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MIDDLE-EARTH, MIDDLE-MARGINS:
SEEING DWARVES IN THE SHADOWS OF ELVES

by
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A dissertation
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English
Idaho State University
Spring 2015

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To the Graduate Faculty:

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Gwynne, Charles, Amelia, and Margaret. Thank you for letting me do this. I love you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Brian Attebery for guiding me through this project with wisdom and patience, Dr. Thomas Klein for graciously attempting to teach me to read Old English, Dr. Jennifer Attebery for especially thorough editorial commentary, and Dr. Stephanie Christelow for the generous contribution of her valuable time. Special thanks are extended to Dana Knott for knowing more than I do about MLA documentation.

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ABSTRACT

MIDDLE-EARTH, MIDDLE-MARGINS: SEEING DWARVES IN THE SHADOWS OF ELVES

Dissertation Abstract—Idaho State University (2015)

Tolkien scholarship has generally neglected one of J.R.R. Tolkien's most significant contributions: the conventionalized warrior Dwarf. This figure has become a fixture of the fantasy genre and a staple of post-Tolkienian fantasy, including various popular table-top and video game franchises. This dissertation begins with a discussion of the marginalization of Dwarves in Tolkien and fantasy scholarship and establishes the necessity of a book length study of Dwarves. The first chapter positions the Dwarves of Middle-earth as a central race and addresses the issue of race in Middle-earth broadly. The second chapter examines the origin of Dwarves in Tolkien's mythos and presents a clearer picture of the defining features of the Tolkienian Dwarf. The third chapter is an exploration of the early Norse and Germanic mythological texts that served as major sources of inspiration for Tolkien's conceptualization of his Dwarves. The fourth chapter is a consideration of folk and fairy traditions as possible sources for the Tolkienian Dwarf, and provides several examples of tales that were either directly influential on Tolkien or that belong to the narrative tradition of dwarves. The fifth chapter is primarily concerned with identifying stories outside of the mythological and fairy traditions that represent dwarves or dwarf-like figures and that may have played some part in Tolkien's establishment of the fantasy Dwarf. The fifth chapter ends by looking at a few major

examples of how the Tolkienian Dwarf has affected post-Tolkienian fantasy: literature and games. The dissertation ends with a pedagogical essay that considers how the research translates to teaching practice; the pedagogical essay also proposes a radical assessment model.

Introduction: Dwarves in the Shadow of Elves

In her 1996 satirical *Tough Guide to Fantasyland*, Diana Wynne Jones writes:

Dwarfs are short, muscular, bearded people much given to mining and foraging. They mostly live hidden inside hills, where they do their mining. Until recently, almost no female Dwarfs had been sighted, but now they are seen quite often. They do not have beards, but seem to be squat like the males. All Dwarfs, perhaps through living so long immured in Dwarven Fastnesses, have a very old-fashioned, surly demeanor. They bow a lot, but also grumble. They recite long epics about the marvelous deeds of their ancestors. (82)

The entry goes on like that for a bit longer and is followed by a description of the aforementioned Dwarven Fastness (an underground fortress or kingdom very familiar to anyone who has read much fantasy literature at all). The passage is worth a chuckle for just about any reader, but its real significance is far too easy to overlook. The mere existence of this passage is testament to the remarkable and painstaking work of J.R.R. Tolkien. The Dwarf parodied here by Jones is ninety-percent Tolkien's creation. Many readers, even those very familiar with modern fantasy, would be surprised to learn that before the publication of *The Hobbit* in 1937 (and the subsequent publication of *The Lord of the Rings* in the 1950s), dwarves had no clear and consistent set of qualities or characteristics: there was no conventional dwarf. Tolkien's Dwarves have become conventional. This is a tremendous accomplishment, and one not generally recognized. This may be due in large part to the treatment of Dwarvish material by Tolkien and

fantasy scholars, as well as the way in which readers (especially would be Tolkien scholars) are first introduced to the world of Middle-earth.

I came to Tolkien at a decidedly young age; I couldn't have been more than nine or ten. This is not impossibly young, but it was young enough for Tolkien's work to have a profound impact on my imagination and my worldview—and ultimately on my professional path. The earliest memory I have of reading anything at all is of me hunched under the weight of a heavy quilt, flashlight in hand, late at night, fulfilling every cliché of nerdy children sacrificing sleep to steal away with a favorite book. For me that book was *The Fellowship of the Ring*, and I suspect I am not alone in that sentiment even today. More specifically, I recall hanging on every action of Tom Bombadil, trying to imagine what his songs may have sounded like as he came to the rescue of the Hobbits trapped in the hoary bark of Old Man Willow or lying as if dead in the Barrow Wight's mysterious tomb. These were passages of impossible, immeasurable thrill for a boy—they remain so for the man that boy became.

There is a significant part of me still wandering with Bombadil, and I confess that I'm glad he didn't make it into Peter Jackson's movies. Aside from Bombadil, it was Gimli the Dwarf who captured my attention; it is largely my love for Gimli and his kin that causes *The Hobbit* to resonate so powerfully with me to this day despite Peter Jackson's best attempts to destroy it. But I recognize my love for Dwarves marginalizes me as a reader—appropriate, considering the marginal space occupied by Dwarves in the larger body of Tolkien scholarship. Elves, I have always known, are far more lovely and far more popular among fans and scholars—especially among the scholars.

It is worth pointing out that when *The Hobbit* hit bookshelves in 1937, the Dwarves rather than the Elves took the front page. They tumbled through Bilbo's curious, round door; they brought with them the promise of riches and adventure, and the promise of danger in the form of Smaug the Terrible; and it was they who rescued Bilbo (or he them) from hungry trolls, marauding goblins, and monstrous spiders. The Dwarves were in constant need of deliverance, it would seem. Aside from Gandalf and Bilbo, readers are allowed to be intimately familiar with only the Dwarves. The Elves, who are the central figures of Tolkien's deeper mythology, are ancillary to the plot of *The Hobbit*, which functions as a stand-alone tale. Now it is considered the prologue to *The Lord of the Rings*, but it was no such thing at its inception—some twenty years prior to the publication of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. In fact, it is not at all inappropriate to say that *The Hobbit* is a story about the Dwarves. After all, it is their adventure—their quest—which Bilbo undertakes at the insistence of Gandalf who now appears to have had more insight into the future events of *The Lord of the Rings* than did even Tolkien himself.

But *The Hobbit* has never enjoyed the prestige afforded *The Lord of the Rings*—the prestige that comes from academic acknowledgment and institutionalization. Partly this is because *The Lord of the Rings* deals in a much more serious way with much more serious issues—issues of war, industrialization, and cosmology. *The Hobbit* deals with vengeance, glory, and heroism; it is in many ways much more a fairy tale, its structure and thematic elements easily paired with and illuminated by the work of Max Lüthi, Stith Thompson, Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm, and even Tolkien's own famous essay on the subject. *The Lord of the Rings* is readable apart from any theoretical framework (as far as that is possible, and there are those who would say that it isn't), but subjects itself much

more readily than *The Hobbit* to the intellectual positions of Marx, Jameson, Frye, and whoever else the Tolkien scholar wishes to use as a lens through which to read.

Timing is everything, of course, and *The Lord of the Rings* came along at just the right time as far as literary criticism is concerned. The earliest pioneers of Tolkien scholarship were frequently quasi-spiritualists, hippies and new-agers, drawn to Tolkien's concern for the environment. These early eco-critics introduced Tolkien institutionally, opening the door to the structuralists, who saw in Tolkien's work a multitude of linguistic experiments and the potential of a successful modern epic (where others had miserably and notoriously failed); the Marxists, who saw Tolkien's work as a critique of the corrupt, even evil socialist system—a war machine unconcerned with the well-being of the people or their land; and even postcolonialists, who found in the Elves a melancholy indigenous people beset upon by colonizing Men and Orcs, propelling the noble savage to the brink of cultural extinction. And so the same set of mechanisms that propel students thumbing through indices towards a study of Elves and away from a study of Dwarves propelled early scholars and students of Tolkien's fiction toward *The Lord of the Rings* and away from *The Hobbit*.

Scholars breed scholars, and once literary critics recognized a fertile field in *The Lord of the Rings* they found little reason to promulgate their ideas elsewhere, and *The Hobbit* was relegated to the unenviable (and indefensible) position of the lesser work, the earlier work, or worst of all *juvenile* literature. And so an entire generation or more of would be Tolkien scholars were told to write about *The Lord of the Rings*—maybe *The Silmarillion* following its publication in the late 1970s—but certainly not to write about *The Hobbit*. In fact, until just recently, there had been more scholarship produced about

Tolkien's own scholarship (his essays and lectures on *Beowulf* for example) than on *The Hobbit*.

New mechanisms are in place now at the institutional level that have allowed for a renewed interest in *The Hobbit* and the Dwarves, namely the seismic shift away from the dominant theoretical frameworks of the 1950s-1990s. Tolkien scholars as a group tend towards Medieval studies and philology so that *The Hobbit* has lacked real natural appeal. *The Lord of the Rings* is much closer to a Medieval text and includes much more of Tolkien's linguistic work. And reading Tolkien's work critically is not unlike reading Medieval literature; one must sift through a multitude of manuscripts, many of which are incomplete or apparently inconsistent, until one arrives at something that can be reasonably called *the* text, an authoritative original work of unquestionable value.

Even so, *The Lord of the Rings* is a similar sort of story to *The Hobbit*: Aragorn comes of age as a hero-king in much the same way Bilbo comes of age as a hero-burglar, through a fairy tale like sequence of trials (some magical, many not) which serve to reveal his character. But it is hard to say that *The Lord of the Rings* is about Aragorn or about Frodo; rather, it feels almost more accurate to say that Aragorn and Frodo are about *The Lord of the Rings*. There is simply too much depth and too much breadth of story for one character or group of characters to take control of the story the way the Dwarves do throughout most of *The Hobbit* and the way Bilbo finally does near the end. Even Sauron, whose presence reaches back into the prehistory of Tolkien's mythology, does not have the sort of influence over the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* that would make a reader identify him as the main character.

But this is exactly because *The Lord of the Rings* deals with mythological content—*The Hobbit* does not. Tolkien worked it back in—even to the extent of revising the story post-publication. But it was never a part of the original plan, and it forever and always appears grafted on. However, that has not dampened the enthusiasm of readers towards Tolkien's fiction, particularly not *The Lord of the Rings*.

Four independent readers' polls were conducted in England between 1996 and 1999. The purpose of the polls (which surveyed readers affiliated with serious literary societies, readers of mainstream journalism, and listeners of popular radio) was to determine the most influential work of the twentieth century; the result—in all four polls—J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (J.R.R. xx-xxi). Explaining these results and Tolkien's popular success in general to the academic community at large has proved a daunting task, for fans and Tolkien scholars alike. Nevertheless, Tolkien's impact on the fantasy genre is undeniable: "Tolkien's version of the fantastic...is most typical...is our mental template" for the "content," "structure," and "reader response" we expect from a fantasy text (Attebery 14). This was Brian Attebery's conclusion following an informal experiment he conducted in which he submitted a list of personally selected titles to some scholarly acquaintances and asked them to rank the titles according to their fantasticness. Attebery used this "unscientific experiment" to prove his fuzzy set theory, which it did; it also proved through nearly unanimous results, that "*The Lord of the Rings* stands in the very center of" the genre (13, 14).

Attebery and his fellow scholars have offered a variety of formal definitions of fantasy; fans, also, define genre through less formal means. Though not essential, for many readers this definition includes the presence of Elves and Dwarves alongside

Humans as the dominant races of a fantasy world. Tolkien scholarship (and to a lesser degree scholarship of the fantasy genre) bears this out, and a tremendous body of very excellent and thorough scholarship has materialized around the Elves, exemplified by the work of Verlyn Flieger, Tom Shippey, and Dimitra Fimi; strangely, such a body of scholarship has not as yet materialized around the Dwarves, though there is some scattered commentary.

In an effort to explore the significance of this curious schism, and prove its existence, I have designed my own unscientific experiment. It is a simple one: the method, perfected by curious readers worldwide, is simply to open each book to its index, search a few key terms, and decide based on those quick returns whether or not the book contains what I am looking for—evidence of scholarly consideration of the narrative evolution of the Dwarf as a fictional race, one of Tolkien's grandest and least appreciated achievements. It is worth considering the way in which an index can shape the perceptions of readers by validating the worth of a topic through inclusion, or by undermining it through exclusion.

I recognize that this list is in many ways arbitrary—simply what is in front of me on the bookshelf in my office as I type this dissertation: *Interrupted Music* by Verlyn Flieger; *Tolkien and the Invention of Myth* edited by Jane Chance; *Perilous Realms* by Marjorie Burns; *The Hills of Faraway* by Diana Waggoner; *The Impulse of Fantasy Literature* by C.N. Manlove; *Tolkien, Race, and Cultural History* by Dimitra Fimi; *The Road to Middle-earth* by Tom Shippey; *The Rise of Tolkienian Fantasy* by Jared Lobdell; *The Fantastic in Literature* by Eric S. Rabkin; *Strategies of Fantasy* by Brian Attebery; *One Earth, One People* by Marek Oziewicz; and *Rhetorics of Fantasy* by Farah

Mendlesohn. On the other hand, there may be no less arbitrary selection of books imaginable than what is in front of me on the bookshelf in my office as I type this dissertation. These titles represent, at the very least, something of a primer on fantasy and Tolkien studies.

I sought for a few key terms—dwarf/Dwarves, elf/Elves, and Tolkien (and in a few cases other interesting entries which I will discuss separately)—among the indices and came to some interesting conclusions. To begin with, I tallied seventy-two entries for dwarf/Dwarves, one-hundred and fifty for elf/Elves, and an astounding three-hundred and forty-eight entries for Tolkien (J.R.R., not his son Christopher). Spread evenly over the twelve titles, this amounts to six, twelve, and twenty respective entries per text. Of course, that is a gross oversimplification that does nothing to help us make sense of the numbers.

We should first consider that six of the authors (Attebery, Manlove, Mendlesohn, Oziwicz, Rabkin, and Waggoner) are fantasy/fantastic scholars while the other six (Burns, Chance, Fimi, Flieger, Lobdell, and Shippey) are Tolkien scholars particularly. Then we see that of the three-hundred and forty-eight references to Tolkien, one-hundred and twenty-five are found in the indices for our fantasy scholars. That is better than a third (slightly less than thirty-six percent). The number itself is not surprising (considering the results of Attebery's experiment) until we recognize that Shippey's index does not contain an entry for Tolkien (J.R.R.)—while this is not too much of a shock since the entire contents of the book have to do with Tolkien, it does significantly reduce the count. Chance's volume, for example, accounts for sixty-eight entries alone. On the whole what this suggests is that Tolkien—who is mentioned in all but Shippey's

index, and at least twenty times by four of the six fantasy scholars (excluding Rabkin¹ and Mendlesohn whose texts cast far broader nets)—is central to any serious discussion of fantasy literature.

However, when we check the other terms, we find that of our fantasy scholars only Waggoner has an entry for elf/Elves (a paltry three), while not one has an entry for dwarf/Dwarves. This means that all but three of the combined two-hundred and twenty-two entries for dwarf/Dwarves and elf/Elves are found in the explicitly Tolkien-focused texts written by authors known to be Tolkien scholars. This is a weighty result indeed. And one from which a great many conclusions can be drawn. First and foremost, it reveals that Tolkien scholars view Tolkien differently than do fantasy scholars. While this may seem obvious, the reason for the disparity may not be so obvious. The most likely explanation is that many Tolkien scholars are not fantasy scholars. Again, perhaps obvious, but worth stating for those readers who may assume that Tolkien scholarship is a natural subset of fantasy scholarship; those of us who practice Tolkien scholarship know better. Tolkien scholars (and as much can be said for the six authors in question here with the exception of Lobdell) are most often Medievalists, folklorists, philologists, or some hybridization of the three with (possibly) an interest in fantasy or the fantastic. Lobdell is the outlier—the fantasist on the Tolkien scholarship list. So it is appropriate that his index is the only one bereft of references to either Dwarves or Elves.

The attempt to distinguish among the Tolkien scholars' references to Dwarves and Elves, presents some difficulties. Compellingly, only Fimi's index features more entries for dwarf/Dwarves (thirteen) than elf/Elves (eight); however, she lists many

¹ Rabkin is concerned with the fantastic as a mode, Mendlesohn with a taxonomy of fantasy—the other authors are more concerned with fantasy as genre.

names of both Dwarves and Elves individually in her index, obscuring the true count. A quick search of important names reveals entries for Elrond (seven), Galadriel (four), Gimli (six), and Legolas (four). Gandalf asserts his importance with eleven², but Elves are clearly more prominent in Fimi's discussion than Dwarves. Making sense of these numbers takes some work, but suggests a strong focus by Tolkien scholars on race. This reflects nicely the conceptualization by many fans of a fantasy world necessarily identifiable by the presence of Dwarves and Elves. In fact, as should be expected, three of the six references to Gimli in Fimi's index overlap with references to Dwarves, with two of the remaining three within a page of a reference to Dwarves.

This suggests quite clearly that when Fimi discusses Gimli, she discusses him as an exemplar of his race. The same thing is revealed by an examination of similar entries in other indices. The final conclusion to be drawn from this experiment, is that references to Dwarves tend to be tightly clustered in one or two areas of the texts whereas Elves are discussed more consistently throughout. For example, of the twenty-two entries for Dwarves in Shippey's index, sixteen of them direct the reader to a relatively narrow sixty page section of the book. By comparison, the twenty-five entries for Elves in Shippey's index, direct the reader to a better than two-hundred and fifty page section of the book with fewer than thirty pages between each entry. Additionally, each term features an extended overlapping entry on pages fifty-five to sixty-five, the longest extended entry for either term by far. This distribution suggests that Tolkien scholars are concerned with race, are more concerned with Elves than Dwarves, and tend to discuss Dwarves in relation to Elves.

² Shippey's index features a whopping sixty-one entries for the name Gandalf!

None of this is meant to incriminate these or any other authors but to illustrate what a student or new scholar of Tolkien might encounter. They will look to this excellent scholarship—and by extension, these excellent authors—to tell them what is important to study in Tolkien (and fantasy), and how to go about contextualizing that study. They will see very little to suggest that Dwarves are worth their time. Admittedly, judging a book by its index is tantamount to judging the book by its cover. Using an index to learn what a book is about may be somewhat trite—but it can be an excellent indicator of what an author is about. This author is about Dwarves.

So, too, was J.R.R. Tolkien, as evidenced perhaps most clearly by his carefully composed responses to questions about Dwarves asked him by his earliest readers, both friend and critic. In a letter to Stanley Unwin dated 16 December 1937, Tolkien identifies the Dwarves in *The Hobbit* as “conventional and inconsistent Grimm’s fairy-tale dwarves” (Carpenter 26). But this should not be read as an indictment of the Dwarves, or a confession by Tolkien that he simply plucked these characters from the German *Märchen*. Rather, when Tolkien writes “conventional and inconsistent” he does so to contrast his use of the Dwarves in *The Hobbit* with his efforts toward “the construction of elaborate and consistent mythology” mentioned only two lines before in clear reference to his work on *The Silmarillion*, in which is contained (among other tales) the legends of the Dwarves from their creation through the First and Second Age, the Third Age being matter for *The Lord of the Rings*. So Tolkien is not claiming his Dwarves are Germanic here anymore than he admits they are Norse a month later in a letter to the editor of *The Observer*, dated 16 January 1938:

There is the question of nomenclature. The dwarf-names, and the wizard's (Gandalf), are from the Elder Edda...in any case, *elf*, *gnome*, *goblin*, *dwarf* are only approximate translations of the Old Elvish names for beings of not quite the same kinds and functions.

These dwarves are not quite the dwarfs of better known lore. They have been given Scandinavian names, it is true; but that is an editorial

concession...Dwarvish was both complicated and cacophonous. (Carpenter 31)

It is important that Tolkien makes the concession that indeed he borrowed the names. It is far more important that he clearly refutes any notion that in borrowing the names he was in any way suggesting a direct link between familiar Norse dwarfs and his own Dwarves³ of Middle-earth. His explanation for the use of the Eddic names, even the term dwarf, is typically wry and suggests he was tiring of answering such petty objections and inquiries. He would have used the proper Dwarvish names if he had known using Eddic names would cause so much confusion, but Dwarvish is just so damn complicated. The humor of his sardonic wit is at times occluded by the opacity of his rhetoric, but in these letters Tolkien simply means to contrast the Dwarves of *The Hobbit* against the Dwarves of *The Silmarillion* to point out the (in 1937) disconnectedness of the latter narrative from the former.

Of particular interest, probably because it was a source of terrible confusion to the early reader, is this matter of Dwarf nomenclature. For example, much has been made from the get-go of Tolkien's liberal borrowing of names from the *Elder Edda*, especially with regards to the roster of Dwarves found in *The Hobbit*. It has been (wrongly)

³ Throughout the dissertation I distinguish between Tolkien's Dwarves, fantasy dwarves generally, and specifically non-Tolkienian dwarfs.

assumed by many readers that the use of these mythological Norse names is a short-cut employed by Tolkien to suggest a connection between his Dwarves and the dwarfs of Norse mythology. Tolkien, however, rebuts this notion—they are neither Norse nor Germanic, exactly.

Tolkien is forced to return to this point again and again, and as late as 1954 (following the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*), Tolkien writes to Robert Murray that “the dwarfs [found in *The Lord of the Rings*] are not really Germanic ‘dwarfs’ (*Zwerge*, *dweorgas*, *dvergar*), and I call them ‘dwarves’ to mark that” (Carpenter 207). The letter to Murray is in response to continued questions of translation, and readers (even intelligent readers) conflating the issue of translation with sourcing or allusion. Perhaps Tolkien should have named them in Dwarvish or in Elvish, but he thought “people would not ‘take’ a string of Elvish names” so risked “the false association of the ‘translation’” (Carpenter 207). Apparently people did not take to that approach either.

As late as 1967 Tolkien is compelled to respond in a letter to a Mr. Rang that he “remain[s] puzzled, and indeed sometimes irritated, by the many guesses at the ‘sources’ of the nomenclature, and theories or fancies concerning hidden meanings” (Carpenter 379). Later in the letter to Rang, Tolkien makes two lengthy, specific, and clearly annoyed responses to specific inquiries on the nomenclature of Dwarves: one specifically regarding the name Gimli (which is a very late Third Age reference), and one regarding (once again) Dwarf names in *The Hobbit*. With regards to the name Gimli, Tolkien reminds Rang that the name is derived from the language of men and “given Scandinavian shape, as rough equivalents of the kinship *and* divergence of the contemporary dialects” (Carpenter 382). This is significant because it demonstrates how

complicated the nomenclature has become by the end of the Third Age; the linguistic evolution internal to the narrative is approaching the complexity of linguistic evolution external to the narrative, so even Dwarf nomenclature requires an understanding of the history of both Men and Elves and the development (both kinship and divergence as Tolkien points out) of their respective languages. Sure *Gimli* is a name borrowed from Norse mythology, but that has little to do with its origin or meaning internal to the narrative.

A little later in the letter, Tolkien (clearly exasperated) returns once again to the issue of Dwarf names in *The Hobbit*:

Thus the names of the Dwarves in *The Hobbit* (and additions in *L.R.*) are derived from the lists in *Voluspa* of the names of *dvergar*⁴; but this is no key to the dwarf-legends in *The L.R.* The ‘dwarves’ of my legends are far nearer to the dwarfs of Germanic [legends] than are the Elves, but still in many ways very different from them. The legends...have no counterpart known to me. (Carpenter 383)

So how close are Tolkien’s Dwarves to Norse dwarfs? Not very; they may have Norse names in many cases (or Norse sounding names) but that is no reason to infer any closer relationship. So says Tolkien. In fact, it would be closer to point towards the Germanic legends; but that’s not right either because we know his Dwarves are not *dvergar* (or *Zwerge* or *dweorgas*). All Tolkien concedes is that his Dwarves are closer to these Germanic predecessors than Elves are, though the differences far outstrip the similarities. Such incongruous comparisons are fruitless, and Tolkien had clearly grown tired of addressing them after thirty years.

⁴ Tolkien’s specific use of this word is significant since he has already (years before) distinguished his Dwarves from the *dvergar*.

Tolkien ends this letter, and his discussion of these matters largely, with an almost audible sigh:

I write these things because I hope they may interest you...and also possibly convince you that looking around for more or less similar words or names is not in fact very useful...as an explanation of inner meanings and significances (Carpenter 387).

So it would seem that the case is closed; reading the so-called source material in which the Dwarf names are found will yield no insight into Tolkien's creative process or the maturation of his narrative conceptions. Well, perhaps this is a bit of an overstatement (a habit of Tolkien's). At the least, there can be no harm in reading what Tolkien read.

Whether or not his adoption of nomenclature equates to his adoption of narrative constructs is probably a moot point; at least in the case of the Dwarves, Tolkien seems to be telling us the truth.

Tolkien's attention to the matter in his letters proves the significance of the Dwarves to his mythology if it proves nothing else. His assertion of their absolute originality—that "they have no counterpart"—sounds like a challenge to think differently about the Dwarves, and to really think about them. The down-shot is that we can no longer accept scholarly assessments that either categorize the Dwarves as Norse or Germanic, nor can we sweep them under the rug entirely. The up-shot is we have freedom to search for Tolkien's Dwarvish inspirations in other literary periods, genres, and modes. We do this not so we can "find" the dwarfs from which Tolkien built his Dwarves, but so that we can appreciate the scope and magnitude of the originality of his narrative invention. And while very little of this matters to very many of you, much of it

matters a great deal to a very few of you; that it mattered to Tolkien is evidenced by the pains he took in bringing it into line with the larger narrative of *The Silmarillion*; and this is why it matters to me as well. Tolkien saw value—real value—in the story of the Dwarves: his Dwarves and the traditional dwarfs that lurk always at the back of his mind.

So in the larger narrative we are composing as scholars of Tolkien, fantasy, folk and fairy tales, mythology, literature, and any of the dozens of related areas of academic interest and study, we need to take time to see the Dwarves in the shadow of the Elves. I propose this dissertation as a lens for just such seeing. I will raise here a great many questions and offer very few solutions; I will suggest various theoretical approaches but exhaust none of them; I will proffer evidence suggestive of great currency and relevance of the Dwarves to contemporary literary and cultural study.

The value of this study, the details of which follow, is in the opening of doors for a future generation of scholars. I seek to reveal a path obscured from me by an overzealous institutionalized fixation on all things elvish. The direction of this path appears as follows.

In my first chapter I focus on the significance of race in Tolkien's fiction and the establishment of the Dwarf as a race. This includes a brief response to charges of racism, a look at Tolkien within the context of the shifting and volatile race science of the early twentieth century, and a consideration of the Dwarves as allegorical Jews.

Having established a clear argument for reading the Dwarves as a distinct and central race in Middle-earth, my second chapter addresses the defining qualities and characteristics of Tolkien's Dwarves with particular emphasis on their occupations as smiths and warriors and what we can learn of them from the artifacts they forge.

The third chapter focuses on the Norse and Germanic mythological sources Tolkien may have drawn inspiration from. Special attention is given to the *Edda* and Jacob Grimm's *Teutonic Mythology*. The discussion focuses on the representation of dwarfs in the early Norse and Germanic texts and then draws comparisons to Tolkien's Dwarves.

The fourth chapter shifts focus from Norse and Germanic mythological texts to German and French fairy tales. Particular attention is given to representation of dwarfs in tales such as *Snow White*, *Rumpelstiltskin*, and *The Yellow Dwarf* with comparisons to Tolkien's Dwarves.

The fifth and final chapter looks at some other potential sources of inspiration for Tolkien: the literary fairytale "Puss-Cat Mew," the late Victorian fantasies of William Morris and George MacDonald, and one of Tolkien's own favorite works, *The Marvellous Land of Snergs*, by his contemporary E.A. Wyke-Smith. An examination of dwarfs and dwarf-like figures in these stories helps to illustrate the scope of Tolkien's vision for the Dwarves and the swiftness and thoroughness of its implementation. The chapter closes by looking at the influence of the Tolkienian Dwarf in major fantasy gaming franchises and fiction.

Following the conclusion of the dissertation I have included an essay in which I explore the pedagogical implications that have arisen from this scholarship, and discuss the particular design of a fantasy literature course and a radical assessment model that was inspired by my reading of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Some readers will be surprised to find that a book length study dedicated to the creative evolution of Tolkien's Dwarf as an imagined race is not already available. There

have been some excellent papers published in recent years that deal with Dwarves in some way or another, and I reference several of those papers in this longer study. There have even been authors who have made significant mention of Dwarves in their books; but these books are concerned with other matters in which Dwarves play some key role, thus the authors' attentions have been compelled in their direction. However, this dissertation represents, to the best of my knowledge, a unique piece of scholarship for its devotion to Tolkien's Dwarves. This alone proves its significance. On the other hand, Tolkien fans and scholars rarely need any reason whatsoever to read the latest word on Middle-earth.

Chapter 1: Conceiving of Race in Middle-Earth

While it is tempting simply to accept that Tolkien derived his Dwarves from a combination of Scandinavian and German mythological and folk sources, to do so severely restricts both the complexity of the Dwarves and also the impact of Tolkien as a modern author. Arguing very much along the same lines as these regarding the significant contribution Tolkien made to the conception of Elves, Dmitra Fimi, in her book *Tolkien, Race, and Cultural History: From Fairies to Hobbits*, concludes that “What makes Tolkien’s Elves distinct from many other similar beings in European mythology is their centrality” to the narrative (9). This distinguishes Tolkien’s Elves from the fairies that many scholars have rightly pointed to as their predecessors. So too Tolkien’s Dwarves are distinguished from any single antecedent, equally distinguishing Tolkien himself from his literary predecessors. Tolkien should not be relegated to the role of a fantasy author recreating a romantic vision of medieval England. His vision is a product of his twentieth-century environment—a product of *his* times as much as he would strive to revive others. With this in mind, it feels appropriate to look for contemporary, modern, primary-world counterparts for Tolkien’s Dwarves. Other authors (Dmitra Fimi and Jane Chance come to mind) have done exemplary work showing Hobbits as bourgeois Englishmen and Elves as English nobility; the Númenóreans are clearly a line of Kings (both literally and figuratively); Valar and Ainur are angelic; Balrogs demonic; and so on. Little mention is made of the Dwarves.

It has been suggested elsewhere that the Dwarves are at the very least vaguely Semitic if not explicitly representations of the Jewish people. I would like to carefully consider this suggestion with one last caution to remember that we cannot read Tolkien’s

narrative allegorically in any wholesale way. The narrative will not withstand such a reading (or, rather, such a reading will not withstand the narrative); for the Dwarves to *be* Jews strains every other aspect of the narrative to breaking; where, for example, is Israel? We cannot ask Sauron to be both Pharaoh and Hitler (and every other tyrant who has persecuted the Jews); the image of Gandalf as Moses becomes downright comical. Nevertheless, the Dwarves are at least suggestive of the Hebrew nation as essentially victims of diaspora, and stereotypically possessing a certain proclivity for financial shrewdness.

Before pursuing textual evidence for such a line of reasoning, it is worth pausing to consider that Tolkien's relationship to the Jews was one developed through the course of both world wars—the first of which he fought in, the second he lived through—a point of inestimable historical importance for the engagement of Englishmen with a Jewish people they had historically persecuted and were now fighting (in large part) to defend. Tolkien would have been acutely aware of the periods of persecution that English Jews had suffered across the centuries, much of which came at the hands of Catholic monarchs. He contended with this religious and national history all of his professional life, and has not been immune to accusations of racism in even the most current scholarship. Racism, of course, cannot be excused simply on historical grounds; however, it seems patently unfair to expect authors to demonstrate attitudes wholly out of keeping with their place in history. Tolkien's military service—he was an infantryman at the Somme—indicates his commitment to England and his opposition to tyranny. These attitudes constitute the bedrock of his narrative fiction and must inform our reading.

Tolkien himself was well aware of the potential of fiction—especially a fiction claiming to be a national mythology—to promote oppressive, fascist ideology or to be subject to them. In fact, in July of 1938 Tolkien’s publishers Allen & Unwin successfully negotiated for a German translation of *The Hobbit*. The German publishers Rütten & Loening Verlag solicited from Tolkien confirmation of his *Arisch* (Aryan) ancestry, apparently as a sort of credential required to publish in Germany under the laws of the Nazi Reich. Tolkien’s responses to both Allen & Unwin and the Verlags, both sent on the 25th of July, passionately reveal his attitude towards Jews as well as Nazis. To Allen & Unwin, Tolkien writes:

Personally I should be inclined to refuse to give any [confirmation of German heritage]...and let a German translation go hang. In any case I should object strongly to any such declaration appearing in print. I do not regard the (probable) absence of all Jewish blood as necessarily honourable; and I have many Jewish friends, and should regret giving any color to the notion that I subscribed to the wholly pernicious and unscientific race-doctrine. (Carpenter 37)

Tolkien’s response to the Verlag’s is considerably more antagonistic and begins with a quick philology lesson on the word *arisch*, which Tolkien obviously feels the Germans are misapplying. Then he writes:

I can only reply that I regret that I appear to have *no* ancestors of that [Jewish] gifted people...I am an English subject—which should be sufficient. I have been accustomed, nonetheless, to regard my German name with pride...however...if impertinent and irrelevant inquiries of this sort are to become the rule in matters

of literature, then the time is not far distant when a German name will no longer be a source of pride. (Carpenter 37-38)

This appears to be the polite version of the letter Tolkien wrote to verify his German name and accept the translation—for nowhere in the letter does he deny his German heritage (slight as that may have been) nor, as he suggests to Allen & Unwin, let the German translation “go hang”. He mentions in his letter to Allen & Unwin that he has included two versions of a response and leaves the decision of which to forward on in the hands of his friends.

To attempt an answer to the primary question of this dissertation—Tolkien’s contribution to fantasy of a definitive race of dwarf—it must first be accepted that race is a primary concern in Middle-earth; furthermore, it must be understood that it is not with any malicious or sinister intent that Tolkien incorporated so fully his complex and shifting views of race. This is the principal challenge for a reader in the 21st century. Race has come to carry with it almost exclusively negative connotations; so much so, in fact, that even mentioning race is enough in some circles to imply racial bias or to draw accusation of racism. It should be stated, emphatically, that Tolkien was not a racist. This defense has been taken up over the decades by Tom Shippey, Jane Chance, and Dimitra Fimi, among others, and need not be reiterated here. A reader inclined to believe otherwise has had ample opportunity to be dissuaded by more articulate arguments than those presented here and must choose to accept this premise for a time.

To a great degree, the controversy that arises around Tolkien’s work—especially *LotR* as the most popular work—and the applications of race in Tolkien’s fiction is a product of the shifting context in which the text is received. It is difficult for a 21st

century reader to adopt the ideology or worldview of the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. It may be dangerous as well, since great progress has (generally) been made in the arena of race relations, race theory, and race politics over the past hundred years. Tolkien himself lived through much of that century, and a close examination of his writing shows that his personal growth mirrors that history as well as could be expected of an enlightened and considerate mind. This is not always evident in the fiction since the fiction itself is not always exclusively reflective of the author's personal ideologies; this is part of the successful enchantment of the best fiction, after all. Dmitra Fimi suggests as much when she notes that "Tolkien's [fictional] world is steeped in medieval literature and culture, but Tolkien was a man who lived mostly in the twentieth century and was not detached from what was happening around him... 'race' was a term that changed in meaning and denotations during his lifetime... [his] views on 'race' changed throughout his lifetime, along with contemporary ideas and intellectual trends of his times" (Fimi 314-315). Of course understanding this requires a reader to be familiar with Tolkien's larger legendarium, not just *LotR*, which comes very late in his work.

The changes in notions of race during Tolkien's lifetime are likely less familiar, especially to the casual reader and even less so to those who may come to Tolkien quite young and relatively unprepared through Peter Jackson's film adaptations—adaptations which decontextualize the work to a large extent and serve to exacerbate racial tension through powerful visual representation that may or may not be indicative of Tolkien's original conception.

What is certain is that Tolkien lived through a period of intense social unrest evidenced by WWI—in which he was a soldier—and WWII. This second war was perpetuated in part by a propaganda born of misguided scientific attempts to define race as it relates to human race⁵ through such endeavors as Eugenics, Social Darwinism, and other branches of scientific racism—trends that were countered post-haste following the conclusion of the second world war and the collapse of the Nazi Reich. The development and proliferation of scientific theories designed, in most cases, to promote racial hierarchies combined with Tolkien’s familiarity with medieval notions of social hierarchies and racial demarcations to create a portrait of race in Middle-earth that is nigh indecipherable to many readers. Nevertheless, it is safe to agree with Fimi that Tolkien’s understanding of and position on race change as he ages and as he grows intellectually and philosophically. As with Samuel Clemens⁶ or James Fennimore Cooper⁷, what may appear distasteful or dangerously naïve to contemporary readers can be, in many cases, understood as progressive in the proper context. Again, none of this is to defend Tolkien or even suggest that he needs defense, but to recognize the anxieties felt by some readers when walking Middle-earth and to acknowledge the necessity of at least attempting a definition of race that will assist in the endeavor to better understand the Dwarves found there.

Tolkien makes a number of pointed remarks about the racial ideologies of his solicitors in the letters referenced earlier in this chapter—remarks that may now appear

⁵ Prior to the mid to late nineteenth century, the word race did not imply human race as it does now for most readers—the word was synonymous with species.

⁶ Clemens has been alternately praised and abused for his portrait of the runaway slave “Nigger” Jim; perhaps most noteworthy is his highly offensive (and likely satirical) essay “The Noble Redman.”

⁷ Cooper, most famous for his series of Leather Stocking novels, has periodically come under criticism for a more subtle racial stereotyping; Cooper famously represented Native American Indians as noble savages. Ironically, one of Cooper’s most vocal critics was Samuel Clemens.

veiled. These remarks, when considered carefully, lead to a clearer understanding of how Tolkien conceived of race and how that may have impacted his writings. Most notably, Tolkien attempts to distance himself from what he calls the “wholly pernicious and unscientific race-doctrine” (Carpenter 37). The doctrine in question is the supremacy of the Aryan race (and the coinciding inferiority of the Negro and the Jew) perpetuated by the supposedly scientific findings of anthropologists and naturalists, mostly. Philologists, linguists, and philosophers also contributed heavily to what became generally known as race science in the latter half of the nineteenth-century, or more contemporarily (and far less pejoratively) ethnology⁸.

The results of this centuries-long scientific endeavor, which had been fueled during Tolkien’s lifetime primarily by the Nazi Reich, led to the popular adoption of Eugenics and Social Darwinism, and in the most extreme cases, the mass exterminations of the Holocaust. Of course Tolkien wanted to distance himself.⁹ Tolkien demonstrates his understanding of the principals of scientific racism when he replies to the German solicitors that he does not consider the “absence of all Jewish blood as necessarily honourable” (Carpenter 37). One of the goals of the race-scientists in the first half of the

⁸ Race science itself is difficult to define but generally involves the efforts of scientist in a broad spectrum of disciplines to identify empirical evidence of racial differentiation. While this pursuit has fallen under extreme criticism in the decades following the Holocaust, events of the Second World War, and the desegregation of the American South, many scientists (evolutionary biologists and geneticists most often) continue to show evidence of racial differentiation. They are most often opposed by researchers in the social sciences who have managed to gain the advantage of public opinion. Nevertheless, current research suggesting evolutionary divergences of race are continually published. One recent controversial volume is *A Troublesome Inheritance: Genes, Race and Human History* by Nicholas Wade. It is important to note that Wade and many of his colleagues conducting similar research believe that their scientific explanations can be used against racist ideologies—a very different aim than many of the researchers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

⁹ Tolkien distinguishes himself in this way from some other prominent literary figures of his day. Ezra Pound made a series of famously anti-Semitic radio broadcasts from Italy during the second world war and was a vocal supporter of both Mussolini and Hitler. T.S. Eliot and Wyndham Lewis both espoused anti-Semitic sentiments through some of their earlier writings; however, various critics have provided some evidence that each may have changed his mind after witnessing some of the atrocities performed against the Jews during their lifetime.

20th century was to purify the Aryan bloodlines, especially by removing the taint of supposedly weaker Jewish blood. This pure-blood ideology is not present in Tolkien's work (quite the opposite, as I will show later in this chapter), but it is prevalent in J. K. Rowling's popular *Harry Potter* series in which evil wizards are often shown attacking and even killing Muggles (non-magic folk) and Mud-bloods (wizards and witches with traceable Muggle ancestry). Rowling herself undercuts these racial purity ideologies by representing some of the most powerful wizards and witches as having at least some Muggle ancestry—including Harry Potter, Tom Riddle (Lord Voldemort), Professor Dumbledore, Rubeus Hagrid (half giant), and Severus Snape. These blood arguments are often associated with the conflicting scientific theories of monogenism and polygenism, which mark two sides of the debate over the common ancestry of all *Homo sapiens*.

The most subtle—and perhaps most important—criticism leveled in these letters is when Tolkien almost threatens the solicitor that “the time is not far distant when a German name will no longer be a source of pride” which, when taken with his comment to Allen & Unwin that he “let a German translation go hang” is strongly suggestive of Tolkien's view that language and race are inextricably linked (Carpenter 37). Tolkien was ready to disallow a German translation of his work because the German language would link him to those same “unscientific race-doctrine[s]” he wanted to distance himself from—even to the point of rejecting a heritage and language important (historically and aesthetically) to his Englishness (Carpenter 37).

Tolkien's contentious relationship with the various race ideologies and the scientific attempts to validate them are not unique to Tolkien; they are indicative of a progressive academia Tolkien was clearly a part of as a well-respected member of the

Oxford faculty. What Tolkien did not attempt in his mythos—a formal rebuff of the race-doctrine and the presentation of a newly formulated definition of race for the post-WWII world—the United Nations Economic and Social Council (Unesco) had been charged with, following its general conference in 1949.

Tolkien and UNESCO: “The Race Question”¹⁰

The link between Tolkien and Unesco is an important one. Unesco was represented by a global collection of the most reputable scientists, social scientists, and philosophers working in the middle of the twentieth-century (including Claude Lévi-Strauss,¹¹ Ashley Montagu,¹² and Theodosius Dobzhansky¹³). Their ideas and writings closely paralleled Tolkien’s and influenced the broader social attitudes affecting Tolkien daily. In a text issued on the 18th of July, 1950—roughly half way between the end of WWII and the publication of *The Fellowship of the Ring*—Unesco attempted to reconcile the various misdeeds of the scientific racism movement (Nazism specifically) by redefining race in order to clearly distinguish between biological race and popular (ideological) notions of race. The authors of the document set out fifteen articles in this text covering topics from the scientific differentiation of race, the mechanics of and implications of interracial breeding, and the distinction between biological and mythical¹⁴ race. This last point is of

¹⁰ This UNESCO statement on race was subsequently revised several times, and there have been other statements on the topic of race since; I use this here, not as a definitive statement on race—for either myself or Tolkien—but to illustrate that Tolkien was in tune with the most progressive thoughts on race offered by the establishment during his own lifetime.

¹¹ French anthropologist and ethnologist; a leading figure in structuralism.

¹² British-American anthropologist, rapporteur for the UNESCO publication *The Race Question*, and well known for questioning the scientific premise of race.

¹³ Russian born evolutionary biologist and geneticist.

¹⁴ I follow Fimi’s lead and distinguish biological from ideological—UNESCO uses the term mythical, I believe, to convey the same notion of a race formed more or less arbitrarily from the subject’s perspective rather than from actual, demonstrable biological processes.

profound importance to Tolkien and his audience, and will be considered in great detail later in this chapter. First, it is worth reproducing the five scientific conclusions arrived at by UNESCO following their fifteen articles. Each conclusion is essentially a summary of a subset of the articles. They are presented on the following pages, in order, with clear textual evidence from Tolkien's writing to suggest that he was indeed in keeping with the most progressive notions of race available to him at the time (many of which continue to exert major influence even in the twenty-first century).

UNESCO Conclusion, the First

"In matters of race, the only characteristics which anthropologists can effectively use as a basis for classifications are physical and physiological" (9).

This deceptively simplistic statement requires some significant explanation. The greatest challenge facing UNESCO was to define race in a way that disallowed racial differentiation on biological grounds. This statement is a major stride in that direction. First, it identifies the anthropologist as the figure most equipped to answer the question; this is perhaps less revelatory now than in 1950, but it sequesters the religious and philosophical pedagogues, and requires physical and physiological evidence for classification. This is in response to the arbitrary naming of races as distinguished by religion (Muslim, Jew), nation (American, German), language (English, French), or culture (Turkish, Spanish). This is a critical distinction because it recognizes in a very official way the gap between scientific (especially biological) definitions of race and popular (ideological) definitions. The result is a rather limiting definition of race in which

all humans are of the species *Homo sapiens*. Members of this species exhibit differentiation as a result of evolutionary processes such as isolation and gene selection. These appear as individual populations within the species. These populations within the species, popularly called races, are not fundamentally distinct—they are statistically far more alike than different—and have no direct connection to cultural groups (or religious, or national, etc.). The recommendation of Unesco is to use the term “ethnic group” rather than race when discussing humans (6). And most readers will find this an agreeable compromise. Furthermore, there is evidence that this is a working definition of race in Tolkien’s Middle-earth.

There is a lack of agreement among Tolkien scholars as to which of Tolkien’s “peoples” constitute races, and which are—something else. Setting aside the timeline of Tolkien’s writing for a moment, and working with the completed and published texts, Middle-earth is populated by Men, Elves, Dwarves, Hobbits, Orcs, Istari, Ents, Trolls, Giants, Dragons, and a variety of animals and spirits. The animals are clearly distinct species, so we need not concern ourselves with the giant spiders, oliphaunts, wargs, bears, or horses at this time. The same could be said for those beings that seem to constitute at the least different species (and perhaps distinct orders of creation) such as Dragons, Giants, Trolls, and Ents. A species, after all, is only capable (except in very few odd exceptions) of breeding successfully with members of its own species. It is difficult to imagine a scenario of a dragon breeding with a man—common sense presides over these distinctions. The groups in consideration are those that *appear* roughly human—the Men, Elves, Dwarves, Orcs, and Istari. Tolkien is very clear that the Istari—while they walk in human form (and could, conjecturally, produce offspring with a human) are

spiritual beings—Maiar from the Undying Lands. Orcs are generally considered distinct, though probably only because they are generally considered evil and physically repulsive, so that only other members of their group might find them suitable mates.¹⁵ The real groups in question by most readers and scholars are Men, Elves, Dwarves, and Hobbits.

Verlyn Flieger dismisses Dwarves from consideration, listing only Men, Elves, and Hobbits as the three races of Middle-earth:

Eventually the world is peopled by a variety of species, but two major races predominate, Elves and Men. Both races embody aspects of humankind...[Tolkien] classes hobbits with humans and excludes Elves...thus three distinct peoples...Elves and Men (separately and together) as humankind and Men and Hobbits (separately and together) as mankind. (*Splintered Light* 51-52)

Flieger's explanation for these divisions is that the races (Elves and Men) are distinguished by their immortality and mortality, respectively. Why the mortal Hobbits are identified by Flieger as a distinct people and potentially a third race while the Dwarves, with their considerably longer lifespans (than Hobbits or Men), are not acknowledged is perplexing. Her argument is drawn from a letter written by Tolkien to Milton Waldman in 1951 in which Tolkien makes the footnote (which is quoted and apparently disregarded by Flieger) that "Hobbits are, of course, really meant to be a branch of the specifically *human* race (not Elves or Dwarves)" (Carpenter 158, note). It is

¹⁵ Some references in the lore make it fairly clear that at least certain groups of Orc are created through magical corruption of Elves. This sort of mythical element severely complicates a scientific approach to race in Tolkien's fiction—perhaps intentionally—a clear indication of Tolkien's attempt to reconcile his ideological conception of race (which is largely a product of his medievalism) and the newer biological definitions.

clear from this note that Tolkien conceives of three principal races in Middle-earth: Men, Elves, and Dwarves.

One critical distinction that needs to be made between the Unesco definition of race and what is seen in Middle-earth is that the Unesco group is working from an established position of monogenism—that all *Homo sapiens* have a common ancestor. In Biblical terms, all humans come from the same seed; in biology, the same genome. This is evident in the Unesco definition and is a common position of biblical creationists, since the Genesis account of creation is monogenic. Readers might expect to find this position in Tolkien's fiction considering his well-documented Catholicism; however, what is clearly shown in the creation accounts in *The Silmarillion* and elsewhere throughout Tolkien's mythology is a position of polygenism. Elves and Men are created separately by Ilúvatar, the Dwarves are created separately by Aulë, and the origin of the Hobbits remains a mystery (though it is explained well enough by Tolkien's note and Flieger's commentary on that note, above). The significance of this polygenic structure is that it allows—at least tenuously—a biological system in which ideologically distinct races can exist.¹⁶

It should be noted that the application of a polygenic origin myth in Tolkien's mythology does not equate to a polygenic belief by Tolkien himself. What Tolkien's mythology clearly demonstrates is Tolkien's dedication to presenting what he consistently insisted was a deep and already existing mythology of England. But the bottom line is that it makes perfect sense to conceive of Men, Elves, Dwarves, Hobbits and even Orcs as distinct races in a polygenic sense; members of the same species with

¹⁶ This may be Tolkien's attempt to have it both ways, much to the consternation of critics like Rebecca Brackmann as we shall see by the end of this chapter.

distinct ancestral origins arising (more or less) independently of one another. They must be members of the same species since they are able to interbreed—even if they don’t do so regularly. Each of these races can be further divided into several ethnic groups each with their own set of characteristics (assignable to the aforementioned evolutionary forces and population genetics), culture, religion, and language. This is the natural result of the confluence of Tolkien’s medievalism in the midst of modernity—what Jane Chance has dubbed *Tolkien’s Modern Middle-Ages*.

The notion of Dwarves as a distinct race begins with Tolkien (as this dissertation will demonstrate) and has been broadly, perhaps universally accepted. Most major works of fantasy since Tolkien show Dwarves consistently appearing alongside Men and Elves. Additionally, major secondary-world building game systems such as Wizards of the Coast’s *Dungeons and Dragons* provide highly detailed accounts of the origins and practices of the Dwarvish race (always called a race) alongside Humans, Elves, and Halflings (i.e. Hobbits). To this end, it seems odd to exclude Dwarves from this designation.

UNESCO Conclusion, the Second

“According to present knowledge there is no proof that the groups of mankind differ in their innate mental characteristics, whether in respect of intelligence or temperament. The scientific evidence indicates that the range of mental capacities in all ethnic groups is much the same” (9).

This is certainly consistent with what is seen in Middle-earth. Each ethnic group demonstrates strengths and weaknesses that seem to position one group advantageously over another, situationally. While most critics focus on the medieval-style hierarchies that exist in Middle-earth, it may be much ado about nothing. It is true that Tolkien discussed the stratification of Elvish culture, but culture and race do not directly correlate; therefore, a cultural advantage is not necessarily a racial advantage. Besides, it is no longer appropriate to consider the three groups of Elves as distinct races, since they share a common origin. They are, more appropriately, ethnic groups. The advantages enjoyed by the Noldor depend greatly upon perspective, and are the result of a decision made by the Sindar to isolate themselves from their kin, which has immediate and lasting effects—clearly mimicking evolutionary forces. The same is true of the distinct groups of Men. The Rohirrim are not necessarily advantaged or disadvantaged when compared to Gondorians; Iron Dwarves are but one of seven distinct ethnic groups of Dwarves.

In any case, Men, Elves, or Dwarves, no clear advantage exists in regards to mental capacity. This is an important distinction for the UNESCO panel since IQ testing had become a primary tool of the eugenicists. It was believed that intelligence quotients were directly linked to the superiority (or inferiority) of a race. The prime example was the suggestion by sociologists that Negroes were far less intelligent as a race. This was often substantiated by linking lower IQ scores among blacks to smaller brain size, compared to the generally higher IQs and larger brains of Caucasians. The UNESCO group was strongly opposed to such testing, believing that intelligence quotients were highly subjective and generally more indicative of the education provided an individual, which is a cultural measure, not a racial.

UNESCO Conclusion, the Third

“Historical and sociological studies support the view that genetic differences are not of importance in determining the social and cultural differences between different groups of *Homo sapiens*, and that the social and cultural *changes* in different groups, have, in the main, been independent of *changes* in inborn constitution. Vast social changes have occurred which were not in any way connected with changes in racial type” (9).

The suggestions of the second point carry over into the third. While there is no major intellectual advantage found in one ethnic group compared to another, there is also no significant cultural advantage found among one race (Elves) compared to another (Dwarves) in Tolkien’s fiction that can be explained adequately through “inborn constitution” or essential racial qualities, such as intelligence. This is abundantly evident throughout Tolkien’s work. While many scholars choose to focus on Elves in Tolkien’s fiction and discuss the elevated quality of Elvish culture—even Fimi notes the cultural hierarchy of Elves, Men, and Dwarves (descending linearly)—Elvish culture (whether Sindarin or Noldor) cannot be said to be *higher* than Dwarvish, or even those of Gondor, Rohan, or Númenór. In fact, many of the most notable cultural achievements in Arda before the sinking of Beleriand were wrought not by the great smiths and craftsmen of the Noldor, but by the Dwarves (and, perhaps most significantly, the two groups working together).

UNESCO Conclusion, the Fourth “There is no evidence that race mixture as such produces bad results from the biological point of view. The social results of race mixture whether for good or ill are to be traced to social factors” (9).

A common belief among eugenicists and Nazi sympathizers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was that race-mixing resulted in a watering down of the best qualities of the superior race. Thus the prohibitions against intermarriage between Aryans and Jews for fear the superior Aryan blood would be greatly diminished by the inferior Jewish blood. In America, it was feared Caucasian blood would be diminished by Negro blood. While there may be suggestions of this in the creation of Trolls from Ents, Wargs from the great ancient Wolves, and Orcs from Elves in Tolkien’s mythology, these scenarios are best understood as failed or corrupted efforts at creation through evil magic reflecting Nazi genetic experiments—Melkor intentionally corrupted the creation of Ilúvatar in order to mock it; he was unable to produce legitimate, viable creations of his own through a spiritual deficiency more than a little reminiscent of Satan’s attempts to corrupt God’s perfect creation. In this way Tolkien ascribes not only ideological, but theological, significance to race in Middle-earth.¹⁷ In any case of intermarriage directly shown in Middle-earth the resulting offspring are a sort of super-breed, not diminished half-breeds.

¹⁷ This is central to the creation mythology of *The Silmarillion* and will be discussed at length in the later chapter dedicated to the rise of Tolkien’s Dwarves.

There are three specific examples of intermarriage constituting race-mixing; each involves a male human and a female elf; each results in the birth of heroic offspring. There is a notion implicit in these events that the offspring are similar to classical demi-gods—the Elves being closer to divine than Humans, thus elevating the offspring. Even if this is Tolkien’s model—and this is an interesting point without any real evidence one way or other—the Half-Elven offspring are decidedly unique from the demi-god offspring seen in Greek myth such as Hercules or those seen in Norse myth such as Thor. “The Half-Elven...provide an enrichment of the ‘racial’ structure of Tolkien’s invented world...because the real differences between the ‘races’ of Elves and Men [and Dwarves] are mainly spiritual and theological rather than biological” (Fimi, *Tolkien* 154). Elrond is the most notable example, and he is demonstrably the most powerful figure in Middle-earth (excepting Tom Bombadil, who constitutes a very unique exception). Elrond is wise enough to advise Gandalf, powerful enough to stand against Sauron (not once, but twice), maintains the immortality of his Elvish mother, and the empathetic qualities of his Human father. There is no figure like him in all of Tolkien’s writings—he is in no way diminished or corrupted by his lack of blood-purity.

There is, unfortunately, no example of Dwarves producing hybrid offspring (or offspring at all, for that matter). But one can easily imagine a hybrid character drawing on the best qualities of his (or her) dwarf/elf heritage. A powerful, lithe, immortal, viciously loyal, vengeful, warrior-poet—Beowulf, basically.

UNESCO Conclusion, the Fifth

“All normal human beings are capable of learning to share in a common life, to understand the nature of mutual service and reciprocity, and to respect social obligations and contracts. Such biological differences as exist between members of different ethnic groups have no relevance to the problems of social and political organization, moral life and communication between human beings” (9).

This is the prime edict of Middle-earth. Sauron (and Melkor before him) works to disrupt this commonality—Elrond, the greatest of all Middle-earth figureheads, works to foster it. It is the ability of the races of Middle-earth to cast aside their differences for the common good that most readers find so compelling—far more compelling than the idea that people could completely disassociate ourselves from the very notion of race. This is true at the ethnic group level as well; so, despite cultural differences and some bad history, Rohan responds to the call for help from Gondor. The most potent and fantastic demonstration is when Aragorn summons the Dead Men of Dunharrow to fight against the Haradrim that have allied with Sauron. The larger context of *LotR* is that Dwarves, Elves, and Hobbits (even Ents) fight a common enemy to preserve the future for Men. This is clearly an ideology born of Tolkien’s experience in WWI and as a close observer of WWII—which is almost certainly what the Unesco council had in mind as well as they represented the United Nations and their armies had formed the backbone of the Allied Forces.

This lengthy deposition has served to illustrate that while Tolkien was a medievalist, and while his fiction feels quasi-medieval in many ways, he was a truly modern thinker and writer. That Tolkien so completely reflects the thinking of the Unesco panel by the completion of *LotR* should be taken as neither a criticism nor a defense—to neither condemn his attitudes and ideology nor to exonerate them, as though it were necessary to do either. Middle-earth, for all of its medieval hierarchies of class and race and its strangely religious piety regarding matters of sex, has shown itself a progressive setting for a uniquely transcendental narrative. Race doesn't mean the same thing for Tolkien in the 1950s that it meant in the 1920s—nor does race mean the same thing to the inhabitants of Middle-earth by the third age that it meant in the first or the second—nor does it mean the same thing in *LotR* that it meant in *The Hobbit*. Reconciling these three timelines is a fool's errand; some excellent attempts have been made, but each with somehow less-than-satisfying results. But the pressing concern for this dissertation is how Tolkien's evolving racial worldview informs his evolving conception of Dwarves in Middle-earth.

There are a number of potentially productive entries into this discussion; creation myths and origin stories will need to be discussed, but are complex and varied enough to demand an entire chapter. But the origins of Dwarves within the construct of the narrative and without are two distinct matters. Tolkien's principal mechanism for developing the Dwarves, as with any race, was the development of language. Language and race are inextricably linked in Tolkien's ideology. This is not unique to Tolkien, but it is significant in situating Tolkien among his contemporaries, particularly in regards to race. One of the primary distinctions between acolytes of monogenism and polygenism is how

they approach the evolution of language in humans. There are some notable exceptions, but monogenism generally requires a common language exemplified in the common ancestor which then fragments along with the population. As the distinct ethnic groups form the language evolves as well so that there are distinct languages for distinct groups and populations. Polygenism, on the other hand, demands no common linguistic ancestor just as it demands no common biological ancestor—distinct races of *Homo sapiens* evolved independently of one another, as did their languages.

Tolkien, as a Catholic, would have been a monogenist—but it has already been demonstrated that Middle-earth represents a polygenist worldview. Similarly, Tolkien subscribed theologically to the belief that God had endowed the first humans (Adam and Eve) with speech and, as the human race divided into distinct groups following the expulsion from Eden, language diversified as well. This is explained biblically by the Tower of Babel in Genesis chapter 11:

(1) Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. (2) As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. (3) They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. (4) Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.” (5) But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. (6) The Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. (7) Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand

each other.” (8) So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. (9) That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth. (NIV)

There are a few points worth noting about this passage of scripture. First, it clearly establishes the idea of linguistic monogenesis in the first verse. Second, verses two through four suggest language as a means of cooperation and advancement, which is a focal point of Unesco’s concluding articles. Finally, the concluding five verses of the passage illustrate an evolutionary mechanism for the diversification of language: isolation. This final point is particularly critical since it provides a basis for the link between language and race. Language allows for communication and cooperation, but it also serves as the principal barrier between groups of people. If people cannot communicate they cannot cooperate, and this lack of cooperation often leads to direct conflict, war, oppression, and (in the most extreme cases) genocide. Nazi race scientists often cited the linguistic inferiority of the Hebrew tongue as evidence of the inferiority of the Hebrew people.

Charles Darwin, arguably the most influential thinker of the nineteenth (or any) century, and a noted monogenist, also believed that language developed prior to the diversification of human races. This idea was generally opposed by the German philologist Max Müller, whose lectures against Darwin’s theory of language ultimately led to Nazi race science (through no fault of Müller’s). Tolkien’s personal ideology often seems to be at least partially in conflict with what he exemplifies through his

mythology. The monogenist Tolkien created a clearly polygenist Middle-earth;¹⁸ in similar fashion, he applies the qualities of the Genesis account of a monogenist linguistic diversification to that polygenist system so that each race is not only created separately without common ancestry; they are created with distinct languages. These languages are not acquired, as Darwin and most of his contemporaries believed, through the mimicry of animal sounds and gesticulation, but were divinely endowed at creation, as the Bible portrays in Adam and Eve.¹⁹

To further complicate the mechanism, Tolkien subjects each of his races to the evolutionary force of isolation. This results in seven distinct populations of Dwarves, three distinct populations of Elves, and a huge variety of distinct Human populations. These populations eventually develop distinct languages to match their distinct cultures, religions (one must assume, though religion is notably absent in Tolkien's fiction), and nations. Gondor and Rohan, for example, have distinct languages; however, the way those languages are represented in the text points to a common ancestry. The same is true of the evil Haradrim. The intertwining biological and linguistic ancestry of these groups is a philologist's puzzle, and indicates more about Tolkien's passion for his profession than any particular ideological conviction. But again, it shows Tolkien's keen awareness of the shifting attitudes and ideologies of his day.

Tolkien makes two really brilliant maneuvers in this complex setup that are worth considering. The first is that he establishes a common tongue *after* the diversification of

¹⁸ Even more significant is his use of a pantheon when he is obviously a monotheist.

¹⁹ It is probably worth noting that Darwin is distinguishable from many of his contemporaries in that he believed *Homo sapiens* had a genetic proclivity to linguistic development early in its genetic evolution that allowed for this successful mimicry. They did not, however, arrive on the scene with a fully developed language.

the people and their languages. This common tongue, Westron,²⁰ not only allows all humans to communicate, but all intelligent races. In fact, the ability to participate in this common tongue is perhaps the clearest indicator of race since only beings of a particular intellectual rank can be considered races at all, as the early discussion demonstrated. This means that all Men, Elves, and Dwarves (along with Hobbits, Beornings, Ents, Istari, Orcs, and whatever-the-hell Tom Bombadil is) must be races since they participate in the common speech.

The significance of this common speech cannot be overstated. It allows for a sort of proto-societal level of organization witnessed only in the first few verses of Genesis 11. Ideologically, it eradicates racial division because one language equates to one people. Practically, it allows all of the people to unite in a common cause (often against an enemy) as cited by UNESCO. It is a double-edged sword in that the enemy can understand the communication as well, but it is used to greater effect by the allied forces of good (i.e. the Elves, Men, Dwarves, and Hobbits) than it is by the evil forces for reasons better explained by Tom Shippey in *The Road to Middle-earth*. Essentially—and this is a tremendous over simplification of Shippey’s argument—the evil people constantly underestimate the efficacy of the good.

The racial implications of language in Middle-earth are numerous and profound. There are countless examples of secretive dialogues relying upon insider knowledge of language such as the inability of Merry and Pippin to understand their Orc captors arguing in the black tongue of Mordor or the cryptic password into the hidden entrance of

²⁰ The Common Speech as it is elsewhere called is derived from the Númenórean mannish language and equates roughly to modern English, according to Tolkien in several of his letters. Like English, it becomes a common speech because Númenór is politically powerful and its allies adopt the language to facilitate communication. There is also the very real benefit of a common language among allies, something Tolkien also would have appreciated from his wartime experience.

Moria—the Elvish word for friend, *mellon*. But the most potent illustration of exactly how linked a language can be to racial identity and ideology is found in *The Silmarillion*. Finrod and Angrod, Noldor princess, were visiting their uncle Thingol, the Sindar King fresh off of their entanglements in the complicated events known as the kin-slaying. In response to Finrod’s silence and Angrod’s angry outburst—both of which agitated the grieving Thingol—the king issues an edict:

Never again in my ears shall be heard the tongue of those who slew my kin in Alqualondë! Nor in all my realm shall it be openly spoken, while my power endures. All the Sindar shall hear my command that they shall neither speak with the tongue of the Noldor nor answer to it. And all such as use it shall be held slayers of kin and betrayers of kin unrepentant. (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 154-155).

By banishing the use of the language—here, the Noldor tongue, the High Speech of the West—Thingol effectively banishes the Noldor themselves. Now the Noldor who wish to remain in Thingol’s court or in his realm must abandon their language, effectively abandoning their ethnic identity. To use their own language would be to out themselves and risk a capital offense.²¹

Keeping a language secret can also have the effect of empowering it. It became the case that “the High Speech of the West was spoken only by the lords of the Noldor among themselves. Yet that speech lived ever as a language of lore, wherever any of that people dwelt” (*Silmarillion* 155). Clearly, the prohibition against the language failed to eradicate the people (which was never Thingol’s intention), but it also failed to eradicate

²¹ This prohibition is so powerful that it is observed by Elrond in *The Hobbit* when he fails to read a Noldor transcription, instead translating the inscription into the Sindar tongue before rendering it into the common speech.

the language, instead bestowing upon it a mythical power. The closest approximation is probably the use of Latin or Hebrew in liturgical service for Catholics and Jews respectively. The language is reserved for special occasions and serves to emphasize a group identity.

The Dwarves observe similar self-imposed prohibitions against their own language, Khuzdul, so that very few Khuzdul words are ever spoken by Dwarves in ear-shot of others. And there is strong suggestion that the Petty-Dwarves were exiled for their casual use of the Khuzdul tongue.²² Tolkien does not shy away from the nationalistic elements of language, even those that are potentially more sinister than shame or exile. The Petty-Dwarf Mîm, a decidedly bitter if not evil character, venomously notes of the hill his home is built into: “Amon Rûdh is that hill called now, since the Elves changed all the names” (*Silmarillion* 248). This clearly positions the Elves as colonizers in what Mîm evidently believes to be his land. Mîm, however, was exiled to the land long ago with the rest of his kin when they were expelled from the eastern Dwarf kingdoms—ostensibly Nogrod and Belegost—further illuminating the complexity of colonization and claims to indigenous status. Mîm is not a sufficiently pitiful character for the reader to sympathize with his hardships.

There are plenty of contemporary, real-world examples of the effects positive and (largely) negative of associating language so closely to race. It is counterproductive in most instances to try to find a “real-life” example to credit as Tolkien’s inspiration or source. Those who have attempted such have fairly consistently arrived at the conclusion that Tolkien’s Dwarves appear to be very Semitic, as I alluded to earlier. This, at first blush, makes a tremendous amount of sense considering the influence that racial

²² The Petty-Dwarves will be discussed in detail in a later chapter.

scientists and both world wars had on Tolkien's racial world view, particularly concerning the Jews. But it is dangerous to take anything at first blush.

First of all, Tolkien's fiction as a whole has proved to be highly resistant to allegorical reading. Essentially this means that seeing the Dwarves *as* Jews cannot work; there is simply too much involved in completing that allegory which cannot be made to fit Tolkien's narrative, even by the most insistent scholar. Second, as later chapters will detail, Tolkien's sources are largely mythical (Norse) and fairy (German) in nature, not drawn from his own direct primary world experiences (as are, for example, his depictions of trench warfare). Nevertheless, the argument has been presented regularly enough to demand some attention here before moving on.

Dwarves, Jews, and Some Final Thoughts on the Problems of Race

In another letter sent to Robert Murray on 4 November 1954, Tolkien remarks without any prompting on issues of race "Even the dwarfs are not really Germanic 'dwarfs'...and I call them 'dwarves' to mark that. They are not naturally evil, not necessarily hostile, and not a kind of maggot-folk bred in stone; but of a variety of incarnate rational creature" (Carpenter 207). The time seems to have come, as Tolkien earlier suggested it would, when a German name is no longer a source of pride. I will discuss elsewhere at great length Tolkien's commentary on the spelling of Dwarves and their relationship to Dwarves of Germanic or Norse lore or the philological antecedents and so on. Most interesting about this particular letter is that Tolkien makes a point to distinguish once more his work from that of the Germans, and simultaneously redeems his creation and

the reputation of the Jews he implies dwarfs represent in the German narratives. By extension then, readers are permitted (encouraged even) to infer a relationship between Dwarves (Tolkien's) and Jews. We can feel confident at this point believing that the dwarf is in some part reflective of or representative of the Jew in Tolkien's work. Furthermore, he answers his would be accusers—those who would find attitudes of racism in his work—quite satisfactorily when he writes that “they [the dwarves] are not naturally evil...hostile...maggot-folk” which is exactly what the dwarf is in the mythology and also precisely what Nazi Germany believed the Jews to be. “Incarnate” has powerful religious, biblical implications; Tolkien clearly intended to emphasize his designed link between Dwarves and Jews. The Dwarves are an incarnation of their creator just as the Jews are an incarnation of theirs—neither are the monstrosities of golem-like beginnings that debasing lore would suggest.²³ Tolkien at least recognized a Jewish antecedent behind the dwarf of the German *märchen*, recognized that his use of the German tradition implies a similar antecedent in his own dwarf, and he made sure to point out the difference. If a reader is inclined to see Tolkien's Dwarves as Semitic, this would seem to validate that reading and to suggest a positive representation of Jews, not the anti-Semitic portrait that some critics have outlined.

Particularly, Rebecca Brackmann whose article “Dwarves Are Not Heroes: Antisemitism and the Dwarves in J.R.R. Tolkien's Writing,” which appeared in the Spring 2010 edition of *Mythlore*, represents one of the most significant pieces of dwarf scholarship to date. In her piece, Brackmann references a number of instances in which Tolkien himself acknowledges that he does “think of the ‘Dwarves’ like Jews: at once

²³ Some traditions portray the Jew as less than human—a clay puppet animated through sorcery—wicked and soulless—like the golem.

native and alien in their habitations” (Carpenter 229). The thrust of Brackmann’s argument is that the most Jewish of the traits ascribed to Tolkien’s Dwarves place them outside the heroic ethos of the narrative, thus constituting an anti-Semitic portrait. In 2013, Renee Vink published a rebuttal of Brackmann’s essay titled “‘Jewish’ Dwarves: Tolkien and Anti-Semitic Stereotyping” in that year’s volume of *Tolkien Studies*. It is a thorough rebuttal, largely critical of Brackmann’s knowledge of Tolkien’s writings and her propensity to read Tolkien’s work allegorically. I have neither the time nor the space in this dissertation to pose my own rebuttal, nor would it be fruitful to restate all of Vink’s excellent scholarship, though I should very much like to; I would like to address a few particular points that Vink does not. To begin with, I respectfully disagree with Brackmann’s assertion that “Valor that comes from a motive of helping others is heroism” and that lacking such valor places the Dwarves outside the heroic ethos (98). The use of Anglo-Saxon runes as a Dwarvish alphabet in *The Hobbit* clearly links the Dwarves to Anglo-Saxon culture and narrative in this stage of Tolkien’s development. The heroic ethos in *The Hobbit* is not a classical²⁴ ethos as Brackmann seems to believe, but an Anglo-Saxon ethos—and why not? The greatest heroic figure associated with this ethos is, of course, Beowulf—a figure Tolkien knew more intimately than any other reader of his day—a hero who acted not out of selfless valor as Brackmann insinuates, but from a love of gold, a desire to accumulate treasure and fame, to associate his name with powerful artifacts, vengeance, and a good deal of complaining and boasting. These are the qualities Brackmann herself reckons Dwarvish. Perhaps Beowulf was a dwarf. Nevertheless, of more direct interest to the task at hand are Brackmann’s comments about race in Middle-earth, which demand to be addressed with severity and alacrity.

²⁴ By which I mean Mediterranean—Greek or Roman.

First and foremost, Brackmann refuses to acknowledge the significance of Tolkien's changing worldview from the time of his earliest writings (the early 1900s) through the publication of *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55).²⁵ According to Brackmann, Tolkien's attempts to revise some of the more potentially anti-Semitic qualities between the Dwarves found in *The Hobbit* and those appearing twenty years later in *LotR* are futile and cannot "erase what he had already written" (104). This is unanswerable notion—Tolkien's willingness, even eagerness, to revise what he suspected may have been problematic in his representation of Dwarves means everything.²⁶ Tolkien's greatest misstep, in Brackmann's estimation, involves "the basic assumption that there are innate Dwarvish and Jewish 'qualities'" (103). Furthermore, Brackmann finds this assumption—regardless of whether the qualities in question are negative or positive—"troubling" (103). Included in the list of anti-Semitic qualities pointed out by Brackmann are that they have long beards (88), "they complain constantly" (90), "their love of gold" (91), the relationship of "their very identity with their artifacts" (92), their "desire to defend [their] treasure" (93), and their "vengeful motives" (95). These are indeed qualities of Tolkien's Dwarves—and of myriad other figures throughout his mythology. Nor are they necessarily negative qualities; Brackmann suggests as much, but the distinction is of no consequence in her reading. However, the core of her argument is that Tolkien "still subscribes to claims for racial identity" (104). This is, I suppose,

²⁵ Not only this, but as Vink points out, Brackmann seems to either misunderstand or ignore the timeline of Tolkien's work. It is hard to know which; though I have already suggested that I am largely concerned with the major published works, the kind of argument Brackmann presents exists largely outside the work and certainly must consider fragmentary writings, revised writings, notes, etc...and it is on the grounds of Brackmann's apparent unfamiliarity with these works that Vink bases her counterargument.

²⁶ As Vink points out, this may be a nonsequiter as far as the Dwarves are concerned anyway since there is strong evidence suggesting Tolkien's association of the Dwarves with the Jews does not come about until 1947. If this is the case, then the *LotR* material, and the subsequent material Brackmann either was unaware of or wantonly ignoring, cannot be considered as revisionary in the context Brackmann suggests. For a more complete discussion, see Vink 141-142.

intended to be a scathing criticism, but Vink concludes that “There is no reason to assume that anti-Semitism or any form of Jewish stereotyping contributed to Tolkien’s description of Dwarves” (142). I would agree, and I find Vink’s argument far more compelling than Brackmann’s.

Race is, as I have attempted to show, a central element of Tolkien’s mythology, and we must accept the reality of race in Middle-earth if we are to come to any sort of understanding of Tolkien’s contribution—Dwarvish or otherwise. Denying the existence of race has done little to move us forward culturally; redefining race is critical. We have already seen how notions of race changed dramatically over Tolkien’s lifetime, especially during the period between the two great wars, the period of Tolkien’s greatest productivity. A careful consideration of the redefinition of race and the shifting world view Tolkien actively participated in should be sufficient to nullify Brackmann’s harshest criticisms. Ironically, Brackmann’s reading seems to reveal more about her own world view than Tolkien’s and serves as confirmation of the significance of Tolkien’s contribution of a Dwarvish race. How else could we explain her reaction to what she calls “innate Dwarvish....’qualities’”? (103). Recognition of a set of innate qualities constitutes admission that she recognizes the Dwarves as a race—thus participating in the very same assumptions she finds so “troubling” in Tolkien (103).

The issue that we keep coming back to—the issue that Unesco ultimately came back to—is that what science would call race we as a general population tend to conflate with nation, or religion, or culture. And even populations of people, which are also erroneously and very frequently labeled as race, do have recognizable, discernable qualities—some good, some ill. But race in Middle-earth is generally not a matter of

biology (though Tolkien, as I have shown, did have a fairly clear biological structure in place) or even necessarily cultural, which (I think) is Brackmann's underlying concern.

Dimitra Fimi addresses the confounding nature of Tolkien's combined modern and pseudo-medieval world view when she observes that Tolkien's creation is "Elf-centric." When she makes this claim, Fimi provides us with the opportunity to understand race in Middle-earth as something beyond biological, and even something beyond cultural; race, in Middle-earth, is principally ideological. Particularly, it is a modern recapitulation of an essentialist worldview which takes its clearest form in the dwarf whose diminutive stature sets him in stark contrast to the tall elf and even taller Númenórean, and serves as constant reminder of both his diminutive moral condition and also his second class citizenship. As children of Aulë, the Dwarves are flawed approximations of Ilúvatar's perfect design—his children—Men and Elves. This is a more likely explanation for why we see a select few unions between Elves and Men (always Númenóreans) while we see no such elf/dwarf or man/dwarf unions; they may be biologically capable of producing offspring (i.e. members of the same species), but they would be ideologically nonviable; their essential natures are incompatible from creation.

This is, in fact, how monsters are conceived in Middle-earth; they are not created outright, rather they are corrupted forms of higher beings; their essential nature is corrupted, evidenced by their corrupted forms. This corrupting power of Melkor and his pupil Sauron is made tangible in the form of the One Ring which we see change the hobbit Smeagol into the monster Gollum, all of which is undone by Gandalf through his efforts in bringing Frodo to Mount Doom (and Gollum who bit off the finger and fell with it into the fire). In this essentialist ideology Tolkien is decidedly un-modern. Even

Tolkien's early contemporaries such as Bram Stoker had begun to see monstrosity as a social or cultural construct—a byproduct of modernity. This modern construction of identity accounts, in part, for Dracula's ability to pass while in London (without a doubt his most terrifying power). Evil doesn't pass in Middle-earth without using magic to do so, and even then it is easily recognized and outed by Gandalf or Aragorn or Elrond—characters of intense, nobler essence.

This probably helps account for the tendency of fans and scholars alike to read *LotR* as allegory. It is an untenable reading, as Tolkien himself pointed out on more than one occasion. But it would be unfair not to forgive twenty-first century readers (especially) for mistaking Tolkien's (at least partly) essentialist world view for allegory. If monsters are evil and ugly, while heroes are good and beautiful we can easily mistake analogy for allegory. So we need to be careful not to read allegorically, especially the Dwarves. Though Vink and I argue along two quite different lines, we are in agreement that this appears to have been Brackmann's greatest misstep: "If Dwarves=Jews, Brackmann would have a point, but that would turn the Dwarves into allegories, which they are most certainly not...Brackmann turns analogy into allegory and thereby kills it" (Vink, 141-142). To read the Dwarves as allegory would be to risk marginalizing them and Tolkien's achievement through them of a race of dwarf; allegorical beings belong to no race and exist as mere types. The dwarf who accompanies Una and Redcrosse in Spenser's *Fairie Queene* (arguably the best example of allegory in the English language) is a dwarf out of necessity. The allegory demands that he be smaller, uglier, and less upright (physically and spiritually) than Redcrosse. Thus we hear the "fearefull Dwarfe" cry out for Redcrosse to "Fly fly" as they approach Errour's den (Book 1, Canto 1,

Stanza 13). Tolkien's Dwarves, despite their essential distinction from Men and Elves, are equally capable of heroic behavior. Tolkien makes this clear time and again, as he makes clear the furious opposition of the Dwarves to Sauron (and much earlier to Melkor).

This fierce opposition to the principal antagonists in Tolkien's fiction necessarily places the Dwarves at the center of the story, which in turn necessitates a reading of the Dwarves as central figures—making *LotR* hardly elf-centric (if I can be permitted to disagree with Fimi on this one matter). When Sauron moves, so do the Dwarves—so much so that a troop of Dwarves serves as a sure sign in *The Hobbit* that something significant is about to happen in Middle-earth, and Gimli's mere presence at the council of Elrond in *LotR* is an emphatic gesture towards the severity of the situation. As if to say: *The Dwarves are involved—this must be serious.*

Chapter 2: The Tolkienian Dwarves

Though Tolkien's Dwarves constitute a distinct race in Middle-earth, pinning down the defining dwarvish characteristics is challenging as it is important. In *The Road to Middle-earth*, Tom Shippey is able to summarize the character of the Dwarves in a single passage: "These qualities, it seems, are those which Tolkien chose and developed for his dwarves...the whole tough, fair, bitter, somehow unlucky character of the dwarvish race" (63). But this seems too simple; there is more to a Dwarf than Shippey suggests. For example, we learn in *The Silmarillion* that Aulë creates the Dwarves to be "strong and unyielding" (40). Similarly, in Appendix F of *The Return of the King*, Tolkien describes the Dwarves as "a tough, thraven race for the most part, secretive, laborious, retentive of the memory of injuries (and of benefits), lovers of stone, of gems, of things that take shape under the hands of the craftsmen rather than of things that live by their own life. But they are not evil" (473-474). Much more is said in Appendix A, which we will certainly consider. What is clear immediately is that Shippey's list is untenable in its brevity; more particularly, the characteristics given by Shippey are exclusively Norse, as the next chapter will demonstrate. Indeed, Shippey compiles this list from what he considers the master narrative behind Tolkien's creative impetus—the story from which Tolkien drew the inspiration for his Dwarves—*The Everlasting Battle*. This is the tenth episode of *Skaldskaparmál* in Snorri's *Edda*; it is the account of the kidnapping of Hild, King Hogni's daughter, by King Hedin Hjarrandason.²⁷ Hild is carried off as the spoil of war. Hogni pursues Hedin in an attempt to recover his daughter; however, when he

²⁷ Unlike the texts I will consider in the following chapter, this narrative is not specifically concerned with dwarves nor does it feature a dwarf.

catches up with Hedin, Hild presents her father a necklace as a peace offering on behalf of her new husband. Hogni refuses and the two sides prepare for battle. A second offering—a large sum of gold—is put forward by Hedin in an attempt to reconcile with his father-in-law. Once again Hogni refuses, this time crying out:

It is too late for you to want to settle and make such an offer, because I have now drawn Dainsleif [Dain's Legacy] from its sheath. The dwarves made it and it must be the death of a man each time it is unsheathed. Its stroke never fails and its wounds do not heal. (Byock 107)

This remarkable passage is echoed in *The Two Towers* when we find the company (Gandalf, Gimli, Legolas, and Aragorn) come to Meduseld, the hall of King Théoden. Before entering the court of Théoden, all are asked to leave their arms as a symbolic gesture of good will:

‘Hail, comers from afar!’ [the watchmen] said, and they turned the hilts of their swords towards the travelers in token of peace. ...

‘I am the Doorward of Théoden,’ he said. ‘Hama is my name. Here I must bid you lay aside your weapons before you enter.’

...

Aragorn stood a while hesitating. ‘It is not my will,’ he said, ‘to put aside my sword or to deliver Andúril to the hand of any other Man.’

‘It is the will of Théoden,’ said Háma.

...

[There is a brief argument as to which King has the authority. Eventually Aragorn relents.]

Slowly Aragorn unbuckled his belt and himself set his sword upright against the wall. 'Here I set it,' he said; 'but I command you not to touch it, nor to permit any other to lay hand on it. In this elvish sheath dwells the Blade that was Broken and has been made again. Telchar first wrought it in the deeps of time. Death shall come to any man that draws Elendil's sword save Elendil's heir.'

The guard stepped back and looked with amazement on Aragorn. (135-136)

There are a few key parallels of note between the Eddaic text and Tolkien's. First, this is a dispute between kings. This is significant, because it underscores the severity of the situation; this is not a disagreement between simple people. Second, the dispute cannot be resolved through a symbolic peace gesture, largely because pride interferes—again, a dispute between kings. Finally, the dispute is resolved by a sword, though in Aragorn's case, nobody is actually killed. But the sword is the key to both stories as well as the key to justifying Shippey's claim that this—not one of the specifically dwarf-oriented stories we will look at in the next chapter—constitutes Tolkien's ur-narrative.

Hogni's blade is called Dainsleif, Dain's Legacy, forged by the dwarves and named for the dwarf patriarch, Dain. Aragorn's sword is Andúril, forged from the shards of Narsil, Elendil's blade—an elvish blade any Tolkien fan recognizes. Only it isn't an elvish blade. The sheath is elvish—a gift from the Lady Galadriel—but Aragorn reveals what only Aragorn could possibly know; Elendil's sword was *wrought in the deeps of time*; the smith's name is Telchar, the greatest smith of the Dwarf kingdom of Nogrod. Andúril is a Dwarvish blade after all.

Andúril is not only Dwarvish, but apparently willful, possibly sentient, and certainly dangerous. Collectively, these qualities could be construed as a curse, as we see from

Shippey's list of Dwarvish characteristics. But a blade that must draw blood once unsheathed is not necessarily a bad thing, after all. There is no equivocation, no allowance for second thoughts, no opportunity to back down, and no chance whatsoever for cowardice. When Hogni tells Hedin that it is too late for deal-making because the sword has been drawn, what he means is that his mind has been made up. He isn't being obstinate or unreasonable, but he has an obligation as King to finish what he has begun so that backing down would cost him his own life, which is why he says that Dainsleif cannot be sheathed until it takes a life. A king's life is forfeit to his own men if he shrinks from battle or scorns his duty. Hedin, a king himself, recognizes the honor in Hogni's words and the two respectfully prepare to hack each other to bloody bits.

Andúril's curse functions somewhat differently; thanks to Tolkien's creative mind. When Aragorn tells Hama that it is not by his own will that he parts with the sword, Hama hears in the words a deference to his own lord, thus his response: "It is the will of Théoden." But Hama misunderstands completely; it is the will of Andúril that Aragorn submits to, not the will of Théoden. The sword allows itself to be parted with, temporarily, just as it "dwells" within the elvish sheath, and just as it recognizes Aragorn as Elendil's true heir. Similarly, what Hama perceives as a threat—"Death shall come to any man that draws Elindil's sword save Elendil's heir"—is actually a warning. Tolkien leaves us to wonder whether Théoden would have been as keen in understanding Aragorn's words as Hedin was in understanding Hogni's. Kingship carries with it a grim burden, a burden lesser men (even honorable men like Hama) see as a curse. Perhaps, then, we can say the same of the Dwarves whose essence is bound up in these blades; they are grim but not cursed.

It is no small point that the name Hild translates as *battle*. Hogni pursues battle, and his pursuit cannot be assuaged by gold or jewels. The purpose of Aragorn's visit to Meduseld is to arouse Théoden to battle. These kings and their dwarvish swords do find themselves in the thick of it more often than not.

The overarching theme of these stories, as Shippey understands them, is “revenge” (*Road* 62). This is a bleak portrait of a Dwarf: tough, fair, bitter, unlucky, cursed, remorseless, and vengeful. It would be patently unfair to Shippey for us to dismiss these characteristics as not dwarvish; it would be equally unfair of us to saddle the Dwarves with the perception that their character stops with these traits.

We can learn a great deal about the Dwarves—and the character of the Dwarves—from their craft; after all, their love of “things that take shape” is one of their defining characteristics according to Tolkien himself. So a grim, remorseless, vengeful blade may indeed be indicative of a grim, remorseless, vengeful people. Along those same lines, we have to acknowledge that a Dwarvish blade shattered and reforged by elvish smiths has certain symbolic value when understood as a representation of the reconciliation of the Dwarves and the elves through the Númenórean line of Isildur—Elendil's heir—Aragorn, King of Gondor.

And *The Silmarillion* reveals other defining characteristics of Dwarvish smith-craft which could be read as indicative of Dwarvish character more broadly, as revealed by their interactions with others:

A warlike race of old were all the Naugrim, and they would fight fiercely against whomsoever aggrieved them: servants of Melkor, or Eldar, or Avari, or wild

beasts, or not seldom their own kin, Dwarves of other mansions and lordships.

(107)

This reads like an indictment of Dwarves, and Shippey's brief list begins to feel kind. But if we continue in the same passage we learn that with the help of dwarvish weapons, the Elves "drove off all creatures of evil, and had peace again" (*Silmarillion* 107).

Furthermore, "the hauberks of the Dwarves were so fashioned that they rusted not but shone ever as if they were new-burnished. And that proved well for Thingol in the time that was to come" (*Silmarillion* 107). There is no hint of a curse or ill-fate in this description of the Dwarvish arms and armor, so again I think it is helpful to consider that "warlike" is not a pejorative descriptor, nor is ferocity which can be easily construed as vengeance or bitterness. And this amelioration is affirmed by Tolkien in Appendix F of *The Return of the King* when he notes the falseness of some of the old tales (conjecturally, tales from *The Silmarillion*) suggesting the evil nature of Dwarves and points out that these tales were a smear campaign against the Dwarves in an effort to obtain "their wealth and the works of their hands" (474).

Clearly the character of the Dwarves is bound up in the smith-craft of the Dwarves; the shining hauberks without rust attest to the steadfastness and readiness of the Dwarves, and the image of elves wading into battle with dwarvish weapons against evil foes is akin to wading into battle with the Dwarves at their side (which they do on more than one occasion). So as to better discern the character of the dwarvish race, we need to look closely at their greatest artifacts (Andúril notwithstanding). The greatest of all is the Nauglamír, the Necklace of the Dwarves.

The Nauglamír²⁸

In the early years of the First Age of the Sun, Thingol sends the Dwarves of Belegost and Nogrod to the caverns of Narog to begin construction on the fortress of Nargothrond for the Noldor lord Finrod Felagund, the Hewer of Caves.²⁹ Finrod pays the Dwarves with gold and jewels from his treasury, and from a portion of this payment the Dwarves fashion a necklace as a token of honor for Finrod. According to *The Silmarillion*:

In that time was made for him the Nauglamír, the Necklace of the Dwarves, most renowned of their works in the Elder Days. It was a carcanet of gold, and set therein were gems uncounted from Valinor; but it had a power within it so that it rested lightly on its wearer as a strand of flax, and whatsoever neck it clasped it sat always with grace and loveliness. (134)

Surprisingly little else is said of the Nauglamír, which apparently stays in Finrod's possession until he leaves Nargothrond to aid the human hero Beren in his quest for the Silmaril some four hundred years later. Amazingly, in spite of its relatively mundane and potentially heavy composition of gold and gems from Valinor, the Nauglamír remains surprisingly light because "it had a power within it." Tolkien's careful use of *but* to adjoin the clauses, suggests that the enchantment originated as a part of the creation

²⁸ I defer here to the account presented in *The Silmarillion*. Other versions of the story can be found—especially an early draft called "The Nauglafring" recorded in *The Book of Lost Tales* 2. Not only is this draft of the story considerably longer, Christopher Tolkien notes in his commentary that "The stories are profoundly different in essential features... while the whole history of the relation between Thingol and the Dwarves is changed" (246). This is a profoundly interesting read, and if my goal were to exhaustively trace the minute developments of the tale specifically or Dwarves more generally, then I would necessarily discuss it at length here; however, as I am principally concerned with demonstrating Tolkien's lasting contribution of a race of Dwarves to fantasy and the popular consciousness of readers, I choose to focus on that version which is most familiar and the one Tolkien settled on publishing. The story that appears in *The Children of Húrin* is hybridized by Christopher but most closely resembles that of *The Silmarillion*. The source for the Nauglamir is likely the Brisingamen—the mythical necklace of the Norse goddess Freya which also appears in *Beowulf* (line 1198).

²⁹ At this same time, Turgon was beginning the construction of Gondolin.

process rather than as a product of the material components, implying a unique quality of the dwarvish artifact—beyond reflecting dwarvish character, it may actually carry within its composition the essence of that character.³⁰

While such a maneuver can appear sinister, such as Sauron's own divestiture of power into the One Ring, in this instance the Dwarves use their ability benevolently³¹ to render the Nauglamír supernaturally light and beautiful. The mechanism of enchantment is not immediately clear; it could be that the Nauglamír actually extends in length to accommodate the tall Noldor Prince Finrod then later contracts to fit a Dwarf-lord.³² Regardless of the mechanism, this magic is particularly impressive considering the sheer volume of jewels said to be set into the carcanet.

The Nauglamír plays an important part in the relations between Dwarves and Elves. And it is interesting to contemplate why this artifact is even called the Nauglamír, the Necklace of the Dwarves, when it seems as though it should have been called the Necklace of Finrod. After all, it was made specifically for Finrod, from Finrod's gold and jewels that he brought with him out of Tirion. The name seems to signify ownership and represents an important philosophical distinction between the Dwarves who value crafting and labor and the Elves who value living things—the very distinction set forth in Appendix F of *The Return of the King*—which must be considered a distinguishing quality of Tolkien's Dwarves. In this particular case, the ownership by virtue of craft

³⁰ This would certainly be in keeping with Tolkien's own views on the creative process. The divestiture of spiritual energy during the act of creation is a recurring theme easily seen in *The Silmarillion* as well as the much more allegorical *Leaf by Niggle*.

³¹ The Nauglamír acts differently than the knife of Flinding or Anglachel.

³² The One Ring possessed a similar power, growing heavy at times, light at others—large enough to fit the hand of Sauron, yet small enough to fit securely on Hobbit fingers as well.

supersedes ownership of the raw materials of gold and jewels.³³ That is—a necklace made by Dwarves from materials provided by Elves belongs to the Dwarves.

This ownership dispute is pronounced and escalates quickly to tragic violence. The Dwarves hold that an item of their make should return to their possession after the original owner dies and so believe, following the death of Finrod, that the Nauglamír should rightfully return to the Dwarves, despite the elvish origin of the materials used to create it. It is easy to see how such ownership laws could cause discord between the Elves and the Dwarves.

Some four-hundred and fifty years after the creation of the Nauglamír, Finrod leaves his home to aid Beren in the quest of the Silmaril. He perishes on this quest, killed by a werewolf in the pits of Sauron. Nargothrond and all of its treasure, including the Nauglamír, are left to Finrod's brother Orodreth and are eventually sacked by Glaurung, the father of all dragons.

In spite of Finrod's death, Beren's quest is successful; he manages to cut one of the three Silmarils from the crown of Melkor. Beren trades the stone to Thingol for his daughter's hand, evidencing the value the Elves have for their heirlooms.

The Silmarils themselves were more than mere jewels; they contained the last light of the Trees of Valinor which had been destroyed by Ungoliant in an event known as the Darkening of Valinor. The Silmarils were cursed so that destruction seemed to follow in their wake, and in time the heart of Thingol becomes corrupted and his kingdom laid bare to Melkor. Thus we see that cursing is not a quality reserved for the

³³ In fact, early on Dwarves preferred to work almost exclusively with iron and stone. Only after they began trafficking with the Elves did they take real interest in gold and jewels.

Dwarves; the Noldor are capable of executing curses as well, and even ascribing these curses to their artifacts.

Eventually, the hero Húrin ventures to the sacked Nargothrond where we are told he “stood before the broken Doors of [Finrod], leaning on his staff” (*The Silmarillion* 284). The Petty-Dwarf Mîm had also returned to Nargothrond, and he rushed to meet Húrin at the entrance, calling out “I am Mîm; and before the proud ones came from over the Sea, Dwarves delved the halls of Nulukkidîn. I have but returned to take what is mine; for I am the last of my people”³⁴ (*The Silmarillion* 284).

The tale of Mîm is short, and it is found in the twenty-first chapter of *The Silmarillion*.³⁵ Mîm is one of three remaining Dwarves who had been banished from the great dwarvish kingdoms in the East. Over a long period of time—perhaps hundreds of years—these outcast Dwarves “diminished” and were hunted by the Elves. Mîm is captured by Túrin and he leads the men to his home, what remains of an apparently much older and larger subterranean city. These Petty-Dwarves no longer mine, they no longer smith, and they apparently no longer fight. But they are evidently still Dwarves, for this is how both the narrator and Túrin refer to them.

Aside from the fact that any character who receives a half-dozen pages in the story of Túrin Turambar must be taken seriously, Mîm is an important figure in understanding the Tolkienian Dwarf because Mîm is aberrant. These are Dwarves, but they are diminished Dwarves. “Diminished” is significant in Tolkien’s lexicon—it refers

³⁴ Mîm speaks in half-truths, delusions, the way Gollum eventually will. Petty-dwarves, not Dwarves proper, were responsible for hewing the original caves of Narog, as can be surmised by their rough and uninhabitable condition when Finrod first begins the construction of Nargothrond. So, in a certain sense, Mîm is returning to the halls of his ancestors, but to call the builders of those original caves Dwarves is to claim a heritage that is not his to claim.

³⁵ Again, I will remind the reader that I defer here to this one version, though others are available, especially in *The Book of Lost Tales 2* and *The Children of Húrin*.

to both the physical and the spiritual condition of the character. We see, most famously, the Elves diminishing in the Third Age. After one diminishes, one fades, and then one is utterly imperceptible. So in the case of Mîm, he is diminished in physical stature, which is the most likely cause for the Sindar to label him as Nibin (Petty). But we have to assume that as their physical being wanes, so too does their spiritual being. Mîm and his sons, Khîm and Ibun, are petty both in size and character. And they have diminished individually into something only vaguely reminiscent of a Dwarf, but they have also diminished in number to a paltry three, with no hope of ever multiplying again. Túrin and his men recognize these as Dwarves, but I have some suspicion that we would not.

Húrin, having lived with the Sindar, knows of the Petty-Dwarves and understands more than what Mîm intends. To what would Mîm be entitled as his inheritance? Certainly not the gold and jewels of Valinor, nor the smith-craft of the Noldor and Dwarves stored up in Nargothrond over the past five hundred years. Húrin is keenly aware of this and without delay slays Mîm. He then enters Nargothrond, where he “stay[s] a while,” but amazingly when he issues out once again from the vastness of Nargothrond, “he [bears] with him *out of all that great hoard* but one thing only” (*The Silmarillion* 285, my emphasis). For five years Glaurung had piled up and slept on and sullied all the countless treasures of Nargothrond, and yet Húrin finds and retrieves the Nauglamír. Húrin brings the Nauglamír out of Nargothrond where it has rested peacefully for more than four centuries and brings it to the shining halls of Menegroth, where he presents the Nauglamír as a gift to Thingol saying, “Receive now, lord, the Necklace of the Dwarves, as a gift from one who has nothing, and as a memorial of Húrin of Dor-lómin. For now *my* fate is fulfilled, and *the purpose of [Melkor] achieved*; but I am his

thrall no longer” (*The Silmarillion* 286, emphasis mine). In this simple act, Húrin passes the curse of Melkor from himself to Thingol. His fate as the thrall of Melkor is fulfilled by the very act of bringing the Nauglamír to Thingol. Húrin then travels far into the West, and when at last he reaches the sea, he flings himself into the waves and is seen no more. The death of Húrin marks the end of the Nauglamír’s involvement with Men, but its power over Elves and Dwarves is waxing full.

Following the departure of Húrin, Thingol begins to brood upon the Nauglamír and upon the Silmaril of Fëanor. He becomes so obsessed with the Silmaril that he removes it from his guarded treasury and keeps it on his person at all times. The power of the Silmaril is eerily similar to the effect that the One Ring has on Gollum, Bilbo, and Frodo.³⁶ In each case, the possessor is stripped of clear reason and ultimately becomes the possessed. *The Silmarillion* says of Thingol that “it came into his mind that [the Nauglamír] should be remade,” and that he “became bound to [the Silmaril]” (286). Clearly this is an external suggestion, the origin of which is unclear. It may come from the Nauglamír which had been touched by the dragon or from the Silmaril which had been touched by Melkor; either way, the wicked power of Melkor—who has now polluted both the Nauglamír and the Silmaril—has taken hold of Thingol.

This seems to be in stark contrast to the scenario described earlier in which Aragorn perceives the will of Andúril without the sword speaking directly into his mind. There is no clear explanation for the distinction, though it is likely that because the shards

³⁶ Not only this, but the Arkenstone has the same effect on Thorin—and to some extent this is the effect of the palantir on Sauruman and Denethor—the artifacts act as a spiritual conduit, channeling malignant power to the possessor. It is worth noting that the rings of power forged by Sauron for the seven Dwarf-lords apparently had a similar sort of influence on the dwarves, which is distinct from the domination experienced by others who possessed rings of power. In Appendix A of *The Return of the King*, it is written that “the Dwarves proved untamable by this means. The only power over them that the Rings wielded was to inflame their hearts with a greed of gold and precious things” (407).

of Narsil had remained in the possession of the Dúnedain and safe in Rivendell it avoided the taint of Sauron, thus distinguishing it greatly from the One Ring or the Nauglamír.

Nevertheless, a great host of Dwarves had come to Menegroth from Nogrod³⁷ and Thingol solicited them to re-forge the Nauglamír with the Silmaril at its center, effectively making the Silmaril the heart of the Nauglamír, completing its connection to the Arkenstone (which I will discuss later in this chapter). Thingol's decision is ill-fated:

The Dwarves looked upon the work of their fathers, and they beheld with wonder the shining [Silmaril]; *and they were filled with a great lust to possess them*, and carry them off to their far homes in the mountains. But they dissembled their mind, and consented to the task. (287, emphasis mine)

Thus, like Thingol, the Dwarves also were overcome with a desire not their own. But the Dwarves were in such total accord that they were able to conceal their plans as if with a single mind, and so they worked for Thingol. The Dwarves were long at their labor, and Thingol would often tarry in the smithies with them. When the great work was finally finished, it was marvelous, and Thingol's "desire was achieved" (*The Silmarillion* 287). However, when he made to place the Nauglamír about his neck, "the Dwarves in that moment withheld it from him, and demanded that he yield it up to them, saying: 'By what right does the Elvenking lay claim to the Nauglamír that was made by our fathers for Finrod Felagund who is dead?'" (*The Silmarillion* 287). The Dwarves of Nogrod apply the same argument that Mîm attempted to use on Húrin: that the Nauglamír should revert back to its creators after the death of its intended owner. Half a millennia has passed, and still the Dwarves claim ownership rights to the work of their fathers, affirming the quality

³⁷ When the Nauglamír was originally made, Dwarves from both Nogrod and Belegost were present.

Tolkien records in Appendix F of *The Return of the King*; they are indeed “retentive of the memory of injuries (and of benefits)” (473).

Thingol perceives on the part of the Dwarves a thinly veiled attempt to take possession of the Silmaril, “and in his wrath and pride he gave no heed to his peril, but spoke to them in scorn [...] And standing tall and proud among them he bade them with shameful words be gone unrequited out of Doriath” (*The Silmarillion* 287-288). The Dwarves are often pegged as temperamental, greedy, and possibly wicked. Here it is Thingol, one of the most noble and ascendant Elves, who demonstrates an equal portion of self-indulgence and pride. So, pride clashes with pride, greed with greed, and bloodshed soon ensues.

The Silmarillion recounts that:

The lust of the Dwarves was kindled to rage by the words of the King; and they rose up about him, and laid hands on him, and slew him as he stood.[...]Then the Dwarves taking the Nauglamír passed out of Menegroth and fled eastwards through Region.” (288)

Thus, the Nauglamír was reforged to house the Silmaril, combining Thingol’s lust for the Silmaril with the Dwarves’ lust for the Nauglamír. The end result is that all involved perish. The Dwarves flee; all of their company but two are slain in the woods; and the Nauglamír is taken back to Menegroth. Following these events, the Dwarves of Nogrod seek help from their cousins in Belegost in hopes of retrieving the necklace yet again. The Belegost Dwarves refuse, but the Dwarves of Nogrod attempt the assault on Menegroth anyway. Many more Dwarves and Elves are slain in the ensuing battle for the

Nauglamír, which changes hands several times over a period of relatively few years, until it is eventually lost.³⁸

The Arkenstone

The lore of the Arkenstone closely resembles the Nauglamír/Silmaril lore. Bilbo first discovers the Arkenstone (and we along with him) after he and the Dwarves have shut themselves in the halls of Erebor following the arousal of Smaug; in the darkness, Bilbo perceives “a pale white glint, above him and far off in the gloom” (*Hobbit* 235). He wanders off to investigate. As he draws closer, the glint becomes “a little globe of pallid light” and eventually “a flickering sparkle of many colours” (*Hobbit* 237). The stone “shone before [Bilbo’s] feet of its own inner light, and yet, cut and fashioned by the dwarves...it took all light that fell upon it and changed it into ten thousand sparks of white radiance shot with glints of the rainbow” (*Hobbit* 237). It is no wonder that Thorin became obsessed with finding the Arkenstone, or why it stood for centuries as symbol for the king of Erebor.

The resemblance to the Simarils is fairly clear and direct, and I believe they are at least conceptually connected, as are the magic rings (and especially the One Ring) in the quality of the enchantments and the effect they have on those who come into contact with them. Thorin’s response to the Arkenstone—even Bilbo’s response initially—is nearly identical to Thingol’s response to seeing the Silmaril set into the Nauglamír. We are told that “Bilbo’s arm went towards it drawn by its enchantment” (*Hobbit* 237). This is the second occasion Bilbo has had to pick up and pocket an enchanted artifact, and on each

³⁸ The Silmaril ends up either as a star or possibly as the jewel Elessar given to Aragorn by Galadriel before he departs Rivendell. Elessar—which means “elf-stone”—is the name the elves prefer for Aragorn, especially once he assumes his kingship of Gondor.

occasion his body seems to move in response to the artifact rather than out of a conscious effort. We can—and must—distinguish between the Arkenstone and the One Ring at least in so much as the One Ring was a tool of Sauron used to dominate the mind and will of others while the Arkenstone, though it generates a powerful response, does not seem possessed of that malicious spirit.

Either way, it is clear that the Arkenstone desired to be found by Bilbo and brought out of the treasure hoard of Smaug—exactly the scenario played out in the tale of the Nauglamír which had also once been the greatest treasure of the Dwarves and had similarly been lain upon as part of a dragon hoard and then brought out of that hoard by Húrin following the death of the dragon Glaurung. While I am not claiming these to be the same artifact (the Arkenstone is not literally a Silmaril), they are nearly indistinguishable in their conception.

The Arkenstone is unique because it is a naturally occurring jewel; in this regard it has no parallel in Tolkien's lore. Thus, it is possible that the enchantment that lay upon it was not a result of the Dwarves' working with it—there is simply no way to know. Likewise, it is Sauron's malice that makes the One Ring so dangerous (and ultimately what makes it possible for the One Ring to summon the others, since they all were touched by Sauron and bear some portion of his malice—all except the three rings possessed by the Elven-lords). Clearly, it is not the Dwarves alone who have the skill to craft enchanted artifacts; this is useful since the quality of the enchantment could be used as an indicator of the quality of the one who placed the enchantment. Again, it is Sauron's own evil spirit that makes the One Ring malicious and dangerous. The Silmaril held a potentially dangerous sway over the hearts of Elves because they contained the last

light of Valinor. What we know of the Arkenstone is that it ignites the desire for wealth, “the desire of dwarves” (*Hobbit* 216). Much can be said of this desire and the changes of character that may be affected in Dwarves by their apparently racial craving for gems and wealth of all kind; “even the most respectable [Dwarf], is wakened by gold and jewels, he grows suddenly bold, and he may become fierce” (*Hobbit* 239). Whether these are negative qualities or positive is for the individual reader to decide—they simply are qualities of Dwarves, and Tolkien’s Dwarves most specifically.

The remaining tale of the Arkenstone is fairly brief and familiar to most readers; Bilbo uses the stone to help Bard barter for provisions from Thorin and initially results in drawing Thorin’s wrath towards Bilbo; then, upon Thorin’s death (which is honorable, he having broken free of the enchantment in the end) he is buried beneath the mountain with the Arkenstone upon his breast. Again, the correspondence among the Arkenstone, the Silmaril, and the One Ring is remarkable. The Arkenstone has returned to the heart of the mountain, the light of the Silmaril shines on as a star that guides the Elves to the undying lands, and the One Ring is ultimately destroyed in the fires of Orodruin where it had been forged. Recognizing the connection between these three artifacts helps to solidify the significance of the Dwarf as a race in Middle-earth on par with Elves and Men and really further emphasizes the significant contribution Tolkien makes to fantasy literature in presenting such a Dwarf.

The Warrior Dwarf

The centrality of the Dwarves to Tolkien’s mythology, which was touched upon in the previous chapter, is worth revisiting now in greater detail. Aside from their skill at smith-

craft—a skill which Tolkien recognized in, and borrowed from, the Norse dwarf—Tolkien’s Dwarves are most recognizable as warriors. In fact, this image of the warrior dwarf has become so familiar, that most readers of fantasy would be surprised to find that prior to the publication of *The Hobbit* in 1937, very few such dwarfs can be found, certainly not an entire race—seven kingdoms worth—of warrior dwarfs.

The war-like aspect of Tolkien’s Dwarves is not merely cosmetic. And in a passage from Appendix A of *The Return of the King*, this particular characteristic is given as the central counterargument to those (like Fimi and Fleiger) who would shunt the Dwarves aside or relegate them to stand in the long shadows of the elves:

“I grieved at the fall of Thorin,” said Gandalf [to Frodo and Gimli]; “and now we hear that Dáin has fallen, fighting in Dale once again, even while we fought here...When you think of the great Battle of the Pelennor, do not forget the battles in Dale and the valour of Durin’s Folk. Think of what might have been. Dragon-fire and savage swords in Eriador, night in Rivendell. There might be no Queen in Gondor...but that has been averted—because I met Thorin Oakenshield one evening on the edge of spring in Bree. A chance-meeting, as we say in Middle-earth.” (410-411)

In this passage Gandalf, following the victory at Pelennor and the coronation of Aragorn as King Ellesar of Gondor and his wedding to Arwen, eulogizes the fallen Dwarves of the northern kingdoms of Erebor and the Iron Hills. According to Gandalf—and none would doubt his presage and insight—the efforts at Pelennor would have been for naught without the Dwarf blood spilled far to the north. This is because Gandalf knows (and

likely Aragorn and certainly Elrond) that Sauron intended to first destroy the Elves at Rivendell before assailing Gondor and reclaiming his full power in Mordor.

Gandalf's curious remark about his chance meeting with Thorin way back before the start of *The Hobbit*, is clarified at other points in the same Appendix A; the entire expedition to Erebor, as it turns out, was Gandalf's plan to remove Smaug, whom he perceived to be a potential tool for Sauron. It would be way too simple to dismiss Gandalf's discourse as mere sentiment or an effort to honor his friend Gimli, who at the time had to be feeling very distant from home as well as distraught over the lives of his kin that had been lost in his absence—an almost certain point of shame. Gandalf's words probably do make Gimli feel better about the part he had played in the defeat of Sauron, but they clearly establish the Dwarves as central not only in Tolkien's conception of Middle-earth, but central in the narrative that Tolkien eventually constructs.

They also establish the Dwarves as warriors. This is the effect of a eulogy—to establish the legacy of the eulogized. In this case, the only quality named by Gandalf to describe the Dwarves who had sacrificed themselves in battles unwitnessed is *valour*.³⁹ So, for Gandalf, for Gimli and Frodo, and for us as readers, the final image we have of Dwarves in Middle-earth is not of greed, or jealousy,⁴⁰ or bitterness. It is certainly not an evil image. It is, contrary to Rebecca Brackmann's claim, decidedly heroic. And not only heroic, but central; without the Dwarves, Rivendell would have been sacked, Arwen slain, Gondor lost, and the whole of Middle-earth laid to waste and enslaved to Sauron.

³⁹ The word "valiant" is used earlier in the same Appendix to explain why Sauron had been unable to destroy the Dwarves at Khazad-dum when he was revealed at Eregion after the forging of the ring (400).

⁴⁰ This word has far too many negative connotations in 21st century English. Tolkien used it generally in a much older almost Biblical sense.

And where did this idea of a warrior-dwarf come from? Certainly not from the Norse mythology or German *märchen* that serve as the most immediate sources of dwarvish inspiration for Tolkien, as I will show in the subsequent two chapters. Rather, if there are antecedent warrior dwarfs to be found, they must be found in the various legends of Arthur; however, a quick search demonstrates this to be not so. Courtly dwarfs, especially those of the British tradition, are singular figures—that is, they reside as a part of a kingdom of *men* not dwarfs. So even those that take on a role of warrior (which is most generally done as a pantomime or parody), do so not as part of an organized dwarf-battalion, but on their own. The French tradition, as it turns out, is somewhat richer in dwarfs, likely owing to its being somewhat older and therefore closer to the folk traditions from which the romance was spawned, especially Celtic oral traditions.

This is all very interesting, except that there is little to suggest these romances—or the folk traditions, whether Celtic or Welsh—had any part in Tolkien’s vision for the Dwarves. We know that he loved very much the Welsh language, and that he used it extensively in developing the Elf-tongue Sindarin. He never had any love for French, as a language, but that does not preclude him from having read the romances, which he certainly must have. Nevertheless, Tolkien, who wrote and spoke extensively on the influence of Norse myth and German *märchen* on his own narrative, was relatively dismissive when it came to medieval romance:

I was from an early day grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own...not of the quality that I sought...there was and is all the Arthurian world, but powerful as it is, it is imperfectly naturalized, associated

with the soil of Britain but not with English...its 'fairie' is too lavish and fantastical, incoherent and repetitive. (Carpenter 144)

There may be a pair of clues contained in this letter that can help us decide how much effort to expend in searching the Arthurian court and its antecedents for evidence of Tolkienian Dwarves. First, while he concedes the greatness of the Arthurian tradition, Tolkien associates it with Britain and not so much with England. Second, he finds the fairy elements of the stories to be too "lavish and fantastical". This sounds a lot like Tolkien's scathing critique of Michael Drayton's *Nymphidia*, which he calls "one of the worst [fairy-stories] ever written" in the opening pages of his essay "On Fairy-Stores" (*Tolkien Reader* 36). This second point is the simplest to deal with; don't look here for sources of inspiration into the fairy-tale elements of Tolkien's fiction. The first point is more complex, and bears further consideration. Basically, here Tolkien suggests what later becomes obvious—he prefers the German and the Norse to the Celtic and the "Romance" (French). This is important because the dwarfs in the Arthurian material—British and French—derive from these sources as Vernon J. Harward Jr. demonstrates in an exceedingly thorough manner in his *The Dwarfs of Arthurian Romance and Celtic Tradition*.

It is not necessary to recreate Harward's work here; however, Harward does provide a number of key examples of the characteristics of dwarfs through this medieval tradition that help illuminate just how grand Tolkien's vision is in advancing an entire race of warrior Dwarves. One particularly interesting point Harward draws attention to is that Welsh dwarfs tend to live in "wealthy, dimly lighted underground kingdom[s] ruled by hospitable dwarf [kings]" (16). So it is possible that Tolkien had internalized this

notion, especially having read the stories as a child or a young man. The idea of an active dwarf kingdom is an interesting one that differentiates this tradition from the Norse and German.

But Harward includes discussions of Leprechauns, pixies, goblins, and other diminutive fairies (again, the sort that Tolkien strongly disliked) in his discussion of dwarfs. This makes sense in the context of tracing antecedents to the medieval court-dwarf, which is largely Harward's goal; however, Tolkien makes great effort to distinguish these beings from one another, and some of the characteristics that Harward ascribes to this tradition, such as the location of the dwarf kingdoms as "subaqueous" are completely out of place as sources of inspiration for Tolkien—Tolkienian Dwarves make no special attempt to live near (or under) water. Curiously, Harward identifies what he calls a "remarkably homogenous tradition about the dwarfs" (19). The characteristics of that tradition seem to be anything but homogenous:

1. The dwarfs are sometimes strikingly handsome or beautiful, sometimes grotesquely ugly.
2. Their realms are variously located...
6. They boast several supernatural attributes: strength, the ability to disappear, immortality, clairvoyance, and musical skill which charms the listener.
7. They play various roles [warrior not listed among them]... (19)

That dwarfs can be either beautiful or ugly, that they can live in a kingdom located in one of a variety of places, that they can have one or more (or sometimes none) of a list of abilities, and that they may fill any number of roles in a tale hardly seems a homogenous tradition. Nevertheless, Harward does identify some characteristics that could be

construed as loosely Tolkienian. Particularly, these seem to be related to wealth and possessions:

3. Their social organization is much like that of their human contemporaries. The kings enjoy lordship over populous courts and kingdoms.
4. Their wealth appears in splendid dress and in such possessions as precious or magic vessels and supernatural weapons. (19)

This can certainly be said of Tolkienian Dwarves as well. However, there is no evidence that Tolkien was using—consciously or otherwise—the Celtic tradition or the medieval literature it precipitated; all these traits, except for living in large-scale kingdoms, could be drawn from the Norse and German sources Tolkien does identify. And despite Harward pointing out that some dwarfs “possess the armor and weapons of a medieval warrior,” there is no evidence of their forming a warrior society (20). In fact, Harward notes much later, that the Romance authors were often “reluctant to let a knight...be overthrown by a midget...divided a single dwarf figure like the Petit Chevalier into a normal sized knight of great prowess and a boastful dwarf servant” (53). These dwarfs, divorced of their supernatural qualities (and thus divorced of their fairy-tale traditions), populate medieval romance by the hundreds; yet not one of them can be found dwelling in Middle-earth. Instead, Tolkien’s warrior Dwarves display a decidedly Anglo-Saxon influence, evidenced by the Anglo-Saxon heroic model as discussed in the previous chapter.

Luck, Chance, and Doom

Finally, the most curious quality Shippey names for Tolkien's Dwarves—if we can return briefly one last time to his list—is “unlucky.” This is a curious choice for a number of reasons. First, luck is a force not easily dealt with in Tolkien's work; luck never carries with it the notion of accidental in Middle-earth. Shippey writes quite a lot about Tolkien's use of the terms *chance*, *luck*, *fate*, and *doom*, so his choice of “unlucky” here strikes me as curious if not mistaken. Gandalf's word “chance” in the Appendix A passage we just examined feels more precise; and Gandalf's casual “as we call it in Middle-earth” suggests that whatever chance is, it isn't chance in the realms beyond Middle-earth (strongly suggesting something less like luck and much more like destiny, fate, or providence). Before we can decide whether or not the Dwarves, specifically, are *un-lucky*, we must first determine what luck is. Shippey is of great help in this regard: “‘Luck’, then, is a continuous interplay of providence and free will, a blending of so many factors that the mind cannot disentangle them...[a word] people use every day...It is not providence, but it may have been *meant* just the same” (153). Luck is distinct from chance, Shippey notes, because luck “works much more often...[as] a strongly patterning force in the world” (153). So when Gandalf says ‘chance,’ does he mean luck? Maybe. Shippey points out that Tolkien “uses the word ‘chance’ quite often in a suggestive way” (152). This is one of those times; specifically, Gandalf recognizes that “chance is sometimes meant” (152). Looking back at this web of definition, the word that stands out from the rest is *providence*.

The notion that there is a controlling force somewhere behind the scene that can make luck happen; that the outcome has been ordained, or at the very least proposed; that

is providence. If we cannot avoid the outcome, we call that force *fate* or, if we are feeling especially connected to our English ancestry, *doom*.⁴¹ Doom is a word Tolkien is especially fond of, probably for the sound of the word as well as for its ambiguity. However, Shippey notes that doom plays a much more prominent role in *The Silmarillion* than in *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings* most likely because the mood suggested by doom is more suitable to the mythical *Silmarillion*. So maybe we can accept that chance and luck are basically interchangeable in *The Lord of the Rings*. And we may also be able to accept that both words (each word?) suggest a nudging that we can either answer or ignore. We must still decide what Shippey meant by calling the Dwarves “unlucky,” a problem compounded by the centrality of Dwarves not only to *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* but also to *The Silmarillion*.

First, to call the Dwarves unlucky is not just to suggest that things don’t work out well for them most of the time; this could be said of just about anyone in Tolkien’s mythology. The Elves are sundered, diminished, and ultimately pass out of Middle-earth; the Beornings are all but extinct; even Sauron is overthrown when a Hobbit drops the One Ring into Mount Doom: talk about unlucky. Beyond this, to call the Dwarves (as a race) unlucky is paramount to saying that no matter how hard they try, the invisible forces—providence—simply abandon them. They are without (*un-*) providence; remember, Shippey defined luck as the interplay of providence and free will” and we know the Dwarves have free will. This is a harsh pronouncement then by Shippey, that the Dwarves are without providence. Even if we remove the religious (Christian) connotations of the word, it still strongly suggests that the Dwarves have been

⁴¹ Shippey details the etymology of these two words on page 253. Doom, he notes, is an English word—fate is not. Luck, unbelievably, has no discernable origin.

abandoned. But then how do we explain Gandalf's chance meeting with Thorin Oakenshield? We could simply say that it was Gandalf who got lucky, and thereby exclude Thorin, but Thorin reaped as much benefit as Gandalf from the encounter, and Thorin put in as much hard work towards the outcome, even sacrificing his own life; it seems like everyone got lucky that day.

Gimli, of course, is pretty much the lone representative of Dwarves in *The Lord of the Rings*. The rest of the Dwarves lie dead or dying far to the North in an effort to buy time for the southern campaign, a fact that brings us back to Gondor, and Gandalf standing with Gimli and Frodo, and the eulogy that Gandalf speaks. His words are intended as a comfort to Gimli, confirmation that his kin did not die in vain. The elements of effort and sacrifice are key here, for Shippey recognizes that "While persistence offers no guarantees, it does give 'luck' a chance to operate, *through unknown allies* or weaknesses in the opposition" (my emphasis, 165). Never mind that Shippey uses luck and chance together in this definition; this is strongly contradictory to the notion that the Dwarves are (racially) unlucky. Without some luck, Frodo's, Gandalf's, Aragorn's, even the Dwarves', that northern campaign would have been unsuccessful. I would go one step further even and consider the second point brought up by Shippey's definition—this is the *doom* of the Dwarves. They are now all but lost as a race, but they have also pronounced a judgment on the enemy whom they have been fighting for ages and in the process redeemed their people from the harsh feelings of ancient wrongs, evidenced by Gimli's invitation to sail on the last ship out of the Grey Havens.

The notion that Dwarves, as a race, are unlucky is simply inaccurate. They are doomed, and they may be cursed as we have already discussed, but that certainly isn't the

same as unlucky. More than likely, Shippey is making reference to the litany of misfortunes that befall Durin's Folk, especially Thorin and his immediate forebears Thrain and Thror and Dain. Of this, the Appendix A tells us "that Sauron by his arts had discovered who had this Ring, the last to remain free, and that the singular misfortunes of the heirs of Durin were largely due to his malice. For the Dwarves had proved untamable by this means" (407). Bad luck does not follow the Dwarves; rather the malicious spirit of Sauron does, moved to wrath by his inability to enslave the Dwarves to his will, further evidence of their free will.

Chapter 3: The Norse and Germanic Influence

While it is often pointed out that Tolkien drew inspiration for his work from Snorri Sturluson's Icelandic *Edda*, especially *The Sybil's Prophecy*,⁴² that inspiration is often described in very limiting terms. Tolkien did not simply create a pastiche of the various Norse and Anglo-Saxon works he read and taught. It is not even enough to say that Tolkien borrowed names from the so called catalogue of the dwarfs. Tolkien himself chastised would-be critics for drawing too direct a connection between his fiction and its antecedents; however, far too little attention has been given to these texts and how Tolkien used them. Shippey notes that "Tolkien put a very high value on his ancient texts, like *Beowulf* and the *Prose Edda*" and that "What he meant to do, then, was to recover the authentic tradition which...gave rise to Snorri and *Beowulf* and the Eddic poems" ("Light-elves" 232). These great texts serve as more than models for the preservation of mythological heritage, and it is clear that Tolkien was up to more than simply borrowing from them as has been suggested by some critics.

What these texts are, when and how they came to be, is a point of contention among scholars; this is perhaps somewhat surprising considering the relatively small number of Old Norse scholars in addition to the relatively few pieces of text they have to work with. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon to find accusations directed from one scholar to another even in the notes and introductory materials of published translations. Not only can this be amusing to stumble across, but it also suggests the difficulty of

⁴² There are several variations on the spelling of Voluspa depending on the translator, edition, etc. The word, however spelled, translates as Sybil's (or Volva's or Seeress's) Prophecy. This is the first poem recorded in the *Poetic Edda*; it is recounted partially in Sturluson's *Prose Edda* (including the passages concerning the dwarfs), and is preserved in the *Codex Regius* manuscript. I will use the generic term Sybil's Prophecy for the sake of simplicity and consistency.

working with these texts and the strong sense of ownership these individuals develop through such specialized work. This was intellectual work Tolkien directly involved himself in as a philologist, translator, and professor. This intellectual and professional investment necessarily bore on his creative endeavors, giving Tolkien a keen sense of the texts as both artistic products and also cultural artifact. With these notions in mind, it is important to look closely at the texts in which dwarfs feature most prominently. This includes *The Sybil's Prophecy*, *Alvissmol*, *Reginsmol*, and the *Volsungasaga* which Tolkien himself reworked as *The New Lay of the Völsungs*. This new lay, and the accompanying commentary by his son and editor Christopher, is also quite instructive. We will begin, as *The Poetic Edda*, with *The Sybil's Prophecy* because it contains not only the creation myth of the dwarfs but also the famous catalogue of dwarfs from which Tolkien borrowed many names.

The Sybil's Prophecy

Henry Adams Bellows calls the Sybil's Prophecy "the most famous and important...likewise the most debated, of all the Eddic poems" (1). It seems a reasonable assessment, if for no other reason than the poem's position as the first in the *Codex Regius*⁴³ and its extensive reproduction in Sturluson's *Edda*. The debate seems to swirl around the particular translations of several words and phrases—not unusual in a text of great age and obscurity (and generally degraded condition)—and especially the inclusion of what Bellows calls "obvious interpolations" and "occasional lesser errors" (3). The most famous of these interpolations, stanzas 9-16, is commonly known as the catalogue

⁴³ Simply translates as "The Royal Book"; there are several manuscripts that adopt this label; Bellows here means the 13th century Icelandic text that contains the earliest recorded versions of many important Eddic and skaldic poems.

of dwarfs. This is the list in which can be found the names of Tolkien's famous Dwarf company from *The Hobbit*, along with other names such as Gandalf. Based on Tolkien's letters throughout which he seems to grow increasingly impatient with the line of questioning that attempts to too directly link his fiction to its antecedents, it may be tempting to discard this list or dismiss the notion that it has any significance beyond the simple correlation of names; however, concerning the legitimacy of such suggested interpolations, it should be pointed out that Bellows finds it "quite needless to assume such great changes as many editors do...[since] the lack of continuity which baffles modern readers presumably did not trouble [the early listeners] in the least" (3). This is a useful suggestion because as Bellows goes on to point out, the purpose of the Prophecy was not to tell a story in the contemporary narrative sense; it is a montage intended to create an associative effect in the audience; the more familiar the audience is with each character and each incident, the more likely they are to appreciate the impact of the message. Editors, according to Bellows, make too many changes to the text in an effort to recover its original composition.⁴⁴ It seems likely that Bellows is referring to (among others) the translation by Lee M. Hollander in which the catalogue of dwarfs is removed completely to the end of the *Poetic Edda* (on pages 322-323) immediately preceding the glossary. This audacious maneuver is done, according to Hollander's note because "Scholars agree that [it]...is an interpolation" which needs to be omitted "in order to keep in agreement with the sequence of the original" (3). While scholars may agree that the stanzas represent an interpolation, it seems an overreaction to remove the stanzas entirely; Hollander offers no further insight into his method for determining the

⁴⁴ Perhaps ironically, this is something akin to what Shippey suggests Tolkien does; the distinction, I think, is that Tolkien is more concerned with the meanings of individual words more than the cohesion of the narrative.

“sequence of the original” (which seems itself a highly contestable point of interpretation), nor any sense of how the interpolation might negatively affect the reading.⁴⁵ The issue of original sequence is further complicated by the fact that many other stanzas are considered by various translators and editors as interpolation as well. According to Bellows, stanzas 5, 6, 65, and 66 may also be interpolations, while there is serious disagreement about the order of several stanzas, with some editors even going so far as to move later stanzas to precede the first stanza in an effort at narrative clarity.⁴⁶

But the suggestion of interpolation is not problematic for my purposes here, which are to identify a tradition of dwarvish origins in Norse myth and align that tradition with the creative vision of J.R.R. Tolkien several hundreds of years later. It is not problematic because the mythology of which it has become a part was originally transmitted orally, not recorded (as far as we know) until the work of the poet-historian Snorri Sturluson in the early 13th century.⁴⁷ By this time the stories had been told and retold for centuries and the influence of nearly two centuries of Christianity had already begun taking their toll—compelling Sturluson’s act of literary-historical preservation. All of this makes the notion of originality seem rather irrelevant. There is the original manuscript of course—that is, the artifact, the document. But if that is what the descriers of interpolation have in mind, that is likewise unimportant to me since that is a poetical concern (and perhaps an aesthetical concern) not a substantive concern, not a concern for the narrative.

⁴⁵ While purely speculative on my part, I can’t help but believe the increased presence of Tolkien as a figure of serious academic study between Hollander’s translation in 1962 and Bellows’ in 1991 may be a factor in Bellows’ inclusion of the catalogue. Readers of Tolkien have an interest in this list—even if only a casual interest—and readers of Tolkien also comprise (I feel secure in guessing) a significant population of readers interested in Eddaic poetry. Perhaps Bellows is aware of this potential audience.

⁴⁶ Sourced from various endnotes on pages 11-23.

⁴⁷ The *Codex Regius* was recorded around this time but separately.

No alternative exists. No other document of Norse myth records a secondary account of the creation of the dwarfs; thus, even if Sturluson or an unnamed monk two or three centuries later fabricated these twelve stanzas, they are no less interesting and no less authoritative as tradition. This is still the account, and these are still the lines read by Tolkien early in his creative genesis. Even if Tolkien did view these passages as interpolations and was actively working to recover the original from these perceived corruptions through careless translation or transcription of previous writers, the effect they had on him as he worked out his own fiction remains the same.

In order to understand the development of the Dwarves as a significant and definite race in fantasy literature, we must first familiarize ourselves with the accounts of their creation in the Norse text and Tolkien's *Silmarillion*. According to *The Poetic Edda*⁴⁸, the creation of the dwarfs precipitated out of a heavenly game of checkers. Creation had begun; the sun, moon, and stars were in place and the seasons and times of day had been named; even temples and forges had been erected and some of the gods were already busy at work smithing ore and fashioning tools (stanza 7). The poet then reveals the gods:

In their dwellings at peace they played at tables,
Of gold no lack did the gods then know,--
Till thither came up giant-maids three,
Huge of might, out of Jotunheim. (stanza 8)

The response of the gods to the disruption of their leisure by these unwelcome giantesses is to create the dwarfs:

Then sought the gods their assembly-seats,

⁴⁸ Trans. Henry Adams Bellows

The holy ones, and council held,
To find who should raise the race of dwarfs
Out of Brimir's blood and the legs of Blain. (stanza 9)

There was Motsognir the mightiest made
Of all the dwarfs, and Durin next;
Many a likeness of men they made,
The dwarfs in the earth, as Durin said. (stanza 10)

A close look at these remarkable stanzas shows us that the dwarfs are created as weapons against the giants. While we do not actually see dwarfs marching to war against the giants in Norse mythology (a key distinction between Tolkien and his sources), we do have several accounts of dwarfs crafting weapons and other battle-gear various gods deploy against the giants, their mortal enemies. If we accept this possibility, it tinges the stanzas with an ironic tone not at all unusual in Eddic text.

Sturluson's account in his *Edda* is considerably more elaborate; though the situation is much the same. The creation has largely been completed, the gods have made their dwellings and furnished them richly, and are resting in their stronghold when the giantesses appear, prompting the gods to consider a course of action:

Next the gods took their places on their thrones. They issued their judgments and remembered where the dwarves had come to life in the soil under the earth, like maggots in flesh. The dwarves emerged first, finding life in Ymir's flesh. They were maggots at that time, but by a decision of the gods they acquired human understanding and assumed the likeness of men, living in the earth and the rocks.

Modsgnir was a dwarf and Durin another. So it says in *The Sybil's Prophecy*.

(Byock 22)

Sturluson then provides the relevant lines from the *Prophecy*, which we have already looked at. He also provides the catalogue, which we will look at shortly.

Worth considering in this passage is the elaboration made by Sturluson, especially concerning the apparently spontaneous generation of the dwarfs from the flesh of the giant Ymir and the subsequent endowment of human intellect and form by the gods. It is not completely clear what Sturluson means when he writes that the dwarfs “assumed the likeness of men.” Some scholars have speculated that this means the dwarfs were of human stature, but I think it is a mistake to take Sturluson too literally here. Sturluson comments on the original form of the dwarfs, calling them in one line “like maggots” and in the very next line saying that “they were maggots.” It seems appropriate to wonder whether we are intended to see the dwarfs as physically formless, as literal maggots, or simply as morally degenerate in some way, like maggots: most likely the latter. It seems significant that the dwarfs are gifted with human intellect and form at the same time, but to confuse this with a metaphysical transformation from dwarf into human would be a mistake. It would be best, I think, to assume that the dwarfs were granted an intellect on par with humans and a physical form suitable to that intellect in order for them to function as effective opposition to the giant threat, a role they never fulfill.⁴⁹ Sturluson emphasizes the separateness of the dwarfs by singling out Modsgnir and Durin as progenitors and then by offering the catalogue.

⁴⁹ Perhaps—and I have seen this suggested nowhere—the gods simply provide these gifts to the dwarfs to in order to secure them as combatants against the giants, but to simply deny them as allies; they may have feared a dwarf/giant alliance given the origin of the dwarfs. Such gifts as were offered would at the least guarantee the dwarfs’ sympathies would align with the gods in the ensuing battles.

Tolkien's account of the creation of the Dwarves is quite different and makes no mention of war or giants:

It is told that in their beginning the Dwarves were made by Aulë in the darkness of Middle-earth...And Aulë made the Dwarves even as they still are, because the forms of the Children⁵⁰ who were to come were unclear to his mind, and because the power of Melkor was yet over the Earth; and he wished therefore that they should be strong and unyielding. But fearing the other Valar might blame his work, he wrought in secret: and he made first the Seven Fathers of the Dwarves in a hall under the mountains in Middle-earth. (*The Silmarillion* 40)

Despite the different circumstances that lead to the creation, Tolkien's account is pretty much in line with the *Poetic Edda*; in each, the dwarves are made by the gods and fashioned in the shape of men; only in Sturluson's account is there a suggestion that the dwarves are something other than what they were to become. In both *The Poetic Edda* and *The Silmarillion* the act of creation occurs in secret somewhere within the earth by processes remarkably similar to the biblical account of the creation of man found in Genesis:

Then God said "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them...the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.
(Genesis 1:26-27, 2:7)

These three accounts (*The Poetic Edda*, *The Silmarillion*, *Genesis*) are very similar in a number of important aspects, particularly the intimate nature of the creation and the use

⁵⁰ The Children of Ilúvatar; a term used to denote Elves and Men.

of elemental earth. Tolkien's account serves as intermediary between the biblical and (poetic) Eddic narratives, relating the dwarves more closely to men in Tolkien's cosmology.

The accounts of the dwarves' creation by Sturluson and Tolkien are more detailed than the (poetic) Eddic account possibly because Sturluson and Tolkien do not face the restrictive form of an eddic poem. While the creative divinity is unnamed in the (poetic) Eddic text, Sturluson grants this creative power to the All-father and his twelve co-deities residing in the temple of Gladsheim; Tolkien assigns the creation of his Dwarves to Aulë, the Valar Craftsman, master of stone and earth. This has real significance for the Dwarves as a race. Similarly, while the Eddic texts locate the site of the creation simply "in the earth," Tolkien specifies the location as "in a hall under the mountains in Middle-earth." The Norse dwarfs are later assigned to Svartalfaheim, which Grimm concludes is the location of the dwarf smithies and "must therefore lie in a mountainous region" (*Teutonic* 447). The Eddic texts make reference only to Motsognir/Modsgnir and Durin, while Tolkien divides his Dwarves into seven houses or kingdoms, the most notable of which is fathered by Durin.⁵¹ And, finally, Aulë crafts his Dwarves imperfectly in his attempt to anticipate the creation of Elves and Men (the Children of Ilúvatar); thus they are in the likeness of men, but are not men. This clearly parallels what we see in Sturluson's account in which the dwarfs are given human understanding and likeness but are not human.

One significant distinction between Tolkien's account and Sturluson's is that in *The Silmarillion* we are presented with a Dwarf fully formed in its physical being (unlike

⁵¹ The Eddic texts later divide the dwarfs into those who dwell in the ground (i.e. caves or holes) and those who dwell in rocks.

the maggots of Sturluson's *Edda*) yet lacking understanding. This again positions Tolkien's narrative as intermediary. In Tolkien's mythology only Ilúvatar has the power to create intellect; when he discovers the work of Aulë, Ilúvatar informs him "thou hast from me as a gift thy own being only, and no more; and therefore the creatures of thy hand and mind can live only by that being" (40). Aulë, perceiving that he has offended his own creator, moves to destroy his Dwarves who shrink from the blow:

And the voice of Ilúvatar said to Aulë: "Thy offer I accepted even as it was made. Dost thou not see that these things have now a life of their own, and speak with their own voices? Else they would not have flinched from thy blow, nor from any command of thy will." (41)

This completes the creation of the Dwarves, despite Aulë's prayer that Ilúvatar "amend" his work, which he never does (41). It is an account at once like Sturluson's and yet unlike it; Tolkien's is far more elaborate and clearly functions to position the Dwarves in relation to the Elves and Men created by Ilúvatar; thus "they live far beyond the span of Men, yet not forever" (42).⁵²

The Poetic Edda clearly offers the simplest account of the creation of the dwarfs; however, what seems a direct account of the creation of dwarfs from the bountiful corpse of the giants Brimir (Ymir) and Blain is in fact, some scholars argue, an interpolation that warrants separate reading. This curious claim is a matter of poetics; some discrepancy in diction or tone suggests to the trained scholar that the original poem makes no account of

⁵² Longevity often correlates to the order of creation to which a being belongs—the longer one lives, the higher the order and generally the greater their virtue. Thus, Elves are essentially immortal (though subject to death by violence), Dwarves live a very long time, and different groups of men live typically human lifespans with the exception of the Númenóreans who have some elf-blood.

this creative act or the extensive and famous catalogue of dwarfs that comprises nearly every line of the subsequent six stanzas of *The Sybil's Prophecy*.

The catalogue itself does very little to shed light on the dwarfs of Norse mythology since it is nothing more than a list of names with little to no context available to support conjectural interpretations. The names themselves are interesting of course, especially since Tolkien borrowed so many of them. However, most interesting are the notes offered by Bellows and Hollander, given below in their entirety for comparative purposes.

According to Bellows' endnote to stanza 10:

Very few of the dwarfs named in this and the following stanzas are mentioned elsewhere. It is not clear why Durin should have been singled out as an authority for the list. The occasional repetitions suggest that not all the stanzas of the catalogue came from the same source. Most of the names presumably had some definite significance, as Northri, Suthri, Austri, and Vestri ("North," "South," "East," and "West"), Althjof ("Mighty Thief"), Mjothvitnir ("Mead-Wolf"), Gandalf ("Magic Elf"), Vindalf ("Wind Elf"), Rathsvith ("Swift in Counsel"), Eikinskjalði ("Oak Shield"), etc., but in many cases the interpretations are sheer guesswork. (12-13)

Compare this discussion to Hollander's footnote from stanza 9:

Two giants.⁵³ The meaning of a number of names in this thula or rigmarole, is uncertain; that of others, quite obvious. Most seem to refer to the nether world of death, cold, dissolution; a few to natural phenomena and to the skill for which the

⁵³ The footnote begins with the names Brimir and Bláin.

dwarfs were known. It will be noted that some names are applied also to other beings—gods, giants, and men—mentioned in the Collection. (322)

While both authors seem to agree that the names mean something, though translation verges on impossible in many cases, there is a striking difference in the way the two scholars perceive the list. Bellows kindly gives us interpretations for ten prominent names, though these are by far the most obvious, making his “etc.” at the end of the transparent list more than a little frustrating. Hollander (not surprisingly) performs no such elementary exercise; he does something much more useful when he categorizes the names. Of particular interest are names that deal with “the skill for which the dwarfs were known.” Nowhere does Hollander suggest which names, or which skills he has in mind. Would that he had done so. Of the seventy-two names, Bellows interprets ten, Hollander six.⁵⁴ And of the ten⁵⁵ Bellows interprets, only four seem to fit into Hollander’s classification of “natural phenomena,” which can be broadly interpreted to include the principal directions. None seem to be related to “the nether world of death, cold, dissolution” that Hollander claims encompasses most of the names. Four of the remaining six could be read as “skill” referents, if we accept thievery, drinking, magic, and wisdom (counsel) as skills. Wind and oak almost certainly function metaphorically—perhaps wind implies swiftness, speech/language, or life (as in quickening); oak may be another reference to wisdom, steadfastness, longevity, or a number of similar notions; though these seem to be more directly traits than skills. It is a perplexing list that even the

⁵⁴ Northri, Suthir, Austri, and Vestri (North, South, East, and West); Nýi and Nithri (Waxing and Waning Moon) (322).

⁵⁵ Bellows has separate notes on Dvalin, Lofar, Andvari, and Regin, though he doesn’t interpret their names.

preeminent scholars seem loth to work out in any satisfactory way, making it even less obvious why or how Tolkien used this list to name characters in his own work.⁵⁶

Of the twelve combined interpretations offered by Bellows and Hollander, only two of the names appear in Tolkien's work: Gandalf and Eikinskjalldi. These names readers will recognize immediately as the famous wizard (not a Dwarf at all) and the deposed Dwarf-king, Thorin Oakenshield. However, in early manuscripts of *The Hobbit*, the wizard was initially called Bladorthin; the name Gandalf belonged to Thorin Oakenshield before there was a Thorin Oakenshield; "all the other dwarves' names remain the same" (Rateliff x). Tolkien must have recognized from the start that even though the name Gandalf appears in the Catalogue it contains the root *alf* (elf); Tolkien's decision to transfer the name from the Dwarf-king onto the wizard reflects his growing sense of distinction between the races of Dwarf and Elf in Middle-earth. That the name Gandalf appears as part of the Catalogue might suggest that the first millennium Norse audience made no such distinctions.

Of the other dozen Dwarves that trip through Bilbo's door—Dori, Ori, Nori, Bifur, Bofur, Bombur, Dwalin, Balin, Gloin, Oin, Fili, and Kili—only Oin and Balin do not appear in the Catalogue. Oin makes the list in Sturluson's *Edda*, though Balin still is absent⁵⁷. Thorin also appears on both lists, though not associated with Eikinskjalldi in any particular way. Dain, Durin, Thrór, and Thráin also appear in both places and again as significant Dwarves in Tolkien's mythology. But there is no apparent selection method

⁵⁶ Renée Vink suggests "Bifur and Bofur probably mean 'shaker' and 'trembler,' and Oin, 'timid one'...Thorin almost certainly means 'brave one'...Ori could mean 'combative.' Fili and Kili have names meaning 'File' and 'Wedge' respectively" (130). However, Vink gives no source for her translations, and I have not been able to verify them (despite consulting E.V. Gordon's glossary).

⁵⁷ Balin is so close to Blain that it seems possible—though purely conjecture—that Tolkien might have derived the one from the other. It is possible Tolkien altered the name slightly to make it sound more consistent, a philologist's prerogative.

employed by Tolkien other than the very likely possibility that he liked the sounds of these names the best.⁵⁸ Many of the names alliterate or rhyme (approximately at least).⁵⁹

From *The Sybil's Prophecy*, Sturluson's account of the creation of the dwarfs, and the infamous catalogue, we must turn our attention now to *Alvissmol*. The *Alvissmol* (alternatively written as *Alsvinnsmol* or *Olvismol*) is a thirty-five stanza skaldic⁶⁰ verse concerning the marriage of Thor's daughter to the dwarf, Alvis, and Thor's effort to thwart the marriage through a series of trivial questions. Bellows points out that the answers provided by Alvis matter very little, though he always answers correctly; the quizzing, or riddling, really amounts to Alvis' ability to translate proper nouns—kennings, specifically—between the languages of the gods, the elves, and the dwarfs. Thor is successful in forestalling the marriage long enough that the sun rises and turns the poor dwarf to stone. A number of interesting details can be drawn from this little-known story and used to demonstrate how Tolkien might have been influenced by such a tale.

Of great interest is the name Alvis, which translates as All-wise (or All-knowing); not only is this name unique among dwarfs, it suggests that the dwarf's defining characteristic is his wisdom rather than his strength or smith-craft. This may be further supported by the fact that Thor's only known daughter is Thruth, whose name means Might. Ostensibly, this is a good match pairing Wisdom and Might. Thor, however, can't

⁵⁸ This may also be a matter of audience. *The Hobbit* was written as a story for Tolkien's children. These names, with their strangeness and alliterative and rhyming qualities are especially suited to children. They would be fun to read and the mnemonics would assist the reader (even adult readers) with remembering the names. Additionally, whatever the names may have suggested in the Old Norse, many of them are suggestive of the particular Dwarf Tolkien attaches them to; looking at the list, on Bombur could be the comically fat one; Fili and Kili must be brothers. These names, in short, are fun. Contrast these with names found in *The Silmarillion*; Telchar, for example, is not a fun name and clearly did not come from this list.

⁵⁹ And here I will agree with Vink that what is important is "what Tolkien *thought* [the names] meant...[and] We cannot be sure if he intended the names to mean something at all" (130).

⁶⁰ "The two forms of poetry, eddic and skaldic, are closely related...skaldic poetry employs more intricate word choices and metres than does eddic poetry" (Byock ix-x).

seem to accept that his daughter is marrying a dwarf; his objection is clearly the small stature of Alvis, who otherwise seems to be a good match, and who has already received the blessing of the other gods before whom this trial takes place.

The first stanza has Alvis preparing to depart for his wedding bed with his newly won bride, and Thor wastes no time in rebuffing him in the second stanza in the sarcastic mode of mockery so associated with the god:

What, pray, art thou? Why so pale round the nose?

By the dead hast thou lain of late?

To a giant like dost thou look, methinks;

Thou wast not born for the bride. (Bellows 138)

Thor's taunt, that Alvis looks like a giant (presumably this means ugly), and one who has been recently in the earth (lain with the dead), feels decidedly childish and weak. It also smacks of irony considering Thuth is the only of Thor's children born of a goddess (Sif); his sons were all sired on giantesses.

Nor do the taunts seem to chafe much on Alvis whose simple response, "Alvis am I, and under the earth / My home 'neath the rocks I have" appears to take Thor (who won't reveal himself until the sixth stanza) for a fool and so responds to the question literally without acknowledging either the insult or the rhetorical tone of "What, pray, art thou?" (Bellows 138). Further evidence of the cognitive divide between Thor and Alvis can be discerned in their exchange in stanzas six and seven when Thor threatens Alvis that "Against my will shalt thou get the maid, / And win the marriage word" to which Alvis (apparently misunderstanding the severity of Thor's tone) replies almost eagerly "Thy good-will now shall I quickly get, / And win the marriage word" (Bellows 139).

This helps to emphasize the contrast between Thor the god and Alvis the dwarf, and perhaps serves as an early source of inspiration for what will become a trademark of Tolkien's Dwarves: direct, earthy, matter-of-fact speech.

The next twenty-six stanzas relate a question and answer session in which Alvis gives names for everything from the moon to beer; the entire purpose of the game is to hold the dwarf above ground until the sun should rise, which it inevitably does in stanza thirty-five where we see Thor offer one more ironic complement to Alvis before revealing his scheme and watching the dwarf turn to stone:

In a single breast I never have seen

More wealth of wisdom old;

But with treacherous wiles must I now betray thee:

The day has caught thee, dwarf!

(Now the sun shines here in the hall.) (Bellows 142)

Thor's confidence in his game is typical of his brash approach to most challenges he faces. Stanza fifteen, as an example, could have alerted Alvis to his danger and thus ruined Thor's plot; asked what each of the groups call the sun, Alvis replies that "The Deceiver of Dvalin' the dwarfs [call it]" (Bellows 140). There is double irony in the answer: Alvis should know the hazard he faces from the approaching sunrise, and he is being deceived not by the sun but by Thor. Alvis' response clearly indicates a tradition of dwarfs being unable to stand the direct sunlight.⁶¹

The tradition of the subterranean dwarf turning to stone when exposed to sunlight is hinted at in Thor's original mocking of Alvis' pale face, but the irony only becomes apparent in the end as Alvis is petrified. This is obviously not an aspect Tolkien

⁶¹ F531.6.12.2 "Sunlight turns giant or dwarf to stone"; F451.3.2.1 "Dwarfs turn to stone at sunrise."

maintained for his Dwarves; however, the scene of Bilbo taunting the Trolls until the sun could rise in *The Hobbit* suggests that Tolkien was familiar with the *Alvissmol*. Readers familiar with the *Alvissmol* surely appreciate Tolkien's having the Dwarves present to witness the effects on trolls. The ability of Tolkien's Dwarves to move about freely above ground and in full sunlight unquestionably distances them conceptually from the Norse dwarfs.

Also significant as a source for Tolkien's Dwarves is the skaldic verse *Reginsmol*. Bellows makes a big deal in his introduction to *Reginsmol* that the poem was not an individual work but part of a narrative sequence including *Fafnismol* and *Sigdrifumol* that had been artificially separated into units.⁶² Bellows keeps that separation out of convention, and so will I. Doing so makes this poem frustrating to read. It is incomplete and incoherent in places, clearly relating content that is available in other (sometime more complete) form elsewhere in Sturluson's writing as well as in the sagas.

The poem relates the slaying of Otr, brother of Regin, by the god Loki. In order to pay the debt, Loki (and Othin and Hönir, who accompanied Loki) had to fill an otter skin with gold and heap gold over it until it was completely covered. They procured the gold from the dwarf Andvari who was cursed to live as a pike in the waterfall where the slaying took place. Loki promised to lift Andvari's curse in exchange for the gold. Andvari gave the gold, but he attempted to withhold one ring which Loki discovered and took, prompting the dwarf to retreat into his subterranean cavern and curse the treasure:

“Now shall the gold that Gust once had

Bring their death to brothers twain,

⁶² I will only address the *Reginsmol* as it is the only one that deals with a dwarf; however, these skaldic verses inspired are reiterated in the *Volsungasaga* (which I will deal with in the following section) and inspired Richard Wagner's *Siegfried*.

And evil be for heroes eight;

Joy of my wealth shall no man win.” (Bellows 272, stanza 5)

Bellows unpacks the various allusions in the stanza, but makes the observation that this stanza in particular seems to have been coopted from other tales and seems completely incongruous with the first four stanzas of this poem as well as the four stanzas which follow. The ring itself is just one of many that clearly left an impression on Tolkien, but may have been equivalent to Baldr’s Draupnir, famous for its power to produce more gold.⁶³ This would certainly explain Andvari’s willingness to part with his pile of gold and his reluctance to part with the ring.

The origins of this poem—oral or otherwise—and the various antecedents do not really matter. It is only important to recognize that the tales of dwarfs guarding and cursing treasure were a regular and recognizable feature of skaldic poetry. Tolkien apparently was deeply impressed by the curses laid upon treasure. This was not simply a feature of dwarfs, but of dragons as well. The fact that not only Loki, but the warriors Fafnir and Regin whose brother Otr had been slain, also felt the effects of the curse suggest the depth of injustice felt by Andvari. This bitterness and greed are evident in Tolkien’s Dwarves, even the nobler ones; Thorin Oakenshield is strikingly Andvarian in his obsession for the Arkenstone. Besieged in the Lonely Mountain, Thorin lays a similar curse on the treasure hoard: “none of our gold shall thieves take or the violent carry off while we are alive” (*Hobbit* 260). This is more of a threat or a boast, properly; other curses are laid on treasure throughout *The Silmarillion*. Later, Thorin is grudgingly

⁶³ The Appendix A to *The Return of the King* discusses the ring of power that was bestowed upon Durin III, King of Khazad-dûm, and eventually passed to Thrór, Thorin’s grandfather. According to Thrór, “the Ring needed gold to breed gold” suggesting the connection to Draupnir (407). This also corresponds to F1456.2.1 “Magic ring multiplies wealth”

willing to ransom the Arkenstone (which has been stolen by Bilbo and handed over to Bard) for one fourteenth of his treasure—the same amount promised to Bilbo at the outset of the adventure. This effectively nullifies the curse since thieves will carry off the Dwarves' gold while they yet live. The deep irony is that the treasure cannot be delivered before Thorin and several of his companions are slain fighting alongside those same thieves against the Orcs, thus fulfilling Thorin's curse—he is indeed dead before his treasure is carried off. Curses are powerful and dangerous and nearly impossible to escape once they have been set down—eight warriors are slain in the fulfillment of Andvari's curse in *Reginsmol*. And none are more adept at placing curses on artifacts—gold, jewelry, weapons—than dwarves because of their connection to the artifacts as creators.

The preceding selections of skaldic verse have been taken from *The Poetic Edda*; however, each is reiterated, perhaps more famously (and in prose), in the *Volsungasaga* and then again in a new verse translation in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Völsungakvida en Nýja* (*The New Lay of the Volsungs*) published posthumously by Christopher Tolkien as the first part of *The Legend of Sigurd & Gudrún*. Readers may also recognize this content—tales of the hero Sigmund/Sigurd and the dragon Fafnir—as that of Richard Wagner's operatic masterpiece *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, itself taken from the Norse sources mentioned as well as the later German iteration *Nibelungleid*, the hero of which is Siegfried. We will deal with Wagner and the German material later. I provide this quick itinerary as it were, only to emphasize both the complexity of sorting out any correct or authoritative version of the tales and also Tolkien's early and enduring interest in them.

It matters little if at all that Tolkien preferred the verse to the later prose when he taught or when he began to compose his own contribution to the myth. What matters is that these portions of the saga—*Alvismol*, *Reginsmol*, and *Fafnismol*—all appear among Tolkien's selections. In fact, he begins his own poem with an account of Andvari's gold. Not surprisingly, Tolkien's translation is easier to read; also not surprisingly, Christopher's commentary is tremendously valuable and helps illuminate the connections between the Sigurd myth and the larger body of Middle-earth mythology. It also helps to know that Tolkien was working through his translation of the verse as he taught it, probably sometime in the 1930s (according to Christopher's best speculation), placing it sometime after Tolkien's conception of the early myths of *The Silmarillion* and coinciding roughly with his publication of *The Hobbit*. This is tremendously important because it further emphasizes Tolkien's interest in Dwarves, further solidifying my conviction that they were at the forefront of his mind, not afterthoughts or secondary citizens of Middle-earth from their conception.

Furthermore, the account of Andvari's gold and his connection to Sigurd is profoundly significant in establishing some of the main characteristics of Tolkien's Dwarves. Particularly their connection to dragons and a warrior culture. It is clear that *Beowulf* provides the most direct source of inspiration for much of the later portion of *The Hobbit* including Smaug the Terrible and his encounter with the burglar Biblo Baggins, climaxing in Smaug's destruction of Lake Town. However, a reader aware of Tolkien's lay might be reminded more than a little of Sigurd's encounter with the dragon Fafnir (who, it so happens, rested on the hoarded gold of the dwarf Andvari). Fafnir is the

greatest dragon of northern myth, with all respect to the nameless wyrm of *Beowulf* fame (from whom is clearly borrowed the notion of a soft spot on the belly).

The dwarf treasure, the curse laid upon it, and the dragon that literally lies upon it, are all drawn from this Eddic verse (and the prose sagas) at least in part (in conjunction with *Beowulf*). This, perhaps, explains Tolkien's adamancy that he was unaware of *Beowulf* influencing him as he wrote *The Hobbit*—perhaps he was distracted by Sigurd.⁶⁴ We do need to exercise some discretion when mining these myths for sources of Tolkien's new mythology lest we, like the Dwarves of Moria, dig too deeply. Nearly every character, every treasure, every encounter found in these Norse texts can be discovered among the forests and fens of Middle-earth—from the great horses to the weapons to the gods themselves (Gandalf is strangely Odin-like, many have suggested). Thorin may be a descendant of Andvari—Thrór, we know, went mad and cursed the treasure under Erebor—and it was ultimately during his reign (very brief it was) that Smaug was destroyed. But following this analogy too far would make Bard into Sigurd, and that move feels preposterous.

What we know absolutely for certain is that Tolkien was not only profoundly influenced by these Norse tales, but that he loved them. It should be no wonder that he returned to them time and again, no wonder that they leached into his own fiction by conscious or subconscious design, no wonder that he struggled to co-opt them in any logical, consistent fashion. These inconsistencies, as we have seen, have been sources of consternation for some scholars who would criticize Tolkien for altering his vision (especially of the Dwarves who may have evolved from at least partly evil into heroes

⁶⁴ Tolkien's interest in the Sigurd myth extends back into his childhood, and some of his earliest work on the legend of Túrin Túrumbar is clearly inspired by Sigurd; Túrin is the greatest dragon slayer in the *Silmarillion*.

and champions of the light) over nearly six decades. But they are, for me at least, simply byproducts of frequently returning to the same site for inspiration and being inspired differently upon each returning.

Aside from these tales in which dwarves play central parts, several fairytales, such as those collected by the brothers Grimm, feature dwarfs or other dwarf-like beings. Even so, the body of literature for dwarfs is quite limited compared to (for example) the body of literature concerning elves and fairies.⁶⁵ Tolkien was keen to draw on the distinction between such beings (as we will see) while earlier writers often were much more likely to use the names haphazardly or even interchangeably, suggesting a fundamental difference in the concept of dwarf between medieval⁶⁶ and modern authors (and audiences), particularly distinguishing the traditions leading up to and following the publication of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.⁶⁷

Tolkien's creative genius clearly conceived of the Dwarf as a figure distinct from the Elf. This was clearly a departure (in Tolkien's day) from the Elizabethan, Romantic and Victorian models, which seem to have considered the dwarf at least kin to the elf, and both as kinds of fairy. Already by the 13th century Sturluson struggles to represent what he seems to consider two separate races of being to his audience, who by then he clearly

⁶⁵ In a 1961 letter to Rayner Unwin, Tolkien acknowledges this dearth of material: "There are no songs or stories preserved about Elves or Dwarfs in ancient English, and little enough in any Germanic language. Words, a few names, that is about all. I do not recall any Dwarf or Elf that plays any part in any story save Andvari in the Norse versions of the Nibelung matter. There is no story attached to Eikinskjalði, save the one I invented for Thorin Oakenshield. As far as old English goes 'dwarf' (*dweorg*) is a mere gloss for *nanus*" (Carpenter 314)

⁶⁶ This was discussed in the previous chapter; see Harward.

⁶⁷ We have already established that Tolkien was peculiarly modern and medieval and his work bears marks of both traditions, so it is not surprising that he would need to reconcile the fundamentally distinct representations of the dwarf.

knows will be difficult to convince.⁶⁸ Thus Grimm notes in *Teutonic Mythology* with some astonishment, “Here [in the *Edda*] the most remarkable point for us is, that *âlfar* and *dvergar* (dwarfs) are two different things” (TM 443). Grimm goes on to point out that the distinction is fine enough to differentiate between not only *âlfar* and *dvergar*, but also *döckâlfar*, and even the norns. This is critical because it suggests a far more elaborate cosmology than Grimm recognized in his own later Germanic material.⁶⁹

I do not want to over-emphasize the impact Grimm’s pronouncement may have had on Tolkien.⁷⁰ Tolkien’s conception of the Dwarf as individual from the Elf may have begun to form prior to his encounter with Grimm’s writing; however, we know that Dwarves became increasingly important to Tolkien as his writing matured, while Elves remained central throughout the long course of his work. It is entirely within reason to conclude that Grimm’s earlier discovery served as precedent and allowed Tolkien the freedom to construe his cosmology in a way that included Elves, Men, and Dwarves on the same level of creation, yet disparate in their biological and mythic origins. That is, Dwarves and Elves, when traced back to their creation, do not share a common ancestor. It is extremely helpful that this is true philologically as well, since Tolkien claimed to have begun his creative process with language and formulated story to explain the language rather than the other way around.

⁶⁸ This confusion—melding or lumping all magical or fae beings together—is probably related to the shift away from Paganism towards Christianity which increasingly placed pressure culturally to view these beings as evil or demonic, even the divinities. Continuing to recognize distinctions could have been seen as worship.

⁶⁹ It is rather curious that the distinctions become less, rather than more, clear as time passes; Tolkien’s work *recovers* much of this distinction (much of which apparently never existed to begin with).

⁷⁰ For a very thorough consideration of Tolkien’s familiarity with and appreciation of the passages presented here from Grimm’s *Teutonic Mythology*, see Tom Shippey’s “Light-elves, Dark-elves, and Others: Tolkien’s Elvish Problem” in which Shippey largely ignores the discussion of dwarfs and instead looks at Tolkien’s development of the Sindar—the Twilight Elves. Shippey suggests Tolkien would have been “familiar” with Grimm’s linguistic solution and “annoyed by it” (226).

However, obscurity and inconsistency in nomenclature is a major obstacle to the study of dwarves. Sturluson makes reference to three kinds of *âlfar* (elves): *svartâlfar* (black elves), *liosâlfar* (light elves), and *döckâlfar* (dark elves). He also references *dvergar* (dwarfs). The confusion results from what appear to be inconsistent usages. Grimm points out that the lays from which Sturluson worked⁷¹ do not include the terms *svartâlfar* or *liosâlfar*—Sturluson invented these terms. According to Grimm, *svartâlfar* “seems synonymous with *döckâlfar*...and these Snorri evidently takes to be the same as *dvergar*, for his *dvergar* dwell in *Svartâlfheim*,” the subterranean home (*heim*) of the black elves (444-445).

One of the first major claims made by Grimm in this chapter of *TM* is “that *âlfar* and *dvergar* (dwarfs) are two different things” (443). This is almost a ridiculously obvious statement to us because we are used to this distinction. In fact, this suggests that the audiences for the Eddic myths would have recognized the distinction. There is an additional suggestion that Grimm’s own audience must have failed to make that distinction, perhaps because of a linguistic blurring of the lines in which the names of these distinct beings did not always translate in such a way as to mark the distinctions, or perhaps because the audience (or the storytellers themselves) did not perceive consistent distinctions. Either way, Grimm here notes what becomes a major point of emphasis for Tolkien, the distinction between elf and dwarf—a distinction, as we will soon see, not always readily apparent in the fairy tales.

Grimm takes issue with Snorri Sturluson who, in Grimm’s estimation, did not preserve enough of the distinction “between *döckâlfar* and *dvergar*,” a blurring which he sees as a violation of the particulars of the poetic language of the lays Snorri was working

⁷¹ Those contained in the *Codex Regius*.

from (445); in short, Grimm would like to maintain more distinction between the elf (of any color) and the dwarf. The reason for his insistence is that he perceives the audience (and perhaps Snorri as well), adopting a sort of dualism that results in an elf=good, dwarf=evil dichotomy. In large part Grimm blames Sturluson for locating the forges of the dwarves in Svartálfaheim—essentially, hell. But Grimm notes that Svartálfaheim, if it is the dwelling place of the dwarf, must “lie in a mountainous region, not in the abyss of hell...[because] Their forges are placed in caves and mountains” (447). Clearly, Tolkien was aware of this and appreciated Grimm’s philological assessment, and we see Dwarves in Tolkien’s mythology consistently dwelling under mountains and in caves, and never in the abyss of hell. In fact, the greatest threat to the Dwarves in *LotR* is the Balrog, a fiery demon, who rises out of the abyss below Moria, deep within the bowels of the earth. This seems to emphasize the dwarf as dwelling in the earth, not in hell (but adjacent to it).

The Dwarves in Tolkien’s mythology, like the dvergar, dwell in caves and under mountains because they (apparently) can use geothermal energy to power their forges; as Grimm points out, “all or most of the dvergar in the Edda are cunning *smiths*...And our German folk-tales everywhere speak of the dwarfs as *forging* in the mountains...In such caves they pursue their occupations, collecting treasures, forging weapons curiously wrought; their kings fashion for themselves magnificent chambers underground” (447, 455). Again, this seems to reinforce what we take for granted, but these become more than simple occupations for the Dwarves in Tolkien’s own mythology. As I have already demonstrated, these are defining characteristics reflective of the circumstance of their own creation. Grimm sees this as linking them to “smith-heroes and smith-gods” such as

Vulcan (447); perhaps Tolkien had this in mind when he decided to write his Dwarves into heroic roles.

But Tolkien does not simply recapitulate Grimm, as tempting as it may be to think so. In fact, where Grimm is less than kind in his treatment of the dwarf, we see Tolkien deviating considerably, demonstrating his love for the race. This is most true in respect to the physical appearance of the dwarf, which in many regards is its most compelling aspect because it is for most readers the distinguishing feature. This is not only true of the dwarf, but of the elves as well. Consider the following description from *TM*:

The leading features of elvish nature seem to be the following:--

...an elf comes as much short of human size as a giant towers above it. All elves are imagined as small and tiny, but the *light* ones as well formed and symmetrical, the *black* as ugly and misshapen...The dwarf adds to his repulsive hue an ill-shaped body, a humped back, and coarse clothing; when elves and dwarfs come to be mixed up together, the graceful figure of the one was transferred to the other.

(449)

First, it is important to clarify that when Grimm suggests the elf and dwarf become “mixed up,” he means conceptually mixed up as a result of the non-particular language he accuses Sturluson of: he does not suggest here intermarriage. Aside from this, we can see that the dwarf as it is represented in the folk-tales Grimm has heard around the German countryside (and in the tales we will look at in the next chapter) is not an attractive figure. While it would be false to suggest the Dwarves in Tolkien’s mythology approach the Elves in grace and beauty, it would be equally false to suppose that they are at any point “ill-shaped.” Grimm even notes that “There are curious stories told about the

deformity of dwarfs' *feet*, which are said to be like those of *geese* or *ducks* (450). This is a curious feature that once again seems at odds with Tolkien's conception of the Dwarves, but does make its way into George MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin*, a fantasy Tolkien confessed to admiring. In MacDonald's novel, goblins rather than dwarves (which don't make an appearance) are the figures mining under the local mountain; they are stout and hard-headed, but have "soft" feet; "I could carry ten times as much if it wasn't for my feet...it is a goblin weakness" declares a goblin father to his son (53). This doesn't materially impact Tolkien's mythology, but it does speak to the ease with which a folk-feature of one character can be translated onto another, a practice we see Tolkien performing with regularity in an attempt to more clearly align and define his mythological cosmology.

The size of the dwarves and of elves in general, is a perplexing matter. If they are proportionally equivalent to men standing next to giants, then they are indeed diminutive. Size—especially height—becomes very important in Tolkien's mythology because Tolkien employs a hierarchy of scale; taller figures are generally more powerful; thus, Númenóreans are taller than other Men (and, of course, more powerful). Elves diminish over the millennia of Middle-earth, so that they are roughly the size of or shorter than Men by the end of *LotR* though they are quite tall in the early mythology. Dwarves are shorter for a variety of reasons, but their size matches their position relative to the children of Ilúvatar. Size matters. Curiously, Grimm notes that in the folk-tradition, "Their very height is occasionally specified," which suggests that the specific height is not generally important and could not be used to distinguish an elf from a dwarf (449). The variability of scale can be maddening to a modern audience and must have at least

frustrated Grimm who goes on to write that they sometimes appear the height of “a four years’ child” or at other times a “span⁷² or thumb” (449). Tolkien rails against this sort of fairy in his essay “On Fairy Stories,” and generally dislikes any sort of bug-like diminutive fairy—these indistinct elves and dwarves would qualify, making Tolkien’s claim that his Dwarves are somehow closer to the German than the Norse dwarf even more confounding.

This, I am convinced, is more a statement of character than anatomy. We see a variety of traits ascribed to the dwarves in *TM*, from the ability to “conceal their form” (463) to outright “invisibility...lodged in a particular part of their dress, a *hat* or a *cloak*” (462) to “superior strength” (463), “the gift of *divination*” (471), a tendency to “fire up and take offense” (471), a “fondness for *music* and *dancing*” (469), a hatred of “the clearing of forests, agriculture, [and] new fangled pounding-machinery” (459), and a propensity to complain “of the faithlessness of mankind” (458) giving them the “impression of a downtrodden afflicted race” (459). All of these are characteristic of Tolkien’s Dwarves, though they are not necessarily found in the Eddic myths, and they far exceed Shippey’s narrow list (which seems to hang on this last descriptor) and the examples we will see in Grimms’ own tales. What is clear from reading *TM* is that these are characteristic of dwarves as a race, but that each appears as an almost singular example—save the mining of ore and smithing or weapons, which we have already seen is categorically true of dwarves—so that this dwarf may demonstrate this characteristic while this other dwarf this other characteristic. Once again, the genius of Tolkien’s vision

⁷² The distance measured from the tip of the little finger to the tip of the thumb when the hand is spread—roughly nine inches. This was a common German unit of measure.

rests in his having brought so many of these disparate portraits together into something cohesive and definitive.

Tolkien exploits the fluidity of the dwarf as a figure throughout Sturluson's texts and the Grimms'. Dwarfs were a part of creation in Norse myth. They were divinely created from the blood and flesh of the giant Ymir (or Brimir and Blain, depending on your translator), perhaps as a response to the intrusion of the giantesses, but perhaps not. Sturluson then elaborates this scenario. Grimm's solution to what he understands as inconsistency in Sturluson's work (and potentially between Sturluson's work and the texts he was attempting to preserve) is a philologist's concern akin to the biologist's concern for illuminating the steps along an evolutionary chain. There will inevitably be gaps in each.

Similar gaps persist in Tolkien's own work. While these gaps can be perceived as weak points in the narrative, they also contribute to the genuineness of Tolkien's mythos. Well-crafted works of fiction rarely boast inconsistencies or anomalies of the sort Tolkien's work contains; oral histories and mythologies preserved as literature often do (as we can see in Sturluson's work). These points of contention, these flaws, lend a certain aesthetic quality to Tolkien's work that helps us believe Tolkien when he claims to be recovering a mythology for England rather than crafting one. This recovery was Tolkien's principal aim; he says so again and again. In the same way, any perceived inconsistencies in Tolkien's representation of Dwarves and the revisions he performed over decades of writing only serve to position them more centrally in the narrative of Middle-earth and lend authenticity to its mythology.

Chapter 4: Dwarves in Fairy-Stories

While the German *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* and Norse myth were the likely primary sources of inspiration for much of Tolkien's work—the Dwarves especially—the Grimms were themselves heavily influenced by somewhat older French fairytales (which in turn impact Tolkien, whether he would admit it or not). Because it bears directly on the German fairy tales on which we will focus our examinations in this chapter, it makes sense to begin our discussion with a look at Madame D'Aulnoy's treatment of the dwarf in her fairy tale *The Yellow Dwarf*. This is a long and complex story in which the dwarf figures surprisingly sparingly considering his position as the title character. This is a tale of a spoiled, narcissistic princess who refuses to take a suitor. She is tricked into taking the hand of a yellow dwarf in marriage in order to preserve her life from ravenous lions. She attempts to double-cross the dwarf (with the help of her mother) by preemptively wedding the King of the Goldmines who she believes will protect her from the dwarf (and likely, hopefully, slay him in the process). Ultimately, the dwarf enlists the aid of the Fairy of the Desert (who actually controls the aforementioned lions) and the two plot to reclaim the princess, Toubelle,⁷³ and murder the king. Despite the aid of a magical mermaid who presents the king with an enchanted sword, the evil plot is eventually realized; the tale ends with the miserable Toubelle in the clutches of the dwarf (who now rides a large Spanish cat) who murders the king by stabbing him through the chest and slicing him down to his toes.

It is a typically awful and strangely satisfying end. Some critics, such as John Rateliff, have argued that Tolkien's Dwarves began (conceptually, in the early phases) as

⁷³ The name just means "most beautiful."

such evil beings. Remnants can be found in *The Silmarillion*, which notes early alliances between Dwarves and orcs, for example. It is possible that we can see the roots of such a concept in *The Yellow Dwarf*. This dwarf is referred to at various times as “contemptuous,” “testy,” and “wicked” which sounds quite a bit like Rumpelstiltskin actually (par. 8, 13, 14).⁷⁴ We need to be very careful, however, that we don’t force the tale to fit a role it never actually played. I believe this is a very important tale for anyone interested in understanding the long development of the dwarf, though it is likely less useful in regards to understanding only the direct influences on Tolkien.

D’aulnoy’s dwarf, for starters, is highly allegorical—the entire tale is highly allegorical—and seems to fill a role similar to Rumpelstiltskin (whom we will discuss shortly). The yellow color of his skin, his most significant feature (as reinforced by the title of the tale), is unique. None of the dwarves we examined in the Norse or German myth had yellow skin; none of the Dwarves in Tolkien’s work have yellow skin. The yellow skin may have several explanations, most of which do not necessarily have anything to do with dwarves. For many centuries Westerners referred to Asians as Yellow-skinned; it is possible that the yellow skin could indicate the dwarf as an eastern figure, therefore alien and dangerous. This seems reasonable, though there is no particular explanation as to why such a character would need to be a dwarf—a full-sized figure would presumably be at least as threatening, if not more so, as a diminutive one.

It is far more likely that the dwarf’s yellow skin be symptomatic of scurvy. Scurvy is primarily a nautical or maritime disease resulting from an extreme deficiency in vitamin-c. This was not fully understood until at least the time of the Napoleonic wars and the disease was responsible for the deaths of millions of sailors throughout the

⁷⁴ F451.5.2. *Malevolent dwarf*.

ancient and medieval times. It would have been a major concern for the French (and British) sailors who comprised a significant portion of D’aulnoy’s contemporary audience. This audience would have recognized immediately the symptoms of scurvy in the dwarf, beginning with his jaundiced (yellow) skin. Such a reading is well supported by the tale in which we read that the Queen’s first encounter with the dwarf commences when “Raising her eyes, she looked all round her, and saw on the tree a little man no bigger than your arm,⁷⁵ *eating oranges*” (par. 7, emphasis mine). Only a little further along we are told that “the yellow dwarf...was so called from the colour of his complexion and the orange tree in which he lived” (par. 7). The references to the oranges the dwarf eats, and even the fact that he lives in the tree, closely associates the dwarf with the citrus fruit which is the primary source of vitamin-c and the most widely employed natural cure for scurvy. It is also worth noting that the dwarf claims to have been seeking a bride “over sea and land,” suggesting his position as a sailor (par. 7); additionally, the dwarf is later described as armed with “a large cutlass”, which was a common weapon among sailors and pirates (par. 24); scurvy was one of the greatest threats to sailors, particularly those on long voyages such as the dwarf claims to have made.⁷⁶

The point is simply that while the dwarf does seem to have some magical abilities, he should not strike us as especially dwarf-like.⁷⁷ It is interesting, however, that the citrus tree in which the dwarf lives acts as a portal into another land. While this is a common trick among fairies (such as in *Sir Orfeo*) who conceal passage to their realms in

⁷⁵ F451.2.1.1. *Dwarfs are small*.

⁷⁶ F451.9. *Dwarfs emigrate*. There is no mention in the index of a motif of the dwarf as a sailor; as an underground spirit, sailing seems a far-fetched profession. Perhaps this dwarf has emigrated.

⁷⁷ It is worth noting that the *Yellow Dwarf* does not really participate in the folk traditions; this is a literary tale and so the dwarf is a literary figure. He has many qualities that seem to separate him from the folk-dwarfs: yellow skin, living in a tree/hut/steel castle variably, eating oranges, riding a cat, carrying a cutlass, sailing, and summoning supernaturally large hell-turkey, for example.

trees, rocks, and hills, there is an emphasis in Norse myth, German fairy tales, and later in Tolkien's writing, on the concealing of magic doors as a particular skill of dwarves.⁷⁸ Once the Queen has agreed to exchange her daughter, Tutebelle, for her rescue from the lions, "The orange tree immediately opened... The queen was so upset that she did not notice a door which had been contrived in this tree. At last she saw it, and opened it" (par. 7-8). This is very similar to the concealed door in *The Seven Ravens* as well as *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Those doors—and this one presumably—were made by dwarves. It is difficult to say with any great certainty why the construction of concealed doors remained so intriguing that Tolkien adopted it so clearly into his own narrative. It is consistent with the nature of dwarves as craftsmen⁷⁹ across the Norse and Germanic myth and indicative of their secretive and (occasionally) deceptive dealings with other beings. It is telling that Tolkien's Dwarves, far removed from their early narrative ancestry, were not capable of locating or opening the doors leading into the Lonely Mountain (in *The Hobbit*) or Khazad-dûm (*The Fellowship of the Ring*).

Whatever the reason for the dwarf's yellow skin, D'aulnoy's tale is interesting in that it does something none of the German tales we consulted did—it provides a relatively clear picture of the dwarf. As I noted much earlier in the chapter, the *märchen* are as compelling for their lack of physical description as they are for their vivid depictions of dwarvish traits and character. But most of us, in absence of other details, struggle to avoid picturing Gimli peaking over the window ledge at Snow White (or worse, Dopey peaking over the ledge). D'aulnoy at least tells us that the dwarf is "a little

⁷⁸ F451.4.3. *Description of dwarf home*.

⁷⁹ F451.3.4. *Dwarfs as workmen*.

man no bigger than your arm” possessed of a “hideous face”⁸⁰ and startlingly yellow skin (par. 7). In fact, this does not really qualify as a highly detailed portrait of a dwarf, but we can take away some key ideas from this brief description.

First, he appears to be a man—a little man, certainly, but a man just the same. In fact, throughout the tale he is referenced many times as both little man and little dwarf, suggesting that the distinction is not so terribly important (as it will become in Tolkien’s work when the dwarf is a distinct race of being); at one point he is even called “an ugly little imp” (par. 24). His size and his connection to the fairy world take precedence over any particular taxonomic categorization. Regarding the Fairy of the Desert (herself a malevolent force), the dwarf notes “I am her relative, her friend” (par. 13). And at a later point in the tale, the Fairy reinforces the connection between the two, who at times seem to work in tandem, and at others seem at odds. They both are connected to the mermaid that appears much later, the several nymphs which tempt the king, the dragons that try to slay him, the giants summoned by the dwarf, and the colossal fire-breathing hell-turkeys.⁸¹ So while he may not be particularly dwarf-like, he is absolutely fae, once again demonstrating the work Tolkien (and perhaps Grimm before him) did to sort these figures out.

Second, while an arm is not an exact measure, we can guess the dwarf stands not much taller than two feet. This is significantly shorter than Tolkien’s Dwarves—shorter even than the hobbits. It would also result in a figure much more slender than we see in Tolkien’s Dwarves (or the majority of post-Tolkienian dwarves). It could even be that we are intended to take the girth of the arm as a suitable girth for the dwarf. Whatever the

⁸⁰ F451.2.0.1. *Dwarfs are ugly.*

⁸¹ F451.10. *Dwarfs and other supernatural beings.*

case, this is a very small figure. He is also shown hiding “under a lettuce” (par. 46).

While at several points he is seen riding⁸² a “big Spanish cat” and variously lifting the princess and grappling with the King of the Goldmines. At one point he is flanked by a pair of fire-breathing hell-turkey “who looked by the side of the dwarf like two giants, taller than the mountains” (par. 24). These various descriptions make it impossible to fix a size for the dwarf, though it is worth noting that the only big cat species native to Spain is the Iberian Lynx⁸³ which stands roughly two feet at the shoulder and weighs an average of thirty pounds; a two foot or two-and-a-half foot tall dwarf could plausibly ride one, though it would take a lettuce of nearly prehistoric proportions to conceal them.

Finally, he has a “hideous face” (par. 7). This could mean just about anything. But over and over again the dwarf is called hideous and ugly, by characters and narrator alike. This repetition and emphasis on the physical repulsiveness of the dwarf functions allegorically to reinforce the moral corruption of the dwarf and contrast him against the beauty and uprightness of the King of Gold Mines (and even, apparently, the narcissistic Toubelle). Also concerning his physical appearance, we are told that “He wore wooden shoes and a yellow frieze jacket. He had no hair on his head, big ears, and looked a perfect little villain” (par. 9). This description is certainly worth considering further.⁸⁴

Wooden shoes are not recorded as part of the apparel of German, Norse, or Tolkienian dwarves; however, the clog was a common form of footwear throughout Europe for centuries. It may associate the dwarf with a laboring class, positioning him as a farmer or miner. This might explain why the queen makes note of the footwear, since it

⁸² F451.6.2. *Dwarf rides*. The index only mentions hares and horses.

⁸³ Curiously, the Iberian Lynx, like several other species of lynx, has pointed ears and facial fur that appears almost beard-like, giving the cat an appearance of being almost bald with pointed ears.

⁸⁴ F451.2.7. *Dress of dwarf*. The index has several specific entries—none for shoes or for yellow clothing.

would indicate his class. The frieze jacket is likely another indicator that the dwarf is a peasant laborer, though the term frieze has a rather complex history; here I take it to mean essentially linen. This would seem consistent with his having just emerged from a “low thatched hut” in the midst of nettles and brambles (par. 9). Whatever the case may be with his attire, he certainly is not wearing hooded traveling cloaks or armor. More importantly, the fact that he is bald (presumably without a beard, though no specific mention is made) and has large ears, distinguishes him from the other dwarves we have looked at.⁸⁵

Whatever else this tale may be, it is a tale of deception; the dwarf is deceived by the Queen who promises her daughter to the dwarf and by Tutebelle herself who agrees to marry him and then attempts to marry the King of Gold Mines instead; the King is deceived by the Fairy of the Desert; the Fairy of the Desert is deceived by the Mermaid; and Tutebelle is deceived by her mother and the Fairy as well as by the dwarf (despite his saying that he doesn’t want to trap her). Curiously, the deception has dire consequences for all but the dwarf—pretty much the only major character who survives the tale (the mermaid survives as well). Perhaps the suggestion is that he really didn’t deceive anyone, though that feels a stretch. What is clear is that he takes special offense to having been double crossed.⁸⁶ The Fairy of the Dessert notes that “Such insults [the breaking of a promise] are not endured in Fairyland”⁸⁷ (par. 22). The little dwarf is indeed “mortally offended” and declares himself the “rival” and “enemy” of the King (par. 24). This, more than anything else in the tale, seems a dwarvish characteristic that

⁸⁵ F451.2. †F451.2. *Appearance of dwarf*. The index has several specific entries—none for baldness or ears.

⁸⁶ F451.3.6. *Dwarfs are sensitive*. F451.6.8. *Dwarfs become angry*.

⁸⁷ This may recall events of older tales involving fairyland, especially the lays of Marie d’France, in which errant knights often swore oaths to fairies, tried to violate the oaths, and faced extreme retribution for the violation.

persists in Tolkien's work. It is hard to imagine Thorin absorbing an insult such as those hurled at the yellow dwarf by the King: "Consider, you are an ugly little imp, whose hideous face hurts one's eyes" (par. 24).

There are some other interesting nuggets to be taken from this tale, though they likely amount to little more than side-notes. The King is given an enchanted sword by the Mermaid so that he can fight his way into the iron castle of the yellow dwarf. This sword is made of "a single diamond, brighter than the sun's rays...[that need but] scarcely glittered in the eyes of the monsters before they fell helpless at his feet" (par. 42, 45). This is very reminiscent of the shield used by Arthur in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* which also was made of a single diamond and had the power to blind and even disintegrate enemies. The steel castle⁸⁸ of the yellow dwarf sounds an awful lot like Minas Morgul or other of Tolkien's towers and strongholds, though the peculiar property of this steel castle "whose walls, struck by the sun's rays, formed glowing mirrors that burned all who attempted to approach them" is not like any other castle that I can recall (par. 30). And, finally, the dwarf has been collecting beautiful women⁸⁹ (very unlike anything in Tolkien's work) who receive Totebelle and provide her with gifts⁹⁰ of "cloth of gold" and "pearls bigger than nuts" which sound very much like Mithril and Arkenstone(s) (par. 41). None of this is to suggest that Tolkien had made a list and then worked to write these elements into his fiction, but that he was working with a body of narrative both deep and wide, and he had an uncanny knack for weaving the elements into something somehow more logical and cohesive than it had previously been.

⁸⁸ F451.4.3.6. *Dwarfs' castle of gold.*

⁸⁹ F451.5.2.4. *Dwarfs kidnap mortals.*

⁹⁰ F451.5.1.5. *Money or treasure given by dwarfs.* F451.5.1.6.1. *Dwarfs' gifts cease when mortal betrays the source.*

Thus we can recognize a sort of transitional phase in the evolution of the dwarf from a more-or-less two dimensional type into a fully three dimensional being capable of both good and evil and the moralization and rationalization that go along with such complex behavior. So when Tolkien suggests that his Dwarves are more Grimm than Norse, it is worth considering that he is simultaneously acknowledging the two contributing sources while also suggesting that his Dwarves might not really be either, exactly (as if to say, *They are more Grimm than Norse, but that's not really the whole picture*). But, if the Grimms' dwarves are intermediary to the Norse and Tolkienian dwarves, then we need to give them serious consideration. We will look now at a few of the most familiar (to us, and almost certainly to Tolkien) dwarf-related *märchen* and attempt to demonstrate how they may have functioned to bridge the gap between the dwarves the Grimms found in the Eddic texts (which Tolkien also consulted) and the dwarves he found in the patchwork of German folktales he gathered.

Snow White is the benchmark tale featuring dwarves and is worth looking at in considerable detail along with the somewhat less familiar *Snow White and Rose Red*. Before exploring the significance of the *Snow White* tales, it is worth reading three others that illustrate the character of German dwarves as Tolkien might have known them: *The Three Little Men in the Woods*, *Rumpelstiltskin*, and *The Seven Ravens*. There are others, of course, and these tales are the Grimm versions which are more often than not literary adaptations of earlier folk narratives, many of which were oral (as was the case with the Eddic texts discussed in the previous chapter). In some cases, the Grimms adapted earlier literary sources, such as in *Snow White*. Nevertheless, Tolkien was fond of the Grimms' work as writers and as collectors of national myth, and as such their *märchen* serve as

important source material for Tolkien's work.⁹¹ The excerpts that follow are taken from Maria Tatar's excellent volume, *The Annotated Brothers Grimm* (2004).

I will begin with *The Three Little Men in the Woods*,⁹² a short tale that has some of the narrative elements found in the more familiar *Snow White*. The central action involves the common fairytale motif of the wicked stepmother devising clever and brutal punishments for the beautiful and obedient stepdaughter. In this particular version of the story, the young girl is sent into the woods on a particularly cold, snowy winter day in search of strawberries. As extra punishment, the stepmother sews a dress of paper for the girl to wear and packs her only a crust of stale bread to eat; she is not to return until she fills a basket with strawberries.

Clearly this is an impossible task, and the stepmother muses that the girl will freeze and starve ridding them of her forever. However, before either can happen, the girl stumbles upon a small house in the woods.⁹³ Three dwarves stand peering out the window; she greets them kindly, and they invite her inside. Once inside, she reveals her charitable nature, offering to share her meager crust of bread and graciously accepting the task they set her about—sweeping the snow from the back door. While she is out of the cottage sweeping, the dwarves deliberate rewarding⁹⁴ her for her kindness and charity:

The first said: "My gift will be that she becomes more beautiful with each passing day."

⁹¹ The same cannot be said of Wagner, whose famous operatic adaptation of the aforementioned Sigurd sagas is known to have contributed considerably to the German zeitgeist that fed the furor of the third Reich; Tolkien was familiar with Wagner, but Wagner was not the model for Tolkien's work that the Grimms certainly were.

⁹² AT-480: The Tale of the Kind and Unkind Girls.

⁹³ F451.4.2.3. *Dwarfs live in a forest*.

⁹⁴ F451.5.1. *Helpful dwarfs*.

The second said: “My gift will be that gold pieces shall fall from her mouth whenever she says a word.”

The third said: “My gift will be that a king will come and make her his wife.” (66)

While she is sweeping the snow away, she uncovers the strawberries she has been tasked to find; she gathers the berries into her basket, thanks the dwarves again, and returns home without any knowledge of their blessings.

When she begins to speak, gold coins drop from her mouth prompting the ugly daughter to undertake the journey into the woods in search of her own gifts. She goes forth in a fine fur coat and with cakes to eat; she does find the cottage, but she is rude to the dwarves, refuses to share her food, and refuses to sweep. When she realizes that they are not going to give her any blessings, she leaves. Once out of the cottage, the dwarves deliberate her fate:⁹⁵

“Why should we give her anything, when she behaves so badly and has a wicked, selfish heart, never giving anything away.”

The first one said: “My gift is that she will become uglier with each passing day.”

The second one said: “My gift is that a toad will jump out of her mouth whenever she speaks.”

The third one said: “My gift is that she will find an unhappy end.” (68)

The end is indeed unhappy. The good daughter does marry the king, and when the bad daughter and stepmother perform the classic fairytale swap, it is the frogs dropping from her mouth that betray the bad daughter; she and her mother are packed into a barrel lined with nails and rolled down a hill into a river.

⁹⁵ F451.5.2.6. *Dwarfs punish.*

This tale, while typical in many ways and immensely enjoyable for its beauty and simple didacticism, is an interesting case study of dwarvish character. First, it is clear that dwarves are supernatural agents; they have magical qualities allowing them to grant wishes, much like fairies or elves in other tales. Second, they have a keen sense of justice. While they may seem to act hastily, they also act fairly. If sharing bread is worth gold dropping from the mouth, refusing to share cake is deserving of frogs dropping from the mouth; if sweeping a stoop is worth a royal wedding, refusing to sweep is worth a royal execution. The second gift, of increasing beauty or ugliness, is largely metaphorical—goodness is reflected in beauty, wickedness in ugliness. The two girls who appear indistinguishable early in the story are as distinct from one another as two girls possibly could be by the end. The gifting also reveals a good deal about what the dwarves themselves value: gold, beauty, and status. In fact, when Tolkien's Dwarves sing their ancient folk songs following the dinner party at Bag End and Bilbo sits listening, he "felt the love of beautiful things made by hands and by cunning and by magic moving through him, a fierce and jealous love, *the desire of the hearts of dwarves*" (15, emphasis mine). These dwarves appear neither fierce nor jealous (qualities Tolkien may have borrowed from other dwarves, such as Rumpelstiltskin), but their gifting reveals the desire of their own hearts since gifting (when meaningful) often requires us to part with what we value most.

Tatar points out in the introduction to the tale that the dwarves "occup[y] a liminal position, mediating between men and nature" (64). However, this mediation seems only a very general impression of their function and almost serves to reinforce the liminal position of the dwarves that Tatar points out. Furthermore, it is unclear what "men" are

involved in the tale at all; the father is nameless and serves only to bring the daughter into the home of the stepmother, while the king also remains nameless and serves only to remove her from the home of the stepmother. The liminal nature of the dwarves seems to lie in their being supernatural rather than in any act they perform; it is a quality of their being. This is important when considering Tolkien's Dwarves, who fill a liminal space between the mortal (Men) and immortal (Elves) children of Ilúvatar.

Next we will look at *The Seven Ravens*. In this tale, which has antecedents in *The Twelve Brothers* and *The Six Swans* and other such animal transformation tales,⁹⁶ a father speaks careless words and transforms his sons into ravens. The ravens fly off and take residence inside a glass mountain where a dwarf acts as their steward until their sister, with the aid of a magic key, can rescue them and reverse the curse. The tale itself is insignificant to Tolkien's dwarf lore; the setting and the figure of the dwarf are not.

The glass mountain is an interesting location that Tatar points out "becomes accessible only to those with special footwear or, as in this case, a special key" (*annotation*, 137). The girl loses the key—the wishbone—given to her by the morning star, and must instead resort to cutting off her own little finger which (apparently) is a suitable substitute. Magic doors leading under mountains becomes a central motif in Tolkien's dwarf lore, most notably in the hidden door indicated by Thorin's map in *The Hobbit* and the hidden entrance to Moria in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. In both cases, the entrance leads under a mountain to a dwarf kingdom.⁹⁷

Upon entering the mountain:

⁹⁶ AT-451

⁹⁷ F451.4.1. *Dwarfs live under the ground*.

A little dwarf came up to meet her and asked: “My dear child, what are you looking for?”

“I’m looking for my brothers, the seven ravens,” she replied.

The dwarf said: “My masters, the ravens, aren’t at home, but you can come in and wait for them until they return.” Then the dwarf carried in the food for the ravens on seven little plates and in seven little glasses. (137)

No mention is made of the dwarf after this—whether he remains in the mountain after the ravens are restored to human form and return home, or even if he lived there prior to their coming. Still, the image of the dwarf under the mountain, especially when hidden by a secret door or enchanted lock, made a strong impression on Tolkien.

The politeness of the dwarf and the idea of a dinner party⁹⁸ are both important elements found in *The Hobbit*:

Just before tea-time there came a tremendous ring on the front-door bell...[Bilbo] rushed and put out another cup and saucer, and an extra cake or two, and ran to the door.

“I am so sorry to keep you waiting!” he was going to say, when he saw that it was not Gandalf at all. It was a dwarf with a blue beard tucked into a golden belt, very bright eyes under his dark-green hood. As soon as the door was opened, he pushed inside, just as if he had been expected.

He hung his hooded cloak on the nearest peg, and “Dwalin at your service!” he said with a low bow.

“Bilbo Baggins at yours!” said the hobbit...“I am just about to take tea; pray come and have some with me.” (7)

⁹⁸ F451.6.3.1. *Dwarfs feast mortals in their home.*

Tolkien protracts his tea-party, but it greatly resembles this meeting of the young sister and the dwarf under the glass mountain. The role of host is switched to Bilbo from the dwarf, which becomes important again when we see the influence of *Snow White* on Tolkien. This does not change the clear emphasis Tolkien (and the Grimms) placed on hospitality and manners.⁹⁹ But not all German dwarves are polite, and Tolkien's Dwarves are not polite at all times.

Another interesting connection found in this story is the link between dwarves and ravens; this link is suggested much earlier in the Sigurd tales as a dragon-talent. Tolkien later adopts it as a dwarf-talent. Particularly, Roäc and his kin—the Ravens of Erebor—served the Dwarves of Erebor and aided in the retaking of the Lonely Mountain from Smaug the Terrible. They were able to communicate with the Dwarves and provide information and counsel. This relationship seems to have its origin in this tale.

While not technically a dwarf tale, I would like to look now at Rumpelstiltskin,¹⁰⁰ a familiar story to most; a miller's daughter is locked in a series of rooms, each containing an increasing volume of straw. The king, who locks her in each room, demands that she spin the straw into gold by dawn or die. Each time, a mysterious gnome arrives and spins the straw into gold¹⁰¹ in exchange for one of the girl's treasures:¹⁰² a necklace, a ring, and her first born child. The girl becomes queen as a result of her spinning prowess and ultimately thwarts the gnome's attempt to take her child by

⁹⁹ F451.3.13. *Dwarfs are ill-mannered.*

¹⁰⁰ Rumpelstiltskin is a gnome rather than a dwarf, but as I have already shown—these are not consistent or clearly distinct names. Rumpelstiltskin is a diminutive, supernatural figure who serves as a nice segue into Tolkien's dwarf lore. AT-500.

¹⁰¹ F451.5.1.20. *Dwarfs help in performing task*

¹⁰² F451.5.2.14. *Dwarfs demand gifts.*

guessing his name: Rumpelstiltskin. There are some interesting points to make about this story when considering it as an antecedent to Tolkien's dwarf lore.

First of all, it is important to note that Rumpelstiltskin behaves cordially in his early interactions with the miller's daughter:

Suddenly the door opened and a little gnome walked right in and said:

"Good evening Little Miss Miller's Daughter. Why are you in tears?"

"Oh dear," the girl answered. "I'm supposed to spin that straw into gold, and I have no idea how it's done."

The gnome asked: "What will you give me if I do it for you?"

"My necklace," the girl replied.

The gnome took the necklace, sat down at the spinning wheel, and whirr, whirr, whirr, the wheel spun three times and the bobbin was full. (258)

This is a fair transaction, and appropriate for a bartering society. The gnome receives the agreed upon price and performs the task, working all through the night to spin all of the straw into gold. Not surprisingly, the process is repeated three times, each with higher stakes than before. The second round of spinning requires the girl to part with her ring, and by the third she has nothing to trade. "Then promise to give me your first child, after you become queen," Rumpelstiltskin demands. Desperate, she agrees. While this may seem extreme, Tatar notes that "Escalating demands are typical of fairy-tale helpers. They ask for something trivial to start with, then move to something that is beyond the norm of an economy of bartering. The helper or donor quickly moves into the role of villain" (*annotation*, 259). This is a critical shift, and points to the sin of usury in which the donor (the money lender) and borrower agree on an unreasonable fee to be exacted at

a later date (the interest); when the donor tries to collect, he is seen as usurer, a villain.

Rumpelstiltskin's cordial demeanor is perceived by the audience as conniving at this point, and when he is seen dancing around his fire on the eve of the third day on which he is to take the child, it becomes clear that he intends to eat the child, completing his transformation from donor to villain. Bilbo hints at this duplicitous nature in *The Hobbit* when he remarks to a wrathful Thorin, "I have been told that dwarves are sometimes politer in word than in deed" (277).¹⁰³ When the queen guesses Rumpelstiltskin's name the following day, he flies into a rage and rips himself in two.

This rage, the indignant fury of one denied his reward (just or otherwise), is certainly a characteristic found in Tolkien's Dwarves; and it is not one of their better traits. The rage Thorin displays when confronted by Bard and Bilbo (who has stolen the Arkenstone) and asked to barter for what he feels is already rightfully his, is reminiscent of Rumpelstiltskin. Thorin had promised Bilbo a fourteenth of the treasure gained at the quest's end, as Bilbo reminds him; however, Thorin feels that the Arkenstone is a treasure to which he alone has claim as King Under the Mountain, crying "I am betrayed" (277). That Bilbo stole the Arkenstone in order to ransom it for his fourteenth share is of little consequence. He is, as Bard of Dale points out, leveraging for what is already rightfully his: "Your own we will give back in return for our own" (276). Tolkien redeems Thorin through his heroic death, distinguishing him clearly from figures such as Rumpelstiltskin.

These are small examples of tales that Tolkien would have been familiar with from his childhood. It is unlikely that he sat down to create the Dwarves while thinking

¹⁰³ The more obvious example of duplicity is Gollum who is a corrupted Hobbit. Rumpelstiltskin could be a source of inspiration for Gollum and some Dwarvish traits, which further emphasizes the complexity with which Tolkien applied these various tales.

explicitly of Rumpelstiltskin, or the little dwarf under the glass mountain, or the three dwarves in the snow-bound cottage; however, it is equally unlikely that such stories would have played no role at all in his conceptualization of his Dwarves.

Finally, we must take time to consider *Snow White*. If any tale was to impact Tolkien as he sat working on his Dwarves, it would have been the tale of Snow White. This is one of the most familiar *märchen* because of the Walt Disney motion picture *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* which was, by a very strange set of coincidences, released in 1937, the same year Tolkien published *The Hobbit*. 1937 was a big year for the dwarf.

The tale itself is so familiar that it requires very little introduction or summary. However, it is important to distinguish the Disney version from the Grimm version that Tolkien would have been familiar with.¹⁰⁴ One of the most striking differences between Disney and the Grimm version is the treatment of the dwarves. According to the Grimms, “When night fell, [Snow White] discovered a little cottage and went inside to rest. Everything in the house was tiny and indescribably dainty and spotless” (245). In her note on this passage, Maria Tatar points out that these dwarves are distinct from Disney’s because they are tidy, able to keep a cozy home (245). This is a quality Tolkien manages to keep. Despite the lack of female characters in his work (as pointed out by many critics), there is still an air of domesticity, and it is often the most rugged men—or Dwarves—who display this domesticity.¹⁰⁵ Tolkien incorporates this initial scene nicely into *The Hobbit* when the Dwarves come stumbling into Bag End to the dismay of the

¹⁰⁴ He would have been familiar with several versions of the tale, certainly; however, it is his use of the German dwarf that I am interested in here.

¹⁰⁵ Beorn is perhaps the most domestic figure outside the Shire; only Tom Bombadil has a woman to keep his home for him, but Goldberry is less house-keeper and more an object of adoration and worship. Even Tom points out in his songs that he has to keep the land and house.

befuddled Bilbo Baggins who fears they will empty his larder, muddy his rugs, and chip his plates.

Curiously, however, Tolkien and Disney each seemed to have a vision of dwarves with distinct personalities. The dwarves in the Grimms' account are indistinguishable; they have no names, no personalities, and no distinguishing features. Disney turns them into caricatures: Dopey, Doc, Sleepy, etc. Tolkien, on the other hand, bestows Norse sounding names (as already discussed) upon his Dwarves in addition to unique musical instruments, weapons, cloaks and hoods (color coded, much like Disney), voices, rank, and rich back story. Each dwarf becomes a character in Tolkien's work. This is a remarkable departure from the German sources.

Another inversion of the tale is Tolkien's decision to send the Dwarves into the wide world rather than have them peeking out of windows. While it is true that the dwarves in *Snow White* leave their cottage to mine in the mountains, their departure is little more than a trope, a way to remove them from the scene so that the wicked queen can take advantage of the naïve Snow White. This is in keeping with the fairytale structure, which requires Snow White to violate a prohibition, not just once, but three times. Tolkien's Dwarves, to the contrary, are away from home, seeking adventure, and must convince the reluctant Baggins to violate his own prohibition: "Sorry! I don't want any adventures, thank you. Not today" (*The Hobbit* 6).

Tolkien does borrow from the tale as well as alter it. Thorin and company, though gruff and seemingly impatient in their early dealings with Bilbo, are nonetheless loyal and fiercely devoted. When Bilbo becomes separated from the party in the goblin tunnels beneath the Misty Mountains, he finds the Dwarves and Gandalf debating whether or not

to go back in after him: “If we have got to go back into those abominable tunnels to look for him, then drat him, I say” (92). Despite this sentiment, the fact that they are debating at all in the shadow of the mountain and not running on to place distance between themselves and the goblins they know will pursue them come nightfall clearly indicates their growing affection (or at least sense of responsibility) for the Hobbit. And Thorin’s dying words to Bilbo are an apology for his earlier harshness: “I go now to the halls of waiting to sit beside my fathers, until the world is renewed. Since I leave now all gold and silver, and go where it is of little worth, I wish to part in friendship from you, and I would take back my words and deeds at the Gate” (290). This friendship is a relationship of respect and affection; a relationship very similar to that of the seven dwarves to Snow White.

This, too, is a sophisticated inversion of the Grimm’s tale. Thorin dies, like Snow White; and like the dwarves who upon discovering her body “wept for three days” (Tatar 252), Bilbo “wept [for Thorin] until his eyes were red and his voice was hoarse” (*Hobbit* 290). Unlike Thorin, who is buried deep beneath the mountain, Snow White is placed in a transparent coffin of glass and set on display with her name written in gold. The dwarves keep vigil with the body, which is visited and mourned by many (including birds and animals). Tatar notes that “Snow White becomes an object that is put on aesthetic display” (annotation 254). She is the desire of the heart of the dwarves much like the gold of *The Three Little Men in the Woods* or the ancient treasures from the Dwarves’ songs in *The Hobbit*, and especially the Arkenstone of Thorin. Established as their greatest treasure, she is fit to become their greatest gift, which they bestow upon a passing prince:

One day the son of a king was traveling through the forest and came to the cottage of the dwarfs...When he went to the top of the mountain, he saw the coffin with beautiful Snow White lying in it, and he read the words written in gold letters. Then he said to the dwarfs: "Let me have the coffin. I will give you whatever you want for it."

The dwarfs replied: "We wouldn't sell it for all the gold in the world."

He said: "Make me a gift of it, for I can't live without being able to see Snow White. I will honor and cherish her as if she were my beloved."

The good dwarfs took pity when they heard those words, and they gave him the coffin. (254)

While not the end of the tale, it is the last we see of the dwarves. It is a remarkable passage. The dwarves are called good, which is interesting, and seems to function as a title such as in good-sir, good-wife, good-man, rather than simply as a commentary on their nature. The language is not what we expect for a group of miners, nor is their own behavior; they have almost become knights. They have set aside pursuit of jewels and gold, forgoing their mining and industry to guard and worship Snow White. She cannot be bought of them, but when the prince asks them to gift him Snow White so that he can properly honor her, they consent, we are told, out of pity. This is a trait not often associated with dwarves, German or Tolkienian.

There are other German tales in which dwarves make appearances, and it is possible that Tolkien would have been more fond of one not mentioned here; however, these four tales are a fair representation of what could be called a German dwarf, at least in so much as what Tolkien meant when he said that his Dwarves were more like the

German dwarf than the Norse. The tales discussed here serve to illustrate the richness and complexity that even folk-dwarves can possess. Though the Grimms certainly stylized their tales and began the process of transitioning from the folk into the literary tradition, their work remains rustic compared to the complexity of Tolkien's vast narrative; thus, it stands to reason that Tolkien's Dwarves would demonstrate an equally more complex set of characteristics. The German dwarves seen here are kind, piteous, fair, judicious, generous, quick tempered, industrious, clever, hospitable, well-mannered, and good-natured. Tolkien adapted many of these traits to his own Dwarves, but it is important to recognize not only the complexity of the Tolkienian dwarf, but its clear distinction from the Germanic or Scandinavian dwarf. The Tolkienian Dwarves, while capable of kindness and generosity, are above all warriors. They are honorable warriors in most cases, perhaps motivated by vengeance as Shippey suggests, but the very act of taking up arms separates them so clearly and completely from the German dwarf that the two almost demand to be viewed as two distinct races of being. Even the Norse dwarfs, renowned for the weapons they forged, were not known to carry those weapons into battle.

Chapter 5: Alternatives and Outcomes

While it is clear that the two areas of greatest influence over Tolkien's conception and development of the dwarf as a central fantasy race are the Norse myths and legends and the (especially) German folk and fairy traditions, there are many other stories worth noting. In 1869, E.H. Knatchbull-Hugessen published *Stories for My Children*, which contained the story "Puss-cat Mew," an early work of fantasy that makes heavy use of several traditional dwarf motifs; Tolkien later recalled the effect the story had on him as a young man. Just three years later in 1872, one of Tolkien's personal favorite writers, George MacDonald, published *The Princess and the Goblin*. And in 1928, a lesser-known contemporary of Tolkien's, E.A. Wyke-Smith published *The Marvellous Land of Snergs*. Both writers applied traditional dwarf motifs to races of beings other than dwarves; in MacDonald's case, goblins; and in Wyke-Smith's case, the Snergs. Almost simultaneously, another of Tolkien's favorite authors, William Morris, published *The House of the Wolfings* (1892) and *The Wood Beyond the World* (1894), two quasi-medieval fantasies that had a profound effect on Tolkien's work, both of which contain references to enchanted (and possibly cursed) dwarf smith-craft. These works, taken together, represent the sort of primordial soup from which modern fantasy evolved, particularly the dwarf who, even by the early twentieth century, was still rather indistinct. By the time Tolkien published the final installment of *The Lord of the Rings* (perhaps even *The Hobbit*) that was no longer the case. The word *dwarf* now conjures up a fairly consistent image in the minds of fantasy readers, and by the late 1970s dwarves had already become recognized as a staple figure in fantasy table-top gaming franchises. The massive popularity of *Dungeons and Dragons* from the 1980s through the present

concretized the image of the mostly-Tolkienian warrior dwarf. In fact, the figure had become so conventional so quickly, that in 1989 it was brilliantly satirized in Terry Pratchett's *Guards! Guards!*

In a 1971 letter to Roger Lancelyn Green, Tolkien mentions having enjoyed as a child a story called "Puss-cat Mew," which Tolkien erroneously attributed to Bulwer Lytton¹⁰⁶ (Carpenter 407). Green, according to a note on the letter, later informed Tolkien that the author was E.H. Knatchbull-Hugessen (Carpenter 453). This exchange not only confirms Tolkien's familiarity with the story, but offers some interesting insight into "Puss-cat Mew" as a possible source of inspiration.¹⁰⁷ The letter to Green was apparently in response to yet another in the long litany of inquiries into the origin of the word *Hobbit* and other possible borrowings by Tolkien, intentional or otherwise. Tolkien notes in his letter that "one cannot exclude the possibility that buried childhood memories might rise to the surface long after...though they might be quite differently applied" (Carpenter 407). This is a response in keeping with Tolkien's long standing position (dating all the way back to his letter to the *Observer* in 1938, and possibly before). In his forward to the tale, Douglas Anderson cites the letter from Tolkien to Green and notes that "One scene, where by trickery Joe keeps two Ogres and a Dwarf fighting, is similar to the scene in *The Hobbit* where Gandalf keeps the three trolls quarreling" and that the Ogres' ability to disguise themselves as trees "uncannily [foreshadow] Tolkien's Ents" (Knatchbull-Hugessen 47). Tolkien would probably dismiss these observations by pointing out the very great difference between Ogres and trolls, but Anderson seems to be accurate in his

¹⁰⁶ A bestselling English novelist and playwright.

¹⁰⁷ Despite Tolkien's confession to having read the story—and it having made enough of an impression that he remembered having read it (though not the correct author)—it hardly seems the sort of tale he would have enjoyed. Despite the fair amount of originality, and the graphic violence towards the Ogres (which Tolkien did seem to enjoy), the tale is ridiculous in parts and extremely didactic.

observations, and there are some very interesting dwarf related scenes in this tale to consider.

Having entered fairyland and survived his initial encounter with an Ogre disguised as a tree, Joe “came suddenly upon a very little man, sitting on a faggot, and sharpening a stick with a penknife. Little indeed was his body, but his head was enormously big; his hair was red, his nose was hooked, and he squinted fearfully....[with] a voice so harsh and unpleasant as to increase the feeling of distrust which had already taken possession of the traveler” (58-59). This description indicates fairly clearly that Joe has encountered a dwarf—especially since we have already been alerted to the presence of dwarves in the tale—but this figure appears more along the lines of Rumpelstiltskin or the Yellow-dwarf than what will become the Tolkienian Dwarf. Immediately Joe is bothered by the disproportionate size of the figure’s head; his facial features are not especially dwarf-like—note, especially, the lack of a beard. These features may suggest that Knatchbull-Hugessen had used certain medieval romances as his source, or even possible personal encounters with human dwarfs met in real life. According to Vernon Harward, in his book *The Dwarfs of Arthurian Romance and Celtic Tradition* “the romance writers, finding in their sources¹⁰⁸ certain hideous dwarfs, eliminated such fantastic characteristics as the animal paws, hoofs, and horns and simultaneously added features like the ‘camus’ nose and hunched back from dwarfs met in real life” (32). The squinting could indicate nearsightedness, but more than likely alerts the reader that this is a figure accustomed to dark places (such as a mine) who must now squint in the sunlight

¹⁰⁸ Harward specifically means Celtic folk tradition and historical accounts of court dwarfs kept as entertainers.

(even in the deep shade of a thick wood). More than anything, the squinting couples well with the hooked nose to create a wicked appearance—it makes him feel untrustworthy and angry. This impression is only heightened, for Joe and for the reader, by the harshness of the dwarf's voice. It turns out that this dwarf is not to be trusted, and he attempts to lure Joe into the clutches of the Ogres almost immediately.

Joe is rescued again by the fairy Puss-cat Mew (in the form of a tortoise-shell cat) who then leads Joe to the Fairy Green where he is greeted by many fairies, one of whom recites a verse about the nature of fairyland, Ogres, and dwarves:

Seven Ogres, fierce and strong,
Terrify this forest long;
Slave to whom there likewise be
Dwarfs of might—in number three.
Then beware, thou miller's son,
Of these Dwarfs speak thou to none;
Trust, alone to Fairies true
And the faithful Puss-cat Mew.
Thus I give thee, on our green,
Message from the Fairy Queen! (61)

This is all good and well, but for readers of Tolkien it will feel very unlikely to have dwarves serving as slaves¹⁰⁹ to Ogres. But, again, Knatchbull-Hugessen seems to have been working from (at least partially) a knowledge of the dwarves of the romance tradition. Harward offers useful insight into the relationship between what he calls the

¹⁰⁹ Slave here has strong connotations, but the nature of the arrangement between Ogres and Dwarfs is voluntary and mutually advantageous—though the Ogres, by virtue of their physical might, seem to have the role of master.

“truculent dwarf” and his giant master, pointing to several incidents, especially in the French Grail legends and romances, in which a dwarf will deliver a blow to the knight—whether Lancelot, Sarras, Agravaine, or some other—before providing a means (often a horn) by which the knight can summon the giant kinsman or master for a duel. There is no evidence that Tolkien considered such sources, and Knatchbull-Hugessen clearly blends these sources with the various folk traditions he had access to while altogether ignoring the Norse sources Tolkien so clearly favored. Because of this, the names of the three dwarfs sound very un-dwarflike; romance dwarfs generally had no name,¹¹⁰ while Tolkien favored Norse names. The dwarf Joe has already encountered is named Jumper; his brothers are Juff and Gandleperry. Jumper is the ugly one; Gandleperry is the most cunning.

Joe discovers him staring into a thicket from which Joe believes he has heard a cry like that of his own mother—it was, of course, Gandleperry who made the false cry to lure Joe. When Joe investigates the thicket he does not find a woman, instead he finds Gandleperry “sitting upon a fallen tree, with his two thumbs one in each of his wastecoat-pockets... Very unlike the Dwarf whom Joe had met before was this little man. He was older, had a black coat and buff wastecoat on, and his face was by no means disagreeable to look at” (63). It is difficult, first of all, to know what to make of the greatly varied appearance of the two dwarfs; while they are not so different that they are unrecognizable as both belonging to the same race—that is, both dwarfs—it is curious that Gandleperry bears no sign of the disproportions evident in Jumper. At the very least, this suggests that Knatchbull-Hugessen was not concerned with imitating any particular dwarf or drawing

¹¹⁰ There are notable exceptions, of course: Guivret and the Chevalier Petit. But these come from Chretien, and he may have drawn them from Welsh sources (Harward 62). Tolkien, very notably, claimed to have not been impressed by the Welsh.

on a specific dwarf tradition; perhaps he was, as Tolkien mentioned, simply recalling some early childhood impressions; if so, then Knatchbull-Hugessen, unlike Tolkien, made no conscious effort to reconcile these disparate figures into a single image.¹¹¹

Joe is compelled to follow Gandleperry's invitation to show him out of the woods, despite Joe's misgivings, because he simply cannot think of a good enough excuse to separate himself from the dwarf, suggesting clearly that the dwarf is very cunning. At this point the narrator mentions that "The Dwarfs' bargain with the Ogres was that they should have the head of every other Mortal whom they brought to the Ogres—for there is nothing Dwarfs like so much as brains, and they will go any distance, and play any trick, in order to secure this delicacy" (63). And with that the reader loses any sense that these wicked creatures could be forerunners of the dwarves found in Middle-earth. It is also at this point that the three attack Joe with large sticks, without any warning at all.

The story, which is fairly long, continues on in this way for some time. Joe finds himself in trouble with the Ogres and the dwarves, is rescued each time by the fairies—especially Puss-cat Mew—and eventually ends up escaping from the fairy realm and marrying Puss-cat Mew who turns out to be a beautiful fairy daughter. There are conditions, of course, which must be strictly followed in order for her to remain in human form; the two fail to perfectly adhere to these conditions, largely as a result of the mischief executed against them by the dwarves, and in a year's time Joe finds himself back in fairy land attempting to rescue Puss-cat Mew, who has reverted to her fairy-cat form, from the Ogres.

While walking through the woods, Juff drops out of a tree onto Joe's head. The two fight; then Joe puts on his magic glove,¹¹² which renders him invisible. He goads the

¹¹¹ The third brother, Juff, plays an important role later in the tale, but he is never described.

dwarf and the two Ogres with him so that they turn on one another, much as in *The Hobbit* as Anderson pointed out. Once the Ogres have knocked one another unconscious, Joe removes his gloves, takes out his knife, and kills them both, which is not at all like what happens in *The Hobbit*. To finish the scene, Joe “dashed out the brains of the miserable Dwarf with his staff immediately” (76). There is a sort of morbid irony in the knowledge that what the dwarf desired more than anything was brains, and now he has had his own bashed out. But there are still two dwarves to contend with.

Thus Joe, wearing the glove and therefore invisible, follows Jumper and Gandleperry into the dungeon of the Ogre castle where he witnesses the two dwarves tease and torment Puss-cat Mew with all variety of vile insult. This episode culminates with Gandleperry’s violent murder of Jumper: “Joe saw with horror that Gandleperry drew a sharp knife from his belt, and struck his brother Dwarf a fearful blow over the shoulder into the neck. With an unearthly yell, Jumper fell to the ground; but he never yelled again, for Gandleperry jumped on him and cut his throat in a moment, as if he had been a pig!” (79). The motivation for this homicide, we are told, is greed; Gandleperry simply does not like having to share the brains with his brothers. It feels a gross understatement to note that this homicide points to a corrupt moral nature not completely out of keeping with Tolkien’s Dwarves, but certainly not witnessed in *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings*. Only in the text of the *Silmarillion* do we find hints of traitorous behavior among the usually fiercely loyal Dwarves;¹¹³ most famously, the Dwarves of

¹¹² He received a magic glove, a steel dagger, and an enchanted snuff box from the fox as tools to aid in his rescue of Puss-cat Mew.

¹¹³ They can also be found in early manuscripts and the posthumously published volumes of unfinished work.

Nogrod murdered Thingol in the struggle for the Nauglamir.¹¹⁴ Those Dwarves were destroyed along with the Dwarves of Belegost—or mostly so—in the sundering of Arda at the end of the Second Age.

Nevertheless, “Joe now saw the opportunity he had so long waited for, and a tremendous blow upon the head stretched Gandleperry senseless and bleeding upon the body of his murdered mate” (80). Gandleperry, it turns out, had only been knocked unconscious, not killed. He wakes, finds himself alone in the dungeon with the murdered Jumper, and flies into a rage. He does not, like Rumpelstiltskin, rip himself in twain; instead, he does something far more dramatic. Desperate for a way out of the dungeon, he lights a candle, stumbles into a room used to store vast quantities of gunpowder, and blows himself up along with the castle and the remaining Ogre occupants who “flew all in different directions—heads, arms, and legs being torn off and driven through the air” (84). After this incident, Joe decapitates the Ogre captain Grindbones, returns home with the restored Puss-cat Mew, and the narrator informs the children to whom he is telling the story that the ruins of the Ogre castle can still be seen to this day—at Stonehenge.

It really is an entertaining story, and not one that feels at all near as old as it is. It is also not at all Tolkienian. Anderson is spot on in noting the similarity between the scene of Joe turning the two Ogres and Juff against one another. Of course, the differences are more notable than the similarities, and a more likely source for the scene is the Eddic account of the dwarf Alvis. It is possible that the two stories began to swim together in Tolkien’s imagination so that by the time he was writing the scene for *The Hobbit* in the early 1930s, the two had somehow become muddled. More to the point, these are not Tolkienian Dwarves; these are not Norse dwarves, either. They may be

¹¹⁴ I covered this episode in the second chapter of this dissertation.

Germanic or French folk-dwarves, in some ways. But more than anything, they are representative of how fragmentary the idea of a dwarf had become, and an excellent reminder of just what an astounding feat it was for Tolkien to have (in less than a century) created an entire race of Dwarves that would replace *these* dwarves, and other disparate figures called dwarf as a staple of fantasy literature moving forward through the twentieth century.

George MacDonald may not include dwarves in *The Princess and the Goblin*, but his goblins are rather dwarf-like in their occupations as miners, and the tale was an important source of inspiration to Tolkien. In response to a letter published in the *Observer* in 1938 requesting insight into Tolkien's inspiration (especially for the figure of Bilbo), Tolkien notes that *The Hobbit* "derived from (previously digested) epic, mythology, and fairy-story—not, however, Victorian in authorship, as a rule to which George Macdonald is the chief exception" (Carpenter 31). Among Tolkien's favorite MacDonald stories as a child were "The Golden Key" and the novella *The Princess and the Goblin*¹¹⁵ in which MacDonald tells the tale of an impetuous child-princess Irene and an adventurous young miner's son, Curdie. Irene ignores the cautionary tales of her oppressive nurse and strays too far from the castle, is caught outside the walls at sunset, and learns that the stories of goblins are true. She is rescued by Curdie, who knows that the goblins cannot abide rhyme. Their adventures include an expedition into the goblin mine (where Curdie becomes trapped) and the discovery of a plot by the goblins to collapse a mine shaft on the human miners and to tunnel into the castle through its

¹¹⁵ Though, as Douglas Anderson points out, Tolkien had changed his opinion of MacDonald by the time he returned to read the stories again as an adult (21).

subterranean foundations. It is an exciting story, and even a quick summary reveals a number of potential sources of inspiration for Tolkien.

MacDonald was not the first to use goblins, of course; however, his goblins did bear a distinguishing characteristic—soft feet. In a letter to Naomi Mitchison in 1954, Tolkien responds to an (apparent) inquiry about the origin of goblins, “[they] owe, I suppose, a good deal to the goblin tradition...especially as it appears in George MacDonald, except for the soft feet which I never believed in” (Carpenter 178). And the portrait of a tunneling, vaguely human race, complete with subterranean hovels and throne rooms—a malicious and militant race—is certainly consistent with the goblin we find throughout *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Later in the same year, Tolkien can be heard backpedalling a bit in a letter to Hugh Brogan when he comments that he (Tolkien) prefers the term Orc to goblin for historically pedantic reasons only, parenthetically acknowledging that his goblins (or Orcs) “do to some extent resemble” those goblins of George MacDonald (Carpenter 185). The change seems to be in the hardening of the feet and the Orcs’ proximity to legendary history rather than fairy-story, a relatively subtle distinction that Tolkien often hints at. In the same letter to Brogan, in fact, Tolkien distinguishes *The Lord of the Rings* (the text he is referencing in this letter) from *The Hobbit* (the text he was referencing in his letter to Mitchison) “consists in the vistas of yet more legend and history” found in *The Lord of the Rings*. That seems pretty reasonable; most readers recognize a certain depth—a seriousness, it is sometimes described—in *The Lord of the Rings* which is often missing from *The Hobbit*. And it is likely that this sense of legendary history—and Tolkien’s driving obsession to be philologically responsible to that history—can be recognized in Tolkien’s choice to

clearly distinguish the goblin from the dwarf, while the two are clearly bound up together in MacDonald's story as they sometimes are in the folk tradition. Thus, *The Princess and the Goblin* serves as a nice example of the way in which Tolkien often picked and borrowed from a melange of sources without ever saddling himself to a single one.

Another story Tolkien is known to have favored is E.A. Wyke-Smith's *The Marvelous Land of Snergs*, a short and enchanting novel for young readers published in 1928. Tolkien acknowledged the influence of the book on *The Hobbit*, which was published less than a decade after. But the Snergs, while very much Hobbit-like in their propensity for feasts and parties as well as their knack for gardening, also bear several dwarf-like traits.

Of particular interest is Wyke-Smith's first description of the Snergs as "a race of people only slightly taller than the average table but broad in the shoulders and of great strength" (7). Three points of emphasis can be drawn from this sentence, the first of which is purely semantic—the Snergs are described as "a *race of people*" (my emphasis). This sounds very much like Tolkien's way of referring to Dwarves, Elves, Humans, and Hobbits as "the free peoples of Middle-earth"—that is, using the word *people* in a non-human sense. The other two points of emphasis have to do with their height (an average table, roughly three to four feet) and strength (here noted as "great"). These are noteworthy because the dwarves seen in myths, legends, and fairy tales prior have been generally diminutive folk with slight builds and little to no discernable physical power. The broad shoulders are likewise interesting as evidence that their great strength is not only great in respect to their stature, but truly great even for much larger beings.

These traits are not only apparent in Tolkien's Dwarves, they become definitive and help to distinguish the Tolkienian Dwarf physiologically from any dwarf preceding it. The bulk of the Snergs suggests a life suitable to labor, which we find to be at least somewhat the case. Not all Snergs are craftsmen, though Wyke-Smith does make a point of their skill at "building (at which they are expert)" (8). Though the houses they build are not great palaces and passages underground but somewhat precarious wooden contrivances balanced among the trees and adjacent houses. In all, Snerg society greatly resembles human (English) society and Wyke-Smith's description of their town conjures images of Renaissance London.

They are militaristic and skilled hunters, all. This, like their prodigious strength, becomes absolutely definitive of the Tolkienian Dwarf. While it is conceivable that this vein is drawn from Tolkien's encounters with the Scandinavian material, it is hard to deny the immediacy of the influence of *The Marvellous Land of Snergs* as an influence ready at hand. The lifespan of Snergs greatly exceeds Tolkien's Dwarves who can live a couple hundred of years compared to the Snergs, the elders of whom "remember the excitement caused by the landing of William the Conqueror" (10). This lifespan issue is a minor one; Tolkien's Dwarves must live longer than Men (and Hobbits) but die younger than Elves in order to maintain the significance of aging in the cosmology—not hard to achieve considering the Elves' immortality. Wyke-Smith is clearly establishing the Englishness of the Snergs, a designation Tolkien reserves for the Hobbits; Tolkien's Dwarves, whether more greatly influenced by the Germanic or Norse, are decidedly not English.

While the story itself does little to educate us towards a possible link to Tolkien's Dwarves, there is a particularly amusing sequence of events roughly half way through the book in which Joe, Sylvia, and Gorbo (the Snerg protagonist) encounter an errant Sir Percival who misidentifies Gorbo as a dwarf:

[Percival] got [his visor] up at last: "As I was saying, wherefore come ye thus unattended on the King's ways, two children and a dwarf?"

"Who are you calling a dwarf?" said Gorbo disagreeably, "Dwarf yourself!"

The knight gave him a long contemptuous stare in reply...

"Then in that case you had better travel with me." (91-92)

Only a few pages later Gorbo identifies himself as the "valiant squire" of Sir Percival in order to gain admittance to a castle (97). This is a nod to the traditional role of the dwarf in Medieval Romance.

The reinvention of the romance was the work of William Morris, a prolific writer and one of Tolkien's absolute favorite. In a letter to Professor L.W. Forster, new-year's eve 1960 Tolkien claimed that his war experience "had [not] any influence upon either the plot [of *The Lord of the Rings*] or its manner of unfolding" and instead attributes the greater influence to William Morris' *The House of the Wolfings* and *The Roots of the Mountain* (Carpenter 303). First, it would be foolish to accept Tolkien's dismissiveness of the impact of his war-time experience on a work so notably representative of modern mechanized warfare; however, Tolkien is careful about who he attributes as influences. So when he names William Morris, it is worth looking into. Tolkien was not specifically

considering Dwarves when he made his response, but *The House of Wolfings* does contain some interesting references to dwarf smith-work.

In particular, in the third chapter Thiodolf encounters the lady Wood-Sun, the two fall to talking and singing or reciting of verse. At the end of this romantic and rather peculiar meeting, Wood-Sun “leaned down from the stone whereon they sat, and her hand was in the dewy grass for a little, and then it lifted up a dark-grey, rippling coat of rings....and laid that hawberk on the knees of Thiodolf” (46). She tells Thiodolf that she cannot reveal to him who crafted the armor or in what land, but that it will protect him if he will choose to wear it, calling it “the yoke-mate of doom” (46). Thiodolf, however, recognizes the work immediately as dwarf-craft and is hesitant to don the armor questioning “What evil thing abideth with this warder of the strife,” and adding that “all we fear the dwarf-kin, and their anger and sorrow and mirth” (46). Despite Wood-Sun reassuring Thiodolf that “No ill for thee, beloved, or for me in the hawberk lies; / No sundering grief is in it, no lonely miseries,” he hesitates and even allows the mail to fall from his lap back to the grass (46). Eventually he consents to wear the gift, and when Thiodolf emerges from the beech grove “he was covered from the neck to the knee by a hawberk of rings dark and grey and gleaming, fashioned by the dwarfs of ancient days” (48). Much of what this passage contains is familiar by now as the relationship between the dwarves and their work, but this passage does reveal some very specific points of influence.

First, it is compelling that the gift here is a piece of armor rather than a weapon. So much of the dwarf-craft found in the Norse myths, and even in Tolkien’s work after Morris, is weaponry. That this is a hauberk of ring-mail is certainly significant, and

immediately reminiscent of the Mithril shirt worn first by Bilbo and later gifted to Frodo. Thorin presents Bilbo with the Mithril armor after they sack the dragon-hoard, and it is simply described as being of “silver-steel” and it is further adorned with a belt of pearl (240). Second, Morris is clearly working with the same motif that a dwarf-smith has the ability to imbue his craft with some portion of his own character—and that this is generally perceived as a curse. Thiodolf is afraid to don the mail because of the supposed evil that “abides” within it; interestingly, Wood-Sun at once recognizes the potential for this sort of spiritual endowment and assuages Thiodolf’s fear by informing him that the enchantment woven into the hauberk intends no ill towards either of them specifically. That there is an enchantment she acknowledges; especially interesting is that the enchantment seems to have some qualifier that results in a curse on some and a blessing on others. This is similar to the kind of enchantments often encountered in Mallory who was fond of having swords that could only be wielded by knights of especially pure heart; those unworthy would wind up killing loved ones or themselves, if they could draw the weapon in the first place. Tolkien seems to echo this curious quality when Aragorn warns Hama that “Death shall come to any man that draws Elindil’s sword save Elendil’s heir” (*Two Towers* 136). Finally, the adjectives used by Thiodolf and Wood-Sun to describe the dwarves—anger, sorrow, mirth, grief, misery—encapsulate the breadth of early dwarvish representations that Tolkien will consolidate in his Dwarves. No further explanation is given, but to a reader of Tolkien, this is an artifact that feels very familiar. There is no question that this is, as the narrator states, “a hauberk... fashioned by the dwarfs of ancient days.”

It is easy to see how Tolkien was not only influenced by Morris' style generally, a point strongly emphasized by Diana Waggoner, but in his conception of Dwarves specifically. What is truly remarkable is that as familiar as this passage is to readers of Tolkien, there is no dwarf on the scene. This is a mere reference to a race that seems to have passed into the annals of deep, deep time. As wonderful as the passage is, Morris has done very little to alter the representation of the dwarf from the sources he drew on (those Norse sources we have already examined), yet in a matter of decades¹¹⁶ Tolkien will have completely transformed the dwarf from a solitary and seldom seen smith and mischief maker into a cornerstone race of fantasy literature. A remarkable achievement.

Morris does have at least one dwarf character, though he strikes a very un-Tolkien-like image. In *The Wood Beyond the World*, a highly allegorical tale (again, very un-Tolkien-like), the hero, Walter, encounters a strange dwarf figure wearing a yellow samite shirt. Walter, or Golden Walter, is an alien in the land (as we are constantly reminded) and so the dwarf is meant to be a strange figure—and only one of many strange encounters—but this dwarf is so strange, that it is likely we would not recognize him as a dwarf if Morris were not to call him such. The dwarf, who never is given a name, is described as having a “hideous hairy countenance” which could be understood as bearded but seems to encompass more of the face like the mane of a lion (which Walter also encounters). This hairy countenance serves to represent the dwarf as wild and uncivilized and very bestial, a condition greatly enhanced by the voice of the dwarf which is described as “exceeding fierce and terrible” and “fearful harsh” and always when he speaks he roars “and then the words came” (or something of the sort) (34). The

¹¹⁶ Morris published *The House of the Wolfings* in 1888; Tolkien published *The Hobbit* in 1937—less than fifty years later. And fewer than 20 additional years passed before the release of *The Lord of the Rings* which demonstrates further development.

halting nature of the dwarf-speech is reminiscent of the gibberish spewed by Gollum.¹¹⁷ This animal-like quality is greatly enhanced by the way the dwarf moves about “whiles walking upright...whiles bounding and rolling like a ball thrown by a lad, whiles scuttling along on all-fours like an evil beast” (35). Again, there is something very Gollum-like in this varied mode of locomotion—though I do not recall Gollum ever rolling (except perhaps momentarily in one of Peter Jackson’s films). Gollum, of course, is not a Dwarf; he is a Hobbit, or was once. Again, this demonstrates Tolkien’s ability to (as he said himself) digest material and revive it as something reminiscent but still his own.

The dwarf later assails Walter and the Maid with whom he travels, appearing at first as “nought but a brown and yellow rock rolling down the bent” (80). Walter attempts to kill the dwarf with his bow, but despite the arrow striking the dwarf squarely in the chest it “fell down from him as if he were made of stone” (80). This brief line holds a world of meaning. Initially, we may be tempted to connect this dwarf to the ancient race mentioned in *The House of the Wolfings*, in which case we could imagine the dwarf wearing a mail ring shirt beneath the yellow samite much as Frodo wore his mithril beneath his own shirt and when shot by a goblin arrow the shaft “struck Frodo and sprang back” (*Fellowship* 390). This is only remotely possible, and this figure does not appear to be part of an ancient race (first of all) or to be capable of smithing an enchanted hauberk (second of all). It is much more likely that the natural earthy quality of the dwarf’s flesh provided him some protection. This is both an echo of the Norse material both Morris and Tolkien knew so well, and a possible rumor—a source of inspiration—of Tolkien’s own

¹¹⁷ The dwarf reminds me greatly of the fool Caliban in Shakespeare’s *Tempest* who is something of a Wildman himself with similar ill intent towards Miranda.

mythos surrounding the Dwarves who are formed from the earth. The two quarrel loudly over the fate of the Maid whom Walter serves and the dwarf claims has wronged him by murdering his own Lady. This encounter seems to suggest the dwarf as a knightly figure (which Walter certainly is) though a heathen knight certainly; this is a similar, though considerably less successful, allegory to that presented by Spenser in the figures of his Saracen knights, the brothers Sans: Foy, Loy, and Joy.¹¹⁸ Walter eventually rushes the dwarf and smites him on the head with his sword, cleaving the dwarf to the teeth, and (of course) killing him instantly. This was not enough, however, for the Maid; she knows more of the nature of the dwarf and informs Walter that they must “smite off his head and lie it by his buttocks when he is in the earth; or evil things will happen else” (82). This is done by Walter with the dwarf’s own sword, which is tossed into the grave and buried along with the body. In a gruesome and possibly related reversal, the Orc warlord Azog decapitates Thrór at the gates of Moria, setting off a long and bloody feud (*The Return of the King* Appendix A).

Outcomes

It is clear that Tolkien drew inspiration from a vast and varied tradition of myth, folk and fairy tale, and literary sources. This is certainly the case with his fiction generally, but it is especially true of his work with Dwarves, a point often overlooked and seldom discussed. Prior to Tolkien there were dwarfs. They were generally magical, mostly mischievous or malicious, lived underground variably in holes or subterranean kingdoms, often crafted weapons which they just as often cursed, were frequently misshapen or grotesquely disfigured, and had notoriously violent tempers and short fuses

¹¹⁸ The Dwarves serve no such allegorical function in Tolkien’s work.

to match their exteriors; at other times dwarfs are found living peacefully in cabins in a wood, freely distributing benevolent gifts to little girls. In some traditions dwarfs were kin to goblins or fairies, in others they were greatly influenced by real life courtly dwarfs. But after Tolkien—thanks to Tolkien—the figure of the Dwarf comes into clearer view. This has allowed fantasy writers since to include entire populations of dwarves in their fiction without the trouble of wading through a millennium of disparate material to pick and choose the dwarf they want. Thus the figure of the fantasy warrior dwarf becomes a sort of homage to Tolkien’s vision of the race, as in Terry Brooks’ *The Sword of Shannara*. Nowhere, perhaps, is this homage more clear than in the various franchises of the table-top role-playing game (RPG) industry that emerged out of the surge in Tolkien’s popularity in the 1970s.

The fantasy RPG, as it is currently known, hit the scene with the publication of *Dungeons & Dragons* in 1974. The game was popular and underwent almost immediate revision; the revised *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* (AD&D) was released in 1974 and has been revised, expanded, and re-released several times since, including the newest 5th Edition in 2014. The original game drew heavily on Tolkien’s fiction, and the game allowed players to build characters of four familiar races: humans, elves, dwarves, and hobbits. These table-top RPGs spawned plenty of computer counterparts once computer gaming began to proliferate in the 1980s; the RPG has proved one of the most robust and persistent genres in the video game industry, featuring titles in the *Final Fantasy*, *Elder Scrolls*, and *Warcraft* franchises, among many others.

Other table-top games almost immediately followed in the wake of D&D, including the heavily Middle-earth-centric *Rolemaster* and *Middle-earth Roleplaying*

Campaign (MERC). These systems were both popular responses to D&D, which had quickly moved away from Tolkien-based content. However, in 1999, prior to the production of Peter Jackson's film franchises, the Tolkien estate withdrew rights and the company producing Rolemaster and MERC was forced to declare bankruptcy. Several video games have released in the wake of Jackson's immensely popular films, as have some new table-top iterations, but all feature Jackson's distinctive approach to Middle-earth (and much artwork from the big-screen features) rather than attempting to maintain an authentic connection to Tolkien's writings. Throughout the evolution of the table-top and video gaming industry, D&D has maintained its position of preeminence. The representation of dwarves in this franchise and how it relates to Tolkien's conception is interesting and important to consider, since the post-Tolkien notion of the fantasy dwarf has been largely influenced by the D&D game world.

The most successful edition (commercially) of D&D was the 3rd edition which marked a significant departure from many of the rigid game mechanics that had defined the AD&D play through the 2nd Edition. The new game was more fluid, more flexible, and in many ways, more considerate of real-life mechanics. Players and dungeon masters (the person running the game campaign) were suddenly much more free to interpret rules situationally, and many supplemental books were published to expand the players' library and encourage a more individualized and robust game experience. Among these supplemental publications were books dedicated to the treasure heroes might find, dungeons and terrains the heroes might traverse, and the races heroes could encounter or be descended from.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Monsters are distinguished from playable characters, though some monstrous races are playable (such as some kinds of goblins, for example).

The handbook *Races of Stone* was published in 2004 as part of the 3rd Edition (3.5, specifically). The 192 page, hardbound volume features sections on Dwarves, Gnomes, and Goliaths,¹²⁰ and a variety of other subjects from equipment options to campaign settings; also featured are a number of highly detailed illustrations. These illustrations show dwarves that would be at home in any of Tolkien's work, and the descriptions of the D&D dwarves reflects their close relation to the Tolkienian dwarf, though there are differences.

The physical representation of the dwarf in D&D sounds very much like a Dwarf of Middle-earth: "Dwarves are naturally dense, compact creatures. They stand no taller than 4-1/2 feet, but they have breadth and depth of creatures nearly twice their height" (6). And so the dwarf is very human in appearance, though generally shorter and of particularly muscular build. And like Tolkien's Dwarves, they "prize their hair, whether it is on their scalps (for both genders) or on their faces (for males)" (7). And while we generally don't read about the hair of Dwarves in Middle-earth, the significance of their beards has already been emphasized. One important distinction made in this passage is that the female dwarves in D&D do not have beards (and the illustrations reflect their particularly feminine appearance), whereas we are told in Appendix A of *The Return of the King* that in Middle-earth female Dwarves are "in voice and appearance, and in garb...so like to dwarf-men that the eyes and ears of other peoples cannot tell them apart" (411). The clear suggestion of the passage is that the females have beards equally as impressive as those of their male counterparts—clearly not the case in D&D.

¹²⁰ The inclusion of Dwarves alongside Gnomes and Goliaths—essentially stony-fleshed giants—continues the tradition of associating dwarves closely with AT F451 (Underground spirit).

Also interesting is that none of the pictures portray dwarves as grimy or disheveled. In fact, in D&D “dwarves are typically far cleaner and better groomed than most surface races” owing to their affinity for natural hot springs and their cultural practice of bathing in public baths, ala ancient Rome. While it is safe to assume Tolkien’s Dwarves bathed (from time to time, perhaps) it is difficult to imagine Thorin, Bombur, and the others settling in for a nice soak. But the industry of dwarves in D&D directly mirrors that of the Tolkienian Dwarf; they are generally craftsmen, miners, and smiths. And just as in Middle-earth, the best weapons and armor generally come from dwarven forges and smithies. Curiously, dwarves in D&D value utility over beauty, and find a “beautiful item with no utility...a waste of time and resources” (8). This is clearly contrary to the attitude of Thorin who becomes obsessed with the Arkenstone—a beautiful jewel with absolutely no utility.

The dwarves of D&D do have a language of their own, though it is not very similar to that of Middle-earth Dwarves. It is somewhat more accessible, and certainly less guarded. You are much more likely to encounter a dwarf speaking his own language in a D&D setting than in Middle-earth. They are alike in that they are very old languages with runic alphabets and lexicons that cater to engineering language (D&D) and battle (Tolkien). Many of the names available to players who are building a dwarf character sound like names one might find reading through Tolkien’s work, but are really more or less random amalgams built by rolling (or carefully selecting, if the player prefers) prefixes and suffixes from a common list; thus Dolkara (Sword Healer) or Whurtryd (Iron Heroine) would be perfectly acceptable names in a D&D campaign, while they would be mockeries in Middle-earth.

As a developed society, the dwarves have their own economy based largely on the wealth they mine and the tools they craft. Their societal structure is a pretty familiar monarchy with a widespread clan system. All in all, this is a system familiar to readers of Tolkien, and doesn't feel like a major departure from the established, Tolkienian fantasy Dwarf. Despite major departures from Tolkien's cosmology where religion and magic are concerned—D&D dwarves are very religious and have a large pantheon of gods to worship, and they regularly practice magic for everything from transmutation and terraforming to combat and scrying—the playable dwarf character should feel more or less as though he were kin to Gimli.

In fact, the sub-section titled “Creating Dwarf Characters” acknowledges that “it's easy to imagine a dwarf character in your mind as you play. Everybody knows how dwarves are supposed to look and act” (29). So there we have it. Dwarves are—as I have suspected all along—universally recognizable thanks to Tolkien. Likewise, the book lists the “doughty dwarf fighter” as the type, with options for rogues, archers, and sorcerers to play as well; technically, all classes are available to the dwarf, allowing for dwarven druids, wizards, bards, and clerics as well (29). This warrior dwarf, as I have already demonstrated, is Tolkien's doing, though it now feels natural and inseparable from our very notion of dwarf.

The book is extensive and goes on to detail a number of dwarven artifacts, weapons, armor, jewelry, and so on that may be encountered in a campaign. There are additional classes, or professions, that dwarves may elect as they level (or grow in experience). Much of this content moves us further away from Middle-earth where magic weapons and equipment are more rare and often less spectacular—an elven cloak may be

suitable as a ghillie suit, but staves don't launch fireballs and arrows don't explode on contact. But, the general appearance and behavior of dwarves in D&D should reflect their kin of Middle-earth in most of the essential ways.

The familiarity of dwarvish conventions has allowed some contemporary writers of fantasy to not simply participate in Tolkienian fantasy, but to use that model for parody; this is tricky work. Tolkien noted in "On Fairy Stories" that "There is one proviso: if there is any satire present in the tale, one thing must not be made fun of, the magic itself. That must in that story be taken seriously, neither laughed at nor explained away" (*The Tolkien Reader* 39). That is very hard to manage since it seems to be the most obvious thing to make fun of. The best at this has been Terry Pratchett, and for a satire on a dwarf, there is no better book than *Guards! Guards!*

Early in the book Pratchett introduces the figure of Carrot, a man raised by dwarves. Carrot is so-called "not because of his hair...It is because of his shape...When he flexes his shoulder muscles, other muscles have to move out of the way first" (22-23). Carrot is six-foot-six, the adopted son of the king, and has just been informed by his father that he is not a dwarf and is being sent to the city of Ankh-Morpork to join the Watch. This set-up allows Pratchett to poke fun at the conventional fantasy dwarf, which is only possible if there is a conventional fantasy dwarf, which there is because of Tolkien.¹²¹ According to the narrator of *Guards! Guards!* "All dwarfs are by nature dutiful, serious, literate, obedient and thoughtful"¹²² people whose only minor failing is a tendency, after one drink, to rush enemies screaming "Arrrrrrgh!" and axing their legs off at the knee. Carrot saw no reason to be any different" (28). But Carrot is not a dwarf, and

¹²¹ Pratchett also has the benefit of the post-Tolkien D&D dwarf, which he also satirizes.

¹²² Compare to Shippey's list: "tough, fair, bitter, somehow unlucky" (*Road* 63).

the people of Ankh-Morpork share this idea of dwarf with the narrator and the reader. Carrot is not a dwarf, despite his plea to his father: “After all, if you can have short humans, can’t you have tall dwarfs?” (25). That is an interesting question because it raises the possibility that a dwarf is recognizable for a set of characteristics apart from his categorical shortness. Carrot’s dwarvish attitudes and behaviors are amusing because Carrot is not a dwarf; thus he is not expected to behave as a dwarf does.

These expectations are challenged not long after Carrot arrives in the big city when the Watch stumble upon a brawl at a dwarf bar. Carrot, taking his job with the Watch both dutifully and seriously, tries to convince his comrades to intervene, but they are reluctant both because they are cowards and because dwarf bars are apparently notorious for trouble of this sort. Upon learning of the ill repute of his kin, Carrot becomes distraught and forces his way into the bar:

The fight was one of those enjoyable dwarfish fights with about a hundred participants and one hundred and fifty alliances. The screams, oaths and the ringing of axes on iron helmets mingled with the sounds of a drunken group by the fireplace who—another dwarfish custom—were singing about gold.

Nobby bumped into the back of Carrot, who was watching the scene with horror.

“Look, it’s like this every night in here,” said Nobby. “Don’t interfere, that’s what the sergeant says. It’s their ethnic folkways, or somethin’. You don’t go messin’ with ethnic folkways.”

“But, but,” Carrot stuttered, “these are my *people*. Sort of. It’s shameful, acting like this. What must everyone think?”

“We think they’re mean little buggers,” said Nobby. “Now, *come on!*”

(54)

The scene continues, and Carrot even begins yelling at the drunken dwarves in their own language which very much mystifies the dwarves and moves them to tears at the thought of their “own dear mothers” (55). But the entire scene relies on the exaggeration of familiar qualities and characteristics—what Nobby calls “ethnic folkways”—of the fantasy dwarf, realized by Tolkien and perpetuated by the RPG franchises his work spawned.

The drunken dwarf is not a real Tolkienian dwarf. Pratchett cleverly blames the corrupting power of modern, urban society for this phenomenon; immediately before Carrot intrudes on the bar fight, the narrator muses that “No-one knows why dwarfs, who at home in the mountains lead quiet, orderly lives, forget it all when they move to the big city” (54). So the scene is actually atypical for the Tolkienian dwarf; Gimli likes to drink, but he holds it well. The city-dweller dwarf does not exist in Middle-earth, largely because modern cities don’t exist in Middle-earth. This pattern of ill-behavior that Pratchett satirizes so well is the sort of behavior typically seen in gaming scenarios; the popularity of Pratchett’s satire certainly contributed to the perpetuation of this stereotypical (though not Tolkienian) portrait of dwarvish behavior.

It is clear that the fantasy authors of today and into the foreseeable future must contend with the figure of the Tolkienian Dwarf. The dwarf is a central figure of the medieval fantasy for most audiences, so the omission of dwarves from a fantasy world—such as in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* books—is immediately noticeable. The inclusion

of a dwarf or dwarves must be either familiar enough as a Tolkienian Dwarf, such as in most tabletop and video game fantasy franchises, or present itself as a clear parody, such as Carrot.¹²³ It is clear that modern fantasy authors, whether or not they include dwarves in their work, benefit from the strong conventional model that Tolkien established in the same way that they benefit from the conventional model of the Tolkienian Elf. These conventions can be limiting, certainly; however, they are far more beneficial than they are restrictive, and Tolkien's contribution to the clear image of the fantasy dwarf is worthy to be counted among his greatest achievements.

¹²³ George R. R. Martin's *Game of Thrones* series features a dwarf character Tyrion Lannister; however, Tyrion is a human with genetic dwarfism, removing him from this tradition of fantasy dwarf entirely. Even the AT F451 makes it clear that the fairytale or fantasy dwarf "is to be distinguished from the other conception of dwarf, viz., a very small person."

Pedagogical Essay

You Cannot Pass: A Radical Assessment Model

Currently I am serving as an Instructor of English at a large mid-western community college. This is a good job—a rare community college tenure-track job—but it is primarily a composition position that affords me very little opportunity to teach literature courses. More specifically, it affords me no opportunity to develop or teach a course on fantasy literature or J.R.R. Tolkien. There is little to no room for such material in a survey course, and our composition curriculum is designed to discourage the introduction of literature. These factors present a substantial challenge as I try to conceive of how the work I have just shared in this dissertation contributes to my teaching. While it is hard to anticipate when an opportunity will present itself to teach something new, the challenge of incorporating material into a course in a way that makes it feel fresh and indispensable is a nice intellectual fitness program. I will initiate this program by presenting a detailed plan for a fantasy literature course along with pedagogical rationale to support that design. First, however, I would like to share a pedagogical insight I gained from reading *The Lord of the Rings*; this insight is informed by theory, which I will share subsequently, and both the insight and the theory contribute, finally, to the design of the course I will present.

An Introduction to the Study of Fantasy Literature

The course described here is an upper level undergraduate course providing an introduction to the detailed study of fantasy literature with a focus on a short list of major, accessible, likely familiar fantasy narratives. It is not a special topics course on

The Lord of the Rings or a great author's seminar on J.R.R. Tolkien; it is more or less a short survey of cornerstone fantasy franchises. I have included enough secondary reading to introduce students to the work of the literary critic on the fantasy genre, but the focus of the course will remain on the primary works. In this way the course acts as both a survey of the fantasy genre and an introduction to literary scholarship. The course could easily be made into a senior seminar or graduate course by shifting the emphasis to the secondary readings, or even as easily dropped into a lower division, non-major designation (a general elective) by removing the secondary requirements and treating the course as a pure survey. Thus, the design is flexible and highly practical.

The syllabus introduces the course to students with the following statement:

Course Description, Goals, and Expectations

This course is an exploration of literature in the fantasy genre with a focus on the major 20th century authors of fantasy. We will read novels by C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Ursula LeGuin, Terry Pratchett, and J.K. Rowling as well as a collection of stories by Robert E. Howard; these texts will be supplemented by critical scholarship on various aspects of fantasy literature. The purpose of the course is to enhance our enjoyment of fantasy literature by establishing context, not to ruin our enjoyment of it through over-analysis.

The major goal of the course is that each of you will learn to view fantasy narratives as serious representations of potential models of human experience that can either reflect or challenge the contexts in which they were created, or sometimes do both to a certain degree. You will achieve this goal by completing all of the assigned readings, participating regularly and thoughtfully in class discussions, and completing the written assignments on time and with enthusiasm. I will evaluate your expertise at the end of the semester based upon your ability to discuss fantasy literature verbally as well as in writing.

Returning to the syllabus: I present the students with a clear list of readings for the course:

Required Texts

The Hobbit (J.R.R. Tolkien)

A Wizard of Earthsea (Ursula K. LeGuin)

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe (C.S. Lewis)

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (J.K. Rowling)

Guards! Guards! (Terry Pratchett)

The Coming of Conan the Cimmerian (Robert E. Howard)

Required Readings Available on Reserve

"On Fairy Stories" (J.R.R. Tolkien)

Selections from: *Strategies of Fantasy* (Brian Attebery), *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Farah Mendlesohn), *The Hills of Faraway* (Diana Waggoner), *Tough Guide to Fantasyland* (Diana Wynn-Jones)

I strongly encourage students to print the reserve material at the start of the semester to avoid any last minute technical issues. Relatively cheap copies of the books are available for purchase through Amazon or other secondhand resellers, or for lending through the library.

The reading list is worth looking at more closely; some of the primary works might need some justification. In the preface to *The Impulse of Fantasy Literature*, C.N. Manlove asserts "the essence of fantasy is delight in the independent life of created things" (xii).

The authors on my list approach this delight in various ways, as Manlove goes on to detail; however, that they do delight can be easily argued, and since my stated goal is to enhance my students' enjoyment of fantasy literature, it seems apropos to keep this essence in mind as I construct the readings. Furthermore, what gets created in the fantasy world is often not simply stuff but more importantly, people and places. Our ability to delight in those creations within a fantasy text should translate into an ability to express similar delight in the people and places of our primary world (also created, according to

the world view expressed by the great majority of this world's people). This supports the goal of the study of literature according to Rosenblatt, namely the development of some degree of empathy. It is also extremely important to my radical assessment model (described below) since it allows me to consider the work of my students as created things with independent life; my job is not to judge those works, but to delight in them. I will get more into this later.

Pratchett I include because I think it is important to include some humor in a course that could become overwhelmingly serious if not dark; Pratchett's irreverence is also a very nice counterbalance to Lewis' overt moralism. *Guards! Guards!* is one of the funniest books I have ever read, and the subjects of the satire are easily identifiable in the other texts (especially *The Hobbit* and *A Wizard of Earthsea*) helping to illuminate characteristics of the genre. Additionally, because it parodies the genre, locating it near the end of the course should allow me to discuss how the book works to challenge the other narratives as models of reality in a very explicit way. Howard makes the list for me because Conan is the most significant sword-and-sorcery figure. Reading some Conan stories also has the added benefit of challenging the boundaries of the fantasy genre definition that has Tolkien at the center, not to mention the visceral style of Howard's prose will almost certainly engage those students who may (God forbid!) find themselves bored in Middle-earth or Narnia.

The rest of the list really stands without serious challenge. Not only are Tolkien, Lewis, and LeGuin arguably the three most familiar names in fantasy, these three texts are foundational to the franchises upon which the modern fantasy genre is constructed. This is evidenced by the fuzzy-set experiment detailed in Brian Attebery's *Strategies of*

Fantasy. The fuzzy set is perhaps a less sophisticated definition of a genre than we could find elsewhere, but it is supremely accessible, which is why I insist on sharing it with my students. It is an experiment I can replicate with my students who will almost certainly try to situate *The Hunger Games* at the center of the set, but they will have Tolkien in there as well. Some of them will believe that C.S. Lewis is a children's writer, but that's fine for now. Most will not be familiar with LeGuin unless they have seen the mini-series, but reading these three in sequence will not only serve to solidify the core of the genre but to draw the boundaries into question at the same time. Those boundaries will be important when we read Pratchett and Howard; students must decide how they fit in or argue that they don't.

That just leaves Rowling. We could argue the literary merits of Rowling—a writer who seems to arouse vitriolic passion in any gathering of literature professors—but she makes my short list based largely on the popular success of the Potter franchise in an age of video games and social media; whatever success the future holds for the fantasy genre, we certainly owe to the millions of Potter books flying off bookstore shelves for the better part of two decades if not to the superior word-smithing of Rowling (who I believe is a gifted storyteller). She is, if nothing else, a writer who delights supremely in the life of her created things. Of all of our authors, she seems most reluctant to kill her creations—Pratchett and Howard, it should be noted, revel in the absolute destruction of their creation.

The secondary readings would perhaps require more of an explanation; first, I have decided to include Attebery's text as a source of definition while omitting Manlove who operates in the background of what I do, but isn't as important for students as a lens

for their reading. Second, I have decided to use excerpts from books because full books would press our reading load well beyond the limits of an undergraduate course as I see it—I, of course, have read each in its entirety, and their contents contributed greatly to my choice of primary readings for the course. Additionally, book excerpts allow me to be highly specific regarding content without the burdensome task of reading individual journal articles which tend, in my experience, to rely on a denser prose and far more academic jargon than I'd prefer to subject my undergraduates to. The schedule of specific readings would look something like this, assuming a standard sixteen week semester:

Weekly Schedule of Reading

Week 1: Introduction; read Attebery and Mendlesohn

Week 2: Read Waggoner and Wynn-Jones

Week 3: begin *The Hobbit*

Week 4: finish *The Hobbit*

Week 5: begin *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

Week 6: finish *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

Week 7: begin *A Wizard of Earthsea*

Week 8: finish *A Wizard of Earthsea*

Week 9: Midterm Exam w/Essay; begin *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

Week 10: finish *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

Week 11: read Conan: "The Phoenix on the Sword," and "The Tower of the Elephant"

Week 12: read Conan: "The Scarlet Citadel," and "The Black Colossus"

Week 13: begin *Guards! Guards!*

Week 14: finish *Guards! Guards!*

Week 15: read "On Fairy Stories"

Final Exam Week: Final Exam w/Essay

As I already mentioned, I chose to have my students read a small excerpt from Brian Attebery's *Strategies of Fantasy* because it provides a very clear definition of the fantasy genre that situates Tolkien, Lewis, and LeGuin squarely in the middle. This would be the very first reading for the semester, allowing us to establish a clear definition of fantasy and a set of basic criteria for evaluating the works we read. Students will be naturally

curious how an author like Howard fits alongside Tolkien or Lewis; reading Attebery and Mendlesohn up front will allow students to ask that question and eventually to answer it for themselves.

Once we have the definition in place, Mendlesohn offers a fairly simple taxonomic system for dealing with texts that are within the genre but might have some distinguishing features. This is important since *The Hobbit* and *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* are both obviously fantasy novels, but they are also very different in some important ways. Mendlesohn's taxonomy doesn't offer a full framework for distinguishing these two (or any two) texts, but it does offer some good vocabulary that we can use to discuss one novel in relation to another—particularly, the point of entry and the level of commitment to or immersion into the fantasy realm. For students of such a course, the ability to categorize a fantasy as immersive, or liminal, or a portal quest represents a major step in the direction of becoming a student of fantasy and an eventual expert or scholar.

This leads nicely into Waggoner's discussion of setting. Setting is critical to the fantasy genre—arguably the most important element of any fantasy story. A major distinction between the taxonomic designations presented by Mendlesohn is the point of entry for the fantasy and the level of commitment the author invests in his effort to drag the reader into the world. This means that a fully immersive fantasy expresses a high level of mimesis. For Waggoner, this mimetic quality is most significant when it is applied to the setting of the narrative. In fantasy, this setting appears most often as “quasi-medieval” (Waggoner 37). It's not quite that simple, of course, but a survey of this kind necessarily deals in nutshells.

I have students read the opening pages to Diana Wynne Jones' *The Tough Guide to Fantasy Land* not just because it talks about maps specifically, but because it suggests that fantasy narratives work similarly enough that the reader can navigate them all using the same strategies; she encourages the students to have expectations, which can then be challenged through the reading of the primary texts.

Finally, Tolkien's seminal essay "On Fairy Stories" will allow us to reflect on the course and consider not only how a fantasy text is made and defined, but what the function or significance of fantasy narrative may be. Most importantly, Tolkien's discussion of Primary and Secondary worlds stems from his notion of sub-creation, all of which informs not only the language of this paper but that of fantasy scholars generally, Manlove and Waggoner particularly. I like the idea of explicitly presenting these ideas to the students at the end of the course (they have been undercurrents all along) so that they have the vocabulary moving forward but are not wrestling with the ideas during the course; they will, I hope, recognize these ideas as familiar at the end of the course, whereas they would appear strange and difficult at the start.

Returning once again to the syllabus, students will find a balance of writing (formal and informal) and exams:

<u>Graded Assignments</u>	<u>% of final grade</u>
Quizzes	20 (2 per)
Informal Writings	20 (5 per)
Midterm Exam w/ Essay	25
Final Exam w/Essay	35

Assignments

Quizzes: Quizzes are designed to encourage regular reading and attendance. Questions are a combination of multiple choice and short answer. Quizzes are administered at random, roughly every third or fourth class, and should take the first five minutes of a class to complete. They are not intended to be "tough" but

to encourage you and reward you for “getting” the reading at some basic level and participating in the course.

Midterm Exam w/Essay: The midterm exam will cover only the three novels from the first half of the course; it will not cover the secondary readings. The questions will be a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and passage identifications totaling 50% of the exam grade. The essay will be worth the other 50% of the exam grade. You will have only the class period to complete the exam and write the essay; though you may bring one page of hand written notes (an outline, quotes, whatever you might need) based upon the prompt below.

This first essay is largely a critical response. I would like you to think about the readings from the first half of the semester and how those readings have challenged your conception of fantasy. How would you have defined fantasy prior to the start of the term? How has your definition of fantasy changed? Defining fantasy is really tricky business as we have seen already; what makes it so hard to define? For this essay, you are encouraged to consider these questions and any other question you may have already been asking yourself about the definition of fantasy or the limitations of a fantasy genre.

Final Exam w/Essay: The final exam will be similar to the midterm exam, except this exam covers material from the second half of the semester. These include Tolkien’s essay “On Fairy Stories,” thus this exam is worth slightly more than the midterm.

For your final essay, you will play the role of the critical scholar. You will choose one of the primary readings for the semester and argue that it is a poor example of a fantasy text. You must base your argument on the secondary texts we read, and you must provide clear examples from the primary and secondary texts to prove your argument—obviously, this is something you want to plan ahead of time. Clearly this is only an exercise; we have already established that these are fantasy texts; however, your ability to turn the discussion on its head (however effectively) will require you to apply the professional vocabulary you acquired this semester as well as your best critical thinking skills. Your success depends on your use of vocabulary, clear textual examples, and clear organization and logic, not on your ability to “convince” me of anything.

Informal Writings: Over the course of the semester, you will complete four informal writings. These are two page responses to class readings. You should attempt to anticipate the discussions of the texts you respond to and bring your written response to the first session of discussion for the text you are responding to so that they can be used to launch and promote our discussion. Let me know by week two which texts you would like to respond to so that I can ensure we have sufficient responses to each reading. You may be asked to switch a response if

certain texts are being neglected. I will evaluate your responses primarily for their thoughtfulness, though they should be well edited.

These assignments need little explanation beyond what has already been given. Quizzes and exams seem a necessity of a literature course in my opinion; students too often pay too little attention to the details when they read and can easily fail to pay attention to basic plot movement or character development—even character and author names can escape the student who is overly concerned with finding the “meaning” in a story. Quizzes help combat that. Exams ensure students retain the information, even if only for the duration of the semester. The informal writing assignments have proven supremely useful in the literature surveys that I teach. Not only does it keep me from completely dominating every discussion and ultimately forcing my reading upon my students, but the students who prepare informal writings or class notes find that they appreciate those texts much more fully and tend to develop a much more complete understanding of them. Timed essays in the high pressure setting of an exam force students to process information critically and quickly, while the ability to prepare a strategy ahead of time rewards the prepared mind above the gifted bull-shitters.

It may come as somewhat of a surprise that I have not assigned a longer literary analysis or some other comparable research based project. This was a difficult decision; while I do appreciate the high level of critical application required by that sort of project, I am also cognizant of the additional burden this places on students who are already asked to complete large chunks of reading—not to mention the work they have in other classes. I know, that isn’t my problem—but I think it will be if I over burden my students. As I stated in the course goals, I want my students’ appreciation for this literature to be

enhanced by the course. My decision to forgo a substantial analytical essay represents my commitment to that goal, and I don't believe this represents any particular detriment to the course design.

Concluding Rationale

This course is nothing revolutionary, but not every course needs to be. I drew the design directly from a standard two-meetings-per-week course laid out over a fairly standard sixteen week semester. This could be easily adjusted by adding or removing readings to extend or compress the course. As I already mentioned, the course is essentially a survey of major fantasy works. I have not made any attempt, clearly, to organize these works chronologically, as I don't believe that to be an especially productive approach (unless direct development of themes, motifs, or rhetorical elements is the focus, which it is not); the organization may feel ephemeral, but I have in mind to engage students with critical discourse first in order to create a framework for future discussion as well as provide students with some common vocabulary. The relatively rapid pace of the course will prevent the sort of depth I might prefer in a seminar, but it encourages a focus on the genre and our texts as representative of that genre, which is my greater concern.

Key for me—as part of this exercise—was designing a literature course that I could easily translate, pedagogically, into a composition course for semesters when the literature course is not an option as a teaching assignment. I found that creating a composition course that centers on fantasy literature was a unique challenge, especially since I wanted it to align as well as possible with the standards in place for composition courses in my current appointment so that I might be able to implement the design

immediately. I have chosen not to present that particular course design here since there would be little of interest in reading through my writing prompts and course calendar; they would be nothing extraordinary. What I want to do instead is couple the course design I have just presented with theory I have already discussed in my dissertation, and bridge that into a general pedagogical discussion and my approach to teaching writing—which is what I do most—so that it becomes clear how closely related the various disciplines are in my practice.

You Cannot Pass

One of the most powerful moments in J.R.R. Tolkien's masterpiece *The Fellowship of the Ring* must be Gandalf's encounter with the Balrog of Moria. I have always felt so, long before Peter Jackson's excellent visual recreation of the scene brought the Balrog roaring into life on the big screen. Part of the power of the scene lies in its simplicity, its brevity; one moment Gandalf is there, the next he is gone. This sense of suddenness is emphasized dramatically by the urgency with which the party is attempting to escape from Moria, the sudden pause at the exit when they realize that Gandalf has lagged behind, and the surprising inability of the party—even Strider—to go back for their companion in time. Before he falls, Gandalf shouts at the Balrog, "You cannot pass." In fact, he says this simple, three word phrase three times; a nice trick Tolkien was no doubt proud of.

Strider and Boromir run back onto the bridge in an effort to assist Gandalf, but the wizard breaks the bridge sending the Balrog and himself tumbling into the void. His companions believe he is dead—even I believed he was dead, the first time I read it. I

would like to discuss the significance of this scene with you presently, but first let me explain my relationship to the simple directive, “You cannot pass” (392).

As I have transitioned in my role from student to teacher, I have come to appreciate this as a teaching joke—or, at least, as close to a joke as Tolkien ever comes. First, Gandalf is the teacher in Middle-earth. This point leaves no room for debate. The Hobbits, whether Bilbo or Frodo (or Sam or Merry or Pippin), as Farah Mendlesohn points out, have no clue about the world outside the Shire; thus, when they follow Gandalf into the world of Middle-earth, he teaches them about that world and we learn with them each step of the way. It is a testament to the greatness of Tolkien’s narrative that something so didactic wouldn’t bother us more. In fact, it doesn’t bother most of us at all. So, Gandalf is the teacher; he answers almost every question asked within the story of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. If he can’t answer it, Elrond will. So when Gandalf shouts at the Balrog “You cannot pass,” I can’t help but see a teacher confronted by an impossible student—“You cannot pass.”

It really isn’t a funny joke. Later in this paper I will discuss the greatest pedagogical influences on me as a teacher—Louise Rosenblatt among them—and this sort of attitude doesn’t foster a strong student teacher relationship. Maybe joke is the wrong word—it is a satire. I’ve seen this scene played out again and again between my colleagues and their students; I’ve even played the role of Gandalf from time to time. Sometimes a student really cannot pass—sometimes they fall into an abyss half way across the bridge of knowledge we build for them and they are just lost. But that isn’t exactly what happens to the Balrog; no, Gandalf breaks the bridge by force and topples

the Balrog. How many times have we done that? Don't answer; it's a rhetorical question. The answer is, too many times.

While there is a satirical edge to Gandalf's words to the Balrog, the real significance of the scene can't even be found in the scene. The real significance comes much later, when we learn what happens to Gandalf and the Balrog when they tumble into the void. The Balrog is destroyed, utterly; Gandalf, on the other hand, is reborn. He returns to Middle-earth transfigured as Gandalf the White, the wisest, most powerful of his order. This is bad for the Balrog and very good for Gandalf; by extension, it is good for me, the teacher, and very bad for my student, the Balrog.

That seems pretty simple, and we really have to be careful how we read this scene. Diana Waggoner offers us some very important advice in her book *The Hills of Faraway*: "Fantasy is not allegorical, but metaphorical" (27). For us this means recognizing that this scene is not intended to direct us—to instruct us—it doesn't tell us what to do. Thus, I should not shout at my student "You cannot pass," and hurl him off of a bridge (literally or figuratively). Instead, and this is Waggoner's distinction, the scene is intended to enlighten us, to help us see what is and why it is. Quite simply, the scene holds a mirror to us, and if we hear in Gandalf's words a sort of teacher-centric satire, then we need to take note. Specifically, I note that when Gandalf hurls the Balrog into that void, the Balrog drags him down into the void right after. That's the scary part; and I'll be the first to confess, I've faced down too many students on the bridge of Khazad-dum. But the good news is, as I suggested earlier, I came back from the void better than when I fell into it.

This transfiguration can make us hard to recognize—Gimli almost put an axe in Gandalf believing him to be Sauruman. A couple of semesters ago I disappeared into that void, and I have recently emerged. And I look completely different to my students because of what I discovered: Not every *A* is the same. Perhaps that isn't as profound a statement as you expected from the lengthy build up, but it really is a radical idea—at least it was for me. Most of us recognize that our *A* students are not all the same, that some of them have done whatever it is we have decided merits an *A* while others have distinguished themselves somehow; their work is more polished or they demonstrate more potential. Yet, on the grade card, there is no distinction between these students.¹²⁴ But that's not exactly what I'm talking about. I literally mean, not every *A* is the same (not just that every *A* student is not the same). Let me explain what this means and how it has changed my classroom practice of assessment.

Not Every *A* is the Same

For several semesters I was very proud of the balance in my grade distribution; I had a couple students drop from each section by midterm, the ones who remained finished the course at roughly a 70% pass rate, that group consisted of roughly 33% each *A*, *B*, and *C*. That's amazing balance; I thought that meant my course was appropriately challenging and that I was grading fairly. Then I began to ask myself why our expectation was that only about half of our students were doing more than just getting by—that is, getting an *A* or a *B*. Shouldn't all of our students get *As*? Immediately I recognized that this is impossible because too many factors external to the classroom can negatively affect a student's performance. But discounting the students who fail to complete work or

¹²⁴ I teach at an institution with no +/- marks, so a 90 and a 99 are worth exactly the same number of quality points when calculating GPA. If you teach in a +/- system, there still is only a minor distinction; bear with me.

attend class, shouldn't they all—the regular attenders and completers of work—be passing? Well, mine were. I looked back over several semesters of grade records and discovered that, with only a couple of rare exceptions, the pass/fail distinction had to do entirely with completion; every failing student was missing substantial work. So, I wondered, why are all of my students not passing with an *A*? Basically, I wanted to clarify the distinction between the three levels of achievement among successful students.

I discovered that the students who earned an *A* in the course were more times than not the students who entered the course with a high level of proficiency; this was so consistently the case that I began to feel bad; I wasn't asking those students to do anything they weren't already capable of doing; I wasn't pushing them. I would have adjusted the curriculum to solve this problem except that it is a paradoxical problem; if I make the class more challenging, more students could potentially fail; even more likely, the *A* students would wind up with *B*s. Too few *As* would leave me feeling that the course was too hard. So what did I do? Nothing. I did nothing.

Look back at Gandalf's words; I said they are a satire, and they are. Ours is, perhaps, the only profession that devalues success. Nowhere outside of a teacher's lounge or office will you hear complaints about success rates that are too high. No retailer has ever complained because too many customers were satisfied with their product; no service provider has ever complained about too high customer satisfaction rates. Certainly no doctor has ever lamented the loss of too few patients. Why in God's name do teachers fret over high success rates? We seem to believe that our reputation as an instructor is inversely affected by student success. I have heard professors say with great pride, "Nobody ever passes my final exam." Hyperbole, of course, somebody passes;

nevertheless, such a claim would be unthinkable in the restaurant industry: “Nobody can keep my food down.” Absurd. So when Gandalf tells the Balrog, “You cannot pass,” and I think it would be a funny thing to say to my students, I completely miss the point.

So what does it mean that not every *A* is the same? It means learning to look at the grade of each student individually; stop measuring one against the other. Who is really the more successful student? The student who meets all of the standards I have set, and does so from day one in the course (thus, learns and grows very little), or the student who makes major strides, gets everything done, but doesn’t execute as well as the first student? That question was difficult for me to answer. The effect working out the answer has had on my classroom practice is that I now look at each student individually; I consider the work each student produces as the work of an individual; and work as hard as I can to ensure that each student produces the best work that student can produce in the limited time we have together (sixteen weeks is not enough time to “learn” to write, if such a thing is possible at all). If the student completes all of the work, and if I believe the student has done the best that student could do in the time allotted, then that student has earned an *A*. If not, that student fails.

Every *A* is not the same; there is external pressure to look at five *A* students and tell an employer to toss a coin, that they are all equally fit (or unfit) for the job; participating in such an exercise is silly and unnecessary. It is so, in large part, because preparing a student for an employer is not my job (despite what I may read in *The Chronicle*). I have never looked at two students who earned equal grades and believed for a moment that it meant they were doing completely equal work. For me, the *C* and the *B* simply have become too arbitrary. If that sounds absurd, consider the *D*. Institutionally

many places have phased this letter out, suggesting the very arbitrary nature of assessment. If the distinction between a *D* and an *E* is so unclear as to be not worth making, it seems reasonable that the *A*, *B*, *C* distinction be subject to equal scrutiny.

I want to distinguish this approach from a pass fail system; I am recognizing the achievement of each student by awarding the *A*. The pass fail system simply recognizes that the student didn't not do the work. This approach will not work for everyone, and it will not work in every course. It tends to work well in courses with relatively subjective standards of assessment—composition courses, for example. I use it in my literature courses, but only for written assignments; exams are still exams, and a wrong answer is still wrong, no matter how hard the student works at coming up with it. This assessment model will not always result in students achieving an *A* in the course overall, it simply guarantees an *A* for successfully completed writing assignments. The student who only completes three of four required projects will have passed the class with a *C*. Similarly, the student who completes the writing assignments in the literature class but does poorly on the exam may finish the class with a *B* or a *C*. This really is not the point; the point is that I am encouraged to work with the student—and the student with me—towards the *A*. I know it won't work for every teacher, but it has worked for me. Now I would like to discuss the pedagogy and theory that supports this very bold idea.

Where I'm Coming From

I'd like to *quickly* describe the theory behind my pedagogy, but such a thing is not possible. I face similar struggles whenever I am asked to create a statement of teaching philosophy. My initial response: *I'm strongly in favor*. Too brief, perhaps. I have read a lot of theory—literary and compositional—and it would be inaccurate to suggest that any

of the books and journals I have read or the lectures and seminars I have sat through did not impact my approach to teaching in some way. I used to try and tell people that I was an a-theorist, that I taught unfettered by theory; this was naïve, and I knew it at the time, but I didn't like the idea of aligning myself with a theory or a theorist, or a pedagogue if we are talking strictly about teaching. Now I consider myself more of an eclectic. I'm part pragmatist, and I can't stop reading Ken Bain's *What the Best College Teachers Do*. I am part romantic; I have days when I just want to read Elaine Schowalter's *Teaching Literature* or Louise M. Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration*, and the reading becomes a southern call-and-response religious experience with me shouting *Amen!* and *Halleluiah!* behind the closed doors of my office. And I'm part ideologist, and I find myself nodding along somberly to Harold Bloom's *How to Read and Why* or even Northrop Frye's *The Educated Imagination*, steaming cup of six-dollar-joe in one hand and my glasses dangling precariously from the other; I'm a *real* English professor then, I feel. On my worst days I might be found face down in a volume of Robert Scholes; those are the days I lament the prohibition that ended the tradition of tweed-clad professors sipping scotch from behind centuries-old mahogany desks. And on my best days I stumble across bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress* and my colleagues find me wandering among students between classes, shaking hands and soliciting hugs. Hugs, man!

So, what's my point? Only this—it's complicated. I'll do my best to clarify here in as direct a manner as possible, how I salvaged the course detailed earlier from this train-wreck of theory.

I'll start with Bain only because I mentioned him first. This is the only really indispensable volume of theory—teaching theory—I own, and probably the only book I

would dare gift to a new teacher; it should be waiting for you on your desk, the first day on the job. Bain doesn't care that you are teaching physics, or English, or accounting; if you are teaching, there are some things you need to do—not because they sound good or hold to tradition or anything touchy-feely, but because they work. Admittedly, Bain's scientific approach to learning can get a little abstract at times despite his largely pragmatic goals. I have dog-earned so many pages in the book that it has become impossible to find anything anymore, but I always recall my first encounter with his list of what the best teachers know about learning. *Uh-oh!* I thought. *If there's something here I don't know, then I guess I'm not one of the best.* It's an intimidating list, but the first item stands out: "Knowledge is constructed, not received" (26). I have always felt that this should be the motto of English instructors, whether in composition or literature. Bain's conclusion on this item: "[the best college teachers] often want students to do something that human beings don't do very well: build new mental models of reality" (27). In general, a literary text is a model of reality, though students often confuse what they read for reality. Nabakov can help explain this, and so can Frye, but most students—undergrad students—shouldn't be subjected too heavily to those two. Another model that works well to help free students to recognize the difference between reality and a model of reality is the fantasy. This is partly why I believe in teaching fantasy literature—and also because it's so much fun.

The rest of the theory falls in line after Bain. Once I have a course ready to present new models of reality, i.e. my fantasy literature course, then I need to decide how best to encourage students towards the goal while still meeting potentially rigid demands of department, college, and even profession. Showalter and Rosenblatt can help get it

started—at least, they helped me. I always felt Showalter was a teacher’s teacher—her description of the seven anxieties of teaching is the pedagogical equivalent of Carlin’s seven words you can never say on television. It’s real; it’s gritty; and it’s hilarious in a really uncomfortable way. The sixth anxiety Showalter discusses is the anxiety of grading. This is not only the student’s least favorite part of school, it is often mine as well; it takes me a while to return papers, and not because they take a long time to grade (that’s the excuse I offer my impatient students), I’m just scared to death of what I’ll find when I start reading them. Assessment, believe it or not, is the first thing I try to work out when I design a new curriculum. If I can’t get it the way I want it, the course is dead. The key is to remember the purpose of assessment: “Assessment is about helping students learn—not about sorting them out for employers, punishing them, or showing them how tough you are” (18). Yeah, Gandalf. I can’t throw my students off a bridge to prove how tough I am. And I can’t worry about how a future employer might perceive the A I transcribed for them.¹²⁵ There is a pervading sense that toughness equals quality instruction. Showalter suggests otherwise, and when I’m fighting a surge of guilt over not assigning a huge research paper in a survey course (as demonstrated in the course above), I revisit Bain and Showalter. My goal must be to help them learn, that’s it. If I do that, then why shouldn’t my students get As? We earn that grade by working together; it’s my A too.

Of course I recognize that this way of thinking about assessment probably goes against the flow and that going against the flow in a big department at a big college in a vast profession can create varying degrees of anxiety and even some depression. This is

¹²⁵ I realize that grade inflation is a real problem; what I’m describing here is not grade inflation. Grade inflation implies awarding grades that aren’t merited. I am suggesting an alternative way of establishing merit.

when I turn to Rosenblatt who is always able to remind me why I teach at all; forget the administrators and the talking heads; teaching is about students. And Rosenblatt maybe more than any other revels in the teaching of literature, specifically. She reminds me that an “Increase of literary sensitivity” relates to the “fostering of social awareness” which comes from a “more fruitful understanding and appreciation of literature” (23). The ultimate payoff is “The capacity to sympathize or identify with the experience of others [which is] a most precious human attribute” (37). Again, this is what I’m trying to model when I suggest that all of my passing students earn an A. Granted, that’s a pretty romantic notion, and if I share this idea with my students, they will completely take advantage of me. But Rosenblatt’s is a philosophy incompatible with grading students harshly to prove my own toughness or create some sense of academic rigor—a phrase I hear often enough and have never quite felt comfortable with. I always imagine students in a morgue when I hear that phrase, the teacher identifying them by toe-tags and tossing papers dripping in red ink onto the frozen corpses with a sigh and over-the-top eye roll (ala Tina Fey, “Oh, brother!”).

So far I have a fantasy course designed to challenge students with new models of reality, and I know that I want my assessments to be geared towards learning, especially learning about the human experience. I have to be careful here not to allow this romanticism to become social doctrine; the real advantage of cultivating our humanity through the reading of literature is not to reconstruct John Winthrop’s city on a hill. Harold Bloom tempers my romanticism with a loftier idealism in his attempt to free reading from the depredations of the university system. He offers five principles, the second of which has been key for me: “*Do not attempt to improve your neighbor or your*

neighborhood by what or how you read. Self-improvement is a large enough project for your mind and spirit” (24). This is a quote I can share with my students if they start to ask questions about application; students will always, at some point, start asking questions about application. It is maddening. Students who ask about application have confused causalities; the application is not the self-improvement—that is, it is not the cause—it follows the self-improvement, results from it; it is the effect. Frye states it this way: “Literature speaks the language of the imagination, and the study of literature is supposed to train and improve the imagination” (134).

Here I can look back again at Bain—at my ultimate teaching goal—and recognize that literature is the perfect venue for exploring these models of reality because the study of literature, and I would again emphasize fantasy literature, trains the imagination. Once that imagination is trained to conceive of various models of reality, then my students won’t need to ask about application—they will be the greatest scientists and doctors and philosophers and architects of their age. And the best part is, true to Showalter, I didn’t have to get them there by attacking their work like a chipmunk attacks an open bag of marshmallows on a picnic table.

It is clear at this point that I haven’t talked much yet about teaching—that mystical act—but a great deal about learning. I’ll defer here to Scholes who, again, makes me wish I could drink at work, not because I disagree with anything he says, but precisely because I don’t think I have ever disagreed with anything he has said; the fact that he said much of it over three decades ago and the apparatus for teaching English has changed so little in response to what he said is the motivation behind my desirous inebriation. On this idea of self-improvement through the study of literature, Scholes has

much to say, and much of what he says he says with the ring of prophetic doom. “If wisdom, or some less grandiose notion such as heightened awareness, is to be the end of our endeavors,” writes Scholes, “we shall have to see it not as something transmitted from the text to the student but as something developed in the student by questioning the text” (14). And with this stark declaration I return full circle to the pragmatism of Bain who notes that “questions play an essential role in the process of learning and modifying mental models” (31).

So I can’t just teach; I have to encourage my students to ask questions—good questions--productive questions. And I have to ask some myself. I simply want to know, *okay, so how then?* It’s okay, by the way, to ask this question. It doesn’t mean I am a bad teacher (see Showalter’s first anxiety). I know, we thought we settled the decentering debate with Freire in 1970, but students still want us to teach them—to feed them like baby birds in the nest. But literature can’t be regurgitated the way math can—and even math falls off into theory at some point. This is where I started, a self-proclaimed a-theorist; but theory isn’t only unavoidable, it’s good for me. And I don’t think anyone has ever articulated the relationship between theory and practice better than bell hooks who writes that “Making...theory is the challenge before us...If we create...theory....There will be no gap between...theory and...practice” (75). hooks was writing specifically of feminist theory and practice (thus the ellipses), but the principle is the same for any theory and practice. I should be creating my own theory, a theory that speaks directly to the practice for which it was conceived. That, to me, feels like a pretty decent definition of pedagogy, and a great explanation for the radical assessment philosophy I shared

earlier as well as how I came up with the literature course. So how does all this help with teaching composition?

Obviously my pedagogical approach to composition is somewhat different from my approach to literature, but the theoretical framework on which that pedagogy is built remains largely the same. First, let me acknowledge that much of the past half-century of writing pedagogy—and that’s nearly all of it—has focused on the writing classroom as a site of intensive political and social ideologies and activism. This began largely with Freire and continued through Petroski and Elbow and hooks whom I have already mentioned. I’m not opposed to a politicized space in the classroom, yet these names are conspicuously absent from my personal reading list. I did have my Peter Elbow phase as a young graduate student; I dreamed, very briefly, of teaching courses in which students wandered around campuses in glorious bloom rivaled only in Keats’ great odes, spiral notebook in hand, eschewing formal class meetings for conferences in armchairs during which these students would divulge their profound and deeply personal intellectual, emotional, psychological, and moral epiphanies. I would reward them with high marks of course, even if their sentences were not all grammatically correct, and they would go on to be articulate, indispensable members of our democratic society: doctors, lawyers, politicians, and preachers. I got over it.

My theories of composition instruction pick up where my theories of literature instruction left off, largely with Scholes and Bloom. Scholes, especially, is indispensable for developing a composition course out of a literature course, because Scholes recognizes and articulates the relationship of writing to reading better than any other pedagogue: “The writer is always reading and the reader is always writing” (8). This

position requires a recognition of the text as the focal point of both literature courses and composition courses; this recognition then hinges these two practices together in such a way that the breaking of the hinge renders either half utterly useless, which is why Scholes calls for us to break down the binary opposition of literature to composition, something that has, sadly, only become more apparent since the publication of *Textual Power* in 1985. There isn't time to consider how or why this has happened.

Bloom, who factors very little into most discussions of composition pedagogy, provides me with a very important model when in the preface to *How to Read and Why* writes "I turn to reading as a solitary praxis, rather than as an educational enterprise" (21). I believe students would do well to apply the same approach to composition; writing is a solitary praxis. As much as we try to make it about community, and as much as composition pedagogy has become obsessed with group work and community building (and look to Freire and hooks to see this), writing will always and forever be an intimate and solitary activity regardless of the paradox that the product of writing becomes a source for very public scrutiny. But this individualism lends itself well to a composition course predicated upon fantasy. I should, as a teacher of writing, "delight in the independent life of created things" (Manlove xxi). Those created things get handed to me daily by quaking hands extending from averted eyes; for most students, submitting a piece of writing is their Frankenstein moment—that moment when what they have created looks back at them and they are shocked at their own revulsion, at the shame and disgust they feel at the work they have produced. This is largely because we feel a personal investment in our writing that is not present in the solution to a math problem. This phenomena can't be chalked up to effort; math is just as hard as writing for most of

us, or harder; and even students who expend minimal effort on their writing make an intimate investment in it. I believe Manlove's observation about the essential quality of fantasy applies to the teaching of writing; I need to delight in the work of my student, not just because it would make my job a happier one, but because it is essential to my purpose. But it isn't easy to delight in bad writing, unless we can see each piece of writing as unique and independent.

Chapman and Waller, in *The Power of Writing*, seem to acknowledge this paradox, opening their book with the claim that "We frequently write in response to a personal need...the ability to write, *and write well*, [is] a way of exercising control over the circumstances of our lives" (3). This sentiment sounds an awful lot like Frye who notes that imagination is "the power of constructing possible models of human experience" (22). This is profound. I have to stop and consider whether any writing course I have ever taught really encouraged my students to construct a possible model of experience, but that is exactly what Chapman and Waller claim writing does. At least, that seems to be the ultimate way of exerting control over our circumstance. The distinction, perhaps, between good writing and bad is the degree to which the writer is successful in executing her vision of the model of reality that she conceives of.

I do appreciate the diversity of composition pedagogy—at times, composition seems to exist only as a platform for pedagogy. I never felt literature was so saturated as composition in this regard. I have read *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies* by Gary Tate, Amy Rupiper, and Kurt Schick cover to cover several times; it is a sort of miscellany of oddities to my eye; I read it with the same sort of terrified glee I imagine a 19th century bourgeois homemaker would have viewed the freaks in one of that century's

popular travelling shows: they are fun to consider, but I'm not ready to marry myself to one. I have already mentioned my one time love affair with the expressivist pedagogues like Elbow; I like that they emphasize the individual voice even in a community setting. Elbow is also, of course, known for his role in process pedagogy which has, I think, to some extent pervaded western writing instruction at large; who among us doesn't now at least attempt to foster good writing "practices" in our students? I have fiddled with rhetorical pedagogy, but rhetoric to me still feels like something distinct from writing and I don't generally move beyond a quick lecture on *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*; even that is enough to make most students want to run screaming into the night. Service pedagogies, feminist pedagogies, critical pedagogies, and cultural pedagogies all seem far too narrow and compartmentalized for a general writing course; though, of all of these, I appreciate the shift in cultural studies from literary text to cultural text, not because I want to foster such a preposterous distinction, but precisely because I don't. I will refrain from long discussions of my applications of the names associated with these and other significant movements within composition pedagogy, no doubt a great disappointment to some readers.

But the pedagogy and the content of the course matter very little apart from assessment. My daily conversations with my office-neighbor illustrate this point nicely. She is a service-pedagogue, a really great teacher and genuinely concerned with civic engagement. Her courses are elaborate and well planned, and she manages them exceptionally well. She and I are very different, we design and teach courses very differently, and yet our conversations always boil down to assessment, and we face the obstacles because no matter what classroom activities we design or lectures we give or

media, or textbooks, or tools we make available the entire semester boils down to one thing for the students—assessment. There is no way around it; it’s the bottle-neck effect. To get out of the class—the composition class—students have to write; just like to get out of Moria, the company had to cross that bridge. There was no other way. And that Balrog knew it too, and he was just lurking there. And the only thing left for Gandalf to do was to break the bridge. Let me offer the same advice Gandalf offered Aragorn and Boromir as he slid off into the abyss:

“Fly, you fools!” (*Fellowship* 393)

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