

The Human Image and the Interrelationship of the Orcs, Elves and Men

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The race of the Orcs, one of the more ‘complicated’ characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, has similarities with the races of Men and Elves from the “free peoples” (LotR 453-454). There is an interconnect- edness between the three races that cannot be denied. The bond between the Orcs, Elves, and Men goes beyond the physical, into areas of history, conflict, symbolism, charac- ter delineation, and blurring of images that ultimately unite them. While unravelling the complexities of such relations, I shall be dwelling deeper on the nature of the Orcs by dis- cussing the infusion of the human image in them, drawing comparisons with Elves and Men, and finally distinguishing the character of the Orcs from being merely background characters to characters worthy of our attention and essen- tial to the development of the novel.

The Major Races of Middle-earth

Who are the “free peoples” of Middle-earth? Treebeard the Ent briefly described the origins of the free men and elves that fall under this grouping. The “free peoples” of Middle-earth consist of the Elves, Dwarves, Ents, Hobbits, and Men. They are ‘free’ because they are independent of Sauron’s power and any other powers that be. The Orcs, however, are constantly subjugated to the will of the Dark Lord and do not belong under this category. Treebeard, an Ent, recited this grouping to Merry and Pippin in Fangorn Forest:

“Learn the lore of Living Creatures!
First name the four, the free peoples
Eldest of all. The elf-children;
Dwarf the delver, dark his houses;
Ent the earth born, old as mountains;
Man the mortal, master of horses;”

Merry and Pippin insist that the catalogue be ‘updated’ and the race of the Hobbits be included. Treebeard makes a place for them between Ents and Men.

“Half-grown hobbits, the hole dwellers.”
(LotR 453-454)

This rhyme of “living” and “free creatures” lists the intel- ligent races of Tolkien’s Middle-earth. It is interesting to note that each member of the Fellowship is chosen from this hier- archical chain of being that catalogues several major races in order of their appearance in the world.

Another important feature of the “living creatures” is that they are capable of speech, and W.H. Auden commented that “In the Secondary World of Middle-earth, there exist, in addition to men, at least seven species capable of speech and therefore of moral choice – Elves, Dwarves, Hobbits, Wiz- ards, Ents, Trolls, Orcs” (138). Auden’s view is that speech constitutes the ability of making moral choices and would denote a certain degree of intelligence. While it is debatable whether the Orcs are capable of making moral choices, it is undeniable that they are capable of speech and have a degree of intelligence. Here lies one of the earliest links of men and elves to the Orcs. The race of the Elves, Dwarves, Ents, Hobbits, and Men (including the Orcs) are pivotal, and one important feature unites them. The similarity is the image of Man in all the “free peoples” of Middle-earth as well as the Orcs. This recurring image is constantly seen in the race of the Orcs and Elves and could reveal the dynamics of the relationship between the races for a greater perception and understanding of the novel.

The Justification for Middle-earth

It is in this image that the diverse and multifaceted “free peoples” of Tolkien’s world complement one another. I shall only be studying the Elves and Men because they are the races that have the closest association with the Orcs in terms of origin, conflict and resemblance. We must understand the reason for Tolkien’s creative impulses that might shed some light on our understanding of the characters in this study. Being a devout Catholic, Tolkien’s reason for writing such an elaborate mythology was for a more intense purpose. He 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.” (Carpenter 99)

What was this ‘profound truth’? Tolkien has said that while writing *The Silmarillion*, his actions were more than that of a writer creating tales of the mind. This ‘truth’ lies embedded in him and grows accordingly as it progresses. According to Tolkien, the ‘truth’ that he was writing about: “...arose in my mind as “given things”, and as they came, separately, so too the links grew...yet always I had the sense of recording what was already “there”, somewhere: not of “inventing”. (Carpenter 100)

For Tolkien, his role as a mythmaker is not complete in merely conjuring a world that he thinks should be real; it

is also about universal truths and fundamental Christian values. The core of such a creation should also never exclude its spiritual aspect. In this respect, Tolkien's Middle-earth contains a geography that is not only 'latent and symbolic' but: "...where mysteries are forever beyond the reach of objective examination meet us on every hand, as indeed they do the great physicist, in such "contemptible" things as matter and light. It is a world in which God still happens to be alive and man is still responsible, an elusive but not at all illusive world." (Kilby 75)

It is also important that *The Lord of the Rings* is not an overtly religious work, and while the presence of God is felt and the image of Man is infused in many of his characters, Man himself has an important role to play in carrying out God's plan. Middle-earth is in fact earth as it is. While conceptualising it, Tolkien also wanted: "...the mythological and legendary stories to express his own view of the universe; as a Christian he could not place this view in a cosmos without the God that he has worshipped. At the same time, to set his stories "realistically" in the known world, where religious beliefs were explicitly Christian, would deprive them of imaginative colour. So while God is present in Tolkien's universe, He remains unseen." (Carpenter 99)

Thus we sense the importance of Man and the influence of God in Tolkien's work. With this in mind, let us move on to the importance of the elusive image of Man in the race of the Orcs and their relationship with the races of Men and Elves.

Orcs and Elves

The Orcs and Elves in *The Lord of the Rings* have long been feuding races and a part of Middle-earth's history. They are similar and yet dissimilar. Both are bitter rivals from the start and share an almost binary existence that dates back to the creation of Middle-earth's universe. In *The Silmarillion*, the creation of the elves by Ilúvatar and the capture of some of the elves by Melkor (Morgoth), to be turned into orcs, could be the only similarity between them in terms of creation. The creation of the Elves themselves is described as an awakening from a deep slumber into a new paradise.

"By the starlit mere of Cuivienen, Water of Awakening, they rose from the sleep of Iluvatar; and while they dwelt yet silent by Cuivienen their eyes beheld the first light of all things the stars of heaven." (*The Silmarillion* 56)

While the creation of the elves was intended to fulfil the grand designs of Iluvatar, Melkor ensnared some of them and "...by slow acts of cruelty were corrupted and enslaved; and thus did Melkor breed the hideous race of Orcs in envy and mockery of the elves, of whom they were afterwards the bitterest foes" (*The Silmarillion* 58). Thus the Orcs and elves share a calamitous past, made worse when Melkor stole the Silmarils (jewels) of Feanor. There raged total war between the elves and the orcs, who were primarily Melkor's servants. The orcs in *The Silmarillion* are described as ruthless creatures interested in wanton destruction and full of hatred

for the elves. It was Melkor's doing in instilling his evil will into his servants that the orcs became ruthless and violent.

"Now the Orcs that multiplied in the darkness of the earth grew strong and fell, and their dark lord filled them with a lust of ruin and death; and they issued from Angband's gates under the clouds that Morgoth sent forth, and passed silently into the highlands of the north." (*The Silmarillion* 113)

The Orcs were also responsible for slaying Denethor, leader of the Nandorin elves.

"But the victory of the Elves was dear-bought. For those of Ossiriand were light-armed, and no match for the Orcs, who were shod with iron and iron-shielded and bore great spears with broad blades; and Denethor was cut off and surrounded upon the hill of Amon Ereb. There he fell and all his nearest kin about him..." (*The Silmarillion* 113-114)

Another example of their ancient battles was fought when the Noldorin elves drove the Orcs away in the Battle-under Stars.

"The Noldor, outnumbered and taken at unawares, were yet swiftly victorious; for the light of Aman was not yet dimmed in their eyes, and they were strong and swift, and deadly in anger, and their swords were long and terrible. The Orcs fled before them, and were driven forth from Mithrim with great slaughter..." (*The Silmarillion* 126)

In *The Lord of the Rings* the struggle between the Orcs and the Elves is renewed in a manner parallel to *The Silmarillion*. Like inseparable entities, they continue the rhythm and flow of the tale that sees tension between them growing in a similar pattern. Their close involvement is intertwined with the struggle of a higher cause involving powerful forces of good and evil.

The battle for the One Ring sees the Orcs under another dark lord, this time Melkor's lieutenant Sauron, who holds the reins of evil power. The elves eventually create an alliance with the other free races, for the common cause of freedom and goodwill for all of Middle-earth. The Orcs are not only a precursor of darker events and uncertainty but provide the necessary tension with the Elves and other free peoples of Middle-earth.

"That name the hobbits only knew in legends of the dark past, like a shadow in the background of their memories; but it was ominous and disquieting. It seemed that the real evil in Mirkwood had been driven out by the white Council only to reappear in greater strength in the old strongholds of Mordor. The Dark Tower had been rebuilt, it was said. From there the power was spreading far and wide, and away far east and south there were wars and growing fear. Orcs were multiplying again in the mountains." (LotR 45)

In Tolkien's portrayal of orcs and elves, he made it clear from the beginning that they share a common source of

existence, the will of Ilúvatar. In *The Lord of the Rings* the Orcs and elves reprise their roles as mortal enemies. Elrond says in the council that the threat of the enemy is growing and must be contained at all cost.

“Not all his servants and chattels are wraiths! There are orcs and trolls, there are wargs and werewolves; and there have been and still are many Men, warriors and kings, that walk alive under the Sun, and yet are under his sway. And their number is growing daily.” (LotR 216)

Orcs and Men

Like the elves, the race of Men had their fair share of troubles with the Orcs. Melkor, the first dark lord, vowed to disunite Elves and Men and anything else created by the will of Ilúvatar. The more he failed to thwart Ilúvatar’s plans, the more determined he was in creating chaos in the land.

“But Morgoth, seeing that by lies and deceits he could not yet wholly estrange Elves and Men, was filled with wrath, and endeavoured to do Men what hurt he could.” (*The Silmarillion* 175)

And in *The Lord of the Rings*, we have an example of conflict between Orcs and men. Eomer, the Third Marshall of Riddermark tells Gimli the reason for his people’s hatred for the Orcs.

“Some years ago the Lord of the Black Land wished to purchase horses of us at a great price, but we refused him, for he puts beasts to evil use. Then he sent plundering orcs, and they carry off what they can, choosing always the black horses: few of these are now left. For that reason our feud with the orcs is bitter.” (LotR 426)

The race of Men consists of different communities, the earliest of which were the First House of Beor, the Second House of Haladin, and the Third House Of Hador. In the First Age, there were the Easterlings and Swarthy Men who were evil and ‘...proved unfaithful and though feigning friendship with the Elves, they betrayed them to Morgoth, the Dark Enemy’ (Day 154).

At the time of *The Lord of the Rings*, the Northmen of Rhovanian (the vales of Anduin) had become the people of Rohan, while those who followed the elves to the South were the Dunedain, formerly the Men of Westnesse Island or Numenoreans. The Numenoreans had been a great seafaring nation before the Valar destroyed the island. Isildur and Aragorn are Dunedain. Other groups of men include barbaric Men of the South, the Haradim, Dunlendings, Easterlings and Variags. The Balchoth, Wainriders, Beornings, Lake Men of Esgaroth, the Bardings of Dale are from the east and north.

What will be discussed specifically is the blurring of the physical attributes between Orcs and Men and the role of the human image in the Orcs. Here it is pertinent to discuss the Uruk-hai for they are one of the newer breeds of greater Orcs who were made by Saruman and Sauron for diabolical

purposes.

The “uruks”, a new breed of foot soldiers with ‘improvements’ in them emerges as a new threat to Middle-earth. The most notorious of them are the Isengarders, the “Uruk-hai” of Saruman. Under the banner of The White Hand, the Uruk-hai waged battle with the people of Rohan at Helm’s Deep. So much devastation had they caused in cutting down ancient trees of Fangorn Forest to feed the furnaces of Isengard that Treebeard is deeply angered at Saruman for creating such a horror.

“And now it is clear that he is a black traitor. He has taken up with foul folk, with the Orcs. Brm, hoom! Worse than that: he has been doing something to them;... I wonder what he has done? Are they Men he has ruined, or has he blended the races of Orcs and Men? That would be black evil!” (LotR 462)

Thus it would seem that the blending of Orcs and Men is something that is forbidden, against the laws of nature for Men and Orcs to crossbreed, and since evil sorcery was (apparently) used to produce this unnatural race, the laws of the universe and the will of the creator had been violated. Ugly, devious, cruel, and even cannibalistic, the Orcs and the Uruk-hai seem to be portraying Man in his most primitive existence. Compared to the races of lesser Orcs, this new breed of Orcs seems to exemplify a closer resemblance to Man. One example was when Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas were inspecting some of the Orcs they had slain near Parth Galen; a curious physical resemblance was noted.

“And Aragorn looked on the slain, and he said: ‘Here lie many that are not folk of Mordor. Some are from the North, from the Misty Mountains, if I know anything of Orcs and their kinds. And here are others strange to me. Their gear is not after the manner of Orcs at all!’

They were four goblin-soldiers of greater stature, swart, slant-eyed with thick legs and large hands. They were armed with short broad-bladed swords, not with curved scimitars usual with Orcs; and they had bows of yew, in length and shape like bows of Men.” (LotR 405)

The mélange between Orcs and men even appears in the race of half-orcs whom Foster describes as ‘...the product of a cross between Men and Orcs. Although tall as Men, they were sallow-faced and squint-eyed’ (Foster 185). Whereas the Uruk-hai have a certain likeness to men, in the ‘half-orcs’, whose existence is inferred by the hobbits, Tolkien shows us examples of men who seem to resemble Orcs. The blurring of the image of Men and Orcs appears in the chapter “The Scouring of The Shire”, where the Chief’s Men (half-orcs of Saruman) have taken control of the Shire. Merry and Sam chance upon some of the men and note that their likeness is disturbing.

“When they reached The Green Dragon, the last house on the Hobbiton side, now lifeless and with broken windows, they were disturbed to see half a dozen large ill-favoured Men lounging

against the inn-wall; they were squint-eyed and sallow-faced.
'Like that friend of Bill Ferny's at Bree,' said Sam.
'Like many that I saw at Isengard,' muttered Merry.' (LotR 981)

In another instance, when the hobbits were engaged in a battle with the Chief's Men, Merry in the heat of the moment "...slew the leader, a great squint-eyed brute like a huge Orc. Then he drew his forces off, encircling the last remnant of the Men in a wide ring of archers." (LotR 992). The recurring blurring of Orcs and Men in various parts of the novel seems to suggest a play of images that mirror Tolkien's view of humanity. The lesser Orcs, Uruk-hai and half-orcs (who are called "ruffians" in the Shire) seem to project images of Man in different shades of diabolical behaviour.

The Image of Man

Tormented, confused and angry, the Orcs are men in a very fragmented state of existence. In general, the Orcs represent men who are evil and cruel, but that does not mean that they are not entirely irredeemable. The introduction of two separate Orc breeds by Tolkien could signify how complex Tolkien sees the image of Man in both versions but it is undeniable that a stronger image of Man lies in the Uruk-hai and half-orcs because of their physical similarities. In the Uruk-hai, Tolkien wanted a new evil breed, deeply feared and with a stronger resemblance to Man to reinforce our involvement at a deeper level. The Uruk represents Man at a deeply fragmented stage and in an era of new complexities besieging humanity. Therefore man's image must be made stronger to signify humanity's deeper involvement in the struggles of the Third Age before the coming of the Age of Man, the Fourth Age. This seems to justify the importance of the Orcs to highlight the diverse nature of men, from their tormented side to other multiple facets of their character.

The Elves also share a close resemblance to Men in many ways.

"Immortal were the Elves, and their wisdom waxed from age to age, and no sickness nor pestilence brought death to them. Their bodies indeed were the stuff of Earth, and could be destroyed; and in those days they were more like the bodies of Men, since they had not so long been inhabited by the fire of their spirit, which consumes them from within in the courses of time." (*The Silmarillion* 124)

The elves may have similar physical attributes to Man including their avidity and outlook towards life, but they are naturally immortal, and if they are killed, their spirits go to the Halls of Mandos ("Houses of the Dead", *The Silmarillion* 408), and their Paradise would be a journey to the Undying Lands/Deathless Lands in a time unknown to them. For the elves, the "Undying Lands" is a parallel to the desires of Man; though they will never grow old, their continuous existence on Middle-earth will be a sorrowful experience for them as dictated in the will of Ilúvatar. Hence, a 'return' is a must for the elves as they make way for the dominion of men in the fourth age.

The physical bodies of the Elves are equivalent to those of Men, but their physical fairness denotes their great wisdom and ethereal origin. They resemble a "perfect" or almost perfect race of Men as envisioned by Tolkien. They constantly crave for perfection in knowledge and the arts. "In those days Elves and Men were of like stature and strength of body, but the Elves had greater wisdom, and skill and beauty..." (*The Silmarillion* 123).

The Elves have the most perfect and ideal human passions, contrasted to the most basic human desires of the Orcs. Humphrey Carpenter says the elves epitomize Man before the Fall. "They are all intents and purposes *men*: or rather Man before the Fall which deprived him of his powers of achievement. Tolkien believed devoutly that there had once been an Eden on Earth, and that man's original sin and subsequent dethronement were responsible for the ills of the world; but his elves, though capable of sin and error, have not 'fallen' in the theological sense, and so are able to achieve much beyond the powers of men... Most important of all they are, unless slain in battle, immortal. Old age, disease, and death do not bring their work to an end while it is still unfinished or imperfect. They are therefore the ideal of every artist." (Carpenter 100-101)

These, then, are the elves of *The Silmarillion*, and of *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien himself summed up their nature when he wrote of them: "They are made by man in his own image and likeness; but freed from those limitations which he feels most to press upon him. They are immortal, and their will is directly effective for the achievement of imagination and desire." (Carpenter 101).

Thus, just as Orcs are related to Elves in terms of their origin and conflict, and to Men in the blurring of physical likeness, the interrelationship of Orcs to both races is consistent with the deep involvement of the major races in the story. I hope by highlighting such interconnectedness to show the depth of the importance of the Orcs as purveyors of tension and conflict in the story. The Orcs also share a bond with Elves and Men in the unifying of the human image in all three races. For the Orcs, Man's likeness has empowered their character to a point of realism.

"Most of the other creatures are more or less 'human,' with human-like motives and responses. The use of superficially nonhuman beings is Tolkien's method of characterization: "Much that in a realistic work would be done by 'character delineation' is here done simply by making the character an elf, a dwarf, or a hobbit. The imagined beings have their insides on the outside; they are visible souls." (Gasque 156)

The infusion of the image of Man creates coherence and unity while making it easier for readers to relate to the characters. With similar physical attributes, human emotions and experiences, a reader would be able to identify with the characters while affirming and acknowledging their roles and values. It must be understood that Tolkien constantly utilizes the image of Man embedded in the races of the epic, to make his tale believable.

"Tolkien keeps probing into various facets of the differences between elf and mortal as the epic runs its course. But

he knows he must keep showing resemblances, too, if we are to believe in the elves.” (Kocher 91)

With regard to the Orcs, Tolkien’s ‘probing’ of the human image has not only made them believable but he has shown such affiliations as recognisable human relationships. It is the “...mythical and heroic quality” (Lewis 15) of men that Tolkien finds inspiration from to fuse subtle humanistic nuances in his story. This he does with great effect in *The Lord of the Rings*, portraying Middle-earth as a world with a diverse society of other races other than Man. He created a host of beings with their own languages, cultures and histories. From his imagination, Tolkien has wrought a believable tale with believable races and creatures that resemble and divulge human passions because it is an obviously human audience he is writing for, and Christian too.

“But Tolkien is one of us: a member of the race of men, in the twentieth century after Christ. And we only know one intelligent race: our own. The three divisions of human beings (*Hobbits, Elves and Men*) which we call ‘races’ are merely subdivisions of one basic kind of being. Since we only know one kind of intelligent being, our imagination is limited... What we do, therefore - what any author trying to show other beings does - is to use aspects of the one rational race we do know. And of course our one race does have as many different aspects as one could wish. Partly, then, Tolkien’s seven different races are aspects of man.” (Rogers 70-71)

With the distorted human image ‘planted’ firmly in the race of the Orcs, we are given another view of humankind in its pristine state from the race of the elves. The human image then serves as a subtle reminder to us so that we do not emulate the Orcs and their darker passions but follow the example of the Elves and to strive for perfection and goodwill. This process of identification of the human image then serves as a method for us to recognise fundamental values of goodness. While Tolkien does not dismiss the Orcs completely, he is saying that it is *better* to follow the examples of the Elves and perhaps even the Hobbits.

Conclusion

While it is undeniable that the Orcs are often associated with wickedness and violence, they are creatures with the human image embedded in them and perhaps it is in this light that Tolkien wants us to look at every race in Middle-earth (including the Orcs) as being affiliated with humanity at large. It is through this that we recognise the diverse human experiences to be universally linked. Even in the parallel world of Middle-earth, the multiplicities of races are all extensions of Man. And in the case of the Orcs, the blurring of the human image reconciles us to the condition of the Orcs, who are slaves of Melkor and Sauron, corrupted and forced to serve him for all eternity. Feelings of compassion might be felt for this malignant race and it is here that the human image has successfully elevated the Orcs as a race to be pitied and feared at the same time.

While Tolkien himself was not satisfied with his own answers concerning the Orcs’ existence and creation, the

difficulties he had in finalising their roots only demonstrate the complexity of their character and their nature which is fragmented and deeply intersected with the Elves and Men. Although Tolkien left the creation of the Orcs unresolved, the complexity, diversity and affinity of the Orcs has made them indispensable and a significant race vital to the overall meaning of the tale. C.S. Lewis has said that Tolkien’s characters all play a vital role in the story: “...no individual, and no species, seems to exist only for the sake of the plot. All exist in their own right and would have been worth creating for the mere flavour even if they had been irrelevant.” (Lewis 14)

With this in mind, the importance of the image of Man in the Orcs, Elves, and Men is undeniable. This image also gives some depth to the Orcs as a shadowy and complex image of terror that is elusive in the saga. The strong image of Man in the Orcs serves as an important symbol that reflects the universal conditions of Man. Their embodiment of the fragmented image of humanity speaks of the plight of the human self that begs understanding towards the misguided race of the Orcs. This image also unites the three races and portrays the multiplicity of human conditions. By drawing on the image of Man, Tolkien has built the foundations of Middle-earth on common experiences and images that compel the reader towards an understanding of humanity and self.

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Votes for Tauriel - but not the Love

SHAUN GUNNER, RICHARD GONSOWSKI, SOPHIE WATSON



The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug.

Directed by Peter Jackson

New Line Cinema (2013).

Shaun Gunner

The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug was always going to be a difficult film: like all middle films in a trilogy it has to provide a substantial filling between a grand entrance and a climatic conclusion. Thanks to Smaug, it very nearly stands up in its own right.

Unlike the frustratingly slow start to *An Unexpected Journey*, the second instalment in Jackson's unexpected trilogy hits the ground running in an incredibly fast-paced affair. Beorn is a much more threatening and less jovial character – no-doubt to emphasise the idea that Middle-earth is a place full of enemies – but his role is so trivial it might as well have been cut. Mirkwood, however, was an absolute joy to behold and I crave for more screen-time in the Extended Edition (due out in November); of all the locations in this film Mirkwood feels the most authentic and the most original.

Gandalf, of course, disappears when the Company enter Mirkwood, and here rather pointlessly goes off to visit the 'High Fells' to see nine empty tombs. Later we see him entering Dol Guldur (alone) in what has to be some of the best Gandalf battle action ever witnessed. The audience is fully behind Gandalf, only to have their hopes and dreams scuppered as he is captured by the Necromancer (painfully revealed to be Sauron) – the failure of Gandalf feels like an unforgivable betrayal of the audience.

I cannot review this film without discussing the changes from the book. The idea of the dwarves taking on Smaug in a direct confrontation has merit and adds excitement but, sadly, the scene was rather over-done and certainly required a little editing. Similarly, the progression of the storyline through Mirkwood and Lake-town feels coherent and well-considered albeit with a handy dose of serendipity. The barrel scene, however, is a ridiculous piece of slapstick comedy but, I hope, at least be appreciated by the younger audiences that Warner Bros. are trying to appeal to – after all, *The Hobbit* is a book aimed at younger children. The film-makers were right to add Tauriel – a strong and warm voice in the story – but were wrong to cheapen the character by putting

her in a love-triangle and turning her into 'a bit of skirt'. Despite her entirely uncanonical nature, Tauriel is both the biggest gem and missed opportunity of this film. The other big missed opportunity was to reveal to the audience in the closing scene that Bilbo *was* in possession of the Arkenstone – a revelation that would have made for a much more intriguing cliffhanger.

Despite all of this, I liked this film. I liked seeing Smaug. I liked seeing Mirkwood. And I liked seeing Lake-town. I'm disappointed to say, though, that I did not *love* this film: the action sequences felt a little contrived and forced – to the point of near boredom – whilst the barrel scene and the capture of Gandalf really spoils this for me. Saying that, one thing is clear: roll on *The Battle of the Five Armies!*

Richard Gonsowski

On the most basic level, "The Hobbit: Desolation of Smaug" adheres to the storyline of the book, ie Beorn to the Elvenking to Laketown. But once you seek to get about 9 hours of movie from 305 pages of text, that is when things can get interesting. Lest you think I did not like it, let me say once and for all: I did, and saw it on opening day and again twelve days later on Christmas in a local Staten Island theater.

I truly enjoyed the addition of Tauriel and her interaction with Legolas. Her addition might even make it more appealing to families with girls who were not familiar with the novel. I do, however, see an unhappy and tragic end for Tauriel.

I was also happy to see Beorn and look forward to his appearance in the Battle of Five Armies, and Jackson's treatment of the same.

I did not like the way Thranduil was depicted as a class conscious, arrogant, greedy and dishonorable killer. Also, the hint of romance between Fili and Tauriel was a stretch, given the hostility between Elves and Dwarves owing to the murder of Thingol by the Dwarves in the First Age. Lastly, Bard the Bowman as Bard the Bargeman/Ballistaman is not to my liking.

The dialogue of Bilbo and Smaug was interesting. I still prefer the late Richard Boone to Benedict Cumberbatch as the Voice of Smaug. Still, only 173 days to Part III as at time of writing this review.

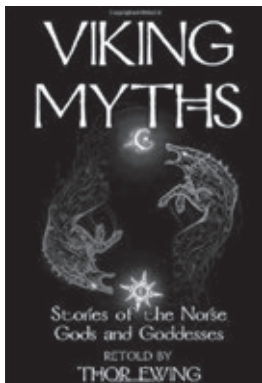
Sophie Watson

My reaction to DoS can be summed up in the comment I posted on Facebook as we came out of the cinema: it's a rollicking adventure film but it isn't *The Hobbit*. Taking it purely as a film, it's rather good fun in places; taking it as an adaptation of one of my favourite books it's a bitter disappointment.

Some of the changes do at least make sense up to a point: for example, the scene where Gandalf tells Beorn of the Dwarves' adventures to date probably wouldn't work so well on film, because it would be ten minutes of repeating what we already know. Many of the changes, though, are just utterly bizarre, particularly the much-discussed Kili-Tauriel-Legolas love triangle. You may or may not agree with the view that it was necessary to have another female character;

I have my own opinion. But a love triangle? Really? In *The Hobbit*?

The first film contained a lot of variances from the book, but I thought it was at least recognisable as being an adaptation of the book. The second film bears so little resemblance to the book that I am torn between running a mile from the third one and going to see it purely out of curiosity.



Viking Myths: Stories of the Norse Gods and Goddesses retold by Thor Ewing.

*Welkin Books 2014
ISBN-13: 978-1910075005,
204pp, 45 b&w illustrations*

PAT REYNOLDS

Author Thor Ewing avows that this is a version for the current generation. Being, personally, of the generation which had Roger Lancelyn Green's *Myths of the Norsemen* (1960) Kevin Crossley-Holland's *The Norse Myths* (1980) and (with more academic leanings) H R Ellis Davidson's *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (1964), all of which I read in secondary school, I do not feel this generation is better served than my own.

In his introduction, Thor Ewing says "I hope the style used for the illustrations reflects something of the attitudes and beliefs of the original mythmakers. Unlike the Viking artists who were carving their work into wood or stone, my illustrations were to be printed on the flat pages of a book. The illusion of solidity had to be drawn into the pictures themselves - rather like the retellings of the stories themselves - a deliberate adoption of Viking style for the modern world".

In the illustrations, this is achieved through the well known conventions of varying the thickness of lines and stippling to indicate depth. Sadly, the same effect has not been achieved in the text. Thor Ewing says he "wanted to avoid the solemn and ponderous style which has bedevilled some retellings. For many of the multitudinous Viking names, for example, he chooses "translations [which] aren't always completely literal, but they take us closer to the spirit of the original tales, and away from the mystique of foreign names". The result is a very plain text indeed;

with few exceptions the impression is of a two-dimensional world, stories stripped to their bare bones, Coles Notes style.

In his introduction Thor Ewing observes the moral ambiguity of many of the stories, and hints that this is what they are 'good for thinking about', so it is a shame that there is very little observation of the ambiguity, and it more often looks like insufficient character development and inexplicable action than a space to consider such questions.

I miss the strong voice of a storyteller: the depth which gesture and intonation give to an oral story need to be introduced in some way. Developing the narrator as a character is only one way of doing this, but there are others missed. The use of new names, for example, often results in flattening the original. Thus Magni and Móði become Strength and Courage, Huginn and Muninn become Thought and Memory. An exception is the use of Scots dialect 'etin' to translate the cognate 'jötunn', more usually translated as 'giant'. Thinking about what has changed since Kevin Crossley-Holland's day, I would argue that there have been fundamental changes in the popular appreciation of Viking-age cultures. The excavations in York and Dublin in the 1970s in particular were popularised, and our understanding of the complex and connected societies deepened by later work. Similarly, work on the economic and social history of the period has developed. If I were expecting any shift to make a retelling for the early 21st century, I would expect it to reflect this.

