What Does It Mean to Talk about Tolkien and Diversity? A Look within and without the Legendarium

Yvette Kisor
Ramapo College of New Jersey, ykisor@ramapo.edu

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I would like to begin by thanking the Tolkien Society for inviting me to speak to you today. I am especially grateful to them because my association with the Society has been fairly brief. I joined the Society in 2018 and attended the Tolkien Seminar that precedes the International Medieval Congress at the University of Leeds where I was able to participate in the Tolkien sessions put together by the accomplished Dr. Dimitra Fimi. I was able to experience as well Tolkien 2019 in Birmingham last summer, the Tolkien Society's celebration of their fiftieth anniversary. My experience of both meetings was an exciting and fruitful introduction to the British exploration of Tolkien's works. This is my first time attending Oxonmoot, and even though our new pandemic reality means it is a very different experience, I am so grateful to be here with you all today. In fact, perhaps I should acknowledge the silver lining that has emerged with the pandemic-required virtual nature of this meeting, because in the world before COVID-19, my attendance would have been all but impossible given the start of the academic semester in my US college and the requirements of my attendance stateside.

The Tolkien Society asked me to talk to you today about Tolkien and diversity, and I was happy to answer in the affirmative because I believe issues around diversity are deeply important, not only to Tolkien studies, but perhaps more crucially, to situations in the real world. I know our global audience is not unaware of the concerns and controversies currently blowing up on the American continent around the policing of black bodies and the ways systemic racism is impacting the lives of black Americans and their families. I know this because I see protests taking place in Europe and around the world in support of the Black Lives Matter movement in America. I respond to these issues as an immigrant to America—an immigrant who arrived at the age of six, the average age of the so-called Dreamers who came to America via much less privileged routes than I did. No harrowing journey for me—I arrived via plane with my parents and two younger sisters. My strongest memory of that time is seeing snow for the first time—in April, no less, as we arrived in Minnesota, of all places. But to my topic: diversity in Tolkien.

As my title states, I would like to explore this topic from two vantage points: from both within Tolkien's legendarium and from without. I should say at the outset that I am aware that diversity is a broad term and encompasses many aspects of difference: differences of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, ableness, socioeconomic status, religious belief, ideology, and more. A thorough discussion of Tolkien and diversity would cover much, much more than I am going to touch on today, but that is the nature of a talk like this one. Hopefully my remarks will open up a broader conversation about many more aspects of diversity in Tolkien than I can hope to cover here now. I am focusing today on issues of race, and

perhaps that is in large part due to my identity as an American. Issues of race loom large in my adopted country and my forefronting of racial diversity may be due to that fact. I say that with full acknowledgement that I understand that it is different in the UK and was certainly different in Tolkien's own day. But with all that said, that is where we are today.

I want to begin within Tolkien's legendarium, and for this part of my talk I need to state first my indebtedness to Dr. Dimitra Fimi's excellent book *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History: From Fairies to Hobbits*, and my endorsement of that book as the first place to begin if you have an interest in these issues. I will not rehash her extensive research into these concerns but simply present some of her conclusions as a way of moving forward in this inquiry. The mythology Tolkien creates as he constructs this world is hierarchical in nature both in terms of the relationships among different beings and peoples and within specific species. How rigid that hierarchy is is a point we can explore shortly. But first, the big picture: what Tolkien referred to as the "hierarchical reordering of the seven categories of beings" (*PE* 14: 7, qtd. in Fimi 141): at the top the Valar, then the Fays, then the Elves and Fairies, then the Children of Men, followed by the Earthlings, then Beasts and Creatures, and finally Monsters. Bear in mind this is very early in Tolkien's development of his mythology and both terminology and conception change in later formulations. Earthlings, for example, include the Dwarves who were evil at this point, and Monsters refer to Morgoth's creatures, mostly Orcs and demons.

Tolkien is drawing here on an important medieval concept of the ordering of all creation known as the Great Chain of Being (*Scala Naturae*, Ladder of Being). Derived from Plato (c. 400 B.C.E.) and Aristotle (*Historia Animalium* and Prime Mover in *Metaphysics* c. 350 B.C.E.) and developed by later Neoplatonic philosophers Plotinus (c. 250) and Proclus (c. 450) it was further developed and Christianized in the Middle Ages by Christian scholastic philosophers like Thomas Aquinas (1224/25-1274) and remains the defining view of the universe through the eighteenth century. The Great Chain of Being organizes the universe according to the mix of Spirit and Matter with pure Spirit at the top to pure Matter at the bottom. At its simplest the Chain consists of God at the top, followed by the Angels, Humans, Animals, Plants, and Minerals.

However, the hierarchy is not confined to the relationships among different beings, i.e., angels being superior to human beings, but exists as well among different types within a single group. Angels are not all of equal status—there are nine orders of angels, and the ordering is not simply a division into types, but a hierarchy. There were attempts in the Middle Ages to alter the hierarchy and propose different schema, but the idea of hierarchical organization itself is taken as a given. So too animals are ranked, with wild predatory animals like the lion at the top, domestic animals in the middle (with more useful animals like horses and dogs seen as superior to more docile ones, like sheep) and creatures like insects much

lower down, though the bottom rung is reserved for snakes due to their role in the Garden of Eden. For plants, trees are at the top followed by plants that produce food, and so forth. Unsurprisingly, for minerals metals are at the top with gold topmost, then rocks, soil, sand, grit, dust, and finally dirt at the bottom. I have gone into a bit of detail here in order to make apparent how pervasive the concept of hierarchy is to the system.

I did, however, leave out one category, as I am sure you have not failed to notice: Humans. Their hierarchical relationships fall into several categories, and there is interplay among them. The first has to do with nobility of bloodlines, and those with noble blood are seen as superior to the peasant, and those with royal blood are seen as superior to both. This leads to notions such as the divine right of kings, as the superior right of those with royal blood to rule over others is seen as God-given. There is also a hierarchy of gender in this system, and it will shock no one to hear that in this scheme men are seen as superior by nature to women. However, I began with nobility rather than gender as it is the stronger force as these categories intersect: the noble woman is perceived as superior to the male peasant. I am also studiously avoiding the word "class," finding the term "nobility" much more accurate to a medieval point of view and preferring to leave modern concepts of class out of the conversation.

I am even more leery of the concept of race because the modern idea of what race is does not line up well with the medieval one. In the Middle Ages, race was more typically viewed through the lens of religion. The races of the world are seen as descending from the progeny of Noah and the main racial divisions were seen as deriving from the three sons of Noah: European from Japheth, Semitic from Shem, and African from Ham. However, this is not the only way this tripartite descent is described. Geographically, typical T-O maps of the time associate Shem with Asia rather than the Semitic. This first map is an extremely simple one, showing the known world divided into the three continents Asia, Europe, and Africa. You can see why they are called T-O maps as their shape consists of a T inscribed in a circle. Note that Asia is at the top because medieval maps are generally oriented with east at the top because east was associated with Paradise. If we lay a modern map on its side so that east is at the top rather than north, we see that the basic geography is correct. A more complex version shows the association of each region with one of the sons of Noah: Asia with Shem, Europe with Japheth, and Africa with Ham, and finally a pictorial representation depicts the distinctions among the three regions primarily through details of dress rather than skin color.

Thus, in works like *Intersections of Gender, Religion and Ethnicity in the Middle Ages* (Palgrave, 2011), editors Cordelia Beattie and Kirsten A. Fenton generally pair religious difference with ethnicity and observe that the editors of *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), Sharon Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack, often do the same. Robert Bartlett has

argued that in "the Middle Ages … religion meant membership of a community much more than adherence to a set of principles or beliefs … there was a sense in which one was born a Christian, a Muslim, or a Jew, just as one was born English or Persian" (42).

What all this suggests is that in this conception, hierarchical relationships among beings, both among different orders of beings and within a category of being, are extensive. They are also conceived of as natural, part of the structure of the universe, and the intention of God's creation. Further, the Great Chain of Being is seen as a rigid hierarchy. There is no movement up and down the chain except through sin. To seek to move up the chain as Satan does demonstrates the sins of pride and ambition and it is possible to see the entirety of his journey in Milton's *Paradise Lost* as repeated acts of debasement as he takes on forms moving down the Chain of Being until he descends at last into the body of the snake: the creature at the bottom of the animals.

Tolkien's conception, while still hierarchical, allows for more flexibility and even some possibilities for, perhaps, reversal. But first, his system. Beyond the hierarchy of beings already discussed as it developed (originally Valar, Fays, Elves and Fairies, Children of Men, Earthlings, Beasts and Creatures, Monsters), there are hierarchies established within each group. Other than the early "hierarchical reordering of the seven categories of beings" (PE 14: 7, qtd. in Fimi 141) mentioned previously, Tolkien does not specifically enumerate such a list in his published writings, other than Treebeard's song cataloging the living creatures of Middle-earth (*TT* III.iv.67), as Fimi points out (141-2). However, such a hierarchy can be inferred without great difficulty. There is not a specific one-to-one correspondence between Tolkien's hierarchy of beings and the Great Chain of Being, i.e. the Valar do not correspond in all points to Angels, but the concept of moving down the hierarchy as creatures' degree of Spirit vs. Matter declines is fundamental to both. In that sense, God and Eru / Ilúvatar clearly head their respective hierarchies as pure spirit.

Like Angels the Valar and Maiar dwell initially with God/Eru and like Angels there is a differing of degree, though nothing corresponding directly to the nine orders of Angels. The Maiar are described as "other spirits whose being also began before the World, of the same order as the Valar but of less degree" who function as "the servants and helpers" of the Valar (*Sil* 30), indicating a twofold differentiation within this order of being and a clear distinction of roles. The Valar also differ among themselves in terms of power and closeness to Eru and there is a secondary bifurcation as Nine of the Valar are "of chief power and reverence," later eight after the removal of Melkor, termed "the Aratar, the high ones of Arda: Manwë and Varda, Ulmo, Yavanna and Aulë, Mandos, Nienna, and Oromë" (*Sil* 29). It can be observed that Tolkien does not exclude the female Valar from this list and creates female figures of power and majesty; it can also be observed that the

female figures are fewer, and that proves true among all the peoples he creates. As a whole, this group shows a tripartite hierarchy of the Aratar, the rest of the Valar, and the Maiar.

There is a similar tripartite hierarchical division among the Elves; however, it includes an additional element not featured in the hierarchy of the Valar, and certainly not in the Great Chain of Being: the element of choice. The most significant division of the Elves is not described as of their natures but a result of their decision whether or not to heed the summons of the Valar. Thus, those who refuse the summons, the Avari, i.e. the Unwilling, never attain the benefits of dwelling in Aman among the Valar, benefits both practical in terms of wisdom and skill but also spiritual in terms of closeness to the Valar and the light of the trees.

The situation of Elvish hierarchies is complicated, however, because there is the hierarchy that results from the choice to journey to Valinor or not, but there are also groupings generated through kinship which intersect. Ingwë, Finwë, and Elwë achieve prominence because they are chosen by Oromë to serve as ambassadors, visiting Valinor and returning to counsel their people to heed the summons, thus becoming leaders. Ingwë leads the Vanyar, Finwë's people are the Noldor (those with knowledge), and Elwë's the Teleri. They also march to Valinor in three waves: Ingwë leads the Vanyar first, Finwë leads the Noldor second, and Elwë brings the Teleri last. The ordering of the marches implies a hierarchy and correlates with increased time in Valinor. Further, the last group, the Teleri (meaning "the last"), are described as "tarr[ying] on the road" and "not wholly of a mind to pass from the dusk to the light of Valinor" (*Sil* 53). Thus, we can see an interplay of kinship and choice: the Vanyar are superior because they hasten on the march while the Teleri linger on the road, and because the Vanyar hasten they achieve greater closeness with the Valar while the Teleri delay the full journey to Aman, remaining on the island Tol Eressëa (the Lonely Isle) for many years. The Noldor arrive in Aman with the Vanyar, but they do not remain there, returning to Middle-earth upon the destruction of the Two Trees. Thus, Ingwë is termed "the most high lord of all the Elvish race" and his people the Vanyar are "the Fair Elves, the beloved of Manwë and Varda" (*Sil* 53).

The great sundering of the Elves is expressed two ways: the separation of the Avari from the other Elves is an act of choice, their refusal to heed the summons of the Valar. However, the other way to represent the division is expressed through the terms Calaquendi and Moraquendi, the first group referring to those Elves who have seen the light of the Trees and the second group those who have not. Therefore, the Moriquendi include more than just the Avari: it includes also the Úmanyar, those who set out on the road but never came to Aman, some becoming lost, others turning aside, or lingering (*Sil* 53).

The situation for Men works similarly in some ways, such as a tripartite kinship division, but for Men the hierarchies appear to be produced less through

choice and more by nature, though choice still plays a key role. Just as there were three kindreds of the Elves who heeded the summons of the Valar, there were three Houses of Men befriended by the Elves: the House of Bëor, the House of Haleth, and the House of Hador. The House of Bëor is the first group of Men to cross into Beleriand (*Sil* 140) and Bëor describes the House of Haleth as "a people from whom we are sundered in speech" whereas the House of Hador speaks a "tongue … more like to ours" (*Sil* 140). Of the three Houses the House of Hador is stated to be "greatest among them" and they are described as "yellow-haired … and blue-eyed" as opposed to those of the House of Bëor who "were dark or brown of hair, with grey eyes" (*Sil* 148). Those of the House of Haleth are described as like to those of the House of Bëor but of lesser stature. Fimi has noted how the differences of physique and character correspond to concepts in the early twentieth century of the three European races: the Nordic, the Alpine, and the Mediterranean (145).

The situation grows more complicated once we move beyond the Silmarillion and the First Age, but once again Tolkien opts for a tripartite hierarchy. It is perhaps best described by Faramir in a conversation with Frodo: "For so we reckon Men in our lore, calling them the High, or Men of the West, which were Númenóreans; and the Middle Peoples, Men of the Twilight, such as are the Rohirrim and their kin that dwell still far in the North; and the Wild, the Men of Darkness" (*TT*, IV, v, 287). The Númenóreans descend from the Edain, from those Men who traveled into Beleriand and befriended the Elves, learned from them, looked on their faces which held the light of Aman, and were gifted with long life and the island of Númenor for their role in the battle against Morgoth. The Middle Peoples descend from those Men of the first Age who never journeyed west into Beleriand and did not benefit from friendship with the Elves. As Faramir goes on to say, the Rohirrim are descended from those of the House of Hador, "from such of his sons and people as went not over Sea into the West, refusing the call" (*TT*, IV, v, 287). The last phrase in particular associates them with the Avari, those of the Elves who refused the summons of the Valar. Thus, the superiority of the Númenóreans is not portrayed as natural but develops from choices made. That superiority of the Númenóreans is further complicated by the way Gondor is portrayed as a dying land alongside the younger and more vigorous Rohan. Faramir describes the Men of Gondor as "a failing people, a springless autumn" (*TT*, IV, v, 286), echoing a decaying Rome.

The Wild, the Men of Darkness, are those who fight alongside Sauron in the Third Age, such as the Haradrim and Easterlings, and those who fought alongside Morgoth in the First Age. They are first referred to as the Swarthy Men, described as entering Beleriand after the Dagor Bragollach, and at first their allegiance is somewhat mixed (*Sil* 157). Some are "already secretly under the dominion of Morgoth, and came at his call" but some ally with the Elves and while some prove faithless, some were faithful (*Sil* 157). However, the betrayal of some

Easterlings at the Nirnaeth Arnoediad (Unnumbered Tears) proves decisive and from that point on "the hearts of Elves were estranged from Men, save only those of the Three Houses of the Edain" (*Sil* 195), who of course become the Númenóreans. In this depiction, the Swarthy Men initially received the benefit of friendship with the Elves just as the Edain did but lost that opportunity permanently through the choice of some to ally with Morgoth rather than the Noldor.

Thus, choice can be seen at the base of the hierarchy Faramir describes as the High Númenóreans go back to the choice the Edain made to fight Morgoth alongside the Elves, while the Middle Peoples like the Rohirrim go back to the choice not to heed the call to travel West, and the Wild Men of Darkness go back to the choice to betray the Noldor they had allied with and fight for Morgoth. In this way they reflect the hierarchy that arises among the Elves based on their choice to heed the summons of the Valar. However, Tolkien adds to his characterization of the hierarchical relationships among Men descriptions of physique and character that are largely absent from that of Elves. The characterizations of the three Houses of the Edain and their alignment with the idea current in Tolkien's day of the three European races has already been asserted. The descriptions of the Swarthy Men, the Easterlings, are problematic, as is the name "Swarthy Men," meaning literally "of a dark hue; black or blackish, dusky," as the OED states. They are described as "short and broad, long and strong in the arm; their skins were swart or sallow, and their hair was dark as were their eyes" (*Sil* 157). The description suggests through the color markers "swart" and "sallow" a racialized demarcation. So, while a choice can be seen as creating the hierarchy, the reality is that those Men allied with Morgoth are dark-skinned.

The issue of black bodies being associated with Morgoth and coded evil is most apparent, though, not with Men but with Orcs. Orcs are not really described in *The Silmarillion*, though their onslaught is described as the "black tide out of the North" (*Sil* 157). There are a few descriptions in *The Lord of the Rings*, however. In Moria the Fellowship encounters "a huge orc-chieftain, almost man-high … [h]is broad flat face was swart, his eyes were like coals, and his tongue was red" (*FR*, II, v, 339). The Isengarders who guard Merry and Pippin are described as "large, swart, slant-eyed Orcs" (*TT*, III, iii, 54). Descriptions are few and brief, but they are clear, and Tolkien was more explicit in his letters: "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" (*Letters* 274). One need only recall the old tripartite racial division of humans among Caucasoid, Mongoloid, and Negroid to see that Tolkien is here describing how he drew on the physical attributes associated with the Mongoloid—and in an interesting conflation, also drawing on the dark skin associated with the Negroid in the descriptions of Orcs present in *The Lord of the Rings*.

In terms of their place in the hierarchy, Orcs occupy the lowest position, though their origin as Elves makes this deeply ironic. They occupy this place not through choice, but not by nature either—it is a result of torture, as Elves caught by Melkor were "by slow arts of cruelty … corrupted and enslaved" and then bred (*Sil* 50). Part of this transformation is physical, and fair bodies become black. It should be noted that Tolkien was troubled by Orcs' origin as Elves and late in his writings was struggling with it, deciding at one point that they were not originally Elves but Men, for it was fundamental to his cosmology that Melkor could not create beings but could only twist what Eru had already created ("Myths Transformed" *Morgoth's Ring*, 408-13). Much of these musings are provisional and sometimes contradictory, but Orcs do not appear to have their own wills in a full sense; when Frodo claims the Ring and Sauron becomes aware of him, for example, "his slaves quailed, and his armies halted, and his captains suddenly steerless, bereft of will, wavered and despaired" (*RK*, VI, iii, 223). The movement down the hierarchy manifested by an Elf being transformed into an Orc can be viewed as due to the presence of evil in the world in the form of Melkor, but as noted Tolkien was never fully comfortable with his notion of how Orcs came to be.

Perhaps the most radical flexibility in the hierarchy he establishes concerns the relationship between Elves and Men. The superiority of Elves to Men is not described as natural but one that develops for a variety of reasons and can be overcome. Both are referred to as the Children of Ilúvatar. At the dawn of Men, who awoke with the first rising of the Sun, it is said that "in those days, Elves and Men were of like stature and strength of body, but the Elves had greater wisdom, and skill, and beauty; and those who had dwelt in Valinor and looked upon the Powers as much surpassed the Dark Elves in these things as they in turn surpassed the people of mortal race" (*Sil* 104). The physical similarity is noteworthy and the greater wisdom and skill of the Elves a function of time, and for those who had lived among the Valar, their superiority due to their influence and the light of the Trees. Individual Men can rise to greatness that parallels or even exceeds that of Elves. It is remarkable that in the Last Battle described in the prophecy of Mandos Tolkien gave the prime role to Túrin Turambar so that a Man, fighting alongside the Valar, gives Morgoth his death blow. No Elf is mentioned but a prominent role is given to Eärendel, the half-Elven offspring of Tuor and Idril (*Lost Road* 333).

The hierarchy can even be inverted if we take seriously the mortality of Men as a gift of Ilúvatar. Elves are not truly immortal but long-lived, fated to end when Arda does. But Men are not bound to the confines of Arda and when they die, they depart and go "whither the Elves know not" (*Sil* 42). Further, Men shall join in the Second Music of the Ainur and the remaking of the world, the implication being that Elves shall not. At Men's creation, their hierarchical relation to Elves is unclear. Ilúvatar asserts the Elves' superiority in certain areas, namely those of beauty and bliss as he declares them to be "the fairest of all earthly creatures, and they shall

have and shall conceive and bring forth more beauty than all my Children; and they shall have the greater bliss." However, he gives to Men "a new gift" (*Sil* 41). That gift seems to be a greater share in free will, "a virtue to shape their life, amid the powers and chances of the world, beyond the Music of the Ainur, which is fate to all things else" (*Sil* 41). Here death as freedom from the confines of Arda goes hand in hand with the gift of freedom, and from that perspective the hierarchy seems to favor Men.

A further way to challenge the apparent hierarchy between Elves and Men is through the half-Elven. Union between Men and Elves is rare, but it produces greatness. The union of Tuor and Idril produces Eärendel, who will find Valinor and successfully seek the help of the Valar to defeat Morgoth. He does this alongside his wife Elwing, the half-Elven granddaughter of Beren and Lúthien; Lúthien herself is the offspring of the Maia Melian and the Elf Thingol, further evidence of the disruption that is possible to Tolkien's hierarchy. The union of Aragorn and Arwen reunites the sundered lines of the half-Elven and leads to a renewal of the kingdom of Gondor. Thus, while the Great Chain of Being is a rigid structure that imagines any movement up and down the Chain only as sin, Tolkien's hierarchy is flexible, with movement not only possible but viewed positively, and often at the formation of the hierarchical structures one finds choice to operate.

In addition to the Great Chain of Being Tolkien is drawing on another very old concept: that of the Deteriorating Ages of Man, a second kind of hierarchical structure. This theory posits a world in decline moving from a blissful origin through various ages of increasing suffering. The Greek writer Hesiod wrote about five ages: a Golden Age when men lived without sorrow, toil, or the pains of aging, and death came painlessly after a life in which they did no labor for their sustenance. This was followed by a Silver Age in which men could not refrain from doing harm to one another and did not serve the gods. The Bronze Age produced men characterized by violence and war and was followed by the Heroic Age, further characterized by battle and war, and finally the Iron Age epitomized by labor, sorrow, and men's mistreatment of their fellow men (*Works and Days*, 109-201, c. 700 B.C.E.). Ovid's account reduces the scheme to four ages by omitting the Heroic Age, which interrupts the decline from age to age, and emphasizes the skills men acquire in each age: agriculture in the Silver, war in the Bronze, and sailing and mining in the Iron (*Metamorphoses*, 1.89-150, c. 8 C.E.).

Tolkien's Four Ages of the Children of Ilúvatar figure a similar decline as superior peoples wax and wane and lesser ones come to the fore. The First Age extends from the awakening of the Elves through the defeat of Melkor and the sinking of Beleriand. The Second Age focuses on the Númenóreans, beginning with the establishment of Númenor and ending with its destruction, the reshaping of the world, and Sauron's apparent defeat by the Last Alliance of Elves and Men. The Third Age features the waning of the Elves and the rising dominance of Men and

ends with the defeat of Sauron through the destruction of the One Ring and the departure of the last of the Elves. The Fourth Age is dominated by Men and includes the return of the line of kings on the throne of Gondor.

Tolkien's Four Ages can be compared to the ancient concept of the Declining Ages of Man that remained influential throughout later centuries. While the specifics of each Age do not match up—there is no one-to-one correspondence between Tolkien's First Age and the Golden Age, or his Third Age and the Bronze Age, for example—the general pattern of a four-stage decline does correspond. Further, the emphasis on an Edenic beginning followed by stages in which evil and injustice become increasingly present in each succeeding stage is recalled. Tolkien's Ages are much more complex and historically grounded than the brief descriptions of Hesiod and Ovid allow, and each of Tolkien's Ages shows an internal decline followed by a rising at each new beginning, but each succeeding Age rises to a lesser height than where the preceding Age began, adding up to a gradual decline over time. These two schemes of Ages are also comparable in the emphasis on spirituality.

Hesiod's golden race are beloved by the gods and after death become pure spirits described as kindly guardians of mortals with the power to bestow favors and protect from harm. The silver that succeed them are specifically indicted for failing to honor the gods but still become spirits after death, though of the underworld. For select heroes of the Heroic Age the islands of the blessed are set aside, an Edenic existence after death. Tolkien's Four Ages feature a shifting emphasis from Elves to Men and within the race of Men from Númenóreans to lesser Men. This reflects a shift in spirituality as the initial focus is on creatures with a greater share of spirit to those with a greater share of matter. In this way the Declining Ages of Man can be seen as a pattern for Tolkien's Four Ages similar to the Great Chain of Being for Tolkien's hierarchy. In both cases Tolkien is drawing on an ancient concept but producing something much more complex, and much more flexible.

I stated at the beginning of this talk that I wanted to consider issues of diversity both within the Legendarium and without. When we turn to the world exterior to what Tolkien wrote, we encounter a range of responses. Peter Jackson's adaptation of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003), esp. given its commercial success, brought many issues around diversity to the fore. As noted already, Tolkien actually wrote very few descriptions of the Orcs, so it is easy when reading not to think about their appearance or the ways they are racially coded. Watching Jackson's movies is an entirely different experience. Where Tolkien gave a few brief words, Jackson gives us hordes of bodies, close-ups on leering faces, and those bodies and faces are black. It becomes impossible to ignore the racial coding due to the powerful visual impact. In some areas Jackson innovates, but in general what

he creates visually is based on Tolkien's words, and the result has an outsized impact.

Aside from the impact of Jackson's films, the prominence and popularity of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* means that his ideas, including the racially coded hierarchy, spread. The high fantasy that grew out of Tolkien's work, and the authors that followed him, often patterned their worlds after Middle-earth. As the father of high fantasy his ideas have had a significant impact. Helen Young has explored this phenomenon in a number of works, but I especially recommend her *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness* (Routledge 2016). Tolkien's racial hierarchy thus gets encoded not just in books but in games, videogames, and merchandising. The game Dungeons & Dragons is perhaps the best example of this.

And unfortunately, a consideration of Tolkien and diversity would be incomplete without recognizing that his works have been embraced by white supremacists. That is an uncomfortable fact and again, I recommend the work of Helen Young, who has been willing to engage with platforms like the Stormfront chat forums to research this topic. It disturbs me that such groups find in Tolkien's work support of their ideology. But I will not end on that note.

An appropriate end to a talk on Tolkien and diversity is to shift the focus to the story and the values that emerge from the narrative. And the story shows us groups of disparate people coming together to defeat evil. To do this they must overcome isolationist impulses, suspicions, and historical grudges. The hobbits must leave their comfortable Shire. Elves and Dwarves must work together. The journey Gimli goes through, from his initial suspicious reception in Lothlórien to his love for Galadriel and friendship with Legolas, is emblematic. As Haldir states, "Indeed in nothing is the power of the Dark Lord more clearly shown than in the estrangement that divides all those who still oppose him" (*FR*, II, vi, 362). The designation of the Fellowship itself is diverse, and that is entirely intentional, chosen by Elrond so that "they shall represent the other Free Peoples of the World: Elves, Dwarves, and Men" (*FR*, II, iii, 289). And it is not only in the Third Age that this message persists—in the First Age the alliance of Elves and Men is key in the battles against Morgoth and the help of the Valar is secured by Eärendel, the result of a personal alliance between Elf and Man, and in the Second Age it is the Last Alliance of Elves and Men that defeats Sauron. As Helen Young has noted regarding *The Lord of the Rings* "The text itself, however, constructs difference and diversity in ways that not only justify but encourage a cosmopolitan reading. Inter-group and inter-species cooperation gives *The Lord of the Rings* a strong flavor of diversity" (Young, "Diversity and Difference" 354). While there is no question that the structure of the world Tolkien creates is hierarchical and some aspects of that hierarchy are envisioned in racially problematic ways, Tolkien imbues his hierarchy with a flexibility not seen in his medieval models and tells a story that is ultimately about the cooperation of diverse groups to defeat evil.

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