging by its chain about his neck, he felt himself enlarged, as if he were robed in a huge distorted *shadow* of himself, a vast and ominous threat upon the walls of Mordor. He felt that he had from now on only two choices: to forbear the Ring, though it would torment him; or to claim it, and challenge the Power that sat in its dark hold beyond the valley of *shadows*. Already the Ring tempted him, gnawing at his will and reason. Wild fantasies arose in his mind; and he saw Samwise the Strong, Hero of the Age, striding with a flaming sword across the darkened land, and armies flocking to his call as he marched… (*RK* 195)
> The hideous vision had seemed so real to [Frodo], half bemused as he was still with wound and fear. Sam had changed before his very eyes into an orc again, leering and pawing at his treasure, a foul little creature with greedy eyes and slobbering mouth. (208)

Sam's focus shifts from heartfelt devotion to an egotistical dream. Its power seems irresistible, offering to each bearer and protector the power to control his wildest dreams. Boromir's desire "to use the power of the Enemy against him" speaks to the sad futility of anyone attempting to dominate the ring (*FR* 469). The over-powering evil of the Ring is its perversion—it makes even Hobbits savage, fearful, and greedy.

The heavy-handed metaphorical use of darkness and shadow in these passages is connected to Tolkien's metaphorical use of *black*, such as in the Black Riders, Black Hand, Black Breath, Black Years, Black Speech, and Black Lands. The quality of blackness is threatening in Middle-earth, but this does not refer so much to the physical blackness but to night and darkness, and the threat that arises with coming darkness. Darkness is a source of fear in Middle-earth, as night marks the time when Morgoth and Sauron's creatures roam freely. Rearick reminds us, however, of the theological context for this connection,

> Readers should draw a line between cultural Christianity and biblical text. The text of the Bible is filled with light and dark images having nothing to do with race… dark and shadow were used to describe an evil or dangerous situation in the Bible: "Before I goe, and returne not, unto the darke land, that is covered with the mist of death: A land of miserie and darkenesse, where is the shadow of death, and no order, but everlasting horrour inhabiteth" (Job 10.21). (870)

The evil of the Orcs is manifested by their darkness—not blackness: "darkness exerts a gravitational force to which every race and individual is susceptible" ("Race and Ethnicity" 556). The physical manifestation of Tolkien's metaphor is in the Orcs' inability to stand sunlight, and Gollum mimics this photophobia (*TT* 306). Obertino also reminds us "in *Fellowship of the Ring*, Orcs are at first found only in darkness and depths, which, we have seen, in Tolkien are often sinister" (125). However, Tolkien does not leave the color-line demarcated by dark as evil and white as good: Saruman is characterized by whiteness and later by rainbow colors, while Aragorn is tall and dark, "a rascal" (*FR* 197, 204).

Moreover, these creatures of darkness are not simply inherently evil and debauched, only apparently bred to be so by Morgoth during the Elder Days (*RK* 472). However, this does not mean they have no hope of salvation. Tolkien clearly sees that there are "not many who are so corrupted as to be irredeemable" (*Letters* 90). Gandalf explains the pity that stayed Bilbo's hand and counsels Frodo to do the same, "Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need" (*FR* 85). Chance explains this "pity and mercy" as that of the Christian virtue *charitas*: "such *charitas* opposes the view of the Other as monstrous… But just as the hero can become monstrous, so can the monster become heroic" (202). This is the nature of the optimistic future for Tolkien's world—*charitas* can bind all creatures together. The opposite of *charitas,* as free-sacrificing love, is domination, and this Morgoth's sin, "the Enemy in successive forms is always 'naturally' concerned with sheer Domination, and so the Lord of magic and machines; but the problem: that this frightful evil can and does arise from an apparently good root, the desire to benefit the world

and others" (*Silmarillion* xiv). Sauron successfully manipulates this kind of domination in the creation of the One Ring and in inspiring the Elves' creation of the Three Rings (xix).

It is this act of subversion degrades the Orcs so much; they become so perverted by this evil domination that they even become incapable of creating language. The Orcs have so many disparate languages that they must use the Common Tongue because otherwise they could not communicate. The distance of Orcs from the other peoples of Middle-earth is marked by their fallen language which is "degraded and filthy… dreary and repetitive with hatred and contempt, too long removed from good to retain even verbal vigour" (*RK* 476). As Tolkien's point is that language is absolutely necessary to establish an unique people, the perversity of Orcs' fallen nature is manifestly made clear. Yet, as evil is garnered out of misdirected good, the chance of returning to good provides a glimmer of hope. This is true of Gollum, whose sacrifice at the end of *The Return of the King* makes possible the salvation of all of Middle-earth. Gehl asks if Gollum would have sailed West if he had survived, and my answer is that yes, *charitas* saved Frodo and would have saved Gollum (265). Similarly, the Orcs are not fully exterminated at the close of *The Lord of the Rings* epic, and Tolkien intentionally leaves lingering the question as to whether their humanoid ancestry would be enough to save them from everlasting evil.

## 4.6    HALF-ELVEN

Only four known unions of human and elf exist in all the text of Middle-earth, yet the existence of these important half-elven families and characters to the movement of the story cannot be overstated. This positive incarnation of miscegenation contrasts the degrading and corrupting power of Morgoth and Sauron. Each of these marriages embodies "heroes [that] come in pairs,

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creating unity through coming together of difference" (Hoiem 82). Each of these couples have to battle misunderstanding, fear, and suffering to attain a "holistic hybridization" of the human-form (Caton-Garcia). Each union is a battle through prejudice, and as Gehl suggests, we a see an "in-depth exploration of the fear, desire, and problems produced by the system of racism" through these struggles (251).

Foremost of these pairs is the union of Beren and Lúthien. Lúthien is the most beautiful of all Elves, with grey eyes and dark hair, while Beren was son of one of the heirs of the House of Beor, but also an outlaw on the run. Their meeting occurred when Lúthien was seen dancing in the woods by Beren; she is within the barrier of the Girdle of Melian, which should prevent anyone but those permitted from entering. The Girdle is an obvious metaphor to the attempts of the Elves to keep out Others, yet Beren is fated to withstand this ostracizing magic, and much worse magic, in his pursuit of Lúthien. They carried on their relationship in secret, until another elf that loved Lúthien reported to her father Lúthien's folly. Thingol "was filled with anger, for Lúthien he love above all things, setting her above all the princes of the Elves; whereas mortal Men he did not even take into his service" (*Silmarillion* 166). Thingol's bigotry leads him to promise Lúthien to Beren only if Beren can recover one of the Silmarils (167). Beren accepts this challenge, and goes into Mordor to battle Morgoth; however, he does not go alone, as Lúthien follows him despite her father's command. Through their unity of purpose, together they briefly overthrow Morgoth and his servants, to rescue one of the Silmarils. Both elf and man take an active part in this quest, and without one another it would have been doomed—and this is the quality of interdependence that Tolkien invokes in these elf-man pairs (Hoiem 81).

In no way is Lúthien appropriated by Beren or Sauron in what Hoiem calls "the appropriation of feminized native lands and cultures by the masculinize colonizer" (76). Lúthien

faced Sauron alone through her own agency; Sauron wanted to dominate her, but rather "Lúthien took mastery of the isle and all that was there" (*Silmarillion* 175). Then Beren and Lúthien together faced Morgoth, working in tandem to subdue him and finally gained one of the Silmarils. Ultimately, Lúthien gives up her immortality and dwells with Beren until they both died together. Their son began the first line of the half-elven.

Unlike Thingol, Turgon, Idril's father and king of Gondolin, readily accepts the marriage of Idril the elf and Tuor the man (241). Rather the tragedy of this love story is found in the treachery of the elf Maeglin who "desired above all things to possess [Idril]" (241). Maeglin's mad desire to possess Idril allows him to be captured and corrupted by Morgoth who promises Maeglin control of Idril and the realm of Gondolin

> Maeglin was no weakling or craven, but the torment wherewith he was threatened cowed his spirit, and her purchases his life and freedom by revealing to Morgoth the very place of Gondolin and the ways whereby it might be found and assailed. (242)

Yet it is through Idril that the remnant of the Gondolin people escape lead by Tuor, as she 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" (241). Then Idril and Tuor rule the remnant of the people of Gondolin, until old age began to take Tuor and the two sailed West.

> Therefore he built a great ship, and he named it Eärrámë, which is Sea-Wing; and with Idril Celebrindal he set sail into the sunset and the West, and came no more into any tale or song. But in after days it was sung that Tuor alone of mortal Men was numbered among the elder race, and was joined with the Noldor, whom he loved; his fate is sundered from the fate of Men. (245)

Tuor accepts immortality, and Lúthien accepts mortality. This interracial space then can be mediated by most of all love to overcome the last seeming incapability between Elves and Men. Tolkien explains "The view is that the Half-elven have a power of (irrevocable) choice" (*Letters* 193).

The union of Arwen and Aragorn mimics the previous union of their ancestors, Lúthien and Beren. Arwen and Aragorn each go through dramatic travails of familial prejudice and destructive forces before being reunited and wedded. Aragorn's mother counsels Aragorn against pursuing Arwen, and Elrond tries to do the same: "Arwen the Fair… is of lineage greater than yours, and she has lived in the world already so long that to her you are but as yearling shoot beside a young birch of many summers. She is too far above you" (*RK* 384). Aragorn attempts to respect Elrond's wishes, but Arwen works in secret to create a new standard for Aragorn (52). A striking change occurs to Aragorn after he receives this, and he takes the *palantír* to reveal himself to Sauron as the heir of Isildur (57). The Fellowship is able to defeat Sauron's legions, and Aragorn is crowned King of Gondor. At Midsummer, Elrond and Arwen arrive in Minas Tirith, where she weds Aragorn, and "the tale of their long waiting and labours was come to fulfillment" (280). Arwen has to deny her father's protective hand, saying farewell to her brethren, before accepting the yoke of mortality, "None saw her last meeting with Elrond her father, for they went up into the hills and there spoke long together, and bitter was their parting that should endure beyond the ends of the world" (285). Through Aragorn and Arwen then the "long-sundered branches of the Half-elven were reunited and their line was restored" (350). With each of these part-Elf, part-Man unions love overcomes the racial tensions, prejudices, and generalizations to create new emotional and spiritual bonds.

## 5.0    CONCLUSIONS

Within Middle-earth, Tolkien uses racial generalizations, yet he repeatedly problematizes these generalizations through the manifested plasticity in his characters and the failure of racial assumptions. Tolkien repudiated the concept of differentiated races in his non-fiction writing, and within Middle-earth, he engages readers in a dialogue on the flaws and illogicity of racist assumptions. He does not freeze and hold any assumptions about the assorted peoples of his world, and within each of these peoples Tolkien focuses on particulars to undermine the racist assumptions of his own characters. No one Middle-earth people is better than any other; no colonial order or social hierarchy remains unquestioned and uncomplicated; and no group is clearly culturally or historically superior. Tolkien emphasizes the need for respect for the Other; the Fourth Age results from an open world based on variable, multicultural difference, and this new age celebrates unity through difference.

Evil in Middle-earth is caused by domination, and those that attempt to subdue the world fall to moral and physical corruption. This is the greatest sin of Morgoth, Sauron, Saruman, the Black Númenóreans, and the Dwarves of Moria, and it is the tragedy of Gollum. The Orcs stand as a final warning against the extent to which domination and power corrupts anyone to evil, to a point where Orcs cannot even communicate. As Rearick suggests, "Racism is a philosophy of power, but *The Lord of the Rings* functions with the Christian idea of the renouncement of

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power" ([872](#)). It is the renouncing of power and evaluating individuals for their own self-worth that offers hope and salvation to the peoples of Middle-earth.

Tolkien celebrates individual choices over assumed characteristics. His characters are unique, diverse, peoples with distinct histories and cultures. In the history of Middle-earth, these various peoples are thrown together to drive the story to its conclusion of goodness and life triumphing over domination and evil. This choice between good and evil, with its grand finale of peace, should be all too relevant to readers of diverse backgrounds. Tolkien's confronts his contemporary milieu where physical traits are thought to be markers of innate physical and mental abilities, and his characters provide tools and examples of ways to mediate racial tensions and overcome racial divisions.

In the letter where Tolkien discusses the biological and spiritual link between Elves and Men that could result in the half-elven, he finishes the letter by saying,

> But I should actually answer: I do not care. This is a biological dictum in my imaginary world… Elves and Men are represented as biologically akin in this 'history', because Elves are *certain aspects of Men and their talents and desires*, incarnated in my little world. (*[Letters](#)* 189; my emphasis)

It is clear from this letter, and from the presence of the children of the union of men and elves, that the apparent racial differences between people do not matter in Middle-earth or for Tolkien. Emotional and spiritual bonds can overcome apparent racial or cultural differences and Tolkien provides examples of this again and again. In Middle-earth, bonding through the discovery and mediation of human difference is especially exhilaration and beautiful as the births of the half-elven confirms. The peoples of each "race" are productive and generative on their own terms, and peace is attained in Middle-earth through reconciliation and harmony of difference.

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