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Nine Tolkien Scholars Respond to Charles W. Mills's "The Wretched of Middle-Earth: An Orkish Manifesto"

Robin A. Reid Dr.

Texas A&M University-Commerce

Bianca Beronio

Robert T. Tally

Texas State

Cait Coker

Cami Agan

Oklahoma Christian University

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Abstract

In spite of being written over three decades ago, Mills's posthumously published "Manifesto" not only anticipates but transcends the majority, if not the totality, of the scholarship on Tolkien, race, and racism which has been published since 2003. Scholars in philosophy and related fields familiar with Mills's work will recognize that the essay was a "critical exploration of [how] a fictional racial hierarchy strikingly illuminates the ongoing influence of certain old racist ideas on our present day [sic] social realities." Reid has invited a wide-ranging Tolkienists who have read the essay to respond, briefly, on the significance of the essay to their work

Additional Keywords

racism; orcs; Mills, Charles W. "The Wretched of Middle-Earth: An Orcish Manifesto"; Race and racism in fantasy literature; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Race and racism; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Orcs

Authors

Robin A. Reid Dr., Bianca Beronio, Robert T. Tally, Cait Coker, Cami Agan, Robert Stuart, Charlotte Krausz, Tom Ue, and Helen Young

it, some other means would have arisen by which Sauron was frustrated: just as when Frodo's will proved in the end inadequate, a means for the Ring's destruction immediately appeared—being kept in reserve by Eru as it were. (228fn, emphasis in original)

Much more could be said about the Rings of Power, but I will stop here. These are just my thoughts; no doubt this has been discussed in much detail in fandom and in academia, but for that you can search the literature yourselves.

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NANCY MARTSCH has for many years been the Editor of *Beyond Bree*, Newsletter of the J.R.R. Tolkien Special Interest Group of American Mensa. She has given presentations and published on Tolkien for the Mythopoeic Society, the Tolkien Society, and others.



NINE TOLKIEN SCHOLARS RESPOND TO CHARLES W. MILLS'S "THE WRETCHED OF MIDDLE-EARTH: AN ORKISH MANIFESTO"

INTRODUCTION

ROBIN ANNE REID

IN 2022, TOLKIEN SCHOLARS WORKING ON THE TOPICS of race, racism, and Tolkien's legendarium were amazed to discover Mills's essay in *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*. An accompanying introductory essay by Chike Jeffers, Mills's literary executor, and David Miguel Gray explains the significance of the posthumously-published essay for their discipline of philosophy. Mills was an Afro-Jamaican philosopher who was born in the United Kingdom, raised in Jamaica, and worked as a faculty member in the United States. Mills continually challenged liberalism as well as the extent to which the White-dominated academic field of philosophy "failed to directly confront the problem of racism inherent in modern liberalism," and how White philosophers failed to "engage

with their counterparts in African American studies" (Greene). In addition, Mills "greatly shaped multiple generations of philosophers interested in race and racism, Africana philosophy, social and political philosophy, and ethics" (Jeffers and Gray 1). The "Manifesto" was written in the late 1980s, before Mills even began his major works. However, Mills apparently never returned to publishing on Tolkien's work.¹ The reason for posthumous publication is that when Mills submitted the essay, the editor of the unnamed journal never replied. Jeffers and Gray describe a copy of the letter, dated April 12, 1990, that Mills sent to note the lack of an editorial response ten months after he submitted "Manifesto." Jeffers apparently did not find a rejection letter which, if it existed, Mills may not have saved. And perhaps, as no doubt a number of us can attest, the editor may have never responded at all.

Jeffers and Gray are primarily concerned with the impact that the publication will have for those who study Mills's work. They emphasize that scholars in philosophy and related fields familiar with Mills's work will recognize that the essay was a "critical exploration of [how] a fictional racial hierarchy strikingly illuminates the ongoing influence of certain old racist ideas on our present day [sic] social realities" (Jeffers and Gray 2). While I agree with the importance of Mills's critical exploration, I am primarily concerned how the essay could impact Tolkien scholarship. Thus, I have invited Tolkienists who read the essay to respond, briefly, on the significance of the essay to their work.²

When I wrote "Race in Tolkien Studies: A Bibliographic Essay" (2017), I cited the earliest academic publication on the topic being published 2003, after Peter Jackson's live-action adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* resulted in critical discussion about racist imagery in the film and in Tolkien's legendarium. However, as we know now, the first published essay was not the first written. In spite of being written over three decades ago Mills's "Manifesto" not only anticipates but transcends the majority, if not the totality, of the scholarship on Tolkien, race, and racisms which has been published since 2003.

Mills anticipates how readers of Tolkien would defend the fantasy novel against charges of racism early in the essay. In the fourth paragraph, Mills rebuts the potential claim that the novel, as a fantasy, has nothing to do with the world in which we live by quoting Tolkien on the extent to which Middle-earth is both a "secondary world" and connected to "our world" (108). Mills also notes

¹ A complete list of Mills's publications can be found at "The Charles W. Mills Memorial Page," created in his honor after his death in 2021: <http://charleswills.com/books.html>.

² The nine responses, which includes my introduction, in this "Note" do not represent all, or even a majority, of scholars working on the topic, only those who saw my open call and were able to respond so quickly. I hope to do another "Note" with additional responses in future.

evidence in the novel which shows the influence of European history and myths on Tolkien's "racial hierarchy" (109):

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." (107)

Tolkien scholarship, and scholars, have been reluctant to fully acknowledge this element and have developed other defenses. Given the rise of fascisms around the world in 2023, persisting in such denial is dangerous.

THE POWER OF FICTIONAL WORLDS: EXPLORING RACISM IN MIDDLE-EARTH THROUGH CHARLES W. MILLS'S "THE WRETCHED OF MIDDLE-EARTH: AN ORKISH MANIFESTO"

BIANCA L. BERONIO

The recent publication of Mills's "Manifesto," which appeared not long after the premiere of Amazon's *The Rings of Power*, is significant for the extent to which it vindicates Tolkien fans of color who are currently witnessing a barrage of racism in online discussions of adaptations of Tolkien's legendarium. Mills argues that the racial hierarchy found in Middle-earth is modeled on the European racial hierarchy championed by Nazis and white supremacists alike, the so-called "Aryan myth" (107). Given the rise of white supremacy in the United States and Europe, the continuing relevance of Mills's work is clear.

Mills uses Tolkien's own words to support the argument that Middle-earth is modeled on our Primary World and that its history and creatures reflect truths found within our very real existence (108). He goes further by detailing the problematic descriptions of the races found on Arda, the language of which is steeped in the trappings of eugenics and is used to justify everything from segregation to the genocide of the orcs, an evil that indigenous peoples, such as my own family, know all too well and fought hard to escape (128-135). I had long suspected that places like Middle-earth were unwelcoming to people of color, unless we were there to serve, as the dwarves do, as "decent enough" sidekicks for the white heroes, singing their praises and gawking at their "white beauty" (114, 120). More often, though, we were cast as a problem to be vanquished with great haste (128-29). Mills's piece confirmed my girlhood suspicions that racism was deeply rooted in our fantasy spaces, and that it could only be combatted through responsible storytelling.

While Middle-earth was a world I loved deeply, *The Lord of the Rings*, like many of the other fairy tales and fantasy stories that filled my girlhood, was deeply colored by Eurocentric beauty standards, and a hierarchy that put people

like me close to the bottom of the food chain. This is why adaptations that seek to correct racist narratives through representation are so important, because they mean so much to readers and viewers, who wish to see themselves as heroes. Amazon's *The Rings of Power* may not be perfect, and still contains aspects of the problematic hierarchy identified by Mills, but through diverse casting and its talented writers, this adaptation elevates people of color within Middle-earth to roles of leadership and bravery.

Calling out racism and sexism can be frightening, particularly for a person of color. As a woman, I have often been cautioned of the dangers of speaking my mind, and when I first began speaking out and writing on the topics of sexism and racism within the works of Tolkien, I was warned of the phenomenon of toxic fans who scare other fans into hiding through cyberstalking. I was undeterred, and after reading Mills's "Manifesto" and learning more about his life, I am emboldened to continue championing discussions on every type of bigotry found in the fantasy fandoms I know and love. If nothing else, Mills has taught me that silence is one of the forces that largely perpetuates racist social constructs, and that speaking out against them is our only weapon against an evil that occupies both real and fictional spaces.

CHARLES W. MILLS: AN APPRECIATION

ROBERT STUART

Ironically, just before I sat down to write this appreciation of Charles Mills's wonderful "The Wretched of Middle-Earth: An Orkish Manifesto," I received my latest *Amon Hen*, which includes yet another supposed proof that Tolkien could not possibly have been racist, hoping to lay "this matter to rest once and for all" (McClain 20). Mills's article stands as a formidable barrier against such ambition. In an alternate universe, Mills's virtually irrefutable demonstration that Tolkien's legendarium is suffused with racist themes would have been published when it was written, at the end of the 1980s, and we would since have had a far more mature, nuanced, and informed discussion of that fraught topic: Tolkien and race. My recent book on the subject (published in 2022), if so advantaged, would have been a fruitful engagement with Mills's insights—an opportunity sadly missed. I am flattered, however, that the editors who have provided us with Mills's very belated publication think that its author, were he still alive, would have "devoured" (a scary word!) my own study (Jeffers and Gray 2).

It is quite incomprehensible that Mills's article was not published during his lifetime, although it was evidently submitted to an unnamed "cultural studies journal" (Jeffers and Gray 2). The article's quality shames many of the works on Tolkien that achieved publication back then, and eclipses many that have been published since. Mills's grasp of the relevant literature available

at the time is certainly impressive (apart from his deference towards Giddings and Holland's strange *J.R.R. Tolkien: The Shores of Middle-earth*), particularly when one realises that his actual field of study was political philosophy. At the same time, as readers of his superb *The Racial Contract* (1997) know, Mills's style is wonderfully lucid and engaging. I laughed out loud when reading his "translation" of the Orkish graffiti on Ithilien's decapitated royal statue (129).

Even more impressive, however, are the scope, depth, and solidity of Mills's insights. His characterisation of Tolkien's legendarium as "racially-structured" (107) is exactly right, as is his overall focus on the "Aryan Myth" (focused through definitive works by historians such as Poliakov and Mosse)—a myth foundational to European racism (107-112). As one would expect from the author of *The Racial Contract*, Mills displays an intense awareness of history, both history in Middle-earth and Middle-earth in history. Most strikingly, Mills points to the variants of medieval racism that echo throughout Tolkien's work, an insight that until recently escaped all too many of the professional medievalists who have dissected the legendarium. Fine scholars like Geraldine Heng, however, have recently illuminated the racism inherent in the high medieval culture that Tolkien so treasured, while today's anti-racist militants have bravely challenged the residual racism of medieval studies (see, for instance, the contributions introduced by D. Kim). Mills was decades ahead of the curve.

There are a few trivial flaws in the article (e.g., the mis-capitalization of "Middle-Earth"). And Mills ignores aspects of the legendarium evident beyond *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. If he had encountered the sons of Fëanor in *The Silmarillion* or *The History of Middle-Earth*, for instance, he could not possibly have concluded that there are no bad Elves (Mills 113). More seriously, there are vital issues that warrant further elaboration. While the clever linkage between Hitler and Tolkien's racist values is startling (118, 127), my own work argues that Tolkien's racial imaginary was not only different from the Führer's, but inimical to it, not least in Tolkien's anti-imperialism, which might have been mentioned (Stuart chapters 5-7). The issue of Tolkien and Nazism will undoubtedly continue to evoke controversy (I am completing a monograph titled *Tolkien in a Time of Fascism*). Finally, Mills sometimes underemphasizes the sheer ambiguity of Tolkien's work, as with the relationship between race and language (29-30). At times Tolkien indeed assumed languages' racialization (*The Peoples of Middle-earth* 306, 308). But Tolkien on other occasions categorically denied any relationship between language and race ("English and Welsh" 166). Still, neither the minor flaws nor the unresolved issues in the "Manifesto" seriously mar what is undoubtedly a landmark work of the highest quality, albeit a landmark whose installation has been sadly delayed for three decades.

ORCS AND REVOLUTION

ROBERT T. TALLY JR.

Charles Mills's "The Wretched of Middle-Earth: An Orkish Manifesto" takes its title from Franz Fanon's monumental critique of colonialism, which had employed the phrase from the opening of "L'Internationale": *Debout, les damnés de la terre* ("Arise, wretched of the earth") (Degeyter and Pottier). Mills's manifesto doubles down on this revolutionary Marxist heritage, showing how racism in Tolkien's world and in our own is enmeshed within systems of political, social, and economic inequality that oppress and exploit the subaltern. As a longtime orc sympathizer, I was thrilled by Mills's revisionary reading of Tolkien's legendarium. It is also a major contribution to Tolkien studies.

Mills notes that the orcs appear in Tolkien "as a potentially insurgent lower class, a racial proletariat" (116). As we see in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, orcs have their own cultures, communities, mores, and morals, which render them more uncouth than monstrous. From the perspective of elves and their supporters, however, that makes orcs worthy of extermination. Orcs are at once the industrial working class, associated with modern technology, and a primitive "Wild other," a race unfit for civilized societies. Their "place" is always elsewhere: orcs are both outsiders who don't belong in "our" lands and persistent threats near or within our communities, a mob threatening peace and order (Mills 115).

Orcs likewise threaten the existing structures and relations of power, which justifies their annihilation by the heroes. Orcs are depicted as "ontological zeros," as Mills says: "The pen here prepares the way for the sword" (128); established as "people without history," orcs are excluded from the legitimate spaces of the world, relegated to "slaves" of the dark powers, a term used with opprobrium and without pity. Hence, "[t]he 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" (135). The orcs are a racialized underclass used to reinforce racist social hierarchies.

"L'Internationale" exhorts the wretched of the earth to *arise*, and Mills's essay enjoins us to see the geopolitical system of Middle-earth in the light of these injustices, to revisit Tolkien's work with fresh eyes and critical thought, and to imagine alternatives. Had it been published in its own time, Mills's contribution could have jump-started the conversations on race and racism in Tolkien studies much sooner, but it is not too late. As Tolkien knew better than anyone, fantasy literature is among the most powerful means of interpreting the world, which in turn is essential to changing it. Mills's "Manifesto," calling for "a genuine re-seeing of the orcs of the past—and present" (135), is an important step in the right direction. *Le monde va changer de base* ("The world is about to

change its foundation”), as “L’Internationale” puts it . . . Orcs and other downtrodden humans of Middle-earth, unite!

And, along with them, scholars should unite in welcoming the long-overdue explorations of race, racism, and “history from below” in Tolkien studies today.

WHY DID THE GOBLINS GO TO WAR?³

TOM UE⁴

In the Department of Literature, Folklore, and the Arts at Cape Breton University, I teach a popular course on “Reading and Writing: Economy” that seeks to reevaluate our understanding of value and our relationship to money and property. We study a range of works in four thematic units: “Communism,” “Capitalism,” “Postmodern Capitalism,” and “Surviving Capitalism.” I assign works by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and George Orwell, for their critiques of capitalism, along with fiction and non-fiction by Ernest Cline, Jessica Bruder, Chloé Zhao, and others, for their ruminations over our co-existence with capitalism. I also assign *The Hobbit*, which may appear, to some, out of place because it lacks the intellectual heft of the earlier works and the timeliness of the later ones.

Yet, as I’d suggest, *The Hobbit* is right at home in a class focused on theories about economic systems. It is formally structured in terms of gains and losses. As Tolkien intimates early on, Bilbo “may have lost the neighbours’ respect, but he gained—well, you will see whether he gained anything in the end” (I.10). Tolkien’s novel accentuates the allure of capital, and how vulnerable it can make us, while arguing for the non-pecuniary kinds of value. Bilbo “would have given most”—but not all—“of his share of the profits for the peaceful winding up of these affairs” (XV.271), that is, the distribution of the treasure; and in this, he anticipates Thorin, who wins him (and us) over on his deathbed by prioritizing “food and cheer and song” (XVIII.301).

But Mills’s essay, “The Wretched of Middle-Earth,” grants us new insights into *The Hobbit* by pointing to the “illuminating contrast” between the

³ I follow Tolkien in identifying “orcs” as “goblins.” According to his author’s note, “Orc is not an English word. It occurs in one or two places but is usually translated *goblin* (or *hobgoblin* for the larger kinds)” (*Hobbit* 9; original emphases). On this, the *Oxford English Dictionary* agrees (see “Orc, n. 2”), and it credits Tolkien for having popularized the term.

⁴ I’m grateful to Kathy Cawsey, James Munday, and Philip Schofield for their friendship and for their insights and to the Centre for Learning and Teaching, the Office of the Provost & Vice President Academic, and the Office of the Vice President Research & Innovation at Dalhousie University and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

complexity of the goblins in *The Hobbit* and the simplicity of the orcs, “defined simply by negation” in *The Lord of the Rings* (128). “[W]e hear,” he writes, “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” (128). References to the Great Goblin are few, but as Mills recognizes, the goblins have their own territory and leaders (128). Gandalf is surely wrong, then, to believe that no king rules in the mountains (66), and he, and the novel’s characters, fail to understand how his killing of the Great Goblin will bring the goblins to war, even more than the lure of the dragon’s treasure.

What intellectual opportunities are before us (including my students), were we to recognize the goblins’ fierce loyalties and to include this species as active participants in the novel’s constellation of exchanges, which works to exclude them in so many levels! A closer reading of *The Hobbit* with Mills’s insights might foreground the commonalities between the novel’s different species—the goblins as much as the dwarves have been deprived—and how vulnerable capitalism can make us, leading to radical new readings of Tolkien.

“ORIENTAL” MORDOR?

CAIT COKER

What particularly struck me about Charles W. Mills’s essay was how it effectively anticipates decades of visual interpretations of Tolkien’s world, especially on television and cinema screens. Adaptations by Peter Jackson and by J.D. Payne and Patrick McKay (*The Rings of Power*) buy into the heavily coded “West vs. East” narrative that was shaped by Tolkien’s own colonial anxiety and that was updated in the early twenty-first century by the post-9/11 world order. Mills argues persuasively that *The Lord of the Rings* rewrites the Crusades (118). I find it fascinating how, while this essay sat unpublished in a Mills’s file drawer, filmmakers applied that same visual language to their adaptations while the academic and critical scholarship mostly did not.⁵

In addition to contemporary filmmakers, a 20th century Russian novelist, Kirill Eskov, published *The Last Ringbearer* in 1999. Eskov’s novel has also been largely ignored by Tolkien scholars and presents a derivative reading that is similar to Mills’s argument. The novel is a derivative retelling of *LotR*, published legally in Russia and disseminated online in fan translations. Mordor

⁵ Roger Echo-Hawk has published on “Tolkien’s Mongol-type Orcs” (*Pawneeland*) and discussed the racist attitudes toward “Asiatics” in the U.K. during Tolkien’s lifetime in a blog post (“Squint-eyed Orc-men”). In “‘Monsterized Saracens,’ Tolkien’s Haradrim, and Other Medieval ‘Fantasy Products,’” Margaret Sinex argues that Tolkien “mirrors” the medieval “othering process of the Christian West” in how he characterizes the Orcs and the Haradrim (176).

is depicted as a peaceful constitutional monarchy that is viewed as a cultural threat by its neighbors, Gondor and Rohan. The War of the Ring is presented as a politically engineered conflict that solidifies power for the ruling elites of Elves and Men. Eskov describes Elves as colonizers and foreign occupiers not unlike their depiction in *Rings of Power*.

Mills intercedes with his readings of both the Orcs and Men who follow Sauron as specifically Islamic. This reading simultaneously looks forward to other texts and provides a new political context to *LotR* as a novel of the mid-twentieth century; additional nuances are gained if we reread its reception within the context of American, British, and European engagement in the Middle East, from the 1953 Iranian coup d'état to the later Revolution and, eventually, the Axis of Evil. Ultimately, the incorporation of Mills's essay into the mainstream scholarship of Tolkien has the potential to enable retroactive and new future readings that will expand the field.

RESISTING ELF-CENTRISM

CAMI AGAN

Charles Mills's "Manifesto" not only helped correct my own tendencies toward Elf-centric readings of my primary area of research, First Age tales, but it also reinforced many of the class discussions about orcs in my Studies in Tolkien course. Firstly, his claims about the hierarchy of race in Middle-earth, "elves at the top; dwarves, hobbits, and men in the middle; and orcs at the bottom" (110), redirected my Elf-centric reading of the *Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth* (*Morgoth* 301-6), written for an upcoming collection on Tolkien and race (Agan). In the paper on the dialogue I originally presented at the Tolkien Society conference "Tolkien and Diversity," I argued that despite differences in gender, race, and (im)mortality, Finrod and Andreth's dialogue remains a positive model of connection and communication. The argument emphasizes Finrod's conciliatory vision of a renewed Arda, with Humans as lords and Elves serving Humans. This vision inverts the power positions of Elves/Humans and can only exist because Finrod values Andreth's perspective.

However, reading Mill's convincing claims that Middle-earth retains "the evaluation of moral, aesthetic, and social worth by race, [and] the restriction of culture and civilization to 'higher' races (111), prompted me to return to the dialogue and read it through Andreth's perspective, or to resist the Elven perspective as primary. I then realized that, while Finrod's vision offers transformative possibilities, it does not resolve Andreth's questions about difference and the power of evil in First Age Beleriand. My upcoming chapter on the *Athrabeth* now attempts to embrace the dialogue's complexities: it (attempts to) enact a potential transformation of Elf-Human destiny (in Finrod's vision); but this vision merely inverts hierarchies of race and power; and the

work remains Elf-centric in its promise of a restored future for Humans only in some far-off time/place. Finrod emphasizes the kinship of Elves/Humans as Children of Eru, but Andreth underlines their difference, and her questions about Human suffering and death remain unanswered and unresolved. After reading and discussing Mills, I have come to see that, like the larger legendarium, the *Athrabeth* attempts to but cannot escape its own Elf-centric, hierarchical systems.

Secondly, Mills's fascinating conclusions about the "genocide" (135) of the enemy orcs at the end of *LotR* reinforces observations my upper-level students over the past ten years have made: these students are increasingly uncomfortable with the dehumanizing construction of orcs. Consistently, students sympathize with the orc "Other," as they question the text's use of phrases such as "crawling like anthills" (*LotR* II.10.400), the pronoun "it" for orcs, and the indiscriminate mowing down of orcs in battle. While I am proud that these young thinkers see Tolkien's problematic construction of the orcs, I cannot help but imagine how scholarly and pedagogical treatments of orcs, trolls, etc. could have been a generation further on if the Mills essay had appeared in the early 1990s.

In future Studies in Tolkien courses, I am eager to include Mills's essay into a week's discussion, possibly as we attempt to synthesize the *LotR* near the course's conclusion. His insights as to how "The average reader does not [...] feel in any way disturbed by the systematic slaughter of the orcs, because [...] Tolkien is in many ways simply retelling an old tale" that casts the West as civilizer should spark important conversations about how texts (literary, historical, journalistic) construct the "other" (131). What is not there, in this case an accounting or even a justification for the killing of orcs, can be as important as what is there, as I often remind my students. In the critical and pedagogical spheres, then, Mills's essay enacts what we hope all literary criticism will: it raises questions, sparks re-evaluation of our own work, points to new avenues of consideration, and makes vital connections between text and world.

"THE WRETCHED OF MIDDLE-EARTH": A RESPONSE

CHARLOTTE KRAUSZ

I was introduced to Charles W. Mills's "The Wretched of Middle-Earth: An Orkish Manifesto" by Robin Anne Reid at a weekly Tolkien research and fan group. I did a year-long mentorship on Tolkien studies through my high school with Robin. During the 2022-23 academic year, she helped me explore the complexities of race and racism in Tolkien's work and the surrounding academic discussion. Mills's essay was published at the perfect time for my project. Not only did it coincide with my research, but it was published at the

same time that Amazon's *Rings of Power* was facing a racist backlash because it cast actors of color.

The "Manifesto" is wonderful not only because of Mills's perspective as a scholar of color, but because it was written some thirty years prior to today's debate. More than any academic study on race in Middle-earth that I have read, Mills calls Tolkien out for the essentialist and hierarchical racism of Middle-earth. Tolkien scholarship must listen to what Mills has to say. It is possible to both admire Tolkien's rich imagination and works, as I have done my whole life, while acknowledging its racist—and at times—fascist elements.

As a seventeen-year-old, I come from the generation of Tolkien and fantasy fans who grew up with the Peter Jackson films. Racism in fantasy is not treated today as it was in the 1950s, when *The Lord of the Rings* was published, or in the late 1980s when Mills's "Manifesto" could not get published. High fantasy has drifted away from the Elves, Dwarves, and Orcs that Mills criticizes into new territory. Postcolonial fantasy by authors like R.F. Kuang and N.K. Jemisin are on the rise, and even writers of high fantasy like Brandon Sanderson are deconstructing the stereotype of "evil races." In response to the Black Lives Matter protests, Dungeons and Dragons removed racial alignment from the evil races of goblins and dark-elves (Wizards of the Coast). The writers and creators of fantasy games are progressing, albeit slowly. So where does that leave Tolkien? What about future adaptations of his work? What about the decades of Tolkien-imitators who copied the Professor's racial worldbuilding? Mills's essay paves the way for those questions, and more, to be answered.

Lastly, I am a fantasy writer and worldbuilder myself. Mills's "Manifesto" and other works have made me rethink the basic principles of race, species, and ethnicity in the building of my secondary worlds. The ultimate message of Mills's argument is that Middle-earth's "races" do not exist in a vacuum. I hope that his words will find a receptive audience. The time is now.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO CHANGE THE LANDSCAPE OF SCHOLARSHIP?

HELEN YOUNG

It is tempting to think that the landscape of scholarship about race and racism in Tolkien studies would have been profoundly different if Charles W. Mills's essay had been published in the early 1990s rather than in 2022. However, the context in which Mills wrote the essay, and the major divide in Tolkien studies about race and racisms (see Reid above) makes it difficult to believe that any single work would have substantially changed the broad patterns. As a scholar whose perspectives have changed over the past decade or so because they have been informed by the expertise of scholars of color working on race (Young), I do not claim that others' interpretations may not have shifted had Mills's essay been published sooner. But given the history and

current state of the field, I find it unlikely that significant changes in it would have been inevitable or universal.

In 1998, ten years after the publication-that-wasn't, Patrick Curry wrote that theoretically-informed critical readings of race and class in Tolkien's work were "fatuous" and "failed [...] miserably" (Curry 6), taking a dismissive position that is repeated by other defensive scholars. It is hard to see that Mills's essay would have changed Curry's assessment, not least because it was repeated in his 2004 reissue (6) and the unpaginated 2012 e-book version. Tolkien studies is and has been shaped by primarily White scholars trained in literary and medieval studies, even if some have developed relevant expertise in race and racisms. Medieval studies in particular is and has been frequently hostile to scholars of color and to scholarship on race, as well as being deeply imbricated in White supremacy (Rambaran-Olm, Leake, and Goodrich; D. Kim "Politics").

Essays that offer critical readings of race in Tolkien's work and thought are cited noticeably less frequently than those that take a defensive approach, as a snapshot of Google Scholar citations indicates. Christine Chism's 2003 defensive comparison of Tolkien's work with that of contemporary Nazi supporters is cited forty-nine times compared to twenty-six for Niels Werber's 2005 article on the German reception of Tolkien's novel and Peter Jackson's film adaptations which highlights their resonances with Nazi racisms. Werber asks whether the contemporary "tremendous success" of *The Lord of the Rings* presciently raises "the very disturbing question" of whether Nazi racisms were re-emerging (242). Anderson Rearick's defensive article has been cited eighty-seven times compared to sixty-four for Sue Kim's more critical one although both essays appeared in the same journal issue in 2004. Mills's essay could, and very likely would, been dismissed just as easily as the other critical works on race and racism in Tolkien's writing and thought.

Mills's essay, nonetheless, would have spoken early and importantly to the concerns about race and racisms that have been articulated by readers, including but not only scholars informed by contemporary critical theory, since the 1950s. The clear connection Mills makes between long-held White European fears of invasion and conquest, which resonate with the so-called Great Replacement Theory that animates much of the far- and extreme-right at present, could have re-directed the conversations more towards the Whiteness at the heart of Tolkien's work sooner. What could have happened is largely a moot point: no doubt something would have been different, but what or how much is only speculation. We are now faced, however, with a new opportunity to change the landscape of Tolkien studies in the 21st century, sixty-nine years after *The Lord of the Rings* was published and thirty-three years after Mills apparently gave up on trying to publish his essay on Tolkien.

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ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

BIANCA L. BERONIO is a high school English teacher with the Austin Independent School District and earned a BA in English and Political Science from Texas State University. As a current graduate student at Texas A&M Commerce pursuing a MA in English, her focus of study is feminist theory, indigenous narratives, and children's literature.

CAMI D. AGAN is Professor of English at Oklahoma Christian University. Her Tolkien scholarship focuses primarily on the First Age Tales, and her recent publications include "Legal Precedent and Noldorin History: Míriel's Weaving" (shortlisted for the Tolkien

Society Award for best article), and her forthcoming edited collection *Cities and Strongholds of Middle-earth* (Mythopoeic Press).

CAIT COKER is Associate Professor and Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is Co-Editor of the Women in Book History Bibliography (womensbookhistory.org) and much of her work is located at the intersections of gender, genre, and print history. She has published widely on such topics as the history of women printers, the textual intersections of science fiction readers and writers, and bibliography as a discipline.

CHARLOTTE KRAUSZ is a student at the University of St. Andrews. In her spare time, she writes and researches science fiction and fantasy. Her poetry has appeared in the Mythopoeic Society's *Mythic Circle*.

ROBIN ANNE REID is an independent scholar whose current projects include two anthologies under contract with McFarland. The first is co-edited with Christopher Vaccaro and Stephen Yandell, "*There are many paths to tread*": *Queer Approaches to Tolkien's Middle-earth*, and the second is *Race, Racisms, and Racists: Essays on J. R. R. Tolkien's Legendarium, Adaptations, and Readers*. Her next project is a monograph on atheist, agnostic, and animist readers of Tolkien.

ROB STUART is a senior honorary research fellow in the School of Humanities at the University of Western Australia. After a career spent teaching and researching the history of European ideologies, he has devoted a decade and more to a multi-volume project on 'The Politics of Middle-earth,' of which his *Tolkien, Race, and Racism in Middle-earth* is the first fruit.

ROBERT T. TALLY JR. is Professor of English at Texas State University. His recent books include *The Fiction of Dread: Dystopia, Monstrosity, and Apocalypse* (2023), *J.R.R. Tolkien's The Hobbit: Realizing History Through Fantasy* (2022), *For a Ruthless Critique of All That Exists: Literature in an Age of Capitalist Realism* (2022), and *Representing Middle-earth: Tolkien, Form, and Ideology* (forthcoming).

TOM UE is Co-Editor of *Film International* and Assistant Professor in Literature and Science at Dalhousie University. He is the author of *Gissing, Shakespeare, and the Life of Writing* (Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming) and *George Gissing* (Liverpool University Press, forthcoming); and the editor of *George Gissing, The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming). Ue is an Honorary Research Associate at University College London and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

HELEN YOUNG is a Senior Lecturer in Literary Studies in the School of Communication and Creative Arts at Deakin University. Helen completed a Bachelor of Creative Arts (Distinction)/ Bachelor of Arts (Hons I) at the University of Wollongong, and a PhD in medieval English literature at the University of Sydney. Helen's research interests include historical and contemporary whiteness studies, popular culture, and far-Right extremist cultures; recent publications include, co-authored with Dr Kavita Mudan Finn, *Global Medievalism: an Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).