

The hobbit



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Tolkien is criticized at times for his racist and race-based elements that he uses in this historic novel. Tolkien uses the characters in *The Hobbit* and symbolism of the good versus evil to depict that racism in society is destructive. Tolkien was known for his legendarium, which is Tolkien's imagined world of Arda. Tolkien, throughout the story, references topics related to racism, such as superiority and bloodlines. While Tolkien thought that racism would be destructive for the human race, he still incorporated it into this novel.

It's hard to depict if Tolkien is writing about racism but there is not a doubt that in *The Hobbit* there is racial division and it sets up great talking points. In *The Hobbit* the author J. R. Tolkien uses racism through symbolism and the manipulation of characters and their action to cause controversy in the story and to show that racism is destructive for everyone. Tolkien used symbolism through his characters and Middle Earth to portray that there was some sort of racial divide in *The Hobbit*.

Christine Chism who is a contributor to the website [tolkiengateway](http://tolkiengateway.net) mentions this issue on Tolkien's writing, " especially *The Hobbit* could be in the three categories: intentional racism, unconscious Eurocentric bias, and an evolution from latent racism in Tolkien's early work to a conscious rejection of racist tendencies in his late work, which he may have not intended to do so (Tolkien Gateway). " With the majority of free people from Middle Earth being and white that goes with what was happening during with slavery and anti-Semitism the time *The Hobbit* was written.

The Uruk-Hai were described as black-skinned and the orcs were beast like creatures that could be inferred to as slaves which would cause for racism. In

The Hobbit Tolkien portrays the good races being in harmony with nature, With all of the races that Tolkien created in The Hobbit, from elves, dwarves, trolls and goblins they all differed philosophically and morally. From the Elves and Dwarves distrusting each other, the ranks within the Orcs such as the Uruk-hai Orcs, which were the highest ranking to which they held superior over the common Orcs, they called snaga, which translates to slave.

This is obvious that Tolkien used these characters as symbols to portray racism in some way. While Tolkien's statement comparing Orcs to the "Mongol-types" is undoubtedly insensitive given today's standards, he does put a disclaimer, "(to Europeans,)" before "least lovely", at least recognizing Western cultural bias and also points out that they were "degraded and repulsive versions" of "Mongol-types", not actual "Mongol-types (Tolkien Gateway).

With the ways the Tolkien created the characters from the Orcs to the Hobbits is in indication that he was using racism in some type in The Hobbit, which helped cause Tolkien is guilty of being insensitive of the race, which goes against his virtues of racism being destructive for society. Geoffrey James writes an intriguing article called "The Unsavory Racism of Middle Earth" and how Tolkien's growing up affected his writing in The Hobbit and how it affected the World War 1 generation.

In Tolkien's generation, the inherent superiority of the light-skinned races over dark-skinned races was considered "scientific fact." As late as the 1930s, "science" books positioned black people as less evolved than white people. For example, the first edition of the quite popular book The Earth for Sam (an introduction to paleontology for children) states that the "white

primate” is the pinnacle of evolution (James). James also goes on to explain that Tolkien’s creation of an essentially racist world would emerge naturally in the early 20th century.

James claims that “ Tolkien based Middle Earth on medieval Europe and therefore it just reflects racism in that period” (James). Also in the “ The Unsavory Racism of Middle Earth” James mentions that one reason why Tolkien created such a race driven world was to portray the race driven world he grew up in but also to reflect the racial prejudice of his generation. Another intriguing topic that James brings up is Tolkien’s father is from South Africa and we all know the racial tension and turmoil that has taken place throughout that countries history.

In South Africa racism has plagued that country for many years. The battle between the whites and blacks caused lots of social tension throughout the country and with Tolkien himself and his father both living their for a period of time the racism their could have affected his writings. J. R. R Tolkien wrote the Tolkien Letters and they depict letters from all of the novels that he has written. All of the letters the Tolkien wrote were nonfiction and they help explain what he was talking about in the stories that he wrote. Here is how Tolkien describes the orcs. “ Squat, broad, flat-nosed, sallow-skinned, with wide mouths and slant eyes; in fact degraded and repulsive versions of the (to Europeans) least lovely Mongol-types. ” (Letters 214) Calling them Mongol-types is very insensitive for today’s times. Tolkien writes in the letters about the subject of racism and how people look at racism in his writings. Tolkien and his German publisher got in a battle in the Letters with

letter 29 and 30 published in the book. Tolkien made the point-of-view the hobbits that their race is being overlooked.

These two letters are as followed Letter 29 was Tolkien's German Publishers asking if he was of Aryan origin, which could potential cause Tolkien to side with Hitler. " I must say that the enclosed letter from Rutten & Loening is a bit stiff. Do I suffer this impertinence because of the possession of a German name, or do their lunatic laws require a certificate of arisch origin from all persons of all countries? ... Personally I should be inclined to refuse to give any Bestatigung (although it happens that I can), 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 colour to the notion that I subscribed to the wholly pernicious and unscientific race-doctrine (Tolkien Letters 29). " While the German publisher asked if Tolkien was of Aryan origin could be another reason he was influenced to included racial divide in his writings. But, Tolkien vehemently denied that he was of Aryan ascent, which was in Letter 30. Thank you for your letter... I regret that I am not clear as to what you intend by arisch. I am not of Aryan extraction: that is Indo-Iranian; as far as I am aware noone (sic) of my ancestors spoke Hindustani, Persian, Gypsy, or any related dialects. But if I am to understand that you are enquiring whether I am of Jewish origin, I can only reply that I regret that I appear to have no ancestors of that gifted people (Tolkien Letters 30). These two letters are examples of why

Tolkien thought racism was destructive since he was being accused of something that he in his mind was not doing.

The Tolkien letters that are published are very important to Tolkien's reputation and help explain him, which might not be possible if he did not publish the letters. Jason Fisher writes a unique review of "Tolkien, Race and Culture History: From Fairies to Hobbits" which Dimitra Fimi wrote about many things that Tolkien included in his writings. One of the many intriguing items was how Fimi depicted the racial division in The Hobbit with the characters Elves and Hobbits. Fimi goes on to say that each of the races in Middle-earth has a division and it goes back to racism. She explains these with what she says are distinct physical and mental capabilities about race and his views on it (Fisher 170). She also compares the Hobbits and Elves with other things that Tolkien has written. Tolkien thought that racism was destructive and did not know why people should care what color of your skin was and why it should matter in liking a person. The article on Global Issues website written by Anup Shah gives a description of what racism is and how racism had an effect on Europe.

In 2010 a report on racism from the Europe and included this quote " Europe has a regional human rights architecture which is unrivaled elsewhere in the world (Shah). Shah writes Ethnic minorities and different cultures in one country can often be used as a scapegoat for the majority during times of economic crisis. That is one reason why Nazism became so popular (Shah). Which relates back to The Hobbit, with the orcs being the scapegoat. From the goblins being evil to the all of the elves being good could potentially reflect what has happened in Europe when Tolkien was writing The Hobbit.

When Tolkien was writing this novel there was a lot of racism and discrimination going on in Europe and potentially Tolkien could be using the different races and groups of people as the characters that he has portrayed throughout the book. Tolkien lived in Europe and when he was writing *The Hobbit* there were many unstable times with war going on in the continent. During this time the neo-Nazism was felt all around Europe and playing a major role in how people acted.

In this article "Racism and Tolkien" from *In The Armchair* they also discuss the negative aspect of Tolkien using racism in his writings especially in *The Hobbit*. *Armchair* state this "This morality is often expressed in terms of light and darkness, fairness versus swarthy it isn't impossible for elves to be evil, but they are. Men are good as long as they throw their lot in with the West, and evil if they choose the East. The evil men are swarthy the good men are fair. Orcs are inherently, irredeemably evil (*Armchair*). *Armchair* focuses on the morality aspect of Tolkien using race in *The Hobbit* and how Tolkien does this through symbols throughout the book. While there is a negative aspect of Tolkien and his use of race in *The Hobbit* it helps prove his point that racism is destructive to society. Race is such a polarizing topic throughout the world today and J. R. R Tolkien in *The Hobbit* was not afraid to use it in this book. Even though Tolkien was criticized for using symbolism from his characters to specific battles to the creation of *Arwen* Tolkien never backed down from his critics.

With the childhood experiences Tolkien had and what racism he saw when he was in Europe he realized it was not good for anyone in society to participate. Even though *The Hobbit* has elements of being race based it is

very easy to criticize Tolkien for this without understanding he was trying to make. Tolkien used The Hobbit to express his feelings about racism and how it is destructive for society.