

THE WRETCHED OF MIDDLE-EARTH: AN ORKISH MANIFESTO[★]

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ABSTRACT: This previously-unpublished essay by the late Charles W. Mills (1951–2021) seeks to demonstrate the racially-structured character of the universe created by J. R. R. Tolkien in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Written long before the popular film series, the essay critically examines Tolkien’s novels and comments on the nature of fictional creation. Mills argues that Tolkien designs a racial hierarchy in the novels that recapitulates the central racist myth of European thought.

Few twentieth-century novels of any kind—and certainly far fewer (if any) fantasy novels—have attained the simultaneous popular and critical success of J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*.¹ After a respectable

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★ For the phrase “the wretched of Middle-Earth,” I am indebted to Nick Otty’s “The Structuralist’s Guide to Middle-earth,” in *J. R. R. Tolkien: This Far Land*, ed. Robert Giddio (London: Vision Press 1983 and Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1984), 162.

¹ J. R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1954–55; rpt. New York: Ballantine Books, 1965). There are numerous editions of Tolkien’s magnum opus; I will refer to the “authorized” Ballantine paperback edition, currently bearing the misleading book cover-stamp “50th anniversary edition!” It is, of course, *The Hobbit* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1937; rpt. New York: Ballantine Books, 1965) which has reached the half-century. The following abbreviations will be used in the text itself to indicate page references: *The Hobbit* [TH]; *The Fellowship of the Ring* [FR]; *The Two Towers* [TT]; *The Return of the King* [RK].

start, sales took off in the 1960s, and though there has been some leveling-off since that period, the book has now sold over ten million copies, been in print for nearly forty years, and been translated into a score or more of languages. The earlier *The Hobbit*, which can be seen as a prelude to the larger work, celebrated its fiftieth-anniversary edition in 1987. Both *The Lord of the Rings* (henceforth LTR) and *The Hobbit* (henceforth TH) have been made into animated films. More generally, there was, particularly in North America, a 1960s cult boom that generated an immense range and quantity of spin-offs, some of which are still with us today: networks of Tolkien fan clubs, Middle-Earth conferences, maps and atlases of Middle-Earth, illustrated calendars, T-shirts, buttons, records, games, specialty journals with names like *Mythlore* and *Orcrist*, and of course numerous “guides,” “companions,” and “dictionaries” to help neophytes find their way around.

Critically, response to LTR has always been fairly sharply divided, with the early panegyrics of W. H. Auden, C. S. Lewis, and others (including extravagant comparisons to Spenser, Malory, and Ariosto) being set off by some famous negative reviews by Edmund Wilson and Philip Toynbee.² But in the overwhelming amount of secondary literature that has been produced over the past three decades—articles, monographs, dissertations, books—most has been favorable, with Tolkien’s moral vision and epic imagination usually being praised even if some caveats are entered about the relative flatness of his characters and the uninspired nature of his prose style. Numerous genealogies and influences have been reconstructed; the relationship of his work to Norse mythology, Jungian archetypes, medieval Christian romanticism, etc., has been exhaustively analyzed.³ A bibliography of critical material on Tolkien would—and in fact does—constitute a book in itself.⁴

In the midst of such a flood of secondary literature, it may seem foolhardy to claim originality for one’s interpretation. But as I shall attempt to show, there is a perspective on Tolkien which has not, to my knowledge, been systematically explored before, though some of the dissenting

² Edmund Wilson, “Oo, Those Awful Orcs!,” *Nation* 182 (April 14, 1956); Philip Toynbee, *Observer* (August 6, 1961). For a discussion of critical responses, see T. A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), 1–4, and Robert Giddings and Elizabeth Holland, *J. R. R. Tolkien: The Shores of Middle-Earth* (Frederick, MD: Aletheia Books, 1982), chap. 1.

³ For a survey of approaches, see Giddings and Holland, chap. 2.

⁴ See Judith A. Johnson’s invaluable *J. R. R. Tolkien: Six Decades of Criticism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986).

opinions do mention the issue in passing. This is the *racially-structured character* of Tolkien's universe.⁵ I am suggesting that if we take Tolkien at his word and read LTR as a "true mythology" of our own earth, then we will find that the text metamorphoses chillingly from a quaint otherworldly fantasy into a literal transcription of one of the most malignant ideologies of the past millennium: the racist "Aryan Myth," which, in one form or another, would ultimately justify both the conquest and mass murder of the nonwhite world by Europeans, and the later Nazi genocide of Europeans themselves.⁶

I

Let me begin by addressing the pre-emptive objection that such a project is likely to meet. To see LTR as racist, it may be argued, is obviously to make a category mistake of the most basic kind, for such a description presupposes that the discourse in question is purporting to reproduce the world accurately. But LTR is a fantasy novel; Middle-Earth is an imagined land; the elves, ents, dwarves, hobbits, and evil orcs are non-human creatures, some invented by Tolkien; and the "history" is completely fabricated. Thus the ontology of the work rules out any such normative evaluation *a priori*.

Now I think that even if all this were true—if, say, Middle-Earth were another planet, the orcs completely non-humanoid aliens (the reptilian or insectile BEMs of 1930s science fiction), and the history utterly separate from our own—we would still be entitled to question the legitimacy of the notion of a race of utterly evil beings (as the orcs are), particularly in a work with such ponderous moral pretensions as LTR. But the point is that this extrapolation of the argument is not even necessary, for the

⁵ As indicated above, the literature is too extensive for anyone to undertake a comprehensive survey. But in addition to reading about fifty articles for this paper (mostly in the collections cited above and below), I have gone through all of Johnson's listings, for many of which she has provided capsule summaries, and this issue does not get central attention in any of them. For some of the brief discussions that do exist, see Otty's (very funny) left critique, in Giddings, and also Walter Scheps, "The Fairy-Tale Morality of The Lord of the Rings," in *A Tolkien Compass*, ed. Jared Lobdell (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1975). The other two collections I refer to are Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo, eds., *Tolkien and the Critics* (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1968) and Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo, eds., *Tolkien: New Critical Perspectives* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1981).

⁶ See Leon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe*, trans. Edmund Howard (London: Heinemann, 1971).

simple reason that Middle-Earth is in fact our world. (The term itself is just a translation of Middle English *middelerde*/Old English *Middangeard*: “the inhabited lands of Men between the seas.”)⁷ Tolkien says this explicitly:

Middle-earth is *our* world. I have (of course) placed the action in a purely imaginary (though not wholly impossible) period of antiquity, in which the shape of the continental masses was different.⁸

Correspondingly, in the Foreword and Prologue to LTR, Tolkien rejects allegorical interpretations of the book, emphasizes his preference for “history, true or feigned” (FR, 10), and adopts the pose of being a mere “translator.” And his biographer, Humphrey Carpenter, reconstructs a conversation with C. S. Lewis in which Tolkien argued that the “myths woven by us” as “sub-creators” are not lies, but “invention about truth,” which “reflect a splintered fragment of the true light, the eternal truth that is with God.”⁹ Carpenter summarizes Tolkien’s position:

Tolkien believed that in one sense he was writing the truth. He did not suppose that precisely such peoples as he described, “elves,” “dwarves,” and malevolent “orcs,” had walked the earth and done the deeds that he recorded. But he did feel, or hope, that his stories were in some sense an embodiment of a profound truth.¹⁰

For Tolkien, then, the ontological status of Middle-Earth and its denizens is a peculiar one, simultaneously fictive and real. Tolkien is a “sub-creator”¹¹ creating a “secondary world” that in one sense is *already* there, chronicling the true feigned history of mythic creatures who “reflect a splintered fragment” of the truth. Thus to bring to bear on this world a normative critical apparatus grounded in our own sordid earthly history is in no way inappropriate or unfair; a writer who is laying claim to such metaphysical and moral insights can licitly be measured against the actual historical record.

⁷ See *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, selected and edited by Humphrey Carpenter (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 220.

⁸ Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 91. Cf. *Letters*, 220, 239.

⁹ Carpenter, *Biography*, 147.

¹⁰ Carpenter, *Biography*, 91.

¹¹ For Tolkien’s concept of “sub-creation” see his essay “On Fairy Stories,” in J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984).

II

Middle-Earth must therefore be seen as a mythical Pangaea, in a distant time so long past that now “the shape of all lands has been changed” (FR, 22). And indeed, even without Tolkien’s explicit admission, it would have been obvious simply from examining the maps provided in the books that the locus of the action is basically Europe, with the Shire itself constituting a landlocked England. The solidity and reality of Middle-Earth—its spatial breadth, temporal depth, intricate *interlacement* of events,¹² and near-ubiquitous fine-grained detail¹³—which constitute a major part of the book’s fascination—derive partially from Tolkien’s reworking of terrestrial geography and history, both real and mythical. Some of the secondary literature is devoted specifically to uncovering these correspondences: the Forodwaith as Eskimos; the three breeds of hobbits (the Harfoots, Stoors, and Fallohides) as the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes; the Riders of Rohan as Anglo-Saxons; the Anduin as the Rhine-Rhone; the Seas of Nurnen and Rhun as the Adriatic and Black Seas; the Battle of the Pelennor Fields as the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains; Minas Tirith as Constantinople, etc.¹⁴

My central claim is that the racial hierarchy of Middle-Earth likewise has its antecedents in European history and European myth. Now on one level, of course, this claim is completely uncontroversial. Elves and dwarves are familiar figures from European fairy tales and legends, while orcs, though not well known under that name, are the ogres/goblins who lurk in the dark places of the same stories. (Tolkien got the name from the *orcneas*, “demon-corpses”/“hell-devils,” of *Beowulf*.)¹⁵ But what I am contending is that in the case of the elves and the orcs, these abstract mythical figures have been invested by Tolkien with characteristics attributed in European racist thought to *human beings*. Tolkien, as a sub-creator, has chosen to recreate as fact, as “true myth,” a hierarchy of humanoid creatures which is, I will argue, a refracted image of the

¹² See Richard C. West, “The Interlace Structure of *The Lord of the Rings*,” in Lobdell, and Shippey, 120–26.

¹³ The significant exception is the treatment of the orcs; see the discussion below.

¹⁴ See Paul Kocher, “Middle-earth: An Imaginary World?” in *Critical Perspectives*; Ruth S. Noel, *The Mythology of Middle-earth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), chap. 6; Shippey, 12, 77, 93–100; Jefferson P. Swycaffer, “Historical Motivation for the Siege of Minas Tirith,” *Mythlore* 10, no. 35 (Spring 1983); E. L. Epstein, “The Novels of J. R. R. Tolkien and the Ethnology of Medieval Christendom,” *Philological Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (Oct. 1969).

¹⁵ Shippey, 45, 50; J. R.R. Tolkien, “Guide to the Names in *The Lord of the Rings*,” in Lobdell, 171.

mythical “truth” of intra-human racial hierarchies. The *human* “sub-humans,” the *Untermenschen* of earth, have been sub-created on Middle-Earth as *literally* sub-human humanoids.

Consider Middle-Earth’s population. There are, to begin with, non-humanoid but intelligent species: the eagles, the evil lupine wargs, the giant spiders (more prominent in TH than LTR), and the tree-like ents (who could be considered as borderline humanoid). Then there are one-of-a-kind entities: Tom Bombadil, Shelob (a spider, but in a class of her own), the were-bear Beorn, the Balrog. There is also the handful of wizards. But the major players, obviously, are the humanoid species: elves, dwarves, hobbits, men,¹⁶ and orcs. (Giants are mentioned in TH, but they disappear by the time of LTR, while the TH trolls only appear briefly in the later work.) And these can, I suggest, be uncontroversially ranked into three categories: elves at the top; dwarves, hobbits, and men in the middle; and orcs at the bottom. (If ents were to be considered humanoid, they would go on the middle rung.)

Now, this three-tiered ranking is not, I will argue, arbitrary or adventitious. It corresponds closely, in fact, to what Leon Poliakov, the well-known chronicler of the history of anti-Semitism, has shown to be the central racist myth of European thought: that humanity can be divided into three branches which trace their origins respectively to Noah’s three sons, Japheth, Shem, and Ham.¹⁷ Because this tripartite scheme was used both to account for differences between white and non-white races and differences among whites *themselves*, there is inevitably considerable variation in how the categorial boundaries were drawn. But it is here that the genesis of racism has to be sought rather than in the more standardly cited nineteenth-century thinkers. For Poliakov argues that the horrors of the death camp have produced an expedient amnesia, so that the centuries-old centrality of racist ideology to the *mainstream* of Western thought has been erased, and attributed instead to scapegoat figures such as Gobineau and Houston Chamberlain: “A vast chapter of western thought is thus made to disappear by sleight of hand, and this conjuring trick corresponds, on the psychological or psycho-historical level, to the

¹⁶ Given Tolkien’s attitudes toward women, this is in fact the appropriate term. For a feminist analysis of the male world of Tolkien and his fellow-Inklings, and its implications for the construction of LTR, see Brenda Partridge, “No Sex Please—We’re Hobbits: The Construction of Female Sexuality in *The Lord of the Rings*,” in Giddings.

¹⁷ Poliakov, “Introduction.”

collective suppression of troubling memories and embarrassing truths.”¹⁸ He goes on to demonstrate that all the European countries, from the Middle Ages onwards, had “myths of national origin” which interpreted the feudal social hierarchies in racial terms, as the rule of a *Herrenvolk* (variously the Goths, the Franks, the Germanic peoples). It is from these diverse and ancient sources, he argues, that the “Aryan Myth” ultimately developed, reaching its logical culmination in the twentieth-century Holocaust. But the crucial concepts are much older: the evaluation of moral, aesthetic, and social worth by race, the restriction of culture and civilization to “higher” races, the emphasis on the “purity” of language, culture, and blood, and the concomitant horror of “pollution” by “lower” races. Once we make the perceptual adjustment to seeing the different “races” of LTR as different varieties of *humans*, all these themes will, I suggest, become immediately obvious.

III

Let us begin with the elves—the Aryans of Middle-Earth. This description is not meant to be frivolous. Consider the following quotation (cited by Poliakov) from a well-known twentieth-century author, in which I have substituted “Elves” for “Aryans”:

[The Elf] is the Prometheus of mankind, from whose shining brow the divine spark of genius has at all times flashed forth, always kindling anew that fire which, in the form of knowledge, illuminated the dark night. . . . If we divide mankind into three categories—founders of culture, bearers of culture, and destroyers of culture the [Elves] alone can be considered as representing the first category. . . . Should he be forced to disappear, a profound darkness will descend on the earth.¹⁹

We will return to this author, and his recommendations, later, but does not this sound familiar? We had the three-tiered racial hierarchy of Middle-Earth, with the elves as founders of culture and civilization, bringing the Promethean light into the darkness; men, hobbits, and dwarves as bearers of a culture that ultimately derives from the elves; and the orcs as the threatening forces who wish to destroy that culture. Moreover, the elegiac tone that pervades much of LTR arises from this sense that the high culture of the past is gradually disappearing—though with Aragorn enthroned as king, a holding-operation

¹⁸ Poliakov, 5.

¹⁹ Cited in Poliakov, 2.

can be maintained for a while—as the elves leave Middle-Earth for the West and the new Age of Men dawns.

But the correspondences go much deeper. In the Aryan Myth, the Aryans were a white race “which had descended from the mountains of Asia to colonize and populate the West.”²⁰ In LTR, the elves come from across the sea to Middle-Earth. In the Aryan Myth, there is an intimate connection between language, race, and culture, with Indo-European being viewed as the superior “Japhetic” language family which is tied by blood to the Aryan race. (The full significance of this to LTR will be explored at the end.) In LTR, the elves are the original creators of language and culture: Treebeard says they woke the trees up, taught them to speak, and gave everything their names (TT, 85, 90). Their language is the “Ancient Tongue” (FR, 119), which is culturally and aesthetically superior to all the other languages of Middle-Earth. As such, it is unlikely to be fully mastered by those of the middle level, who are forced, like Frodo (FR, 121, 307–13), to marvel at its beauties from the outside.

There is also an aesthetic correspondence. Racism, as George Mosse has emphasized, is above all “a visually centered ideology”: “Beauty and ugliness became . . . principles of human classification.”²¹ Thus the German philosopher Christian Meiners, later to be honored by the Nazis as a founder of racial theory, used color as a central aesthetic category in his 1785 *Outline of the History of Mankind*, and claimed that there were “two great human lineages—a race which was fair and beautiful and one which was dark and ugly.”²² The growing color-consciousness in Europe was linked, of course, to Europe’s widening contact with the non-European world, but it also signaled internal national and class differences: “if Europeans were white, some were whiter than others.”²³ These, of course, were the Aryans. Correspondingly, the entire architectonic of LTR is predicated on a fused aesthetic-ethical color polarity, in which white is beautiful and good and black is ugly and evil. And in this normative framework, the elves are definitionally “the Fair Folk” (FR, 74), thus incarnating justice and beauty simultaneously. Not only is their transcendental (white) beauty (which characterizes *all* elves) stressed on every occasion they are introduced, but it is also made clear throughout

²⁰ Poliakov, 188.

²¹ George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1978; reprint Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 233, 11.

²² Mosse, 10–12; Poliakov, 178–80.

²³ Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 154.

LTR that they represent the unattainable aesthetic ideal of *all* the second-tier races, i.e., aesthetic standards are not discontinuous from one race to the next (FR, 117–21, 487, 490; RK, 312–13).

Finally, the elves are also intrinsically and apparently unchangeably good—no bad elves appear in LTR.²⁴ (The three-tiered hierarchy is quite clearly demarcated on this point: the elves are all good; the dwarves, hobbits, and men of the second level can be both good and evil; and the orcs of the third level are all bad.) Correspondingly, the admixture of elvish blood has an uplifting effect on its recipients. Thus Elrond of Rivendell, king-to-be Aragorn, and the Prince of Dol Amroth, are all partly elvish, and this manifests itself in their greater nobility, courage, wisdom, ability to withstand temptation, etc. Throughout LTR, blood—elvish at one end, orkish at the other—invariably tells.

IV

On the middle tier of this racial hierarchy are what I suggest to be the children of Shem: men, dwarves, and hobbits. As noted earlier, the use of the Noachian schema to explain both intra-European and intercontinental racial distinctions has resulted in a variable categorization. Thus Japheth was both the ancestor of the Aryans/whites generally and the father of the nobles in the medieval order specifically, while Shem was the progenitor of both the medieval clerks and the Semitic Asian races.²⁵ My claim here, obviously, would have to be that Tolkien is drawing at this point on the depiction of the medieval middle estate (between the nobility and the serfs), rather than the Asiatic interpretation, and as a reminder of this, I will use “Shemitic” rather than “Semitic.”

A piece of supplementary evidence in favor of my “Shemitic” reading is the fact that, according to Poliakov, the English used Hebraic mythologies to construct their particular myth of origin: “the Anglo-Saxon child king Scaef was transformed in the writings of the copyists into Seth and later Shem, and the consequence of this, from the early Middle Ages onwards, was that the English repudiated Japheth, the ancestor of the

²⁴ In one of his letters, Tolkien explicitly denies that the elves are wholly good, since they “wanted to have their cake and eat it,” to live in the mortal world of Middle-earth while trying to stop its history (*Letters*, 197). This seems to me at most a misdemeanor, certainly not on the level of the evil deeds done by the men, hobbits, and dwarves, so I think my substantive point still holds.

²⁵ Poliakov, 7.

Europeans, and claimed filiation from the eldest of Noah's sons."²⁶ Tolkien's main impetus in writing LTR and his other fictional works was to create "a mythology for England,"²⁷ and it has always been clear to readers that the author himself identifies with the hobbits ("I am in fact a hobbit in all but size."²⁸ It is important to note, then, that my hypothesis of "Aryanist" racism is not meant to imply that Tolkien was anti-Jewish; rather he is the "Shemitic" hobbit looking worshipfully and obsequiously upwards at the culturally superior "Japhetic" elves.²⁹ Thus Frodo is patronized by Gildor et al for his halting attempts at the "Ancient Tongue" (FR, 119–21), and Bilbo is humbly grateful when the elves at Rivendell actually request a second hearing of his song about Earendil (FR, 311–12).

Finally, as mentioned above, the clinching piece of evidence for the shared status of men, dwarves, and hobbits is the coincidence of their racially-ordained moral standing: all are capable of both good and evil. For the hobbits, this is, of course, most vividly illustrated by the case of Gollum himself, but it is also demonstrated by Saruman's collaborators in the take-over of the Shire (RK, book 6, chap. 8). Various men from Western Middle-Earth fight on Sauron's side (I will argue below that the Easterling and Southron men are more properly seen as Hamitic), while Wormtongue betrays Theoden (TI, 151–60) and Boromir succumbs to the temptation of the Ring (FR, 513–17). On dwarves, there is less detail, but Tolkien does tell us in TH that "some are tricky and treacherous and pretty bad lots" while others are "decent enough people" (211). Overall, then, I think a good case can be made for their Shemitic character.

V

This brings us to what will be our central focus: the orcs. It is here that the most unassailable case for a Biblical inspiration exists. Black, utterly evil, lacking culture and history, the bottom link of Tolkien's great chain of being, the orcs are unquestionably the descendants of Ham.

²⁶ Poliakov, 38–39.

²⁷ Carpenter, *Biography*, 89–90.

²⁸ Carpenter, *Biography*, 176.

²⁹ In a review of Tolkien's biography, John Carey comments insightfully on Tolkien's class insecurities: "Tolkien came from an impoverished middle-class background, which made it desperately necessary to feel superior to mere working people. . . . [His grandfather] was pathetically proud of his ancestry, instilling into his family the belief that they came of good stock." *The Listener* 97 (May 12, 1977): 631.

Superficially, their blackness would seem to identify them as African, but this is only part of a far more complicated truth.³⁰ What Tolkien has created in the orcs is, I suggest, the ultimate composite “Wild” Other to the defining Self of white, Christian, class-structured Western civilization. The orcs incarnate in their diabolically black bodies an unholy trinity: the threatening subordinate class within, the Islamic peril to the East, and the restless multitudes of the colonized South. As such, their blackness does triple duty, being simultaneously industrial, metaphysical, and epidermal.

(a) Let us take these in sequence. Long before the “scientific,” post-Darwinian racism of the late nineteenth century, a medieval categorization was developing that was pivoted around the crucial notions of “wildness/barbarity/savagery” as opposed to “civilization.”³¹ This medieval concept would ultimately shape Europeans’ perceptions of non-whites, but it was originally applied to Europeans themselves: “From Ham was descended, later biblical genealogists decided, that breed of ‘wild men’ who combined Cain’s rebelliousness with the size of the primal giants. They must also have been black. . . .”³² Ham was seen as the ancestor of the serfs and the Slavs, as well as of the literally black Africans.³³ Cedric Robinson has argued that from the medieval beginnings of European capitalism, classes have tended to be recruited from different ethnic and cultural groups, thus making plausible the ethno-class identifications cited by Poliakov.³⁴ Similarly, V. G. Kiernan points out that: “Europeans of superior countries thought of inferior Europeans and non-Europeans in not very different terms.”³⁵ The Irish, for example, were described by seventeenth-century Englishmen as “cannibals” and “savages,” using images of “dirt and darkness” and “bestial appearance.”³⁶

³⁰ In a 1932–34 article, Tolkien does imply that Ethiopians are the “sons of Ham.” See Shippey, 33.

³¹ See Edward Dudley and Maximilian E. Novak, eds., *The Wild Man Within: An Image in Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972).

³² Hayden White, “The Forms of Wildness: Archaeology of an Idea,” in Dudley and Novak, 15.

³³ Poliakov, 7–8, 78, 135.

³⁴ See Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Penguin, 1983), chap. 1.

³⁵ V. G. Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind: Black Man, Yellow Man, and White Man in an Age of Empire* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969; reprint New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 28.

³⁶ Earl Miner, “The Wild Man Through the Looking Glass,” in Dudley and Novak, 89–90.

Consider then the evidence for the orcs as a potentially insurgent lower class, a racial proletariat. First of all, there is language. In a book where language reveals one's culture, worldview, and moral and social standing, the orcs, as more than one commentator has pointed out, speak Cockney, exchanging "Ars!" and "Garns!" (RK, 247–48).³⁷ Thus Tolkien has decided that the linguistic equivalent of the evil and ugly "Black Speech" is the language of the working class. Moreover their blackness is not the result of any old dirt, but is specifically *industrial*, the soot and grime of Blake's "dark, satanic mills". One of the dominant oppositions of the book is the conflict between a romanticized (feudal) pastoralism and a diabolized (capitalist) industrialism, and the orcs are inextricably linked to the latter pole. Correspondingly, *pollution* by this blackness (here industrial, but later, as we shall see, also racial and moral) is an underlying theme. "Curse their foul feet in its clean water!" says the elf Haldir of the orccompany crossing the Nimrodel into the sylvan land of Lothlorien (FR, 448). The desolate landscape of Mordor may owe something to Tolkien's World War I experience of trench warfare, but it is also undoubtedly the industrially polluted urban wasteland of the twentieth century: "ash and crawling muds," "high mounds of crushed and powdered rock," "great cones of earth fire-blasted and poison-stained," "gasping pits and poisonous mounds," "foul fumes," "a foul sump of oily many-colored ooze" (TT, 302–3).³⁸ Similarly the penultimate chapter of LTR, "The Scouring of the Shire," involves a cleansing that while metaphorically political and racial, is also *literal*: the need to remove from this rustic paradise the "ugly new houses," and the "black smoke," "stench," "filth," and "stinking outflow" of the new mill (RK, 349, 350, 361, 365–66).

Part of Tolkien's 1960s countercultural success came from this tapping of ecological concerns, but to make the working class itself responsible for capitalist despoliation of the environment, as Tolkien is in effect doing, is clearly irrational and morally ludicrous. Moreover, Tolkien's position goes far beyond any kind of reasonable environmentalism to a simple technophobia. Saruman, says Treebeard, has "a mind of metal and wheels" (TT, 96) and the point is that for Tolkien this characterization is itself an indictment, regardless of what the metal and wheels are used

³⁷ See, for example, Robert M. Adams, "The Hobbit Hole," in *Critical Perspectives*, 173–74; Scheps, 44; Carey, 631.

³⁸ See Charles A. Huttar, "Hell and the City: Tolkien and the Traditions of Western Literature," in Lobbell, 117–42, and Otty, 165–66.

for. And the orcs are consistently associated with technology—not as creators, of course, but as bearers—so that in Mordor and Isengard, and at the sieges of Helm’s Deep and Gondor, they actually have the more advanced weaponry: blasting fires, catapults, siege towers, battering rams (TT, 182; RK, 116–17, 124–25). It could also be argued that the scene in Ithilien where Frodo and Sam come across the Gondorian statue defaced by the “idle scrawls” and “foul symbols [of] the maggot-folk of Mordor” (TT, 395) derives its emotive power from negative associations with urban street-gang graffiti. Finally, a semi-serious case could be made that the orcs’ class identity is demonstrated simply by the fact that they are the only ones who seem, in the sleepless mills of Mordor, to do any work in Middle-Earth.³⁹

(b) Consider now the case for the Islamic and Third World character of the orcs. To begin with, of course, there is the simple geography of Middle-Earth itself. As several commentators have pointed out, Tolkien’s world is one of *paysages moralisés*⁴⁰—indeed *pays moralisés*—a “moral cartography in which North and West are generally associated with good, South and East with evil.”⁴¹ In the actual Europe of our own world, of course, South and East point to Afro-Asia: Tolkien has in fact reconstructed medieval Europe’s “geography of monstrosity,” with Rhun and Harad as the unknown lands whose inhabitants can be slandered without fear of correction.⁴²

What does Tolkien tell us about the men who come from these strange lands, Sauron’s allies? Their description would seem to make them Africans, Indians, Arabs, and other Asiatics, but whatever their origin, they are all conveniently subsumable for Tolkien under the category of “Wild [Men], the Men of Darkness” (TT, 364). The Noachian schema would therefore, I suggest, classify them with the orcs, as Hamitic rather than Shemitic, since “wildness” is their most salient and defining feature. The “Southrons,” “wild . . . men with red banners, shouting with harsh tongues” (RK, 113), are the Africans and Indians, for some come “out of Far Harad,” “black men like half-trolls with white eyes and red tongues” (RK, 148), while others are “Swertings” who ride on “oliphaunts/Mumaks,” and have “dark faces,” “long black hair, and gold rings in

³⁹ Otty, 166.

⁴⁰ Lee D. Rossi, *The Politics of Fantasy: C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press: 1984), 101.

⁴¹ Scheps, 45.

⁴² V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 71.

their ears” (TT, 321–22, 340–42). But both are “cruel Haradrim” (TT, 363), who have “gone over to [Sauron], or back to Him—they were ever ready to His will” (TT, 339). On the other hand, there are in the East the “wild Easterlings” (TT, 363), an all-purpose category which I suggest is intended to include Arabs, Mongols, Turks, etc. But the important point is that whatever their origin, all these different nationalities, Haradrim and Easterlings, are united in their “evil servitude” to Sauron, “hating the West” (RK, 280).

Once we “terrestrialize” Middle-Earth, the clearly medieval character of Tolkien’s eschatology here should be evident. Yet strangely this was missed by many of the early commentators, who, because of the mid-’50s timing of LTR’s publication, saw it as a World War II allegory or a Cold War parable, with the orcs as Nazis and/or communists, and Sauron and Saruman as Hitler and Stalin (or maybe vice versa, given Tolkien’s politics).⁴³ Tolkien himself “utterly repudiated” a Cold War reading: “The situation was conceived long before the Russian revolution.”⁴⁴ He also emphasized what many critics failed to see because of the absence of a personalized deity in LTR: “*The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work.”⁴⁵ The reality is that Tolkien is re-fighting not World War II but the *Crusades*. A few authors have realized this. For example, E. L. Epstein argues from linguistic evidence that Middle-Earth can be temporally located at approximately A.D. 800–1200 when European Christendom “began to feel itself as an entity distinct from Asia or Africa . . . menaced from the east and south by a deadly implacable enemy.”⁴⁶

This enemy was, of course, Islam, Norman Daniel points out that for medieval Europe, “Islam was assessed as the ‘sum of heresies,’ and so, we may say, quintessentially wrong.”⁴⁷ Another author puts it even more dramatically: for the “Western Middle Ages” Islam was “a diabolical laceration in the breast of the Christian Church . . . a perverse schism

⁴³ At the time of the Munich agreement, says Tolkien’s biographer, he “like many others . . . was suspicious not so much of German intentions as of those of Soviet Russia; he wrote that he had ‘a loathing of being on any side that includes Russia,’ and added: ‘One fancies that Russia is probably ultimately far more responsible for the present crisis and choice of moment than Hitler.’” Carpenter, *Biography*, 189.

⁴⁴ *Letters*, 307.

⁴⁵ *Letters*, 172.

⁴⁶ Epstein, 525.

⁴⁷ Norman Daniel, *The Arabs and Mediaeval Europe* (London and Beirut: Longmans, 1975), 321.

perpetrated by a barbarous people . . . a religious catastrophe.”⁴⁸ This is the “black [metaphysical] threat” posed by Mordor and its allies. Correspondingly, Sauron himself can plausibly be seen as Mahomet. Tolkien’s portrayal of Sauron as the incarnation of evil is completely continuous with the medieval tradition, which mounted a disinformation campaign about Mahomet to generate a mass hatred that would support the Crusades.⁴⁹ One Christian propagandist of the time candidly admitted his complete lack of factual sources, arguing simply that: “It is safe to speak evil of one whose malignity exceeds whatever ill can be spoken.”⁵⁰

Christian Europe against the Saracens, then, and all the other Asiatic invaders (Mongols, Turks, etc.): this is an absolutely *central* structuring opposition of LTR, which, unlike the pastoral/industrial conflict, has not received the critical attention it deserves. Tolkien himself would write that a Christian is “hemmed in a hostile world.”⁵¹ And Henri Baudet emphasizes the “defensive mentality” that dominated Europe because of “the fact of its being an invasion area”: “A main theme, essential to the history of Europe, was its defense against the recurrent threat of an Asiatic tidal wave that would engulf the entire continent.”⁵²

Yet the textual evidence for this theme throughout LTR is clear once one looks for it. For the multitudinous orcs fighting alongside the Southrons and Easterlings, who embody this threat, are not just *black*; they are also *Oriental*. More than once they are described as “swart and slant-eyed” (TI, 20, 67). In addition, they usually carry “scimitars” (FR, 417, 427; TI, 20). One of the few Orkish words actually cited in LTR is *sharku*, “old man” (the source of Saruman’s nickname “Sharkey” [RK, 367–68]). T. A. Shippey identifies this as being derived from the Arabic *shaikh*, without, however, seeming to see anything noteworthy in what is surely a remarkable revelation of the evil orcs’ linguistic heritage.⁵³ The greater technological development of the West’s assailants, mentioned

⁴⁸ Francesco Gabrieli, “Islam in the Mediterranean World,” in *The Legacy of Islam*, 2nd ed., eds. Joseph Schacht and C.E. Bosworth (1931; reprint Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 65–66.

⁴⁹ Maxime Rodinson, “The Western Image and Western Studies of Islam,” in Schacht and Bosworth, 13–14.

⁵⁰ Cited in Rodinson, 14.

⁵¹ Tolkien, *Monsters*, 22.

⁵² Henri Baudet, *Paradise on Earth: Some Thoughts on European Images of Non-European Man*, trans. Elizabeth Wentholt (Netherlands, 1959; Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1965), 4.

⁵³ Shippey, 129.

above (the use of gunpowder, catapults, etc.), can also be seen as a grudging and poisoned (given Tolkien's technophobia) admission of the superiority in learning of Islamic civilization to Dark-Ages Europe. One author has suggested that the Siege of Minas Tirith itself has an exact correspondence to the actual Siege of Constantinople, tracing similarities in geography, political history, characters, siege machinery, and naval involvement.⁵⁴ "Muslim tradition . . . has much to say, in history and legend, about the decisive [716–17 A.D.] struggle under the walls of Constantinople . . . it was their failure to conquer Constantinople which saved the Byzantine Empire, and with it Western Christendom, from sharing the fate of Iran and Central Asia."⁵⁵ LTR commemorates this victory. Similarly, the contested nature of the south-eastern regions of Middle-earth, with Ithilien, Osgiliath, South Gondor (described on the map as "a debatable and desert land") and Minas Morgul changing hands more than once, can be seen as the successive conquest and loss of territory between Islam and the West: "a direct centuries-long contact along a shifting frontier, crossed in both directions by wars and forays."⁵⁶ (For example, Sicily, Malta, southern Italy, Acre, Jerusalem.)⁵⁷ Finally, the so-called "Black Years/Accursed Years" in the "Second Age" (preceding the events of LTR), when Sauron ruled over most of Middle-earth before being overthrown by the Last Alliance (FR, 318–20), would simply correspond to the earlier Islamic domination of the Mediterranean, including the seven-hundred-year Moorish occupation of Spain.

As earlier mentioned, then, the blackness of the orcs is *multiply-signifying*: above, the dirt of physical uncleanness and industrial pollution; here, the indicator of metaphysical and racial pollution. There is a significant shift here from TH, where the orcs (there usually referred to as "goblins") are not given a color. By contrast, in LTR the darkness of the orcs is repeatedly stressed so as to keep emphasizing for the reader their position in the bichromatic aesthetic/moral/metaphysical order, in which white good, white skin, white beauty, white people, white countries, white religion, and a white northwest stand opposed to black evil, black skin, black ugliness, black non-persons, black countries, black diabolism, and a black south-east.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ See Swycaffer.

⁵⁵ Bernard Lewis, "Politics and War," in Schacht and Bosworth, 178.

⁵⁶ Gabrieli, 73.

⁵⁷ See Gabrieli, and Daniel.

⁵⁸ For the black and white color opposition, see, for example, Scheps, 45–46.

At this stage, though, we need to consider a last-ditch defense of Tolkien that could be mounted along the following lines. The blackness of the orcs, it may be argued, is in no way connected with darkskinned *people*, but is merely *symbolic*, a reflection of traditional European (particularly English) color symbolism.⁵⁹ As such, it should certainly not be taken to indicate racial attitudes towards non-whites living on this earth (as against Middle-Earth), being metaphysical, but not physical, ontological rather than biological. This view is well summed up by Walter Scheps:

While Tolkien, like all authors, is accountable for his creation, his accountability, unlike that of most other authors, does not extend beyond that creation. We can expect Middle-earth to be internally consistent, but we cannot expect it to conform to important human values . . . looking to our own experience for verification would be as perverse as it would be futile. Once we understand this distinction, we need no longer be bothered by the fact that Tolkien's evil creatures are black (orcs), speak ungrammatical, lower class English (trolls), come from the south and east (both orcs and trolls).⁶⁰

Similarly, C. S. Lewis chides those readers of LTR who “imagine they have seen a rigid demarcation between black and white people.”⁶¹ And Lee Rossi, in a monograph specifically on the “politics of fantasy” in Tolkien and Lewis, makes no mention at all of the possibility of racism in the worldview of LTR, though giving a mild reproof to Lewis for “the British prejudice, which “he” shares, against ‘wogs.’”⁶² (Tolkien's fellow-Inkling Lewis created a seven-book children's series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, in which [English] Narnians confront [Islamic] Calormenes, who worship a god, Tash, explicitly characterized by Lewis as Satan. Rossi's failure to see anything racist, or morally reprehensible, about this depiction of a civilization, other than an unfortunate “prejudice against ‘wogs’” [itself a revealing formulation], is part of the very problem I have identified.)

I think that the evidence already adduced should be sufficient to show the untenability of this disingenuous divide between the inhabitants of Middle-Earth and those of our own world: the historical and geographical

⁵⁹ See Jordan, chap. 1.

⁶⁰ Scheps, 44.

⁶¹ C. S. Lewis, “The Dethronement of Power,” in *Critics*, 12. Lewis's subsequent discussion, however, makes it clear that the orcs do not even enter his moral universe; he is thinking of people like Boromir.

⁶² Rossi, 70.

correspondences, the characterization of Southrons and Easter lings, the likening of black men to “half-trolls” and the literal (nonsymbolic) description of the orcs as “slant-eyed.” In addition, there is the following revealing passage in Tolkien’s private correspondence, from a letter about a (subsequently abandoned) film script of LTR:

The Orcs are definitely stated to be corruptions of the “human” form 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.⁶³

So this is how Tolkien envisaged the orcs: repulsive and degraded Mongols! To my mind, this establishes beyond any reasonable doubt the essentially human nature of the orcs, and explodes completely the pretense that no earthly implications can be drawn from their Middle-Earthly characterization. The opposition of a symbolic and a racial blackness is, in a sense misleading, because, for Tolkien’s characters, it can be said, *ontology recapitulates physiology*. “Their insides [are] on the outside,” says C. S. Lewis of Tolkien’s characters, in an unwittingly betraying judgment.⁶⁴ For the black orcs⁶⁵ the physical and the metaphysical are *fused*, just as they would be for the non-white subhumans encountered by expanding Europe. (Cedric Robinson makes a point that is relevant here, that Islam had always been “closely identified in the European mind with African and Black peoples,” as the very name “blackamoor” signifies.)⁶⁶ And all the allegedly different races of humanoid beings of Middle-Earth are in effect really human. “Laterally,” in the Semitic second tier, this is conceded in Tolkien’s statement in LTR that “Hobbits are relatives of ours” (FR, 21).⁶⁷ But even more importantly, it is inadvertently admitted by the revelation that interbreeding (the traditional sign of speciesmembership) is possible “vertically,” *between* tiers. More than one elf-human combination is mentioned, giving rise, as earlier noted, to humans of noble blood, and Tolkien admits that: “Elves and Men are evidently in biological terms one race, or they could not breed

⁶³ *Letters*, 274.

⁶⁴ Lewis, 15.

⁶⁵ The passage above (note 64) describes them as “sallow-skinned,” but as indicated, this is contradicted by the book. Perhaps Tolkien was just forgetful that the Semitic *bêtes jaunes* had been subsumed by him under the slant-eyed Hamitic *bêtes noires*.

⁶⁶ Robinson, 113, 125.

⁶⁷ In an interview, he was even more direct: “The Hobbits are just rustic English people.” Carpenter, *Biography*, 176.

and produce fertile offspring.”⁶⁸ Correspondingly, among the first harbingers in the Shire itself of the threat from Mordor are a “squinteyed ill-favored” Southerner and a “swarthy Bree-lander” who Frodo and company meet at the Bree inn (FR, 213, 219), and these later turn out to be “half-orcs and goblin-men” (TT, 180).

It is the discrete existence of this *biological/racial* dimension of blackness that underpins “swarthinness” as a signifier of evil. If blackness were merely symbolic for Tolkien (as it largely is in the case of the Black Riders, who are simply fallen white men: thus, with the vision given by the Ring, Frodo perceives they have “white faces” [FR, 263]), then physical intermixture would not have the significance it does—it would, in fact, be an impossibility. But if the orcs are really human, then it makes complete sense that Treebeard should be horrified at what is, in effect, race-mixing, miscegenation. “That would be a black evil!” he exclaims (TT, 96), with the authentic outrage of any Southern segregationist, Afrikaner, or Nazi. The threat the orcs pose is therefore also that of *racial* pollution.

VI

Once the veneer of fantasy is stripped off, the setting terrestrialized, and the orcs recognized as human, then, all the classic themes of Western racist thought become immediately visible. Tolkien’s aesthetic judgment on Mongols and orcs simply repeats Meiners’ aesthetic classification of races, and the even earlier medieval hierarchy: “The figure prized in medieval romances corresponded to Greek statuary, physiognomy was important, and a ‘skin of dazzling whiteness’ exemplified true beauty. Such beauty symbolized goodness, while blackness, small stature, and an ill-proportioned body meant ugliness and evil.”⁶⁹ Similarly, twentieth-century German racists would contrast Aryans and dark “ape-men.”⁷⁰ Blacks themselves, of course, had traditionally been seen in racist thought

⁶⁸ *Letters*, 189.

⁶⁹ Mosse, 31. Mosse also points out (171–74) that in both Germany and England, the camaraderie of the World War I trenches generated a literature that emphasized a heroic “manly beauty” or a classical “ideal-type,” which probably reinforced postwar racism. This may well be significant for understanding LTR, given the war’s formative influence on Tolkien. In addition, the French use of Moroccan and Senegalese troops in its Army of the Rhine caused an uproar about the “black rape of Germany” (175–76). Could this be yet another source for the invading and despoiling orcs?

⁷⁰ Mosse, 99.

as close to apes, and possibly even prone to couplings with orangutans.⁷¹ In keeping with the foregoing, Tolkien describes an orc as “a short crook-legged creature, very broad and with long arms that hung almost to the ground” (TT, 62), while at the siege of Helm’s Deep, we are told, the orcs “sprang up [the ladders] like apes in the dark forests of the South” (TT, 178). The pure-blooded orcs’ fear of the sun also has its precedent in one German anthropologist’s contrast of a diurnal Aryan and a nocturnal non-Aryan race.⁷²

Moreover, these traditional racist views were, in the turn-of-the-century climax of European imperialism, naturally reinforced by the terror of anti-colonial uprisings, which would have the character of race wars. V. G. Kiernan describes European fears after the Boxer rebellion of the “Yellow Peril”: “people saw visions of Chinamen overrunning the world’ . . . China was often thought of as a vast antheap, and soldier ants were exactly what the vast over-drilled armies then coming to full growth required. Similar fears were in the air about a huge black army.”⁷³ These images can surely plausibly be claimed to have influenced Tolkien as he came to adulthood in early twentieth-century Europe, interlocking with the medieval view of Islam to produce his armies of black and slant-eyed (i.e., yellow) orcs, who worship the diabolic Sauron and explicitly refer to their Western foes as “Whiteskins” (TT, 65–68). Nor was the Islamic connection purely a *medieval* one. Turn-of-the-century imperialism saw Islam in a similar light:

The attack upon Islam became as fierce as it could be and the arguments of the Middle Ages were revived with up-to-date embellishments. The Islamic religious orders . . . were presented as a network of dangerous organizations animated by a barbarous hatred of civilization. . . . Pan-Islamism was a fashionable bogey in the same way and at the same time as the Yellow Peril was. Any anti-imperialistic demonstration, even when it sprang from purely local feelings, was attributed to panIslamism. The very word suggested an attempt at domination, an ideology of aggression, a conspiracy on a world-wide scale. Thanks to the popular press, to popular literature, and to children’s books, this view was penetrating the great mass of European minds, and it was not without influence among the scholars themselves.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Mosse, 14–16; Poliakov, 135–37, 176–82; Jordan, 228–34.

⁷² Poliakov, 101.

⁷³ Kiernan, 171.

⁷⁴ Rodinson, 52–53.

In an important revisionist reading of LTR, Robert Giddings and Elizabeth Holland have argued that the book is far more deeply influenced by Tolkien's consumption of the then-popular novels of John Buchan, H. Rider Haggard, and others, than by the mythological sources standardly cited, and that the "world-conspiracy" of Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) is in fact recapitulated in many details in LTR.⁷⁵ But curiously (though in keeping with the *general* critical myopia on the racial issue I have described above), they fail to relate Buchan's anti-Semitism in the book to the "Jewish conspiracy" theories that the forged *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were spreading throughout Europe in this period; nor do they point out anywhere in their book that Tolkien's own "world-conspiracy" theory is similarly *racial* in character.⁷⁶ And derived in part, I would argue, from the parallel views cited above.

But the danger was not merely external: "The fear which haunted racial thought after the mid-nineteenth century was that of degeneration."⁷⁷ Since purity, by definition, is always imperiled ("Bad blood drives out good," ran one racist biologization of Gresham's law),⁷⁸ the standing danger will be that of a diminishing number of pure-blooded whites being swamped by a black tide. This was, in fact, one of the central racist concerns in turn-of-the-century Europe and America. Gobineau's *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* had ended with the warning that, because of racial contamination: "The white species will disappear henceforth from the face of the earth."⁷⁹ Moreover, there is a fusion here with class issues, given the aforementioned "racial" view of the white working-class. Thus Francis Galton, the founder of eugenics, worried that because of the high breeding rates of "bad stocks," Britain's future was being

⁷⁵ Giddings and Holland, chaps. 2 and 3.

⁷⁶ This oversight is all the more remarkable since they explicitly cite in an endnote the warning given to Buchan's hero, Richard Hannay: "The Jew is everywhere . . . if you are on the biggest kind of job and are bound to get to the real boss, ten to one you are brought up against a little white-faced Jew in a bathchair with an eye like a rattle-snake. Yes, sir, he is the man who is ruling the world just now. . . ." Giddings and Holland, 270–71. For the *Protocols* and their impact, see Mosse, chap. 8 and 178–79. Similarly, Giddings's "Introduction" to *This Far Land* compares LTR with the conspiracy theories against Britain of Ian Fleming's James Bond novels, without, however, mentioning the central role of *racial oppositions* in the Bond stories. See, for example, Oreste Del Buono and Umberto Eco, eds., *The Bond Affair*, trans. R. A. Downie (Milan: Valentino Bompiani, 1965; reprint London: Macdonald & Co., 1966).

⁷⁷ Mosse, 82.

⁷⁸ Poliakov, 282.

⁷⁹ Cited in Poliakov, 237. Correspondingly, some versions of the "Jewish conspiracy" theories saw "race-mixing" with Aryan as a deliberate part of the plan, since Aryan blood would then be "adulterated." Poliakov, 1.

jeopardized.⁸⁰ Similarly, in the U.S. in the post-World War I period, the prolific and influential Theodore Stoddard warned of the inundation of Nordics by inferior, but more fertile races and (in a quote that could have been tailor-made for LTR) pointed out that: “Today the small dark types in England increase noticeably with every generation. The swart ‘cockney’ is a resurgence of the primitive Mediterranean stock. . . .”⁸¹ We see here an explicit statement of the overlap of class and race that I have argued underpins the orcs’ multiple identity.

Both by threat of external invasion, and by threat of internal diminution and degeneration, then, white Europe was imperiled. And this is, of course, the dominant image of LTR. Think how often the picture is painted of the fewness and diminishing number of the defenders of Middle-Earth civilization, as against the teeming, literally countless, numbers of barbarians (orcs, Southrons, Easterlings, etc.). The fear of “race-mixing,” as we have seen, manifests itself both in LTR’s degraded men—the “gangrels,” the “squint-eyed and sallow-faced” “half-orcs” who threaten the (racially-pure) Shire (RK, 335, 350, 352)—and in its ominously uplifted orcs—the “half-orcs and goblin-men that the foul craft of Saruman has bred, [who] will not quail at the sun” (TT, 180). The decay of Gondor is accounted for partly by the mixing of their blood with that of lesser men (RK, 165) and partly through the simple failure to reproduce. Faramir warns: “The Enemy increases and we decrease. We are a failing people, a springless autumn. . . . Childless lords sat in aged halls musing on heraldry” (TT, 362–63).

While on the other hand, of course, is the fantastic fecundity of the orcs and their allies. When Frodo sits on the Seat of Seeing he has a vision of the “Misty Mountains . . . crawling like anthills: orcs were issuing out of a thousand holes,” while “out of the East Men were moving endlessly” (FR, 518). In the battle of Helm’s Deep, “the hosts of Isengard roared like a sea” (TT, 178), “thick as marching ants” (TT, 174). They are, killed in their hundreds, but it makes no difference: “The enemy before them seemed to have grown rather than diminished” (TT, 178). In the Siege of Gondor, it takes nearly all the defenders’ strength to beat off an army from Mordor: “and yet it was but one and not the greatest of the hosts that Mordor now sent forth” (TT, 401; see also RK, 194, 206). (Significantly, the eventual defeat of the black racial danger posed by

⁸⁰ Poliakov, 292; Mosse, 73–76.

⁸¹ Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (1963; reprint New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 390–97.

Sauron and the orcs is symbolized both by the fact that the Shirechildren born in the victorious year 1420 have “a rich golden hair that had before been rare among hobbits” [RK, 375]—a token of Aryanization—and by the long list of children Frodo foresees for Sam and Rose [RK, 382]. The race has been saved.)

What Tolkien has done in creating LTR, then, is to draw on a potent complex of images and fears that, though particularly prominent in the early part of this century, goes back much further and deeper in the structures of the “political unconscious”⁸² of the white bourgeois Western psyche. This, in part, is what accounts for the “naturalness” of the narrative even in its supernaturalness. The bizarre situations of LTR strike no discordant note with us because, at a deep level, *they are completely familiar*. For he is painting a picture we have already seen innumerable times before: white civilization besieged by dark barbarity. It is simultaneously the outnumbered aristocracy surrounded by the shrieking mob, the colonial outpost about to be overrun by insurgent natives, the Christian West against the hordes of Saracens, Turks, Mongols. This explains why there are so many orcs: their very identity is predicated on multitudinousness.

VII

And this brings us to what is, in a sense, the climax of LTR: *the final solution to the orkish problem*. After all the preceding discussion, it should now come as little surprise if I reveal that the well-known twentieth-century author cited at the beginning (note 20, above), whose views on Aryans so closely describe the racial hierarchy of Middle-Earth, is Adolf Hitler, and that the excerpt is from *Mein Kampf*. In a letter written to his son in 1941, Tolkien would assert that, “There is a great deal more force (and truth) than ignorant people imagine in the ‘Germanic’ ideal,” and then went on to bewail Hitler’s “perversion” and “misapplication” of “that noble northern spirit” which he had “tried to present in its true light.”⁸³ But how much of a “misapplication” was it, given LTR’s own racial analysis of language, culture, and personhood? I am not saying, of course, that Tolkien was a Nazi. My point is rather that Hitler’s racial fantasies were not idiosyncratic, but grew out of a central tradition within European thought, and that Tolkien’s book

⁸² See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981).

⁸³ *Letters*, 55–56.

is itself fully within that tradition. And, appropriately, ends with its own final solution.

For the genocide of the orcs is, of course, part of the climactic victory over Sauron and Mordor. Yet if it were to be suggested to the average reader of the book that it ends with a great crime, the claim would probably meet with complete bewilderment. The killing of the orcs generates no moral concern (either for the Allies or the vast majority of readers and critics) because, of course, the orcs have been successfully depersonized by Tolkien, rendered as ontological zeros. The pen here prepares the way for the sword. Indeed, a case could be made that *LTR* should be required reading for courses in the literature of genocide, for precisely because of the celebrated “reality” of Middle-Earth, it becomes possible to watch, in synoptic overview, the construction of an epistemology that makes mass murder possible.

How has this been done? To begin with, there is the denial of history and geographical rootedness to the orcs—almost, one could say, the denial of time and space. The density of detail and cross-referencing which give Middle-Earth its solidity and reality are deliberately withheld from the orcs in keeping with their ontological shallowness. Certainly, there are no genealogical tables, no accounts of culture and history, no etymological speculations about their languages, no maps of their territory. The orcs are defined simply by negation, as the antipode to white culture and civilization.

There is an illuminating contrast here with the “goblins” of *TH*, who have a national territory (“Mount Gram”) (*TH*, 17), leaders (“the king Golfimbul” [*TH*, 17], “Bolg of the North” [*TH*, 279]), “cities, colonies and strongholds”, and a capital, “the great mountain Gundabad of the North” (*TH*, 279–80). But because of the symbolic significance the orcs were to acquire for Tolkien, all of this vanishes by the time of *LTR*: we hear of “anthills” rather than cities, neither Mount Gram nor Gundabad can be found on the Middle-Earth maps, and the orcs are no longer described as a sovereign (if odious) people but are merely the slaves of Sauron and Saruman. The conceptual shift is comparable to the change in the description of black Africans necessitated by the rise of the Slave Trade; a revisionist historiography developed in which the Ancient World’s knowledge of Nubia and Egypt would be erased and Africa and its inhabitants re-created:

the most significant of the obliterations of the New World’s past was that which affected the African. . . . The “Negro,” that is the color black, was both a negation of African and a unity of opposition to white. The construct of Negro, unlike the

terms African, Moor, or “Ethiope” suggested no situatedness in time, that is history, or space, that is ethno- or politico-geography. The Negro had no civilization, no cultures, no religions, no history, no place, and finally no humanity which might command consideration.⁸⁴

As with the Negroes, so with the orcs. Similarly, in the maps of Middle-Earth, Rhun and Harad are not depicted as having internal features—cities, capitals, civilizations—but are merely spatial locations. In the Eurocentric geographies of early colonialism, these empty spaces signified the unknown, but Tolkien as omniscient sub-creator cannot plead such ignorance. In this case, the white spaces signify the unpeopled character of these countries, a signal to the reader that we need pay no attention to their claims. For were a history to be provided, it would then be natural to ask what *their* version was of the reasons for this war. Gondorian expansionism? Elvish atrocities against Easterlings? The point is, of course, that we will never know, for the structure of the narrative itself precludes the asking of such questions. In a parallel fashion, our ignorance of Orkish, and Tolkien’s failure to translate, means that we are unable to assess for ourselves the “idle scrawls” and “foul symbols” on the Gondorian statue (TT, 395) that caused Frodo such disgust. Who knows what they might have said? “Gandalf, go home!” “Down with Gondorian imperialism!” “Bolg lives!” “End *apartheid* in Middle-Earth!” Tolkien tells us what we should feel without giving us the evidence.

And this holds more broadly for the general characterization of the orcs themselves. A remarkable thing about LTR, given Tolkien’s omnipotence as creator and narrator, is that he achieves his effects almost entirely through the evocation of negative associations rather than through the citation of actual deeds. The reader finishes LTR “knowing” that the orcs are evil, but I suggest the average person would be hard-pressed to come up with a substantive list of evil acts they have committed. It is an underlining of the point I made earlier: because ontology recapitulates physiology, the orcs merely have to be to *be* evil—they do not actually have to *do* anything. We “know” the orcs are evil *because* they are black, ugly, slant-eyed, misshapen, simian, savages, etc., and such creatures are, circularly, what evil is. The conclusion is independent of—indeed positively refractory to—any factual basis.

Consider the following incidents from the many skirmishes and battles of Middle-Earth. Two prisoners are tortured for information and then killed; one is skinned and nailed to a tree, the other is beheaded and

⁸⁴ Robinson, 4, 105.

has his head mounted on a stick (TH, 130–31). A weapon is devised which sets its victims on fire, sticks to them so they cannot get rid of it, and eventually burns them alive (TH, 102–3). A policy is announced of killing the enemy’s children on sight (TT, 83). Those killed in battle are not given a decent burial; rather, their bodies are desecrated, thrown into a mass grave, and burned (TT, 44). Finally, and most importantly of all, the enemy are never allowed to surrender, but are always hunted down and killed in cold blood (TH, 289–90; TI, 44, 79, 187, 191; RK, 151, 318).

The brutal savagery of the murderous orcs? Not at all; these are, in fact, the recorded actions of the *Western Allies*, war crimes under any reasonable construal of the term. The orcs’ atrocities, by contrast, are almost always subjunctive—what they *would* do, if they had the chance. But of course, they never *get* the chance, because they are always massacred in time. We see here the classic cognitive schizophrenia of the West’s encounter with the non-West: the savages have to be savagely killed before they can demonstrate their savagery, but, of course, *this* killing is completely different.

The fate of the wretched orcs is all the more striking if we set it off against the fate of Gollum, a murderer many times over. Throughout his long life (more than five centuries, according to RK, 459, 467–68), Gollum has clearly killed (and in many cases eaten) dozens of people (or at least intelligent entities) and would therefore seem a prime candidate for some terminal Middle-Earth justice. But in response to Frodo’s argument along these lines—“he is as bad as an Orc. . . . He deserves death” (FR, 92)—Gandalf, in a speech often cited as evidence of Tolkien’s great Christian moral vision, demurs, and prescribes mercy. The rigidity of Tolkien’s racial/moral categories, the unbridgeable metaphysical gulf between persons and humanoid non-persons, is nowhere more clearly revealed than in the fact of Gollum’s survival. For the whole point, *pace* Frodo, is that Gollum can never—no matter what he does, no matter *how many* people he kills—be as bad as an orc simply because of racial reasons. Being Shemitic, he is always potentially redeemable, whereas a newborn orc can be killed immediately with a clear conscience because, being Hamitic, its evil is innate, existential. So Gollum is repeatedly spared by Gandalf, the elves, and the hobbits (FR, 83, 335; TT, 280–81; RK, 273), each time going on to commit further mischief. (Similarly, the mass-murderer and traitor Saruman is also given numerous chances to repent: [TT, 240–41; RK, 319, 322–23, 368, 369].)

The average reader does not perceive these inconsistencies, does not feel in any way disturbed by the systematic slaughter of the orcs, because, as I have suggested, Tolkien is in many ways simply retelling an old tale. The racially-differentiated structure of LTR's moral and juridical codes simply reproduces actual historical earthly norms, going back at least to the Crusades, where "the same behavior, considered objectively, was 'persecution' when it was perpetrated against, and not when it was perpetrated by, the Christians."⁸⁵ Similarly, the fantastic kill-ratios and body-counts of LTR—the party in Moria killing thirteen orcs at the cost of a *scratch* to Sam (FR, 422), Boromir single-handedly dispatching twenty orcs before succumbing (TT, 18), Gimli's grisly orc-killing contest with Legolas, which he eventually wins 42 to 41 (TT, 188)—are made both normatively acceptable and fictionally plausible by the racially-coded non-personhood of the orcs. They do not strike us as reprehensible or as factually unlikely, because of their complete congruence with deeply-embedded images of white conquest over non-whites: the handful of white men with which the Aztec and Inca empires were overthrown (an "intoxicating memory" neither "Spain nor Europe ever lost"),⁸⁶ the superiority of firearms to bows and arrows, the imperial "adventure" fiction in which the intrepid white explorers outfight the teeming but inferior natives, the paradigmatically killable character of arabs, injuns, coolies, niggers, gooks. They are, in short, simply the homologs of the great colonial massacres.

"And then all the host of Rohan burst into song, and they sang as they slew, for the joy of battle was on them" (RK, 138). The joyful slaying of non-Europe by Europe which LTR celebrates begins with the battle against Islam:

Descriptions of carnage continue throughout the Crusade. . . . With the atrocities committed against Muslims there is no . . . expression of disapproval. . . . The *Gesta* repeats these occasions almost monotonously: at Antioch "they killed all the Turks and Saracens they found" . . . at al-Bara the Count of St. Gilles "killed all the Arabs, men and women, great and small" . . . at Jerusalem "our men waded up to the ankles in blood." . . . It seems clear that the murderers, doing this in cold blood, felt about the undefended men and women they killed exactly as if they had been destroying vermin.⁸⁷

We see here the original ancestors of the verminous orcs. But this pattern would be repeated as imperial Europe began to spread into other

⁸⁵ Daniel, 321.

⁸⁶ Kiernan, 10.

⁸⁷ Daniel, 134–35.

lands. “Europe’s idea of the ‘foreigner’ was based for many formative centuries exclusively on the Arab World. . . . It created, and depended on, an absolute conviction of being right.”⁸⁸ Thus, in the New World: “From the beginning, the savages of the newly discovered lands were viewed as the devil’s creation; their religions were considered as the devil’s service; and their gods as various forms of the devil. . . . With this attitude it is small wonder that between fifteen and twenty million Indians were killed or died during the half-century following the Spanish colonization of the Americas.”⁸⁹ Resistance only made things worse, confirming the savagery of the natives. In India, after the British defeat of the 1857 Sepoy rebellion, “there were savage reprisals. For the first time on such a scale, but not the last, the West was trying to quell the East by frightfulness. . . . Some of the facts that have come down to us almost stagger belief.”⁹⁰ Or the revolution in Haiti: “No savagery that has been recorded of Africans anywhere [!] could outdo some of the acts of the French in their efforts to regain control of the island.”⁹¹ Or the continuity in the U.S. expansion westwards of the treatment of the non-white enemy, from the massacres of the 1637 Pequot War to the “mere gook rule” of Vietnam: “the only good gook is a dead gook . . . the troops think that they’re all fucking savages”; “We weren’t in My Lai to kill human beings, really. We were there to kill *ideology* that is carried by—I don’t know. Pawns. Blobs. Pieces of flesh.”⁹² The list could be extended, but the logic is the same. Once the victims have been depersonized, mass murder becomes simply the cleansing of impurities. It is appropriate that the penultimate chapter of LTR should be called “The Scouring of the Shire,” for this image captures exactly the essence of the conceptual operation that the book achieves: the reduction of genocide to mere *Rassenhygiene*.

VIII

Tolkien stated more than once in his writings that LTR is based on philology and language. Thus he says in one letter that his academic and fictional work are “all of a piece, and *fundamentally linguistic* in inspiration.

⁸⁸ Daniel, 322.

⁸⁹ John G. Burke, “The Wild Man’s Pedigree,” in Dudley and Novak, 264.

⁹⁰ Kiernan, 47.

⁹¹ Kiernan, 198. The continuing influence on Kiernan of the very categories he is presumably trying to demystify should be noted.

⁹² Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 457, 456.

. . . The invention of languages is the foundation. The ‘stories’ were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse.”⁹³ Most critics have not known what to make of this beyond the obvious fact that the book itself abounds in languages.⁹⁴ I want to close by advancing a hypothesis that I think both explains this claim and confirms the validity of the analysis offered above. My source here is Martin Bernal’s fascinatingly iconoclastic recent book on the origins of Greek civilization, *Black Athena*, whose first volume bears the provocative title *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785–1985*.⁹⁵ Bernal argues that there is an “Aryan Model” of historical explanation deriving from the “Aryan myth,” and that, to a certain extent, the former still holds sway in the Western Academy. He suggests that for most of the last two millennia, European scholarship took it for granted that Ancient Greece owed a great deal to Egyptian and Phoenician civilizations. This—what he calls the Ancient Model—only began to come under serious challenge in the late eighteenth century, not, in Bernal’s opinion, because of new *evidence*, but because of the rise of European racism, and the increasing ideological importance of establishing a *cordon sanitaire* between this fountainhead of Western civilization and non-white Afro-Asia. What Bernal calls the Extreme Aryan Model denied (because of anti-Semitism) even the influence of the Phoenicians, who were seen as Jewish; but the more “moderate” postwar Aryan Model, which still prevails today, continues emphatically to reject any suggestion of significant Egyptian influence.

Now the posited connection with Tolkien’s work arises because there is an intimate link between the intellectual development of modern racism, the Romantic movement’s preoccupation with *language*, and the

⁹³ *Letters*, 219.

⁹⁴ Giddings and Holland’s book is a major exception here, since their other substantial reinterpretative move (along with the claim for an influence from popular fiction) is the argument that LTR is based on beliefs about the origins of the Indo-European language-family, the argument I myself support below. The closing chapters 10–13 of their book give numerous fascinating examples of possible puns and anagrams in LTR that, when deciphered, spell out these references. But in keeping with the pattern earlier pointed out (note 77, above), they mention the concept of the “Aryan” race, and the work of Gobineau, Chamberlain, and Vacher de Lapouge (151–53), without anywhere indicating the *racist* nature of this tradition. Moreover, their statement of their own position is itself a revealing one: “We believe that [LTR] has strong elements characteristic of the Indo-European races from whom we are descended and from whom our language is ultimately derived” (19).

⁹⁵ Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization. vol. I: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785–1985* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987). In the last chapter, Bernal pays tribute to the earlier work *Stolen Legacy* (1954) by the black scholar G. G. M. James, which remains largely unknown outside the black community, but which advanced essentially the same argument decades before.

then-new discipline of philology. Mosse points out: “Philologists concentrated upon the search for linguistic origins in an attempt to unveil the roots of race.”⁹⁶ Romanticism presupposed an organic connection between language, culture, and people so that the “purity” of a language reflected the biological “purity” of its speakers and their culture; correspondingly, there were linguistic hierarchies isomorphic with the racial and cultural hierarchies being established. The central claim of the Aryan Model was that Greek was a “pure” language and that the (Japhetic) Indo-European language family generally was connected by blood to the hypothetical Sanskrit-speaking Aryan race, and thus sharply distinguished both in genesis and subsequent development from the (Hamito-Semitic) Afro-Asiatic language family. “Since the 1840s Indo-European philology . . . has been at the heart of the Aryan Model. Then, as now, Indo-Europeanists and Greek philologists have been extraordinarily reluctant to see any connection between Greek—on the one hand—and Egyptian and Semitic, the two major non-Indo-European languages of the Ancient East Mediterranean, on the other.”⁹⁷ But as we have seen, some Europeans were more European than others, so that it began to be claimed that the Teutonic languages and peoples were superior to the (Mediterranean-contaminated) Romance languages and peoples, that German was a “pure” language similar to Greek and thus the real descendant of Sanskrit, that Indo-European should really be called Indo-Germanisch, and that the Germans themselves were the true heirs of the Aryans.⁹⁸

The correspondences with LTR are obvious. The Aryan elves bring with them to Middle-Earth their Ancient Tongue, Quenya, together with its alphabet. (Since they come from across the ocean rather than from Asia, the uncomfortable propinquity to the yellow races of the actual Aryan Model is thereby avoided.) This tongue is therefore completely separate genealogically from the “Black Speech” of Mordor and the “barbaric” tongues of the men from Rhun and Harad, as well as being linguistically superior to all the other later languages of the second-tier races (RK, appendix F). And given LTR’s identification of language with culture, race, and civilization, the story of this language is the story of the racial civilization they found in Middle-Earth, and the averting of the threat to its “pure” development

⁹⁶ Mosse, 39.

⁹⁷ Bernal, 4.

⁹⁸ My summary here relies on: Bernal, 193, 226–30, 232, 330. See also: Poliakov, chap. 9; Mosse, chap. 3.

posed by the contaminating cultural, biological, and metaphysical influences of the regions south and east. LTR is simply the Aryan version of the origins of European civilization (which is “civilization” period).

What Tolkien has in effect done, then, is to project onto a fantasy earth the central racist myth of the last millennium: that all human culture comes from the whitest of white peoples, speaking the whitest of languages, and that non-whites are a threat to civilization, culture, and humanity. The “subcreation” of Middle-Earth which is his considerable accomplishment has to be taken out of its misleadingly individualist framework and seen, more illuminatingly, as part of the general European re-invention of the world: the “creation” of the Orient, of Africa, of the Negro.⁹⁹ The contribution of Islam to preserving the knowledge of the Ancient World, the contribution of Egypt (if Bernal and other scholars are right) to creating that knowledge in the first place, are excised, and replaced by the vacant spaces of Rhun and Harad, and the history-less and culture-less orc. One could say, only half in jest, that *The Lord of the Rings* is a medievalist’s revenge on the unacknowledged and undesired ancestors of medieval Europe’s civilization. The literal genocide of the orcs with which the book concludes is in a sense of secondary importance to the cultural genocide that their creation signified in the first place. For the very fact that such a creation was at all possible is a sobering testimony to the completeness of European intellectual hegemony over the world, and its successful re-writing of history. Could there be a clearer indictment of the West’s willed ignorance of its own past, of the continued naturalness to its vision of racially-structured categorizations of personhood, than the fact that this book should have been hailed for nearly four decades for its moral insight and metaphysical truth? It is a blindness that precludes any genuine re-seeing of the orcs of the past—and present.

⁹⁹ See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Mudimbe; Cedric Robinson.