



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 28 | Number 3 | Issue 109/110, Spring/
Summer

Article 7

4-15-2010

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Recommended Citation

Brackmann, Rebecca (2010) ""Dwarves are Not Heroes": Antisemitism and the Dwarves in J.R.R. Tolkien's Writing," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 28 : No. 3 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol28/iss3/7>

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"Dwarves are Not Heroes": Antisemitism and the Dwarves in J.R.R. Tolkien's Writing

Abstract

This challenging paper on mythology in Tolkien's depiction of Dwarves brings some much-needed definition to the ongoing discussion of Tolkien and race. Quotes China Miéville's observation that "*racism is true*" in Tolkien's works, "in that people really are defined by their race," but demonstrates how Tolkien's conception of the racial characteristics of Dwarves changed over his lifetime. Yet we come back in the end to the inescapable fact, with all its implications, that the Dwarves *continue to have* a set of recognizable racial characteristics.

Additional Keywords

Anti-Semitism in J.R.R. Tolkien; Jews; Race and racism in J.R.R. Tolkien; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Attitude towards Jews; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Dwarves

“DWARVES ARE NOT HEROES”:
ANTISEMITISM AND THE DWARVES
IN J.R.R. TOLKIEN’S WRITING

REBECCA BRACKMANN

J.R.R. TOLKIEN HIMSELF COMMENTED IN HIS LETTERS AND INTERVIEWS on the similarity his invented race of Dwarves had, in his view, with the Jews: “I do think of the ‘Dwarves’ like Jews: at once native and alien in their habitations” and “[t]he Dwarves of course are quite obviously—couldn’t you say that in many ways they remind you of the Jews? Their words are Semitic, obviously, constructed to be Semitic [...]” (*Letters* 229; Interview). In this article, I explore this similarity between Dwarves and Jews (or, more accurately, cultural assumptions about “Jewishness”) in Tolkien’s depiction of the Dwarves in his 1937 book *The Hobbit*, and how that portrayal shifts in his later work. I argue that “Dwarvishness” in *The Hobbit* involved several traits, recognizably drawn from antisemitic stereotypes, that, according to the narrator, exclude the Dwarves from the heroic ethos that is the hallmark of the book’s value system. Tolkien’s later recognition of this, perhaps, caused him to sharply alter his presentation of Dwarves in *The Lord of the Rings*, published in 1954-55, and to continue this revision in his later unpublished works.

Before discussing Tolkien’s works, I should explain what I mean by antisemitism¹ and antisemitic beliefs for the purposes of this article. I do not limit the meaning of antisemitism to overt violence or discrimination against practitioners of Judaism or Jewish converts to Christianity. Rather, by antisemitism I chiefly mean the underlying assumption that makes such violence and discrimination possible—the claim that there is something about Jews, biologically and psychologically, that marks them as fundamentally different from the Christian cultures that have been dominant in Europe since the Middle Ages. This kind of thinking is necessary for persecution to happen, as it allows the persecutors to believe in “Jews” as a stable category of identity that persisted regardless of religious conviction, in a way that became more about a supposed

¹ I follow Gavin Langmuir in writing “antisemitism” and “antisemitic” with no hyphen or capital S to underscore that these views originated entirely in the Gentile culture that produced them, and do not reflect Jewish beliefs or cultural values (5-6).

racial identity than a religious one (Maccoby 1-4). Indeed, the category of “Jews” provided a way for the Christian culture to reject those qualities from which it wanted to separate itself, so that the constructed category of “the Jew” became a figure “of Christian self-definition” (Lampert 111). Perhaps the best-known example of this sort of thinking came about in Spain during the Inquisition, where any evidence of Jewish descent could make a person suspect, no matter how remote the ancestor or how devoutly Catholic the accused was. By the modern period, several negative traits had been assigned to “Jewish” identity by the mainstream Christian culture in Europe and the United States, and the assumption that those traits are naturally linked, that they “go together” to form a real, biological Jewishness and to rationalize the Jews’ marginal status, is what I mean by antisemitism in this article. Antisemitism is therefore a set of beliefs, not just an action.²

In Tolkien’s early writings the Dwarves were often evil, but not especially “like Jews” as they became in the later 1930s. Early on, Tolkien’s Dwarves closely mimicked the dwarfs of Scandinavian legends, where they are frequently wicked characters. During the episode of the *Nauglafring* in the early material in *The Book of Lost Tales 2*, all the Dwarves combine to ambush Thingol (called here Tinwelint), including those from Belegost, and they even ally themselves with Orcs for the surprise assault (a clear sign of their evil) (*Book of Lost Tales 2* [BLT2] 232). In fact, the whole race of Dwarves in this text “love[s] gold and silver more dearly than aught else on Earth” and, spurred to ambush and murder by their greed, “have been severed in feud for ever since those days with the Elves, and drawn more nigh in friendship to the kin of Melko” (BLT2 231; 232). In the later *Silmarillion* version, however, this changes; the Dwarves of Nogrod carry on their war with Doriath (after they have already slain Thingol) alone, and “the Dwarves of Belegost sought to dissuade them from their purpose” (280). Also, when the Nogrod Dwarves meet with the Elves it is a great battle, not an ambush completed with the help of Orcs.

However, the *Silmarillion*, in which the Dwarves take on a more ambiguous status than they have in the *Book of Lost Tales 2*, also gives us the first indication that Tolkien was beginning to think of them as “like Jews.” In the *Silmarillion* the creation of the Dwarves marks them as separate from the other good races. The Dwarves were not made by Ilúvatar, the creator-deity of Middle-earth, but by Aulë, one of the servants of Ilúvatar who oversee Middle-earth: “And Aulë made

² This definition, for reasons of space, passes over several key issues about how exactly antisemitism coordinates with racism more generally, its origins and alterations throughout history, and other such considerations; readers interested in the subject should probably begin with Gavin Langmuir’s foundational book *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* and Hyam Maccoby’s more recent *Antisemitism and Modernity: Innovation and Continuity*.

the Dwarves even as they still are, because the forms of the Children who were to come were unclear to his mind” (37). This statement implies that the Dwarvish forms were inferior to the dimly-remembered “Children who were to come,” while making clear that the “Children of Ilúvatar” identity only applies to humans and Elves. Ilúvatar chastises Aulë for his action, which also lessens the Dwarves’ status. Aulë offers to kill his created beings, but Ilúvatar has compassion on them and allows them to have life and individual awareness, saying, “But I will not suffer this: that these should come before the Firstborn of my design [...]. But when the time comes I will awaken them, and they shall be to thee as children; and often strife shall arise between thine and mine, the children of my adoption and the children of my choice” (*Silmarillion* 38). The Dwarves are (briefly) the first race awakened in Middle-earth, but they are not the chosen people, the Children of Ilúvatar.

The narrative of the creation of the Dwarves steeps itself in the sort of supersessionist dynamic that early Christian writers used to separate Christianity from its origin within Judaism.³ The idea of supersession, that the Jewish religion was supplanted and replaced by Christianity and the Jews as the chosen people of God by Christians, appears in Christian writing beginning with Biblical texts, particularly in the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans: “But now we [i.e. Christians] are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit” (*New Oxford Annotated Bible* Romans 7:6). The “old written code” is presented as no longer valid, since it had been replaced by the new faith; the Jews’ status is (like that of the Dwarves in the *Silmarillion’s* *Nauglafring* narrative) somewhat ambiguous—they aren’t evil, exactly, but neither are they as good as Christians. Paul goes on to state that “the law is holy,” but his qualification did not keep the supersessionist aspect of his writings from becoming influential (Romans 7:12). The anxiety that some early Christian writers such as Chrysostom and Augustine felt over Christianity’s origin within Judaism caused them to stress that Christianity was a new religion that had replaced Judaism, and that the Christians were now God’s chosen people instead of the Jews (Maccoby 13-19). In this context, the origin of the Dwarves as the first-awakened race but not the chosen people is a striking similarity.

At the same moment, or very close to it, that their origin myth depicted them as separate from the Children (even though they were awake before the Children themselves were), the Dwarves’ language became reminiscent of Hebrew. In a 1938 letter, written shortly after *The Hobbit* was published, Tolkien comments that the Dwarves’ “Scandinavian names” were “an editorial concession. Too

³ For a discussion of early Christian supersessionist thought generally, see Lampert 21-57; for Christianity’s origin within Judaism see Maccoby 13-15.

many names in the tongues proper to the period might have been alarming" (*Letters* 31). The Dwarves have their own language, Tolkien tells his reader, "both complicated and cacophonous. Even early elvish philologists avoided it, and the dwarves were obliged to use other languages, except for entirely private conversations" (31). The first hints of this Dwarvish language, which "came into being in the thirties," appeared in the *Silmarillion* (Fauskanger); the letter indicates that Tolkien conceived of Dwarvish before or simultaneously with the writing of *The Hobbit*. As Tolkien stated in the interview already quoted, he made Dwarvish words "Semitic, obviously constructed to be Semitic" (Interview). Zak Cramer has explained in some detail how "Khuzdal, the language of the Dwarves, mimics Hebrew, with its guttural consonants, trilateral roots, and typical constructions" (Cramer 9).

The characteristics of the Dwarves in the *Silmarillion* lie in the background of *The Hobbit*. Although Tolkien did not know at first exactly how his book fit into the larger mythology on which he had been working—he did not know what Gandalf was, nor the role that the Ring would play—it was part of that mythology. As Tolkien himself points out in a letter to W.H. Auden, "[*The Hobbit*] inevitably got drawn in to the circumference of the greater construction" (*Letters* 215). That "greater construction" had begun in turn with the languages of Middle-earth, as Tolkien mentioned in the same letter (*Letters* 214). So even though *The Hobbit* neither has examples of the Dwarvish language in it, nor mentions the Dwarves' creation by Aulë, the *Silmarillion* does and it suggests that Tolkien was already thinking of the Dwarves as "like the Jews" when *The Hobbit* was written. And it is in *The Hobbit* that we see Tolkien most explicitly drawing on antisemitic tropes and using them to convey the ambiguous relationship of the Dwarves to the other heroic characters in the text.

Tolkien's exposure to antisemitic beliefs came potentially from two sources: the culture of his own lifetime, and the medieval texts that he studied. One of the prime claims of antisemitism in both periods is that there is a visual difference between Christians and Jews; this argument appeared even in medical literature in the early twentieth-century (Reuter 304). In a 1911 article in *The Journal of Genetics*, Dr. Redcliffe Salaman stated that it was agreed upon by "ethnologists" that "Jews constitute a definite people in something more than a political sense, and that they possess though not a uniform, still a distinguishing type [...] All, however, practically agree that whether blonde or dark, tall or short, long headed or round headed, the Jew is a Jew because he looks like one" (278). Tolkien's Dwarves in *The Hobbit* are distinguished by a physiological trait often stereotypically assigned to the Jews. The first mention of the Dwarves in *The Hobbit* refers to them as "the bearded Dwarves" (1.2). This phrase has the ring of an epithet, which would indicate that their beards are racially characteristic; Jews

in medieval art were commonly portrayed with beards.⁴ Their physiognomy's identification with Jewishness is reinforced by what the *Silmarillion* shows us of their creation and their language. The resemblance between Jews and Dwarves in *The Hobbit*, however, extends beyond language, appearance, and origin. In this novel, the Dwarves' psychological attributes also draw on antisemitic stereotypes, especially the common depiction in early twentieth-century writing (and that of previous centuries) of Jews as whiny, cowardly, and greedy. No one who has read Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* can be unfamiliar with this, and the notion did not die out after the Renaissance. For just one illumination of such stereotypes in early twentieth century fiction, I will briefly consider the popular 1905 novel *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. This is not, of course, to suggest that Tolkien consciously used *The Scarlet Pimpernel* as a source, but to demonstrate what sorts of attitudes and assumptions about Jewish identity were circulating in Tolkien's lifetime. In *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, at one point a character is disguised as a Jew. This is especially significant, as the whole notion of a disguise requires that the assumed identity conform successfully to the expectations of the one who is tricked. If it does not, the disguise will be penetrated. The audience must also believe that the disguise meets the character's expectations or the episode will not be believable. These scenes, therefore, offer us a glimpse into the ideas of a reading audience in Tolkien's day about what it meant to be "a Jew."

The "Jew" in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* is comically timid, persuading his enemies into bringing him as they set an ambush by faking panic about being left alone in the dark (and thereby potentially alerting the quarry):

"I swear by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that I would obey your Honour most absolutely, and that I would not move from this place until your Honour once more deigned to shed the light of your countenance upon your humble servant, but remember, your Honour, I am a poor old man; my nerves are not as strong as those of a young soldier. If midnight marauders should come prowling round this lonely road, I might scream or run in my fright! And is my life to be forfeit, is some terrible punishment to come on my poor old head for that which I cannot help?"

The Jew seemed in real distress; he was shaking from head to foot. Clearly he was not the man to be left by himself on this lonely road. The man spoke truly; he might unwittingly, in sheer terror, utter the shriek that might prove a warning to the wily Scarlet Pimpernel. (237)

⁴ For examples of medieval Jews depicted with beards see the images in Schreckenberg, especially pages 303-340. In medieval Norse texts, the stock epithet for dwarfs was "skillful," not "bearded," so this did not come from Tolkien's Scandinavian sources (Battles 44).

The complaint fools the villain, Chauvelin, largely because it fits his expectation of how a Jew should act. Even the narrator seems to assent to this notion that Jews complain incessantly and are not very brave. As Chauvelin ponders what to do, we are told that, “[t]here was a pause again—Desgas waiting for the decision of his chief, and the old Jew whining beside his nag” (238). The reading audience, in turn, could only believe that the villains were fooled by this disguise if they found it credible as well, or at least understood why Chauvelin believed it; the popularity of the book (which is still in print) argues that they did.

Underscoring this idea that the character (whose disguise has not yet been revealed to the reader) fits social expectations for Jewish traits is that he is referred to almost entirely by the characters and the narrator as “the Jew” and not by name. The only time that the disguised character’s “name” is given it shows that his individual identity is far less important than his supposed racial one:

“Here, you . . . Aaron, Moses, Abraham, or whatever your confounded name may be,” [Chauvelin] said to the old man [...].

“Benjamin Rosenbaum, so it please your Honour,” he replied humbly. (236)

However, after this exchange, the character is still only referred to as “the Jew,” suggesting that this category is far more important for understanding him than his individual self. Certainly, Chauvelin’s scornful and eventually violent behavior towards “Benjamin” helps characterize Chauvelin as a villain, but even as the reading audience is supposed to recognize this behavior as villainous, the text does nothing to suggest that Chauvelin’s basic assumptions about “the Jew” are wrong—at the very least, they cannot be unfamiliar. When Chauvelin pays “Benjamin” for information (after “Benjamin” claims he has been paid already to stay silent) by throwing gold coins one by one into the dirt in front of him, the audience is probably supposed to see his action as contemptuous and impolite, but is supposed to find it credible, as Chauvelin did, that “the Jew” was willing to betray his friend for money and that he crawls around in the dirt to recover each coin (222). If the audience (who may or may not penetrate the disguise themselves) did not believe it, then the entire sequence would not be convincing.⁵

Comparison to “Benjamin” in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* sheds light on some similar qualities of the Dwarves in *The Hobbit*. First, they complain constantly. They complain about Bilbo as their final party member. They complain about Gandalf’s choice of Beorn’s house as a refuge after they escape from the goblins. They complain at Bilbo about being shut in barrels in their escape from the elven

⁵ In teaching this text to college sophomores, I have found that about half of my students see through the disguise before it is revealed; the rest do not.

king. They grumble about not being able to get into the mountain. Early in the book, Bilbo also complains about the hardships of the journey, but by the time the party arrives at the Lonely Mountain Bilbo has become braver, tougher, and more resourceful. Indeed, even though he is by far the least experienced member of the party, he has become its leader. Although he gets in one last lament about missing breakfast when the party has been trapped inside the mountain by Smaug (but only after he has gone over forty-eight hours without eating), Bilbo develops past his initial stage of constant grumbling, a transformation that the Dwarves do not make (*Hobbit* 13.241).

By far, though, the Dwarves’ dominant psychological attribute in *The Hobbit* is their love of gold, which echoes the widespread antisemitic belief that Jews are greedy, a notion that we have also seen *The Scarlet Pimpernel* draw on. This remains a consistent thread of the book, starting from the song the Dwarves sing in Chapter 1:

Far over the misty mountains cold
To dungeons deep and caverns old
We must away, ere break of day,
To find our long-forgotten gold. (1.27)

The last line is ironic, since the Dwarves have clearly *not* forgotten their gold. The entire point of their quest is to regain their treasure, despite having no real need for it, as Thorin tells Bilbo:

“But we have never forgotten our stolen treasure. And even now, when I will allow we have a good bit laid by and are not so badly off”—here Thorin stroked the gold chain round his neck—“we still mean to get it back, and to bring our curses home to Smaug—if we can.” (1.24)

Although the Dwarves have a secondary motive of revenge against Smaug, Thorin leads with recovery of the treasure and a rather smug statement that they are “not so badly off,” combined with fingering the gold that he is already wearing. Although the Dwarves are master smiths, artistic value or pride in their former skills does not seem to be their primary motive for recovering the Lonely Mountain’s treasure. Rather, the relationship of the recovery of their treasure to how “badly off” they are (or aren’t) ties their desire for the treasure to its monetary value. The Dwarves’ avarice in this universe is, apparently, so legendary that it even shapes how other races interact with them. When Elrond of Rivendell examines Thorin’s map of the Lonely Mountain, “[h]e took it and gazed long at it, and he shook his head; for if he did not altogether approve of dwarves and their love of gold, he hated dragons and their cruel wickedness” (3.52-53). Elrond’s enthusiasm for the removal of Smaug is mitigated by his

knowledge of Dwarvish nature. Even if the Dwarves are undertaking an endeavor that is worthwhile, the destruction of Smaug, their prime motive in *The Hobbit* is to recover their gold and Elrond knows this.

Indeed, *The Hobbit's* chief crisis comes when the Dwarves refuse to grant any of the treasure to Bard, the slayer of Smaug, not even for the relief of the destroyed Laketown. When the request is made, the Dwarves have spent two days under the mountain enjoying their treasure: "They spoke aloud, and cried out to one another, as they lifted old treasures from the mound or from the wall and held them in the light, caressing and fingering them," savoring the physical interaction between them and the treasure as Thorin had done in the book's first chapter (13.237). The gold has had an immediate effect on their characters: "[W]hen the heart of a dwarf, even the most respectable, is wakened by gold and by jewels, he grows suddenly bold, and he may become fierce" (13.237). Their love of gold causes them to break with what Bilbo (and the reader) recognizes as justice—giving some of the gold to the humans of the devastated Laketown. Bilbo expects that "Thorin would at once admit what justice was in [Bard's request]"; Thorin's response, not only denying the claim of Girion's descendants to their portion of the treasure but refusing compassionate aid to the people who helped him when he was in need, shows the limitations of his character (15.263). Although some of Thorin's irrational behavior could perhaps stem from a curse put on the gold by the dragon—as a similar curse is in *Beowulf*, one of Tolkien's unconscious inspirations for *The Hobbit*—the hobbit Bilbo is not affected by this infusion of *draconitas*, and cannot understand Thorin's injustice:

But also [Bilbo] did not reckon with the power that gold has upon which a dragon has long brooded, nor with dwarvish hearts. Long hours in the past days Thorin had spent in the treasury, and the lust of it was heavy on him. Though he had hunted chiefly for the Arkenstone, yet he had an eye for many another wonderful thing that was lying there, about which were wound old memories of the labours and the sorrows of his race. (15.263)

The race of Dwarves intertwines their very identity with their artifacts—in gold, gems, and the treasures they construct out of them. Certainly the Dwarves are not the only characters to be influenced by the dragon's gold—the Master of Laketown also succumbs—but they are the only ones for whom doing so seems to be a matter of their racial identity, their "Dwarvish hearts."

Even as linked traits understood to be essentially "Jewish" provided justification for the Jews' marginal status in Western culture, the Dwarves are also denied participation in the heroic ethos of Tolkien's world:

There is it: dwarves are not heroes, but calculating folk with a great idea of the value of money; some are tricky and treacherous and pretty bad lots;

some are not, but are decent enough people like Thorin and Company, if you don't expect too much. (*Hobbit* 12.211)

The narrator here makes the Dwarves' primary cultural trait the “idea of the value of money” and acknowledges that even the best of them are only “decent [...] if you don't expect too much.” This damning statement explicitly casts the Dwarves out from the heroic value system of the book as a whole, based on the attribute that most clearly echoes real-world antisemitic stereotypes.

One critic has even viewed Thorin and Company as parallel to the lower-class characters in H. Rider Haggard's adventure novels, providing comic relief to the deeds of the real heroes (Green 55). Although I am not persuaded that the difference is class-based, I agree that the Dwarves are kept apart from the heroic culture of Beorn, Gandalf, and Bard—the culture into which Bilbo has been initiated by the end of the book. Even when Thorin emerges from the mountain to fight in the Battle of Five Armies, it is not entirely clear whether he does so out of heroism, or the desire to defend his treasure to the death. And even here, at his most potentially heroic moment as he battles with the forces of the Goblins and Wargs, we are told that “[i]n the gloom, the great dwarf gleamed like gold in a dying fire” (17.283). The simile reminds the audience of the narrator's previous comments about the Dwarves' love of gold, their definitional trait. The text undermines Thorin's valiant (although perhaps poorly-strategized) entrance into the Battle of Five Armies to maintain its previous statement that “Dwarves are not heroes.”

One possible counter-argument to my idea that the Dwarves' love of gold relates to antisemitic stereotypes is that it was already part of their character in the earliest material, perhaps brought in from Old Norse sources. As I have already mentioned, Tolkien adapted the Dwarves from medieval Germanic mythology (the names mostly come from the *Völuspá*) where they are often metalworkers, as Tom Shippey observes in his foundational *The Road to Middle Earth* (55-63).⁶ There are similarities, even in *The Hobbit*, although Shippey considers the Dwarves of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* together as fundamentally the same while I do not, and Tolkien himself noted in a 1938 letter that his Dwarves were “not quite the dwarfs of better-known lore” (*Letters* 31). However, even if the Dwarves' desire for precious metals came from the Germanic sources, it does not negate the effect of also making this same race linguistically Semitic, whiny, characteristically bearded, and superseded. In fact, if Tolkien began with folkloric Dwarves who loved gold, and then decided to

⁶ Paul Battles has questioned the notion that Germanic texts broadly characterize dwarfs as smiths, and observed that this claim, found in the work of Jacob Grimm, overemphasizes an aspect that is only found in Norse sources (73-74). Grimm's influence, however, would probably have led Tolkien to believe it.

also give them a Semitic language and other attributes that antisemitic beliefs attached to Jews (whom he himself stated that the Dwarves resembled), it pretty much proves the point. The way *The Hobbit* shows all these traits “going together” and uses them to justify the exclusion of Dwarves from the mainstream culture of the text resembles real-life antisemitic beliefs.

Many of Tolkien’s modern readers reject this idea, however. Cramer admits that some of Tolkien’s comments in the interview with Denys Geroult are disturbing, but finds the statements ambiguous (Cramer 10). Anderson Rearick III contends that “Tolkien’s connection [between Dwarves and Jews] is more historically linguistic and cultural than racial,” but that does not diminish the list of traits commonly linked with stereotypical Jews, and, incidentally, implies that greed for gold is a valid “cultural” link (864). Other writers such as Craig Bird have tried to defend Tolkien against the specter of using antisemitic stereotypes by pointing to his well-known anger at the Nazis, and particularly a letter he wrote to his German publishers when they inquired whether he was “Aryan”:

I regret that I am not clear as to what you intend by *arisch*. I am not of *Aryan* extraction: that is Indo-iranian (sic); as far as I am aware none 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. (*Letters* 37, emphasis original)

In a separate letter to his English publisher about the German inquiry, Tolkien fumes that “I have many Jewish friends” and deplores “the pernicious and unscientific race-doctrine” (*Letters* 37). Quotes such as these and others in his letters have been taken, even by some of Tolkien’s most outspoken critics such as the novelist and socialist China Miéville, as sufficient evidence that Tolkien’s novels cannot participate in antisemitism. Miéville notes that in Tolkien’s world “*racism is true*, in that people really are defined by their race” but denies on the basis of the letter quoted above that Tolkien was “personally a racist” (“Appropriate Means,” emphasis original). Yet, such an evaluation assumes a mutual exclusivity that does not necessarily exist, when we keep in mind that “antisemitism” is not limited to active persecution or exclusion of Jews, but is also a belief in a racial Jewish identity that consisted of linked and recognizable biological and psychological traits. One could have Jewish friends and hate the Nazis, and still subscribe to antisemitic and exclusionary beliefs, perhaps even without realizing it. It is also not clear from Tolkien’s letter to his publishers whether the “race-doctrine” he deplores is the theory of human races at all, or the specific way that the Nazis had co-opted the term *Aryan* and made a linguistic identifier into one they claimed was racial.

If we allow ourselves to fully consider the way Tolkien linked the Dwarves to supposed Jewish characteristics in *The Hobbit*, then we also allow ourselves better scope to understand his Dwarvish characters in *The Lord of the Rings* and see some pointed revisions that take place. I think Tolkien himself was more aware of what he had done in his portrayal of Thorin and Company than his modern defenders have been willing to admit. His dismissal of the “pernicious and unscientific race-doctrine” and description of the Jews as “that gifted people” might have had a tinge of guilt under it, as he realized that the tying together of unpleasant stereotypes about Jews in his depiction of the Dwarves drew on beliefs that could have horrifying consequences for the real people so perceived. Christine Chism has argued that Tolkien, although he rejected any suggestion that his novels were allegories of World War II, nonetheless responded to the cultural turmoil of his day in his approach to his art. Tolkien, in Chism’s insightful reading, “questioned the work of created mythologies with a particularly self-consuming intensity during and after the war” as he saw the ways that mythologies were created and distorted by the Nazis (63). Perhaps this awareness, this willingness to question the very foundations of his enterprise to try to overcome the potential ravages of mythologizing, led Tolkien to some of the drastic alterations in his depiction of the Dwarvish race in the later novels. Particularly in Gimli’s character, Tolkien’s Dwarves in *The Lord of the Rings* radically alter the Dwarves in *The Hobbit*. He sets out to undo the negative qualities ascribed to the Dwarves in the earlier book, and shows them as no longer marginal to the heroic culture of the other characters.

Gimli, from the first, is entirely unlike the Dwarves who appear on Bilbo’s mat in a comic combination of obsequiousness and rapacity in *The Hobbit*’s first chapter. Although he is the son of one of those Dwarves, Gimli exemplifies stalwart courage on a quest with neither financial or vengeful motives (unlike those of Thorin and Company). As the Fellowship sets forth from Rivendell, he and Elrond have an exchange about the risks of the quest. Elrond says that the Fellowship is under no oath, and Gimli questions this strategy:

“Faithless is he that says farewell when the road darkens,” said Gimli.

“Maybe,” said Elrond, “but let him not vow to walk in the dark, who has not seen the nightfall.”

“Yet sworn word may strengthen quaking heart,” said Gimli. (*The Lord of the Rings* [LotR] II.3.274)

Gimli’s words are perhaps a little rash, as Elrond gently points out to him; he cannot know the full terror of the Ringwraiths or of Sauron’s power. But Gimli’s determination to have courage and not to fail in a task that will benefit not only

himself and his kin, but all the created world, puts him firmly in the heroic value-system of the books. The third-person, impersonal construction of his sentences—"Faithless is he" rather than "I would be faithless if"—gives his utterances the ring of proverbs, and Michael Stanton lists this exchange in his catalogue of invented proverbs in Tolkien, noting the "alliteration, metonymy, and [...] metaphor of night journey" (Stanton 336). If such *proverbia* exist among the Dwarves, then not only Gimli, but the whole Dwarvish race is included in the stalwart courage of these sentences. This strategy reappears often with Gimli, as his positive attributes are often set out in such a way that they do not just reflect his character but his entire race.

Gimli's courage is also clear in the mines of Moria. Gimli is enthusiastic about this dangerous route: "I will tread the path with you, Gandalf!" said Gimli, 'I will go and look on the halls of Durin, whatever may wait there'" (*LotR* II.4.289). Gimli's enthusiasm is underscored by his bravery and lacks any mention of the treasure of Moria, in stark contrast to Thorin and Company's stated motivations for reclaiming the Lonely Mountain. Wealth does not enter into the desire of this Dwarf to visit his people's former domain. And although the Dwarves had formerly woken the Balrog by mining too deeply for Middle-earth's most valuable metal, *mithril*, Gimli's own connection to Moria comes from historic appreciation of its cultural importance, a connection made clear by Galadriel in her explanation on Gimli's behalf for his eagerness to see Moria: "If our folk had been exiled long and far from Lothlórien, who of the Galadrim, even Celeborn the Wise, would pass nigh and would not wish to look upon their ancient home, though it had become an abode of dragons?" (*LotR* II.7.347). Galadriel's understanding of the Dwarf's spiritual connection to his people's "ancient home" leads Gimli to respond, "the Lady Galadriel is above all the jewels that lie beneath the earth!"—a rejection of the earlier Dwarves' obsession with such treasures (II.7.347).

Indeed, Gimli's appreciation of culture and, especially, natural beauty, represents a radical shift in the characterization of the Dwarves. To give only the most notable example, his conversation with Legolas about the Glittering Caves is one of the most extensive pieces of natural description in *The Lord of the Rings*:

My good Legolas, do you know that the caverns of Helm's Deep are vast and beautiful? There would be an endless pilgrimage of Dwarves, merely to gaze at them, if such things were known to be. Aye indeed, they would pay pure gold for a brief glance! [...] Do you think those halls are fair, where your King dwells under the hill in Mirkwood, and Dwarves helped in their making long ago? They are but hovels compared with the caverns I have seen here: immeasurable halls, filled with an everlasting music of water that tinkles into pools, as fair as Kheled-zâram in the starlight.

And, Legolas, when the torches are kindled and men walk on the sandy floors under the echoing domes, ah! then, Legolas, gems and crystals and veins of precious ore glint in the polished walls; and the light glows through folded marbles, shell-like, translucent as the living hands of Queen Galadriel. There are columns of white and saffron and dawn-rose, Legolas, fluted and twisted into dreamlike forms; they spring up from many-coloured floors to meet the glistening pendants of the roof: wings, ropes, curtains fine as frozen clouds; spears, banners, pinnacles of suspended palaces! (*LotR* III.8.534)

Gimli continues in this vein for several more sentences. When Legolas teases him that he should not tell the other Dwarves about this find, as they will destroy the cave's beauty to extract its mineral wealth, Gimli retorts that this notion is steeped in a wrongful perception of the Dwarves:

“No, you do not understand,” said Gimli, “No dwarf could be unmoved by such loveliness. None of Durin's race would mine those caves for stones or ore, not if diamonds and gold could be got there. Do you cut down groves of blossoming trees in the springtime for firewood? We would tend these glades of flowering stone, not quarry them.” (III.8.535)

In direct contrast to what *The Hobbit* states, the appreciation of Dwarves for the riches of the earth is aesthetic, not avaricious. They would give gold which has already been mined and therefore has a monetary value to view a natural phenomenon that has none. Flatly contradicting the narrator's claim in *The Hobbit* that Dwarves are “calculating folk with a great idea of the value of money,” Gimli says that the Dwarves would prefer to leave even the most valuable minerals intact to preserve the beauty of the caves. This passage has little to do with the book's plot, and seems to function only as a way of characterizing Gimli—and the whole of “Durin's race.” Although Gimli cannot always be read as a type of the entire Dwarvish race, here it is clear that he speaks for them all. Tolkien in this passage tries to explain what even *The Hobbit's* narrator took as accepted wisdom about the Dwarves—their greed for gold—as a misunderstanding. Dwarvish appreciation of the market value of precious metals and gems becomes secondary to their love of their natural beauty and that of the caverns in which they appear.

Perhaps the most notable change in the Dwarves, though, is the way that Gimli absolutely repudiates the narrator's comment in *The Hobbit* that “Dwarves are not heroes.” I have already discussed his courage and resolve when the Fellowship sets forth. Gimli is also an experienced combat veteran. Particularly in the battle of Helm's Deep when Gimli saves Éomer by beheading two orcs with a single stroke, his martial prowess is clear, as Aragorn tells

Legolas, “Never did I see an axe so wielded” (*LotR* III.7.526). Although in *The Hobbit*, Thorin and his allies have some military skill, and he “wielded his axe with mighty strokes” in the Battle of Five Armies, as I have already mentioned the text undermines him by comparing him to gold and leaving open the question of why Thorin emerges to fight the goblins and Wargs (17.283). Not so Gimli, whose participation comes from altruism and a desire to defend Middle-earth and his friends. Valor that comes from a motive of helping others is heroism, and Gimli is heroic. Tolkien even borrows from a “martial race” of the British Empire to underscore Gimli’s bravery and skill—the Dwarvish battle cry, which translates to “Axes of the Dwarves! The Dwarves are upon you!” (*LotR* App.F.1106) is adapted from the Gurkha cry, “The Gurkhas are upon you!” The notion of martial races held that some peoples were biologically pre-determined to be warriors, while others were not.⁷ The Gurkhas were perhaps the supreme martial race in this view. An allusion that relates Gimli and the Dwarves to the Gurkhas is therefore the highest compliment to their fighting skill (although it still carries some baggage of racism) and once again, the fact that this is a Dwarvish war-cry, “heard on many a field since the world was young,” makes the point that Gimli is not an outlier in Dwarvish culture (App.F.1106). Gimli even has a competition with Legolas in the latter two books of the trilogy to see who can kill more enemies. The teasing exchanges between the two provides some humor, but it is a humor centered on the battlefield and on the knowledge and acceptance of their shared danger. In the later volumes, the Dwarf is not the comic relief, but a heroic member of the party, clearly part of the battle-ready company.

The only place in the novels where Gimli might potentially be read as cowardly is on the Paths of the Dead, where he is terrified. Here, however, as Wayne Hammond and Christina Scull observe, he acts as the reader’s surrogate in the text—a role usually played by the hobbits—and the text is focalized through him in a way that makes him sympathetic, not comic or despicable (Hammond and Scull 533). His fear is also made to contrast with what the reader already knows of his courage; he “had walked unafraid in many deep places of the world” (*LotR* V.2.769). Tolkien’s description of Gimli’s fear in the Paths of the Dead is effective *because* Gimli has been actively participating in the heroic deeds of his companions. Since Dwarves are no longer excluded from the heroism of the other races, Gimli’s fear emphasizes to the reader the great danger of the Paths of the Dead.

⁷ For a discussion of the martial races, and particularly the Gurkhas’ portrayal in British writing, see Lionel Caplan’s article, “‘Bravest of the Brave’: Representations of ‘The Gurkha’ in British Military Writings.” I am indebted to Wayne Harden for this observation about the parallel between the Dwarves and the Gurkhas.

Tolkien was stuck with much of *The Hobbit's* depiction of the Dwarves by the time that *The Lord of the Rings* came out. Even though he could and did edit scenes in later printings of *The Hobbit* to conform better to the master narrative as it developed in *The Lord of the Rings*, such traits as the lust for gold could hardly be written out without drastically altering the plot. Instead, in the later books he refocused some of the race's supposed attributes. Tolkien tried to undo (as much as he could) those negative qualities of the Dwarves that were also the negative qualities ascribed to the Jews whom the Dwarves, by his own admission, resembled. The racial attributes that were most negative, most damning, were rubbed out and over-written in order to integrate the “non-heroic” Dwarves and to undo the marginal status that even *The Hobbit's* narrator assigned them. Some of the legendarium materials continue the trend. Although this article's main focus is on Tolkien's published works, which he himself had a chance to fully revise, it seems worthwhile to briefly consider how Dwarvish characters develop in some of these fragmentary texts as well.

The character of Mím the Petty-Dwarf in the Túrin narratives potentially poses the strongest counter-argument to my claim that the Dwarves are rehabilitated in Tolkien's later writings, as Mím seems to worsen in Tolkien's revision process. Analyzing Mím's development, however, poses daunting problems due to the many interwoven versions of the story; Tolkien worked and reworked this material over most of his writing career, with the result that many conflicting versions exist, sometimes with uncertain chronology. In addition, we should heed Christopher Tolkien's caution in his editor's Foreword to *The Peoples of Middle-earth* that Tolkien did not always stop and check previous notes when writing much of the legendarium materials, and that inconsistencies may be due to faulty memory as much as deliberate revision (viii). Gergely Nagy has even suggested that the layering of alternate versions of the Túrin narrative could be deliberate, as “real mythological texts also show a great variation of detail but still remain the ‘same story’” (250). Nor is it always absolutely clear what is Tolkien's own writing and what is a necessary editorial interpolation, especially in the recently-published *Children of Húrin*. Still, some of Mím's trajectory can be cautiously tracked. Mím's betrayal of Túrin to the Orcs does not occur in the *Book of Lost Tales 2* (probably the earliest version); it first appears in the *Silmarillion's* version, which Tom Shippey believes is “perhaps predominantly work prior to 1937” (Author 249). In the *Silmarillion*, Mím reluctantly shows the Orcs the way to Túrin's refuge only after he and his son have been captured and, presumably, threatened with death. His reluctance vanishes in the version, probably later, published as *The Children of Húrin*, in which Mím is led by his hatred of Beleg to seek out Orcs for his destruction. Although Mím tries to impose the condition that Túrin be let free, he also asks that Beleg be left, bound but alive, for him. The text clearly implies that Mím intends not only to kill Beleg but torture him: “Mím

appeared on the summit, and going to where Beleg lay prostrate and unmoving he gloated over him while he sharpened a knife" (*Children of Húrin* [CH] 150).

Mîm's trajectory seems to reverse my claim that Tolkien revised his negative portrayal of the Dwarves after the publication of *The Hobbit*—although the *Grey Annals*, published in *The War of the Jewels*, no longer has Mîm as the betrayer of Túrin's stronghold, so Tolkien may not have made his mind up entirely about Mîm's role in the narrative (*War of the Jewels* [WJ] 82). The above passage and the one in which Mîm seeks out the Orcs instead of being captured by them come in the portion of *Children of Húrin* that is filled in by Christopher Tolkien from other material; however, Christopher used "the same original materials" as the published *Silmarillion* and states that "there is no element of extraneous 'invention' of any kind, however slight" (CH 288, 289). Surely adding details such as Mîm's deliberate betrayal and intended torture of Beleg would fall into the category of "invention," so even if the exact wording is indeed Christopher's the idea is probably Tolkien's own. Even so, nothing in the text indicates that Mîm is typical of his race, as Thorin so often seems to be. Tolkien, although he makes that character more evil in later versions, actually continues to retreat from making such qualities racial attributes of all the Dwarves. Mîm is a Petty-dwarf, which seems to be an alienated branch of Dwarves. The description of Mîm's heritage in the later texts emphatically distinguishes him from Dwarves proper: "the Petty-dwarves loved none but themselves. [...] They came, some said, of Dwarves that had been banished from the Dwarf-cities of the east in ancient days" (CH 121). The failings of Mîm (and this is the version in which he intends the torture of Beleg) are from the moment of his introduction distanced from the rest of the Dwarves who have probably cast him and his fellows out.⁸ Mîm's bad qualities are his own. Tolkien, even as he rehabilitated the Dwarves from their depiction in *The Hobbit*, did not feel the need to suddenly make every Dwarf (or Petty-dwarf) clean of all failings, any more than the Elves or Humans were. However, these failings were no longer put at the feet of all Dwarves as they had been in *The Hobbit*.

Indeed, the etymologies of the elements of "Petty-dwarf" also mark Mîm's and his sons' alienation from Dwarves at large, in the unusual (for Tolkien) mixing of linguistic origins. *Dwarf* is a Germanic word, found in the English language as *dwerg* from the Anglo-Saxon period (*Oxford English Dictionary* s.v. "dwarf"). *Petty*, on the other hand, came into English much later, from the French *petit*; its original meaning was something small or subordinate (*OED* s.v. "petty"). I assume that "Petty-dwarf" evokes this original meaning, and that "Petty-dwarves" in the most literal sense are "Little-dwarves." Yet it is

⁸ The text stresses "good" Dwarves, too, as the Dwarves of Belegost are against Morgoth and rout Glaurung in the Battle of Unnumbered Tears (CH 56).

odd for Tolkien to have yoked together words from different origins, or even to have chosen a French-derived word at all given his usual preference for words from Germanic origins (such as *thrall*, which he uses rather than *slave* throughout *The Children of Húrin*). The unexpected French-derived word the more emphatically distances Mím and his sons from Dwarves proper. *Petty* also, of course, has a more modern meaning of trivial, even spiteful, and Tolkien’s choice also evokes that meaning even if his primary sense is the older one relating more to size. The Hobbits, after all, are presumably even shorter than the Petty-dwarves, but the adjective is not applied to them. As the dissonant French-Germanic compound suggests, Mím’s evil deeds, if Tolkien did mean for them to stand in the final version, were not meant to be racial, not indicative of Dwarves in the aggregate.

This careful undoing of the negative “racial” traits of the Dwarves continues in other legendarium materials that Tolkien revised after *Lord of the Rings* was published. *The History of Galadriel and Celeborn*, a late text published in the *Unfinished Tales* (although apparently with a heavy editorial hand) states that “it was only the host of Nogrod that took part in that assault” that destroyed Doriath and that “[t]he Dwarves of Belegost were filled with dismay at the calamity” (246). As the *History* goes on to explain, Celeborn distrusted all Dwarves because of the attack on Doriath, but:

Galadriel was more far-sighted in this than Celeborn; and she perceived from the beginning that Middle-earth could not be saved from the “residue of evil” that Morgoth had left behind him save by a union of all the peoples who were in their way and in their measure opposed to him. She looked upon the Dwarves also with the eye of a commander, seeing in them the finest warriors to pit against the Orcs. (*Unfinished Tales* [UT] 246-7)

Far from their earlier “friendship to the kin of Melko,” the Dwarves are an important—necessary, even—part of the removal of the greatest evils in the mortal world. Dwarves are the “finest warriors” in the struggle against evil (a notion already suggested by the Gurkha-derived war cry in *Lord of the Rings*).

If the “far-sighted” Galadriel knew that the dwarves were necessary for the stopping of Morgoth’s “residue” it implies that they were, indeed, part of the Creator-deity’s design for Middle-earth from the beginning. The published *Silmarillion* had implied that this was not the case (although, of course, Ilúvatar knows everything that will happen in advance) as the Creator refers to the other races as the “Firstborn of my design” in contrast to the Dwarves created and awakened early by Aulë (38; my italics). However, “The Later *Quenta Silmarillion*” states that the Dwarves believe “that Ilúvatar will hallow them and give them a place among the Children in the End” (WJ 204). The same text does

re-insert possible avarice into the Dwarvish race: "For buying and selling and exchange were their delight, and the winning of wealth thereby; and this they gathered rather to hoard than to use, save in further trading" (WJ 204). Still, even this hoarding behavior (and how else could one explain all the treasures of Erebor?) has the potential to stem from love of its beauty, since the Dwarves at that time "still wrought iron and copper rather than silver and gold," giving them few treasures of their own, and since they seem disinterested in the purchasing power of their wealth, hoarding rather than using it (WJ 204). Christopher Tolkien's own feeling about this text was that "[t]he long enduring 'hostile' view [of the Dwarves] has at last virtually vanished" from it (WJ 206). More than just a cessation of hostility, however, these alterations specifically undo those aspects of the Dwarves that most recalled the antisemitic associations of *The Hobbit* and the *Silmarillion*. They are heroes, they may have an idea of the value of money but are motivated at least as much by the aesthetic value of precious metals, and they join the Children in the End. One no longer has to be cautious not to "expect too much" from the Dwarves (*Hobbit* 12.211).

Two further acts of revision, found in Appendix A of *Return of the King* and in *The Unfinished Tales*, respond to the claims of *The Hobbit*. The section of Appendix A called "Durin's Folk," relates, among other things, the Dwarves' resistance to domination by the Seven Rings:

For the Dwarves had proved untameable 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, so that if they lacked them all other good things seemed profitless, and they were filled with wrath and desire for vengeance on all who deprived them. (*LotR* App.A.1051)

The passage here suggests that Dwarves' avarice might have a mostly external origin, although this was perhaps altered in the "Later *Quenta Silmarillion*" quoted above. However, the "The Quest of Erebor" in *Unfinished Tales* contains Gandalf's re-telling of the events leading up to *The Hobbit*, and in a manner revises the narrative that had been published. As much as possible, it makes Thorin's faults his own, not racial. For example, Gandalf relates that "[Thorin's] heart was hot with brooding on his wrongs, and the loss of the treasure of his forefathers, and burdened too with the duty of revenge upon Smaug that he had inherited. Dwarves take such duties very seriously" (*UT* 336). Dwarves may take seriously the duty for revenge, but Thorin's greed for treasure—the leading reason in his speech in *The Hobbit*—seems to be his own failing, perhaps stimulated by indirect contact with the Ring his father possessed (as Boromir was affected by proximity to the Ring in Frodo's keeping). At the end of the narrative, Gandalf warns Thorin particularly against avarice: "And curb your pride and your greed, or you will fall at the end of whatever path you take, though your

hands be full of gold!" (UT 339). Gandalf then gives the argument that finally convinces Thorin to take Bilbo:

"I do not give my love or my trust lightly, Thorin; but I am fond of this Hobbit, and wish him well. Treat him well, and you shall have my friendship to the end of your days."

I said that without hope of persuading him; but I could have said nothing better. Dwarves understand devotion to friends and gratitude to those who help them. (UT 339-340)

Thorin's greed is portrayed as a personal concern for him (not his "Dwarvish heart" as *The Hobbit* had it), but his loyalty comes from his Dwarvish nature. Once again, Tolkien rewrites the Dwarves and alters the dismissive and condemnatory comments of *The Hobbit's* narrator.

Tolkien's potential racism poses a challenge to his readers, and it is not the intent of this article to erase that challenge. Miéville's criticism, that race is "true" in Tolkien, stands.⁹ Even if Tolkien removes from the Dwarves the more negative aspects that antisemitism ascribed to the Jews, there is still a belief in such a thing as "Dwarvishness," and it was related to "Jewishness" by Tolkien himself in the BBC interview in 1965. Zak Cramer obtained a full recording of the interview, which was only broadcast in an edited version, and gives Tolkien's elaboration after his comment that the Dwarves' words were Semitic: "[t]here's a tremendous love of the artefact (sic), and of course the immense warlike capacity of the Jews, which we tend to forget nowadays" (qtd. in Cramer 10). Cramer is uncertain how to take the "warlike" attributes Tolkien believes are Jewish, "whether we should understand this to have been, in his mind, a compliment or a slur" (10). Probably it was a compliment, related to the Dwarves' martial qualities in his later works, their indispensability in the war with the Orcs. Similarly, the "love of the artifact" recalls the aesthetic appreciation that replaced *The Hobbit's* "great idea of the value of money." However, the basic assumption that there are innate Dwarvish and Jewish "qualities" survives intact, and this assumption remains troubling. Reversing the qualities from negative to positive ones does not erase the underlying belief that makes the whole system of thought possible.

What we have, finally, in Tolkien is a 20th century author confronted by the ways that his writing, perhaps not even entirely consciously, had drawn on antisemitic beliefs, and attempting to work through the issue in his subsequent books. The Dwarves in *The Hobbit* are not the same as they are the *Lord of the*

⁹ Niels Werber attempts a similar argument, but I find his approach profoundly flawed by his apparent belief that the books and the Peter Jackson films are interchangeable, as well as by factual errors and occasionally misleading uses of ellipses in some of his quotations.

Rings, and critics who have avoided a full assessment of Tolkien's use of antisemitic tropes in *The Hobbit* have missed some pointed alterations in the Dwarvish characters between the earlier book and the later writings. This doesn't erase what he had already written—simply trying to change negative traits to positive ones still subscribes to claims for racial identity—and I think readers and critics do need to acknowledge that he could be (and was) influenced by such aspects of English culture as antisemitism. To observe this is not necessarily to adopt the mode of “gotcha” criticism, as Glen Love refers to it in an essay on ecocriticism, “dragging past writers to the dock” for lack of modern sensibilities (11). Rather, it is to observe that such ways of thinking, “or the writer's diversion from [them] [...] may be worth examining” (Love 11). Instead of insisting that Tolkien is worthy of literary study but resisting analyses that present problems for the reader, critics should allow themselves (and be allowed by their own readers) to examine his books with the same approaches that they use for other texts, noticing changes, gaps, alterations, and biases in Tolkien's texts. After all, in the case of the Dwarves in *The Hobbit*, he seems to have been perfectly willing to perform such examinations himself.

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