

*Biography* by Humphrey Carter, published in *The Listener*, inserted inside the front cover of *The Return of the King*. The review is entitled 'Hobbit-forming' and is mildly critical of Tolkien's work.

**3 January 1992:** the anonymous piece 'Early Reading Hobbits' from *The Times*, inserted inside the front cover of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. The piece briefly recounts how as a boy Rayner Unwin "reviewed" *The Hobbit*. The exact date has been marked on the cutting in pen.

**20 January 1997:** the article 'Waterstone Book Survey: Tolkien Wins Title Lord of the Books by Popular Acclaim' by Dayla Alberge and Erica Wagner, from *The Times*, inserted inside the front cover of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. The date has been pencilled on the cutting.

It is not obvious how these pieces were chosen. Why, for instance, did the Dannatts not include Tolkien's obituary from *The Times*, published on 3 September 1973, in their collection of cuttings? It is equally unclear whether any method lay behind the distribution of the cuttings across the three volumes. Possibly during these years they were collecting and storing cuttings rather at random. This contrasts with the very deliberate choice of the 1955 review pasted into *The Return of the King*: here George selected a review he felt to be of particular value, underlined his choice by physically attaching it to the book, and placed it at the very end of the three volumes, as if to provide a concluding summary of the whole work.


By 1982, the Dannatts were also aware of the monetary value of these volumes. A cutting from a catalogue issued by the second-hand bookseller Michael Cole of York from this year is inserted inside the front cover of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. The cutting, which has the date and the bookseller's name and address marked on it in pen, lists a first edition of *The Lord of the Rings* for sale for £320.

There are no annotations to the text itself in any of the three volumes, which is not unusual: in general, only

teachers and students add marginalia to works of fiction.

The Dannatts sold the three volumes in 2002.

To conclude, examination of these volumes shows how two early readers interacted with *The Lord of the Rings* over a period of decades. Two aspects of this interaction are worth highlighting. First, the novel seems to have engaged them even when not being read. For many years they were apparently more interested in following the debate about its merits, and in tracking its popularity and influence, than in returning to the text itself. Second, it was not uncritical admiration of Tolkien's work that drove this long, if intermittent, engagement with the novel. In 1955–6 George found himself agreeing with a review which found both "merits and limitations" in *The Lord of the Rings*; in 1964 Anne seems to have abandoned her rereading; and in later years they collected cuttings characterized by a wide range of opinions. In George's case, his work as a music critic in 1944–56 may explain some of his interest in a text that from the beginning divided both critical and popular opinion.

As is the case here, examination of individual copies of books generally yields insights that although valuable are relatively modest, not least because aspects of the evidence are inevitably hard to interpret. The uncertainty surrounding why the Dannatts chose the particular cuttings listed here is an example. However, provenance evidence gains in value if multiple copies of the same work can be studied. To this end, I would encourage anyone with access to early editions of Tolkien's works to examine them for inscriptions, annotations, insertions or other marks of ownership, and to publicize anything of interest they find. In this way studies of provenance may help us to document how Tolkien's works were received by his earliest readers. 

**James Blake** is a librarian at Imperial College London. He has a particular interest in how the physical evidence left by readers in books adds to our understanding of literary and social history.

## Orcs and Tolkien's treatment of evil

DAVID TNEH

**T**olkien's world is inhabited by a multiplicity of creatures. Although the labyrinthine topography, fascinating languages and ancient history of Middle-earth dazzle many a reader, it is Tolkien's creation of elves, orcs, balrogs, ents, hobbits and dwarves that makes the lure of Middle-earth hard to resist.

Treebeard speaks to Merry and Pippin of the 'free peoples' of Middle-earth. In his citation of the 'free peoples', the elves were the first to settle on the realm followed by a catalogue of the free-living creatures from the elves to a selection of animals. The race of the orcs does not exist in Treebeard's list of 'free peoples' and, compared with the

other more illustrious characters in the novel, the orcs have long been considered secondary images of evil in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Just who are the orcs and what role do they play in the legendarium? To most readers, they are the embodiment of evil; malignant creatures of terror and destruction. Their origin predates a time even before any battle took place in Middle-earth, when Melkor, the greatest of the Valar, became corrupt and evil and desired to have his own way. He disrupted the Music of Creation, sowing hatred and distrust among all his creations. His vilest 'creation' was the orcs.

For who of the living has descended into the pits of Utumno? Yet this is held true by the wise of Eressëa, that all those of the Quendi who came into the hands of Melkor, ere Utumno was broken, were put there in prison, and by slow arts of cruelty were corrupted and enslaved; and thus did Melkor breed the hideous race of the Orcs in envy and mockery of the Elves, of whom they were afterwards the bitterest foes. For the Orcs had life and multiplied after the manner of the Children of Ilúvatar; and naught that had life of its own, nor the semblance of life, could ever Melkor make since his rebellion in the Ainulindalë before the Beginning: so say the wise. *And deep in their dark hearts the Orcs loathed the Master whom they served in fear, the maker only of their misery.* This it may be was the vilest deed of Melkor and the most hateful to Ilúvatar.

(*The Silmarillion* 58, my emphasis)

One gets the feeling of the orcs' resentment of Melkor for imposing great suffering on them. The orcs are definitely stated to be corruptions of the 'human' form seen in the 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* 210.)

As we make comparisons with the elves, the superior and generically noble race, we notice differences between the two opposing factions. The elves or 'Quendi' as they are known shall "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 in this world" (*The Silmarillion* 47). The elves are immortal, ageless and will never know sickness. They can be killed in any normal circumstances like men but as they age, they will not grow weak, only wiser and fairer. David Day<sup>1</sup> elaborates:

There is always a light on the Elven face, and the sound of their voices is various and beautiful as water. Of all their arts they excel best in speech, song and poetry. Elves were the first of all people on earth to speak with voices and no earthly creature before them sang. And justly they call themselves the Quendi, the 'speakers', for they taught the spoken arts to all races on Middle-earth.

(ref. 1, 75)

The orcs do not have such magnificent attributes. In contrast to immortality, wisdom and — to some — the ability to create, the orcs are capable only of wanton destruction. Even the language they speak is called 'the Black Speech', an unpleasant language developed by Sauron for use by all of his servants. The purest form is used by Sauron, Smaug (the dragon) and the Witch-king of Angmar, whereas at a lower level, several versions of the language exist in a debased form.

The orcs were first bred by the Dark Power of the North in the Elder Days. It is said that they had no language of their own, but took what they could of other tongues and perverted it to their own liking; yet they made only brutal jargons, scarcely sufficient even for their own needs, unless it were for curses and abuse. And these creatures, being filled with malice, hating even their own

kind, quickly developed as many barbarous dialects as there were groups of settlements of their race, so that their Orkish speech was little use to them in intercourse between different tribes.

(*The Lord of the Rings* Appendix F)

Orcs are perceived to be consistently evil from their moment of creation. Their capability of speech, however, is weighted with moral imperative. According to W. H. Auden<sup>2</sup>, "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, Wizards, Ents, Trolls, Orcs" (ref. 2, 138). Therefore, the ability of the orcs to communicate would suggest that they are capable of making moral choices, but Tolkien's portrayal might suggest otherwise. Some critics have treated none too kindly this obvious division of good and evil. Edmund Wilson, one of Tolkien's chief critics, states that "for most part such characters as Dr. Tolkien is able to contrive are perfectly stereotyped" (quoted in ref. 3, p. 80). Catharine Stimpson criticizes Tolkien's treatment of good and evil in the following manner:

Of course, evil is corroding, then corrupting, and finally cancelling. However, Tolkien seems rigid. He admits that men, elves, and dwarfs are a collection of good, bad, and indifferent things, but he more consistently divides the ambiguous world into two unambiguous halves: good and evil, nice and nasty. Any writer has the right to dramatize, not to argue, his morality. However, Tolkien's dialogue, plot, and symbols are terribly simplistic.

(ref. 4, 18)

Adding to this list is Walter Scheps who comments on a similar note:

At this point, it would perhaps be useful to summarize briefly the characteristics of good and evil as they are revealed in *The Lord of the Rings*. First, and most important, good and evil are almost always generically defined; we can often tell whether a character is one or the other if we know where he comes from, who his ancestors are, how he speaks, and which color, black or white, is associated with him.

(ref. 5, 51–52)

Thus, many critics of Tolkien disagree with Tolkien's way of dividing everything into two spheres, black and white, good and evil. The portrayal of the orcs, as an example, seems to prove what the critics think of Tolkien's overall work — that it is rigid, structured and clear-cut, totally void of ambiguity. If that is the case, the orcs will then be perceived as consistently evil. However, I should like to demonstrate that not only are the orcs an important race essential to the saga but that they are capable of showing some finesse of behaviour.

What the critics have failed to take into account was that the orcs are in fact created from elves, the "Firstborn, the immortal Elder Race of Middle-earth, the noblest of the Children of Eru" (ref. 6, 148). They share an exact ancestral past at the beginning but Melkor had transformed some of them into orcs. Although the elves and orcs share

an indistinguishable beginning, complexities arise as to whether the orcs are capable of knowing the virtues of goodness. Tolkien tells us that “For nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so” (*The Lord of the Rings II 2*). This is a positive affirmation that the orcs are not originally evil as even Sauron was good at the beginning. Tolkien further elaborates in his letters that the orcs are “fundamentally a race of ‘rational incarnate’ creatures, though horribly corrupted, if no more so than many Men to be met today” (*Letters* 153). Tolkien’s statement is interesting because he compares the race of the orcs to common men and the orcs are said to be capable of thought. This would indeed do justice to the position of orcs, as they are not the mere mindless slaves of Sauron. Tolkien himself reacted strongly on allegations that his novel was only about the play on good and evil. He says: “Not that I have made even this quite so simple: there are Saruman, and Denethor, and Boromir; and there are treacheries and strife even among the orcs” (*Letters* 154).

The fact that the orcs are capable of transcending their complex state of being is mentioned by Tolkien when he describes how Melkor abused his ‘sub-creative powers’ and:

started making things ‘for himself, to be their Lord, these would then ‘be’, even if Morgoth broke the supreme ban against making other ‘rational’ creatures like Elves and Men. They would at least ‘be’ real physical realities in the physical world, however evil they might prove, even ‘mocking’ the Children of God. They would be Morgoth’s greatest Sins, abuses of his highest privilege, and would be creatures begotten of Sin, and naturally bad. (I nearly wrote ‘irredeemably bad’; but that would be going too far. Because by accepting or tolerating their making—necessary to their actual existence — even orcs would become part of the World, which is God’s and ultimately good.) (*Letters* 153)

Although it is hinted that there is a possibility of redemption for the orcs, Tolkien stresses that the ability of the orcs to have souls or spirits had never crossed his mind. Furthermore, it was due to Morgoth’s dark powers that the orcs were forged, not as an original act of creation but a great abuse of his powers.

But whether they could have ‘souls’ or ‘spirits’ seems a different question; and since in my myth at any rate I do not conceive of the making of souls or spirits, things of an equal order if not an equal power to the Valar, as a possible ‘delegation’, I have represented at least the orcs as pre-existing real beings on whom the Dark Lord has exerted the fullness of his power in remodelling and corrupting them, not making them. (*Letters* 153)

Thus, the portrayal of the orcs in the novel is extremely complicated. The obvious comparison and contrast with the elves would compel many readers and critics to think that there lies no other view in the nature and alignment of the orcs. The mould is cast and set and hence the perception that *The Lord of the Rings* is nothing more than a story of good and evil. But with the orcs, Tolkien portrays the complexity of evil that goes beyond mere comparison

or contrast with the elves. Our understanding of evil is in fact challenged when Tolkien shows that evil can exist in many ‘shades’, and the race of the orcs is a perfect example. To understand such complexities, it is helpful to draw on the idea of Manichaeism and Boethianism for a deeper insight into the nature of the orcs.

Manichaeism or dualism refers to the theory of two opposing principles that exist independently of each other, such as good and evil in all things. “It taught that not God but Satan, the Demiurge, made the world and its wicked matter. Only spirit was good and came from God” (ref. 7, 172). In opposition to Manichaeism, the Boethian view is that:

there is no such thing as evil: evil is nothing, is the absence of good, possibly even unappreciated good... Corollaries of this belief are, that evil cannot itself create, that it was not itself created (but sprang from a voluntary exercise of free will by Satan, Adam and Eve, to separate themselves from God). (ref. 8, 109).

In relation to this, I would like to bring in Shippey’s analysis of the two concepts of evil in *The Lord of the Rings*. In his view, Tolkien’s presentation of evil is convincing and captivating because Tolkien portrays the nature of evil alternately between Manichaean and Boethian perspectives. Tolkien incorporates the two views as a sort of an answer to the nature of evil, which is ambivalent and in a way, multi-dimensional and complex. The Manichaean view also states that “the world is a battlefield, between the powers of Good and Evil, equal and opposite — so that, one might say, there is no real difference between them and it is a matter of chance which side one happens to choose” (ref. 9, 134).

Evil is then made out to be an independent entity, a force of its own, although the Boethian perspective is that “there is no such thing as evil. What people identify as evil is only the absence of good” (ref. 9, 130). We are made to see evil as an internal (Boethian) and external (Manichaean) in which the ambivalent orcs are perfectly Boethian.

That orcs are capable of moral choice is shown by as many as six conversations that they have among themselves. It is also worthy to note that only the orcs, as an evil race, have this many conversations, which reveals much of their character and mindset. In one instance, there is a conversation between two orc-leaders, Shagrat from Cirith Ungol and Gorbag from Minas Morgul. The latter warns Shagrat that although they have Frodo (at this point Sam has taken away the Ring), they have to be careful of another enemy who has wounded Shelob with a magical weapon. Although they are ignorant of the identity of Frodo, the orcs conclude they have bigger problems at hand and the ‘little fellow’ “may have had nothing to do with the real mischief. The big fellow with the sharp sword doesn’t seem to have thought him much anyhow — just let him lying: regular elvish trick” (*The Lord of the Rings IV*, 10).

Gorbag clearly disapproves of such action, he is “convinced that it is wrong, and contemptible, to abandon your companions. Furthermore it is characteristic of the other side, a ‘regular elvish trick’, they do it all the time” (ref. 9, 132). Although this might reveal a side of the orcs that is



affirmative, Shagrat topples this view by making a joke on 'old Ufthak' and their refusal to rescue him from Shelob:

"D'you remember old Ufthak? We lost him for days. Then we found him in a corner; hanging up he was, but he was wide awake and glaring. How we laughed! She'd forgotten him, maybe, but we didn't touch him — no good interfering with Her."

(*The Lord of the Rings IV* 10)

On the other hand, from another angle, Shippey<sup>9</sup> comments that the orcs are associated above all by their "orcish humour"; their jokes are more often than not associated with torture and pain and the joy of seeing their victims or comrade suffer. Common orcish words include 'fun', 'sport' and 'lads' that seem to be contrary to the overall nature of the orcs but in some ways similar to our own scale of humour, as repugnant as that may be.

The orcs may be well down, or even off, the scale of humorous acceptability, but it is the same scale as our own; and humour is a good quality in itself, although like all good qualities it can be perverted. In other examples we see how the "orcs in fact put a high theoretical value on mutual trust and loyalty" and "the orcs recognise the idea of goodness, appreciate humour, value loyalty, trust, group cohesion, and the ideal of a higher cause than themselves, and condemn failings from these ideals in others"<sup>9</sup>. This can be shown by the words of Snaga to Shagrat: "I've fought for the Tower against those stinking Morgul-rats" (*The Lord of the Rings VI* 1), which shows some form of minimal allegiance to one another. Other examples include the use of the word 'lads' that indicates "male bonding and good fellowship"<sup>9</sup>. The orcs, led by Mauháar, even attempted to rescue some of their comrades from the riders of Rohan and in the chapter entitled 'Helm's Deep' (*The Lord of the*



*Rings III* 7), they understood “the concept of parley”<sup>9</sup> and gave Aragorn a chance to surrender: “Come down! Come down!’ They cried. ‘If you wish to speak to us, come down! Bring out your king! We are the fighting Uruk-hai!’” Even the last sentence reveals to us their sense of pride, unity and in some sense bravery because the orcs are known to be fierce warriors. Foster<sup>10</sup> comments that the orcs are quite organized at times:

However, there was some organisation among tribes, and the orcs of the Misty Mountains had a capital, Gundabad. Cooperation was, not surprisingly, greater in wartime, when large numbers of orcs, often under the control of Sauron, were able to work together to fight the Free Peoples. (ref. 10, 305)

In a rare scene, we get a glimpse of the orcs as comfort-seeking creatures that wish that the war would be over so that things would be better for their own kind.

‘You should try being here with Shelob for company,’ said Shagrat.

‘I’d like to try somewhere where there’s none of ‘em. But the war’s on now, and when that’s over things might be easier.’

‘It’s going well, they say.’

‘They would,’ grunted Gorbag. ‘We’ll see. But anyway, if it does go well, there should be a lot more room. What d’you say? — if we get a chance, you and me’ll slip off and set up somewhere on our own with a few trusty lads.’ (*The Lord of the Rings IV* 10)

In the Boethian mould, evil is seen to be “essentially internal, psychological, negative” (ref. 8, 109). In fact, the Boethian conception of evil also explains how<sup>11</sup>:

Absolute good is possible, in fact actual (God is absolute goodness). Absolute evil is impossible, since to be absolutely evil a thing would have to be absolutely non-existent, which is of course impossible. Evil is always parasitic on goodness for its energy and efficacy. An evil thing or person can only exist only by being partly good.

Thus the orcs do not exemplify evil, which is external (Manichaeism) like the One Ring, but are examples of the evil corruption of Morgoth. As they were manipulated by the Dark Lord for his own purposes, the nature of their corruption speaks of evil that comes from within. Evil is seen to be internal and the orcs embody this but at the same time, they have the awareness of the conscience of good. Through their actions, the orcs have shown they are intelligent, daring, coordinated and capable of emotions. Shippey also explains that both perspectives are equally significant and vital toward generating ‘uncertainties’ in the epic that would strengthen the narrative structure of the novel.

The complex interlacement of the narrative structure positively generates ironies (and anti-ironies) for the reader, uncertainties and ‘bewilderment’ for the characters. Those uncertainties, about themselves and others, are mirrored by the ambiguous nature of

the Ring, part psychic amplifier, part malign power, perhaps internal, perhaps external. I have argued that the work’s “controlling vision of things” is in fact a double vision, between the opinions I label ‘Boethian’ and ‘Manichaeism’; and that both opinions are presented at one time or another with equal force. (ref. 9)

In the case of the orcs, evil is a part of good but not vice-versa. It is important for us to know that good is a distinct and separate entity by itself just as Ilúvatar existed before everything else was created. It is the foundation of good that evil is dependent upon. Evil cannot exist on its own, just as the existence of the orcs is related to the coming of the elves, but this does not mean that good shares a reciprocal relationship with evil.

Nothing is originally evil or, in other words “Evil is not a thing in itself but a lessening of the Being inherent in the created order” (ref. 3, 78). The orcs were crafted from the fair elves: this does not mean they are eternally evil without the ability of demonstrating and achieving some form of transcendence beyond their evil portrayal. As discussed by C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*, the concept of Manichaeism is not possible in our worldview today because:

No one “likes badness for its own sake . . . just because it is bad.” They like it because it gives them something, whether that is sensual gratification (in the case of sadists), or something else, “money, or power, or safety”. But these latter are all good things in themselves. Wickedness is always, according to Lewis, “the pursuit of some good in the wrong way”. But since “goodness is, so to speak itself” while “badness is only spoiled goodness”, then it follows that the two equal and opposite powers of the Dualist worldview cannot exist. The evil power, the Dark Power in which Lewis firmly believed, must be a mistake, a corruption, not an independent and autonomous force . . . This opinion is of course very firmly built into Tolkien’s whole mythology.’ (ref. 9, 131)

Colin Gunton also shares the view that not only is evil seen to be ‘spoiled goodness’ but both good and evil share an interrelated and inseparable existence<sup>12</sup>.

And there is something more to be said about the parallels between this aspect of the story and Christian theology. We noted before that evil is parasitic upon the good: it has an awful power, it corrupts and destroys, and yet has no true reality of its own. So it is with Tolkien’s depiction of evil. The ring-wraiths represent some of the most horrifyingly evil agencies in literature. They are wraiths, only half-real . . . Their touch brings a dreadful coldness, like the coldness of Dante’s hell. And yet they are finally insubstantial . . . Similarly, just as the devils of Christian mythology are fallen angels, so all the creatures of the Dark Lord are hideous parodies of creatures from the true creation: goblins of elves, trolls of those splendid creatures the ents, and so on . . . Evil is the corruption of good, monstrous in power yet essentially parasitic. (ref. 12, 132–133)

Tom Shippey observes that the orcs do not have an inverted morality but a sense of knowing good that is only limited. The



orcs are able to recognize goodness when it benefits them or their race and can exhibit positive actions at times but are unable to sustain them because evil, in the Boethian angle, is “internal, caused by human sin and weaknesses and alienation from God”<sup>9</sup>. The orcs recognize the idea of goodness but:

Orcish behaviour, whether in orcs or in humans, has its root not in an inverted morality, which sees bad as good and vice versa, but in a kind of self-centredness that sees indeed what is good — like standing by one’s comrades or being loyal to one’s mates — but is unable to set one’s own behaviour in the right place of this accepted scale. (ref. 9)

In debating this, one must realize the world of the orcs is different from the world of the elves, their mortal enemy. The orcs consider anyone who is against the will of Sauron as their adversary, yet they obey Sauron primarily out of fear for him. And because Sauron’s hold on them is so strong, the orcs are unable to break free. The orcs adhere to self-serving goodness and from the complexities of their creation, splinters of their former self, the elves, remain a part of the orcs that cannot be erased. This corruption is evident when Frodo tells Sam as they embark from the Tower of Cirith Ungol.

“The Shadow that bred them can only mock, it cannot make: not real things on its own. I don’t think it gave life to the orcs, it only *ruined* them and *twisted* them; and if they are to live at all, they have to live like other living creatures. Foul waters and foul meats they’ll take, if they can get no better, but not poison.”

(*The Lord of the Rings VI* 1, my emphasis)

Overall, the orcs do show some form of human behaviour that we recognize and relate to. Their plight is a universal condition of in-betweenness that Tolkien did not fully resolve. The orcs have demonstrated that they are capable of achieving transcendence and that they do know some basic affirmative values but with the interplay of the Manichaeic and Boethian elements, we are made to see that the ‘evil’ nature of the orcs is inconsistent. The Boethian struggle within them also mirrors Tolkien’s treatment of the two aspects of evil as ‘unresolvable’, but necessary to the development of the narrative.

Tolkien’s universe encompasses an unresolvable tension between two views of evil: one, the Boethian (and Catholic) view that evil is only the absence of good, and the other the pagan (and Manichaeic) view of evil as an active and malign force in the world. The narrative constantly pulls us in both directions: we overhear orcs who wish for creature comforts, who demonstrate a sense of justice (even if self-serving and depraved) and who long for the war to end; and we also sympathize with the Rohirrim who overtake a party of orcs and slaughter them without mercy<sup>13</sup>.

And as the orcs are cast in this mould, they remain the ‘brutalized infantry’ of Sauron who are mockeries of the elves. Their ‘bond’ only intensifies their mutual hatred for one another. The orcs cannot be blamed for their predicament because they were ‘created’ to be considered always a

lesser and degenerate race, living a fearful existence according to the will of the Shadow that has ‘ruined’ and ‘twisted’ them. To be living like ‘other living creatures’ will be indeed hard for the orcs as they are caught between battling the better version of themselves (the elves) and handling a tyrannical and monstrous embodiment of evil in the shape of Sauron whom they fear and hate. The orcs are then creatures of circumstances that are manipulated by Sauron for his own gain at the expense of the orcs themselves.

It is interesting to note that to an extent, Tolkien did not regard orcs as evil in their own right, but only as tools of Melkor and Sauron. He wrote once that “we were all orcs in the Great War” indicating perhaps that an orc for him was not an inherent build-up of personality, but rather a state of mind bound upon destruction. In addition, Joseph Pearce<sup>14</sup> notes that “the orcs, therefore are seen by Tolkien as victims of the Fall, as is Man, with the difference that their corruption of the orcs by Tolkien’s Satan was much worse than that of Man” (ref. 14, 95). Thus, the corruption of the orcs, relegating them to the status of killing machines of Sauron, only widens the antithesis between orcs and elves. Hence, the use of contrasts by Tolkien has the effect of putting the race of the orcs forever in the shadow of darkness, to be always a foil to the greater elves. The elves then seem to be made the most perfect and noble race of Middle-earth. Perhaps this is Tolkien’s intention, to contrast the orcs with the elves and in doing so, to highlight the chosen race of Middle-earth. The orcs must be made to be persistently evil for the sake of the elves, and this is why the orcs can only exhibit limited affirmative values that are not sustainable to the end. Tolkien has given the orcs some ‘space’: he has not permanently portrayed the orcs as an absolutely evil race, but neither can he afford to show the orcs ultimately redeeming themselves. Hence, the Boethian perspective is used to demonstrate a slight blurring in the characteristic of the orcs. To show a total transcendence in the orcs would be impossible. This serves to pinpoint the importance of the orcs as a foil to the Elves. One cannot help but have compassion for the plight of orc, as Paul Kocher observes:

The poor brutes are so plainly the toys of a mightier will than theirs. They have been conditioned to will whatever Sauron wills. ‘And for me,’ exclaims Gandalf, ‘I pity even his slaves.’ Aragorn at Helm’s Deep includes them in his warning against the Fangorn huorns, which are marching to crush them, but the orcs do not listen. Never in Tolkien’s tale are any orcs redeemed, but it would go against the grain of the whole to dismiss them as ultimately irredeemable. (ref. 3, 71)

What I am advocating is not that the orcs are good (a word that by now should be considered subjective in its meaning) but that we should view them in the context of evil that is broad and more ambiguous, not something that is finite, pure and unadulterated in its form. Both the orcs and the elves could then be possibly described as ‘two sides of the same coin’ in terms of their origin, troubled history and animosity. Just as the elves’ existence represents good in its



most ethereal sense, the orcs represent evil at its most basic. It acts as a counter-balance to maintain the equilibrium of the plot and as a possible technique whereby the protagonist of the story is not an elf warrior or a powerful wizard or king but a three-foot high halfling. The orcs then provide the necessary *rites de passage* for the character of Frodo Baggins to emerge as the eventual quest-hero of the tale. Besides this, Tolkien must maintain the consistent existence of both images of good and evil, (the elves and the orcs) forever pitting them in never-ending battles with tragedies for the elves and, finally, with no race getting the upper hand until the stalemate is broken by Sauron's foolishness in not guarding the borders of Mordor. Herein lies the challenge for Tolkien to portray the triumph of good over evil as "historically possible, not a daydream" (ref. 15, 31).

Tolkien has also said that his tale is not merely a fantasy about good and evil because "if the conflict really is about things properly called right and wrong, or good and evil, then the rightness or goodness of one side is not proved or established by the claims of either side; it must depend on values and beliefs above and independent of the particular conflict" (ref. 16, 56). Hence, evil is shown to be intrinsically self-defeating with a loss of insight to understand itself and victory is accomplished by the free peoples because of evil's own natural flaw. Although this is the fate of evil, the salvation of Frodo Baggins is sealed when he completes his quest amid a personal setback and returns a hero to Middle-earth.

Tolkien's orcs seem to be the most common image of evil in all his major works: they seem to rank low in terms of importance and intelligence but their function, organization, versatility and commitment are highly commendable for a race that is ignored by many. Their involvement in every single battle from the beginning heralds their ever-increasing importance and also as Tolkien's method of

maintaining a vast, consistent, well-wrought Middle-earth mythology. The use of such an image of evil guarantees the consistency of conflict, evil, plot and character build-up, and not merely a means to provide "a continual supply of enemies" (ref. 8, 174) to the saga. Simple and downtrodden they may be; but the orcs are symbolic of a race that is part of the fabric of Middle-earth. The existence of the orcs is essential to the entire saga; they are not a separate entity but very much dependent on the forces of good, in this case the elves.

In the orcs we see a race torn apart with splinters of past consciousness, the present Boethian struggle, and multiple polarities that shape them as a race worthy of attention. **David Tneh** is from Malaysia. This essay is an edited extract of his unpublished MA dissertation.

1. Day, D. *A Guide to Tolkien* (Chancellor Press, 2001).
2. Auden, W. H. Good and Evil in *The Lord of the Rings*. *Critical Quarterly* **10**, 138–142 (1968).
3. Kocher, P. H. *Master of Middle-earth: The Achievement of J. R. R. Tolkien* (Thames and Hudson, 1972).
4. Stimpson, C. J. *R. R. Tolkien* (Columbia University Press, 1979).
5. Scheps, W. The Fairy-tale Morality in *The Lord of the Rings* in *A Tolkien Compass* (ed. Lobdell, J.) (Open Court Press, 1975).
6. Tyler, J. E. A. *The Tolkien Companion* (St Martin's Press, 1976).
7. Runciman, S. *The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).
8. Shippey, T. *The Road to Middle-earth* (George Allen & Unwin, 1982).
9. Shippey, T. *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (Houghton Mifflin, 2000).
10. Foster, R. *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth: From The Hobbit to The Silmarillion* (George Allen & Unwin, 1978).
11. Koons, R. C. Tolkien's Wizardry: How Metaphysics Molded Middle-earth (9 October 2003).
12. Gunton, C. A Far-Off Gleam of the Gospel: Salvation in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* in *Tolkien: A Celebration* (HarperCollins, 1999).
13. Hayden, P. N. Blogpost on Electrolite (29 December 2002); available at <http://nielsenhayden.com/electrolite/archives/002190.html>.
14. Pearce, J. *Tolkien: Man and Myth* (HarperCollins, 1999).
15. Rosebury, B. *Tolkien: A Critical Assessment* (Macmillan Press, 1992).
16. Harvey, D. *The Song of Middle-earth: J. R. R. Tolkien's Themes, Symbols and Myths* (George Allen & Unwin, 1985).