

Mfs

WHY IS THE ONLY GOOD ORC A DEAD ORC? THE DARK FACE OF RACISM EXAMINED IN TOLKIEN'S WORLD

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In Jonathan Coe's novel, *The Rotters' Club*, a confrontation takes place between two characters over what one sees as racist elements in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*:

Birmingham, Doug maintained, had produced two notable racist thinkers in the last few decades: Enoch Powell and J. R. R. Tolkien. Philip was outraged by this statement. Tolkien was unquestionably his favorite author and in what way, he wanted to know, could he be described as racist? Doug suggested he reread *The Lord of the Rings*. Philip assured him that he did, at six monthly intervals. In that case, Doug replied, surely he must have noticed that Tolkien's villainous Orcs were made to appear unmistakably negroid. And did it not strike him as significant that the reinforcements who come to the aid of Sauron, the *Dark* Lord are themselves dark skinned, hail from unspecified tropical islands from the south, and are often mounted on elephants? (143)

The passage is telling on three levels. First, the character Doug gives in a nutshell the basic concerns raised about racism in Tolkien's Middle-

earth. It is undeniable that darkness and the color black are continually associated throughout Tolkien's universe with unredeemable evil, specifically Orcs and the Dark Lord Sauron. So unredeemable is this evil, in fact, that especially in encounters with the Orcs during the war's action, it is dealt with by extermination. Contrariwise, the Orcs' mirror-selves, the Elves are called "the noblest of the children of Eru"¹ (Tyler 148) and continuously described as extremely fair. Galadriel's hair is "deep gold" (357; bk. 2, ch. 7) and emphasis is made on her "white arms" (367; bk. 2, ch. 7). In fact, so fair are the elven folk in general that the dark hair of Elrond and his daughter Arwen, caused by them being part human, is considered extraordinary among the Elves.

Second, the conversation described in *The Rotters' Club*, while fictional, is set during the seventies. If accurate—and there seems no reason to doubt the author—the setting of thirty years ago indicates how long questions centering on Tolkien's possible racism have existed. Yet the debate occurs between fans who are themselves out of sync with most of their peers, thus underscoring the fact that Tolkien's work has up until recently been the private domain of a select audience, an audience who by its very nature may have inhibited serious critical examinations of Tolkien's work. As Neil Isaacs writes in his introductory essay to *Tolkien and the Critics*, since "*The Lord of the Rings* and the domain of Middle-earth are eminently suitable for faddism and fannism, cultism and clubbism . . . [its special appeal] acts as a deterrent to critical activity" (1). This barrier may suggest why, even in the face of a long-term awareness among readers, the whole question of racism in Tolkien has been ignored by the academy.

The fact that the debate occurs between fans underlines the third level emphasized by the quote, the silence of scholars. Philip has nothing but his own reading with which to defend Tolkien; there are no other authorities. Historically C. S. Lewis did make a passing comment on racism during the *Lord of the Rings'* first publication in his "The Dethronement of Power," noting that people who dislike a clear demarcation of good and evil "imagine they have seen a rigid demarcation between black and white people." However, Lewis does not pursue the issue, saying that by the conclusion of *Lord of the Rings* it is clear that the "motives, even on the right [and light] side [of the War of the Ring] are mixed," and this mixture stops readers who might "brazen it out" from continuing their claim of racism (12). Lewis may have been overly optimistic concerning what he expected to be a short-lived claim, for while the charge of racism has endured, little has been written academically since the works' original publication. Joseph Pearce does set aside a few pages in his 1998 *Tolkien Man and Myth* on the subject, but even he seems to deem the charges

not worth much examination, spending only about three pages on the subject and giving more time to Tolkien's historical letter writing than to his actual text (135–37).

However, with the success of the film adaptations of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*, Tolkien's work has suddenly found itself a part of pop culture, giving it a much broader exposure than it had experienced among the bookish young counterculture readership of the sixties and seventies. As such, *The Lord of the Rings* has also found itself open to pop culture scrutiny, especially among contemporary cultural critics concerned with the racist heritage of Western—and especially American—culture.

Two vocal contemporary supporters of the opinion that *The Lord of the Rings* is racist are John Yatt, a critic for the Manchester, England, based newspaper, the *Guardian*, and Dr. Stephen Shapiro, lecturer in the Department of English and Comparative Studies at the University of Warwick and "an expert in cultural studies, race and slavery" (Reynolds and Stewart). Regrettably for the sake of honest dialogue, both critics weaken their argument by making some claims about Tolkien primarily based on their film experience. Yatt's lead in, for example, alerts the reader to the fact that he is responding not to the original text but to its cinematic interpretation: "Maybe it was the way that all the baddies were dressed in black, or maybe it was the way that the fighting uruk-hai had dreadlocks, but I began to suspect that there was something rotten in the state of Middle Earth." Specific elements of wardrobe and makeup are, of course, choices made by the director, not the author. Don't blame Tolkien for what Jackson does unless it is based on the original text.

Shapiro makes a similar claim when he says, "The recent films amplified a 'fear of a black planet' and exaggerated this difference by insisting on stark white-black colour codes" (qtd. in Reynolds and Stewart).² Again, if this is true, such dress details are not spawned from any racism of Tolkien.

One comment that especially mixes up text and film interpretation is Shapiro's claim that Tolkien's dwarves reflect an English prejudice against Scotsmen: "the dwarves were his [Tolkien's] notion of what Scots were like. It is like a southern England cliché of a dour, muscular race and that represents the Scots in the book" (qtd. in Reynolds and Stewart). This is utterly false. In the actors' commentary found on the extended DVD version of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, John Rhys-Davies describes his decision—not Jackson's and certainly not Tolkien's—to add a Scottish accent to his portrayal of Gimli the dwarf. Thus, both Yatt and Shapiro, claiming to find racism in Tolkien the author, confound their observations with problems they have with directorial and acting interpretations.

Ironically, Tolkien himself did connect the dwarves to a race, but to the Jews not the Scots. Now, considering the dwarves' "love of beautiful things . . . a fierce and jealous love" and their physical quality of having beards and large noses (*Annotated Hobbit* 45, 209), this fact may send off all sorts of alarms centering on Jewish stereotypes. But in a letter to Naomi Mitchison about the broadcast adaptations of *The Hobbit*, Tolkien explains this connection in a very different light than racial: "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). Thus, Tolkien's connection is more historically linguistic and cultural than racial. So even this documented connection between a known human race and Tolkien's imaginary ones is a dead end.

Still, in spite of some muddy thinking, both Yatt and Shapiro do raise concerns that need a response. The silence of the academy must end. While Tolkien may have had a preference for the racial characteristics of his own people, an examination of his life, works, and letters suggest that his treatment of dark forces in general and Orcs in particular is based more on an archetypal and Judeo-Christian parameter than a racial one. In fact, the central message of his famous work is contrary to the central racist presumption, which is that individuals can be categorized and judged by their physical, racial appearances.

Examination of every passage within Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* would be both exhausting and inconclusive. However, some overview is helpful. Yatt, who after responding to the films does return to Tolkien's text, notes the apparent color line in *The Two Towers* between good and evil: "In the good corner, the riders of Rohan, aka the 'Whiteskins': 'Yellow is their hair, and bright are their spears. Their leader is very tall.' In the evil corner, the Orcs of Isengard: 'A grim, dark band . . . swart, slant-eyed' and the 'dark' wild men of the hills." He also verbalizes a very troubling quality in Tolkien's depiction of the battle at Helms Deep, specifically the expendable nature of the Orcs: "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." Yatt's conclusion is that Tolkien's work is filled with "basic assumptions that are frankly unacceptable in 21st-century Britain."

Shapiro's objections to Tolkien's depictions are based on autobiographical assumptions about the author. Although he has not published an essay on the subject, Shapiro has been quoted on several

websites describing *The Lord of the Rings* as racist.³ Like Yatt, Shapiro points to the apparent color line that divides good and evil: "the fellowship is portrayed as über-Aryan, very white and there is the notion that they are a vanishing group under the advent of the other, evil ethnic groups. . . . The Orcs are a black mass that doesn't speak the languages and are desecrating the cathedrals" (qtd. in Reynolds and Stewart). In this he follows the standard complaints already outlined. Far more original is Shapiro's take on what he sees as Tolkien's motivation for writing his epic fantasy:

Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings* because he wanted to recreate a mythology for the English that had been destroyed by foreign invasion. He felt organic English culture had been destroyed by the Normans. There is the notion that foreigners destroy culture and there was also a fantasy that there was a solid homogeneous English culture there to begin with, which was not the case because there were Celts and Vikings and a host of other groups. (qtd. in Reynolds and Stewart)

Reynolds and Stewart go on to paraphrase Shapiro, reporting that "the trilogy, begun in the 1930s and published in the 1950s, was written at the onset of decolonisation, when the first mass waves of immigrants from the Caribbean and Indian sub-continent came to Britain. The Midlands, Tolkien's model for the Shire, was becoming a multicultural region." Of course Shapiro's observations, while interesting, are based on none of the writings of Tolkien himself but are instead built on observations of a time and assumptions of how Tolkien, only because he lived during that time, would interpret those historical moments.

If living in a racist time and culture is to be assumed as a determiner of guilt, there are, in fact, other factors not mentioned by either critic about Tolkien that could cause a pause among some readers. The historical period in which Tolkien lived was one Chinua Achebe described as "when the reputation of the black man was at a particularly low level" (258).⁴ Achebe writes that in the minds of many of that time, there existed "the dehumanization of Africa and Africans which this long [racist] attitude has fostered and continues to foster in the world" (257). Furthermore, Tolkien himself lived at least for a time within this racist African system. He was born in Bloemfontein, South Africa. Although he lived there only four years, his family existed in a circle that had certain expectations. In his biography of Tolkien, Humphrey Carpenter describes Tolkien's home in South Africa this way: "There were servants in the house, some black or coloured, some white immigrants; and there was company

enough to be chosen from among the many other English-speaking residents, who organized a regular if predictable round of dances and dinner-parties" (11). Thus, Tolkien was introduced into a world of privilege (if only middle-class privilege) in which racial distinctions and levels in class were assumed. Additionally, his young man's world of academia was one tinged with a racist tradition of anti-Semitism. Norman Cantor in his *Inventing the Middle Ages*, an examination of the scholars who reshaped twentieth-century perspectives of the past, notes that "a Jewish professor of humanities was as great an anathema in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century as in Germany" (55).

Yet these elements are hardly conclusive. Guilt by association is not a trustworthy tool. And so living in a racist society does not predestine one to be racist. Other factors can play a role in forming a personality. For example, Mabel Tolkien, J. R. R.'s beloved mother and also his first teacher, whose early death canonized her opinions, "found the Boer attitude to the natives objectionable" (Carpenter 13). Moreover, an inclusive, tolerant attitude rather than an exclusive, oppressive one can be inferred in a picture taken in November 1892. Thanks to its addition to the photograph section of Carpenter's biography, the picture is clearly revealed to be on a Christmas card and therefore hardly an embarrassment. On it is the immediate Tolkien family, "[b]ehind [whom] stood two black servants, a maid and a house-boy named Isaak, both looking pleased and a little surprised to be included in the photograph" (13).

Carpenter describes the Tolkien home this way: "in Bank House there was *tolerance*, most notably over the extraordinary behavior of Isaak, who one day stole little John Ronald Reuel and took him to his kraal where he showed off with pride the novelty of a white baby. It upset everybody and caused a great turmoil, but Isaak was not dismissed, and in gratitude to his employer he named his own son 'Isaak Mister Tolkien Victor'" (13; emphasis added). Like the idea of guilt by association, this evidence of equanimity is hardly conclusive. Modern readers are probably uncomfortable that Tolkien lived in a society in which "the novelty of a white baby" should so stir pride among the members of the black staff. Still the generosity of Tolkien's father does suggest the possibility of nonracist attitudes among the Tolkiens.

Stronger evidence of Tolkien's anti-racism appears in his correspondence in which his disgust toward the racism especially prevalent in his time—anti-Semitism—is clear. In a letter to Graham Taylor who had noted a similarity between Sam Gamgee and Samson Gamgee, a name included in an old list of Birmingham Jewry, Tolkien reflects on the suggestion that his own name might have a Jewish

source: "It [Tolkien] is not Jewish in origin, though I should consider it an honour if it were" (*Letters* 410). More overt is Tolkien's response to Nazi publishers who wanted a *Bestätigung* or confirmation of his Aryan, racial "purity." To his own publisher, Allen and Unwin, Tolkien expressed his misgivings of allowing such a statement to appear on his text even if it cost the company money, or as he put it, "let the German translation go hang" if such a statement created the appearance that he agreed with the Nazi concept of racial purity: "I should regret giving any colour to the notion that I subscribed to the wholly pernicious and unscientific race-doctrine" (*Letters* 37). Later, in a letter dripping with sarcasm in which he pretends to not understand the Nazi publisher's definition of Aryan, Tolkien points out that true Aryans are, in fact, an "Indo-iranian" [sic] group and none of his ancestors spoke "Hindustani, Persian, Gypsy, or any related dialects." Tolkien finally writes if "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). Tolkien's own words seem to lay to rest the charge that he was racist in his thinking.

Other writers, although not academics, have presented forceful defenses for Tolkien against the charge of racism. In response specifically to Yatt, Jared Ingham writes in the *Warwick Boar* that, while admitting that the portrayal of evil in *The Lord of the Rings*—especially as represented in the Orcs—may seem "crude" and "simplistic," to "say that Tolkien set out with strictly racist intentions, or that overall his book is blatantly racist, is pure politically-correct hokum." Shapiro, meanwhile, is taken to task by Julia Houston who suspects that some of his conclusions about Tolkien's racism are based more on his being an American who does not understand the European ideas of class that Tolkien seems to have held than to any actual elements of racism in Middle-earth. However, she goes on to an even more provocative conclusion: "Going after the works of a man whose epic champions the strength of 'the little guy,' and who often wrote of the evils of apartheid and racism, smacks of an academic who's just trying to get noticed and an American who really needs to end his witch-hunt and remember that other countries don't write literature based on uniquely American sins."

Like Lewis years ago, Steuard Jensen does an excellent job of reminding the reader of the breadth of *The Lord of the Rings* by showing that the dark and light dichotomy is actually a part of a much larger and mixed description of good and evil: ⁵

Light skinned characters who did evil things include Saruman, Grima, Gollum, Boromir, Denethor, and the Numenoreans as mentioned above. And it is notable that Tolkien described Forlong's people of Gondor and even the

men of Bree as "swarthy," the same term he used for example of the Southrons who were ambushed by Faramir (though to be fair, he may have imagined different degrees of "swarthinness" for those groups). For that matter, Sam's flash of empathy for the fallen Southron he saw during the ambush indicates that many of Sauron's soldiers were likely unwilling slaves, not evil at heart.

The passage to which Jensen refers comes from *The Two Towers* when Sam sees a Southron warrior fall: "His brown hand still clutched the hilt of a broken sword. . . . [Sam] 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" (667; bk. 4, ch. 4). Tolkien as a veteran of World War I had seen battle directly, and to give so much thought about "the other" while in battle surely indicates a heart not directed toward racism but inclusion.

Tolkien's real experience in war brings up another point. As voiced in the opening quote from *The Rotters' Club* by Doug, a number of readers have been bothered by the fact that the Southrons are "dark skinned, hail from unspecified tropical islands from the south, and are often mounted on elephants" (Coe 143). However, as Cantor in *Inventing the Middle Ages* has pointed out, in spite of Middle-earth's fantastic elements, Tolkien seems to have been saying to his readers in *The Lord of the Rings* that "this is the way it really was in the Middle Ages"—

not the Arthurian heroism of golden knights, but the wearing, almost endless struggle of the little people against the reality of perpetual war and violent darkness to find a hiatus of peace and security for their families and communities. *The Lord of the Rings* is thereby a medieval story, but a counterromance telling it "like it really was," not the way the court poets told it to flatter their lords. (229)

War was, in fact, the way it really was, and not only was there war between tribe against tribe, thane against thane, but also, regularly, ethnic group against ethnic group. A major threat to medieval Europe was indeed a people from the South: "The Arabs had conquered—with the aid of newly converted groups to Islam from the old societies of the Mediterranean coastline—North Africa, Sicily, and most of Christian Spain by the mid-eighth century" (Cantor 20). The simple fact is that in the medieval world that Tolkien portrays an enemy from the tropical South probably seemed natural.

Finally, while Leanne Potts of the *Albuquerque Journal* reports the wide divergence of opinion, she includes the comments of Leslie Donovan, a University of New Mexico professor, who points out that "Tolkien is dealing with literary archetypes. . . . Those beings that are closer to the light are considered more heroic, more self-sacrificing, more sympathetic. Those individuals farthest from the light are morally and spiritually corrupt in Tolkien's moral landscape." It does seem that Tolkien, as he depicted beauty in his work, gravitated toward a more northern aesthetic than otherwise. He wanted the work to "be redolent of our 'air' (the clime and soil of the North West, meaning Britain and hither parts of Europe, not Italy or Aegean, still less the East) while possessing . . . the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic" (*Letters* 144). Responding to this quote, Cantor notes that Tolkien had "a faith in the elevated ethos of the Nordic peoples" (227), which again probably sounds troubling to some. However, is having an appreciation for one's own culture and its definition of beauty racist? If it is, then every African American who believes "black is beautiful" is racist. Only when personal taste is mistaken as organic value does a preference become prejudice.

Far more troubling might be the fact that all the races portrayed by Tolkien in *The Lord of the Rings* seem to share his sensibilities and to be internally attracted to the fair qualities of the elven people. Some might question if this should be. Why should dark-skinned and short dwarves and hobbits, who seem especially agog in the presence of elves, find tall fair individuals attractive unless there is an organic sense of their superiority? And again, wouldn't this be racist?

However, there seems to be far more going on in the bright nature of the Elves than just physical attractiveness. They embody ancient lore in all forms of poetry, art, and music. And as the eldest of races they demand a level of honored respect. Meanwhile the other races do stay true to themselves. Sam, for all his desire to meet the Elves, is also more than ready to return home to the Shire and marry Rosie Cotton. And although Gimli becomes the champion of the elf queen, Galadriel, he and the rest of the dwarf delegation can resist elvish charm well enough when they first visit Rivendale. What draws Gimli to Galadriel is her grace and kindness. When she speaks with compassion and appreciation for the beauty of his people's once great city, a bond is created that is not physical but emotional and spiritual. Gimli doesn't carry the threads of her golden hair because he wants a blond wife but because he "looked into the heart of an enemy and saw there love and understanding" (358; bk. 2, ch. 7). In his journey to become the "Lockbearer" (507, bk. 3, ch. 5) and "Elf-friend" (1091, Appendix A), Tolkien seems to suggest in Gimli

the hope for a coexistence of races more than the dominance of one over the other.

There is still the question raised by Yatt, which is also the title of this paper: "Why is the Only Good Orc a Dead Orc?" The answer lies within Tolkien's faith. Carpenter and others regularly describe Tolkien as "a devout Christian" (146), and this central quality had a profound effect on his imaginative work. "*The Lord of the Rings*," claimed Tolkien in 1953, "is, of course, a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first but consciously in the revision" (*Letters* 172). A central error when thinking of Orcs in Tolkien's imagination is to envision them as mortal beings like hobbits and men. However, their darkness is not determined by race but by their alliance with evil. This use of terms like darkness and shade comes from scriptural images. So the battle between light and dark, which runs all through *The Lord of the Rings*, comes from Tolkien's Judeo-Christian mindset.

Although many critics like Achebe have correctly pointed out that Christianity, especially in America, has at times coexisted with racism, 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. Few would think that the Semitic David's comments about the shadow of death is in any way a racial comment. The following scriptural examples were taken from the Catholic "Rheims-Douai" 1582–1610 translation. As a linguist, Tolkien could probably read scripture from the original texts, but these English translations, which just predate the King James version, illustrate how commonly the terms *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 horreur inhabiteth" (Job 10.21; emphasis added). "For, although I shal walke in the middles of the *shadow of death*" (Ps. 22.4; emphasis added). "For al you are the children of light, and children of the day: we are not of the *night* nor of *darkness*" (I Thess. 5.4; emphasis added). This is only the smallest of samples of light and dark metaphors and images used in scripture.

Remembering that dark and light in *The Lord of the Rings* is about the powers of good and evil and not race, readers should realize that Orcs are dark because they are far from the good. Tolkien has adapted for his own use the Old English word *orc*. In a vocabulary in the eleventh-century manuscript, Cotton Cleopatra A.III, the Latin word "orcus" (one of the names for Pluto, God of the Underworld, as well as just "death") is glossed "orc, þyrs, oððe heldeofol"

("orc, giant, or the devil of Hell") (Wright and Wülcker 1.459). The word also appears in a compound in *Beowulf*, line 112, which enumerates among the wicked descendants of Cain: "eotenas ond ylfe . . . ond orcnēas" (giants and elves and animated bodies of the dead).⁶ One way or another the term links Orcs to the infernal world of demons. If this were not enough, readers should remember that in *The Hobbit*, the narrator uses instead of Orc the word "goblin." The swords Orcrist (translated "Goblin Cleaver") and Glamdring, which Thorin Oakenshield and company find in the Troll hideout and bring to Elrond, are identified as coming from the "Goblin-wars" (*Annotated Hobbit* 94). The word "goblin" appears adapted from "Gobelinus," the name of a spirit reported in the twelfth century to be haunting the district of Évreux in Normandy. The word enters Middle English in the early fourteenth century, but is not found in print in French until some two hundred years later. According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, the word has a range of meanings such as "a devil," "an incubus," or "an evil spirit."⁷ In the second version of the translation of the Bible long attributed to John Wycliffe and completed sometime around 1390, the word "gobelyn" is used to translate the Latin "negotium," in Psalms 90.6: "thou shalt not drede of . . . an arowe fliynge in the dai, of a gobelyn goyinge in derknesse" (Wycliffe 2.832).⁸ Why is the only good Orc a dead Orc? One might just as likely ask Tolkien, "Why is the only good demon an exorcised demon?" In Christian thought the elimination of evil is the only way to respond to it. There is no parley in the battle between heaven and hell, and that is why there is none between Orcs and Elves either.

In some of the more recently released Tolkien writings edited by his son, Christopher Tolkien, J. R. R. Tolkien confirms that Orcs were indeed irredeemable at least to the inhabitants of Middle-earth. In part 5 of *Morgoth's Ring*, "Myths Transformed" (367–431), Tolkien writes about elvish rules of engagement concerning Orcs: "the Wise in the Elder Days taught always that the Orcs were not 'made' by Melkor, and therefore were not in their origin evil. They might have become irredeemable (at least by Elves and Men), but they remained within the Law" (419). The suggestion that there might be a plan of redemption in the mind of Eru but that it was beyond the concern of mortals sounds a lot like the ideas of the great Church Father Origen (185–254 AD), who thought that even demons, who were twisted by Satan but made by God, would eventually be redeemed although the process was a concern for God and not men. This portrayal of irredeemable Orcs, which echoes at least one great Catholic theologian, is vital since it suggests one more way that *The Lord of the Rings* is based in Tolkien's faith and that the war between Elves and Orcs parallels the war between hell and heaven.

The final argument against Tolkien being a racist can be gained by looking at the overall message of the work rather than at particular battles or physical descriptions. Whatever qualities the forces and peoples of Middle-earth have behind them, there is the universal truth that all things were created good. And since good is not always shining out like light, a lesson that many of the individuals in *The Lord of the Rings* must learn is not to judge individuals by their outward appearances. "We always seem to have got left out of the old lists," complains Merry when he and Pippin discover that the Ents have no recollection of them (468; bk. 3, ch. 4). It is true that all through the work Hobbits are either gently condescended to or overtly disdained. No one, not even the Elves, judges them aright. And yet this least significant of races—at least so considered by the other peoples of Middle-earth—is the only one with enough love of life and enough selflessness to produce individuals who can carry the ring to the very edge of Mount Doom. Racism is a philosophy of power, but *The Lord of the Rings* functions with the Christian idea of the renunciation of power. Christ gives up heaven, power on earth, and finally his life to achieve his goal. Frodo gives up the Shire, the power the ring might give, and finally his life for the quest. Racism claims that one can tell the value of an individual just by looking at his or her outward appearance. But nothing could be more overtly counter to the Christian worldview that Tolkien functions in even as he creates his fantasy. To paraphrase: "Man [Elf, Dwarf and Ent] looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16.7). Nothing could be more contrary to the assumptions of racism than a Hobbit as a hero.

Notes

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1. God the creator in Tolkien's mythology. "Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Ilúvatar; and he made first the Ainur, the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thought, and they were with him before aught else was made" (*The Silmarillion* 15).

2. Literature professors are well used to explaining to contemporary readers the dangers of assuming that a film and the text upon which it is based are one and the same. Even when a text is followed faithfully, as in Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet*, directorial choices still shape the work to a particular interpretation.
3. Stephen Shapiro's comments are made available in a press release from December 18, 2002, entitled "The Mass Appeal of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings Promotes Racism, Says University Lecturer," on "Insite: The University of Warwick Intranet" website: <<http://www.communicate.warwick.ac.uk/index.cfm?page=pressrelease&id=828>> (accessed August 26, 2004).
4. Chinua Achebe is describing Joseph Conrad's time, but dates for both authors are actually fairly close: Conrad (1857–1924) and Tolkien (1892–1973). Conrad was only 33 years older than Tolkien. Thus much of the social commentary Achebe makes applies to Tolkien as well as Conrad.
5. Although cited just this once, Steuard Jensen has been extraordinarily helpful in this work. Many of the sources included herein were uncovered by his direction both in the site listed as well as through email correspondence.
6. See Glare: "orcus," 1265. The etymologies in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for "orc" (10: 896) are outdated.
7. *Oxford English Dictionary*: "goblin," 6: 638. *Middle English Dictionary*, "gobelin," 4: 186.
8. This is an unusual translation, but perhaps occasioned by Jerome's Latin original. He seems here to be influenced by the Septuagint, which uses the word πράγματος at this point instead of a form of φόβος as might be expected, as the Hebrew noun being translated פָּחַד ("pachad") is commonly taken to mean "fear" or "dread" (which the Authorized Version translates as "terror"). The word πράγμα (Liddell and Scott 1457) has among its meanings "trouble" or "annoyance" or even "creature" in a negative sense. Like πράγμα, the Latin "negotium," "difficulty," or "trouble" (Glare 1168–69) may also have derogatory connotations when referring to a person or thing, and this appears to be the sense that the English translator is trying to capture through the use of "gobelyn."

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