

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **THE ORCS AND TOLKIEN'S TREATMENT OF EVIL**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Tolkien's realm of Middle-earth is inhabited by a multiplicity of creatures; from big to small, their origins are as ornate and quaint as Middle-earth. The myriad of races have their origins dating back to the creation of the entire realm and while the labyrinthine topography, fascinating languages, and ancient history bedazzle many a reader, it is Tolkien's ingenuity in conceiving the living races such as the elves, Orcs, Balrogs, Ents, hobbits, and dwarves that makes the lure of Middle-earth hard to resist.

Treebeard, the oldest and wisest Ent of Fangorn Forest speaks of the 'free peoples' (LOTR 453-454) of Middle-earth to Merry and Pippin. In his citation of the 'free peoples', the elves were the first to settle in the realm followed by the dwarves, Ents, hobbits, and men; it is in fact a catalogue of the free living creatures from the first race to a selection of animals. While these characters can be divided into their respective alignments (good, evil, and neutral), this tapestry highlights the richness and diversity of characters that populate Tolkien's imaginary world. From such an interesting array of complex characters, part of this tapestry then deserves to be studied in greater depth for its uniqueness and labyrinthine involvement in the novel.

The race of the Orcs does not exist in Treebeard's list of 'free peoples' and, compared to the other more illustrious characters in the novel, the Orcs have long been

considered secondary images of evil in The LOTR. The Orcs are one of the oldest races of the realm and are predominantly the slaves of Sauron, spending most of their lives executing his will and command. As they form part of Tolkien's rich fabric of characters, it would be interesting to get some insight into the world of the Orcs so as to deepen our understanding of their intricate association with the novel.

Attention should be paid to the devious and malignant race of Goblins called the Orcs due to their presence in all three of Tolkien's major works, The Hobbit, The LOTR and The Silmarillion. The Orcs are involved in all major battles in the First Age to the Third and are worthy of our attention since they have been overlooked as merely the dispensable and unimportant slaves of Sauron.

I shall begin by discussing the origins of the Orcs, their description, role and the stereotypical perceived notion of the nature of the Orcs. A larger part of my chapter shall debunk the myth that the Orcs are a degenerate race with no values whatsoever. I shall also be analysing their nature, function and purpose in the novel. By doing so, I hope to unravel the complexities behind Tolkien's treatment of evil and the position of the Orcs in relation to the other dominant races in The LOTR. While my first chapter puts the Orcs under close scrutiny, my second chapter deals on a broader plain, with the interrelationship of the Orcs with elves and men, and the position of this race in the subsequent mélange of the human image in both elves and orcs. I shall also be looking at the similarities and dissimilarities in all three races and the effects of the human and sub-human blurring towards shaping our understanding of the novel. My final chapter draws

our attention to the race of the Orcs as powerful physical images of terror. This chapter will discuss the importance of the Orcs in their capacity as a dominant physical image of evil and the contribution of the Orcs in supporting primary portraits of evil in The LOTR. Thus, the main objective of this research is to enlighten us on the race of the Orcs while addressing some of the misconceived notions about them. It is hoped that this dissertation will finally come through in the character study of the Orcs and that it would empower the readers to have a deeper, richer and more insightful reading of The LOTR and the machinations behind Tolkien's mythology of Middle-earth.

## 1.2 The Orcs

Just who are the Orcs and what role do they play in Tolkien's The LOTR? To most avid readers, they are often seen to be the embodiment of evil in Tolkien's epic; vile and malignant creatures of terror and destruction, their rage and brutality are feared by many. They are Sauron's swift shock troops who are furious and fast in doing his will. In fact, their origin pre-dates a time even before any battle took place on Middle-earth. It was a time when Melkor, the greatest Valar or subordinate god, became corrupt and evil and desired to have his own way. He disrupted the Music of Creation of Ilúvatar, the almighty Creator, sowing hatred and distrust among all his creations. His vilest 'creation' was the Orcs.

For who of the living has descended into the pits of Utumno? Yet this is held true by the wise Eressëa, that all those of the Quendi who came into the hands of Melkor, ere Utumno was broken, were put there in prison,

and by slow arts of cruelty were corrupted and enslaved; and thus did Melkor breed the hideous race of the Orcs in envy and mockery of the Elves, of whom they were afterwards the bitterest foes. For the Orcs had life and multiplied after the manner of the Children of Ilúvatar; and naught that had life of its own, nor the semblance of life, could ever Melkor make since his rebellion in the Ainulindalë before the Beginning: so say the wise. *And deep in their dark hearts the Orcs loathed the Master whom they served in fear, the maker only of their misery* (my emphasis). This it may be was the vilest deed of Melkor and the most hateful to Ilúvatar.

(The Silmarillion 58)

One gets the feeling of the Orcs' resentment and hatred towards Melkor for imposing upon them great hardship and suffering in their existence. The Orcs were created from the fair elves, the embodiment of virtue, beauty and wisdom. The elves were also the oldest and most respected race because they were the first to be created during the early years of Middle-earth. Theirs is the life of the blessed while the Orcs remain one of the most hated creatures of Middle-earth, an antithesis of the elves in every way. There exists bitter enmity between the two races from time immemorial, one that has lasted from the Beginning till the present struggle.

The Orcs are the corrupt version of the majestic elves; they are one of the oldest races of Middle-earth and the second oldest image of evil in existence after the evil spirits of fire, the Balrogs who were also corrupted by Melkor himself. The Orcs are often seen

to be a fallen, misguided, and downtrodden race hated by all the other races of the realm, and slaving to carry out Melkor and Sauron's schemes.

The Orcs are also Tolkien's most common image of evil in Middle-earth; they have existed from the time of the Valars. From being just formidable soldiery, the Orcs have risen up in ranks to be the most lethal arsenal of the dark side. Though lacking prominence compared to their more illustrious 'cousins', the elves and other more powerful minions, the Orcs are not merely instruments of carnage like the Balrogs but also mark the pervasive entrance of evil into Middle-earth. So perhaps there is an understanding that we can gather from studying these servants of the dark. Their creation heralds the start of the major wars and suffering in the realm. By disrupting the music of Creation by Ilúvatar, Melkor has sown seeds of distrust, envy and hatred into the World. From this, Melkor has managed to corrupt many of the Maiar spirits including some of the elves whom he remoulded into Orcs.

The Orcs are thus described as a vicious evil-looking race bent on destruction and the total annihilation of anything that is against the will of Sauron.

The Orcs are definitely stated to be corruptions of the 'human' form seen in the Elves and Men. They are (or were) squat, broad, flat-nosed, sallow-skinned, with wide mouths and slant eyes: in fact degraded and repulsive versions of the (to Europeans) least lovely Mongol-types. (qtd. in Carpenter 274)

### 1.3 The Elves

As we make comparisons with the elves, the superior and generically noble race, we notice differences between the two opposing factions. The elves or 'Quendi' as they are known shall '...be the fairest of all earthly creatures, and they shall have and shall conceive and bring forth more beauty than all my children; and they shall have the greater bliss in this world' (The Silmarillion 47). The elves are immortal and ageless and will never know any sickness. They can be killed in any normal circumstances like men but as they age, they will not grow weak, only wiser and fairer. David Day elaborates:

There is always a light on the Elven face, and the sound of their voices is various and beautiful as water. Of all their arts they excel best in speech, song and poetry. Elves were the first of all people on earth to speak with voices and no earthly creature before them sang. And justly they call themselves the Quendi, the 'speakers', for they taught the spoken arts to all races on Middle-earth. (Day 75)

As compared to the elves, the Orcs do not possess such magnificent gifts, or the ethereal position the elves have on Middle-earth. The elves were given immortality, wisdom, and to the Elders, the powers of creation, whereas the Orcs were described to be only obsessed in wanton destruction. Even the language they speak is called 'The Black Speech', an unpleasant language developed by Sauron for use by all of his servants. The purest form is used by Sauron, Smaug (the dragon) and the Witch-king of Angmar while at a lower hierarchy, several versions of the language exist in a debased form.

The Orcs were first bred by the Dark Power of the North in the Elder Days. It is said that they had no language of their own, but took what they could of other tongues and perverted it to their own liking; yet they made only brutal jargons, scarcely sufficient even for their own needs, unless it were for curses and abuse. And these creatures, being filled with malice, hating even their own kind, quickly developed as many barbarous dialects as there were groups of settlements of their race, so that their Orkish speech was little use to them in intercourse between different tribes. (The LOTR 1105)

#### **1.4 Good and Evil: Some Commentaries**

Tolkien's depiction of the Orcs as a misguided race, evil, ruthless and savage had indirectly portrayed the Orcs as consistently evil from the moment of their creation. According to W.H. Auden, 'In the Secondary World of Middle-earth, there exist, in addition to men, at least seven species capable of speech and therefore of moral choice—Elves, Dwarves, Hobbits, Wizards, Ents, Trolls, Orcs' (138). Therefore, the ability of the Orcs to communicate would suggest that the Orcs are capable of making moral choices but Tolkien's portrayal of the Orcs as a lesser race, evil, ruthless and savage might suggest otherwise. In comparison with the elves, the Orcs are shown to be utterly diabolical, without a shred of morality or any good in them. One could not help but conjecture that the two races are an antithesis of one another. This leads critics of Tolkien to consider the obvious division of good and evil in the saga not too kindly. Edmund Wilson, one of Tolkien's chief critics, states that '...for most part such characters as Dr.

Tolkien is able to contrive are perfectly stereotyped' (qtd. in Kocher 80) while Catharine Stimpson criticizes Tolkien's treatment of good and evil in the following manner:

Of course, evil is corroding, then corrupting, and finally cancelling. However, Tolkien seems rigid. He admits that men, elves, and dwarfs are a collection of good, bad, and indifferent things, but he more consistently divides the ambiguous world into two unambiguous halves: good and evil, nice and nasty. Any writer has the right to dramatize, not to argue, his morality. However, Tolkien's dialogue, plot, and symbols are terribly simplistic. (Stimpson 18)

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

At this point, it would perhaps be useful to summarize briefly the characteristics of good and evil as they are revealed in *The Lord of The Rings*. First, and most important, good and evil are almost always generically defined; we can often tell whether a character is one or the other if we know where he comes from, who his ancestors are, how he speaks, and which color, black or white, is associated with him. (Scheps 51-52)



Thus, many critics of Tolkien disagree with Tolkien's way of dividing everything into two spheres, black and white, good and evil. The portrayal of the Orcs, as an example, seems to prove what the critics think of Tolkien's overall work, that it is rigid, structured and clear cut, totally void of any ambiguities in the alignments of good and evil. If that is the case, the Orcs will then be perceived to be consistently evil, a point that I hope to prove otherwise because I believe there is a different side to this often misjudged race. I would like to elaborate that not only are the Orcs an important race essential to the saga but they are capable of demonstrating some form of affirmative behaviour that will debunk the common myth of the Orcs as mere brutal and mindless savages. Hence, they are not consistently evil but capable of achieving some form of transcendence.

What the critics have failed to take into account is that the Goblin race called the Orcs is in fact created from the elves, and they are described as the 'Firstborn, the immortal Elder Race of Middle-earth, the noblest of the Children of Eru' (Tyler 148). They share an almost similar ancestral past at the beginning but Melkor's insidious ways had waylaid them and with his evil powers transformed some of the captured elves into Orcs. Although the elves and Orcs share an indistinguishable Beginning, complexities arise as to whether the Orcs are capable of knowing the virtues of goodness since they were originally elves. Tolkien tells us that 'For nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so' (The LOTR 261). This is a positive affirmation that the Orcs are not originally evil since even Sauron was good at the beginning. Tolkien further elaborates in his letters that the Orcs are '...fundamentally a race of "rational incarnate" creatures,

though horribly corrupted, if no more so than many Men to be met today' (qtd. Carpenter 190). Tolkien's statement is interesting because he compares the race of the Orcs to common men and secondly, the Orcs are said to be capable of thought. This would indeed do justice to the position of Orcs, as they are not the mere mindless slaves of Sauron. Tolkien himself reacted strongly to allegations that his novel was only about the play on good and evil. He says: 'Not that I have made even this quite so simple: there are Saruman, and Denethor, and Boromir; and there are treacheries and strife even among the Orcs' (qtd. in Carpenter 197).

Thus, it would seem that the Orcs have a place in Tolkien's mythology of Middle-earth. The fact that the Orcs are capable of transcending their complex state of being is mentioned by Tolkien when he describes how Melkor abused his 'sub-creative powers' and:

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

necessary to their actual existence—even Orcs would become part of the World, which is God’s and ultimately good. (qtd. in Carpenter 195)

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

But whether they could have ‘souls’ or ‘spirits’ seems a different question; and since in my myth at any rate I do not conceive of the making of souls or spirits, things of an equal order if not an equal power to the Valar, as a possible ‘delegation’, I have represented at least the Orcs as pre-existing real beings on whom the Dark Lord has exerted the fullness of his power in remodelling and corrupting them, not making them. (qtd. in Carpenter 195)

Thus, the portrayal of the Orcs in the novel is extremely complicated. The obvious comparison and contrast with the elves would compel many readers and critics to think that there lies no other view in the nature and alignment of the Orcs. The mould is cast and set and hence the perception that The LOTR is nothing more than a story of good and evil, black and white. In the Orcs, Tolkien portrays the complexity of evil that goes beyond mere comparison or contrast with the elves. Our understanding of evil is in fact challenged when Tolkien shows that evil can exist in many ‘shades’, and the race of

the Orcs is a perfect example where such complexities truly show the many facets of evil. To understand such complexities, it is helpful to draw on the idea of Manichaeism and Boethianism for a deeper insight into the nature of the Orcs.

### **1.5 Manichaean and Boethian Perspectives**

The idea of Manichaeism or Dualism refers to the theory of two opposing principles that exist independently of each other, e.g. good and evil in all things. Steven Runciman further explains in The Medieval Manichee: 'It taught that not God but Satan, the Demiurge, made the world and its wicked matter. Only spirit was good and came from God' (172). Tolkien, being a devout Catholic would probably have disagreed with the idea of dualism because it is a Christian belief that all manner of existence is derived from the grace of God. Hence evil is not an independent and autonomous force but only a splinter from the true nature of goodness. In opposition to Manichaeism, the Boethian is that: '...there is no such thing as evil: "evil is nothing, is the absence of good, possibly even unappreciated good... Corollaries of this belief are, that evil cannot itself create, that it was not itself created (but sprang from a voluntary exercise of free will by Satan, Adam and Eve, to separate themselves from God)...'(Shippey The Road to Middle-earth 109). In relation to this, I would like to bring in Shippey's analysis of the two concepts of evil in The LOTR. In his view, Tolkien's presentation of evil is convincing and captivating because Tolkien portrays the nature of evil alternately between the Manichaeism (or Dualism) and Boethian perspectives. Tolkien incorporates the two views as a sort of an answer to the nature of evil, which is ambivalent and in a way, multidimensional and complex. The Manichaean view also states that '...the world is a battlefield, between the

powers of Good and Evil, equal and opposite—so that, one might say, there is no real difference between them and it is a matter of chance which side one happens to choose’ (Shippey, Tolkien: Author of the Century 134). Evil is then made out to be an independent entity, a force of its own while the Boethian perspective is that ‘...there is no such thing as evil. What people identify as evil is only the absence of good...’ (Shippey, Tolkien: Author of the Century 130). We are made to see evil as an internal (Boethian) and external (Manichaeian) force and the ambivalent nature of the Orcs fits perfectly in the Boethian mould, which I shall now explain.

From the nearly thirty types of evil images in the novel, the Orcs are shown to be capable of demonstrating a limited transcendence and this is seen from as many as six conversations that the Orcs share among themselves. It is also worthy to note that only the Orcs, as an evil race, have this many conversations, which reveal much of their character and mindset. In one instance, there is a conversation between two orc-leaders, Shagrat from Cirith Ungol and Gorbag from Minas Morgul. The latter warns Shagrat that although they have Frodo (at this point Sam has taken away the Ring), they have to be careful of another enemy who has wounded Shelob with a magical weapon. While they are ignorant of the identity of Frodo, the Orcs conclude they have bigger problems at hand and the ‘little fellow’ ‘...may have had nothing to do with the real mischief. The big fellow with the sharp sword doesn’t seem to have thought him much anyhow—just let him lying: regular elvish trick’ (The LOTR 722).

Gorbag clearly disapproves of such action, he is ‘...convinced that it is wrong, and contemptible, to abandon your companions. Furthermore it is characteristic of the other side, a “regular elvish trick”, they do it all the time’ (Shippey, Tolkien: Author of the Century 132). While this might reveal a side of the Orcs that is affirmative, Shagrat topples this view by making a joke on ‘old Ufthak’ and their refusal to rescue him from Shelob.

‘D’you remember old Ufthak? We lost him for days. Then we found him in a corner; hanging up he was, but he was wide awake and glaring. How we laughed! She’d forgotten him, maybe, but we didn’t touch him—no good interfering with Her. (The LOTR 723)

On the other hand, from another angle, Shippey comments that the Orcs are connected above all by their ‘orcish humour’, their jokes are more often than not associated with torture and pain and the joy of seeing their victims or comrades suffer. Common orcish words include ‘fun’, ‘sport’, and ‘lads’ that appear to be contrary to the overall nature of the Orcs but in some ways similar to our own scale of humour, as repugnant as that may be.

The Orcs may be well down, or even off, the scale of humorous acceptability, but it is the same scale as our own; and humour is, in conformity with Lewis’ opinion above, a good quality in itself, though like all good qualities it can be perverted. (Shippey 185)

In other examples we see how the 'Orcs in fact put a high theoretical value on mutual trust and loyalty' and 'the orcs recognise the idea of goodness, appreciate humour, value loyalty, trust, group cohesion, and the ideal of a higher cause than themselves, and condemn failings from these ideals in others' (Shippey 186) and this can be shown by the words of Snaga to Shagrat: 'I've fought for the Tower against those stinking Morgul-rats' (The LOTR 885), which shows some form of minimal allegiance to one another. Other examples include the use of the word 'lads' that indicates 'male bonding and good fellowship' (Shippey 186). The Orcs, led by Mauhár, even attempted to rescue some of their comrades from the riders of Rohan and in the chapter entitled 'Helm's Deep', they understood '...the concept of parley...' (Shippey 186) and gave Aragorn a chance to surrender: 'Come down! Come down! They cried. 'If you wish to speak to us, come down! Bring out your king! We are the fighting Uruk-hai!'' (The LOTR 527). Even the last sentence reveals to us their sense of pride, unity, and in some sense bravery because the Orcs are known to be fierce warriors. Foster comments that the Orcs are quite organised at times:

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

(305)

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

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

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

‘It’s going well, they say.’

‘They would,’ grunted Gorbag. ‘We’ll see. But anyway, if it does go well, there should be a lot more room. What d’you say? – if we get a chance, you and me’ll slip off and set up somewhere on our own with a few trusty lads...(The LOTR 720-721)

In the Boethian mould, evil is seen to be ‘...essentially internal, psychological, negative’ (Shippey, The Road to Middle-earth 109). In fact, the Boethian conception of evil also explains how:

Absolute good is possible, in fact actual (God is absolute goodness).

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



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

The complex interlacement of the narrative structure positively generates ironies (and anti-ironies) for the reader, uncertainties and ‘bewilderment’ for the characters. Those uncertainties, about themselves and others, are mirrored by the ambiguous nature of the Ring, part psychic amplifier, part malign power, perhaps internal, perhaps external. I have argued that the work’s “controlling vision of things” is in fact a double vision, between the opinions I label ‘Boethian’ and ‘Manichaeism’; and that both opinions are presented at one time or another with equal force... (Shippey, Tolkien: Author of the Century 157)

## 1.6 The Dependence of Evil

In the case of the Orcs, evil is a component of good but not vice-versa. It is important for us to know that good is a distinct and separate entity by itself just as Ilúvatar existed before everything else was created. It is the foundation of good that evil is dependent upon. Evil cannot exist on its own, just as the existence of the Orcs is related to the coming of the elves, but this does not mean that good shares a reciprocal relationship with evil. Good stands on its own without ever relying on evil in Tolkien's The LOTR.

Nothing is originally evil or, in other words 'Evil is not a thing in itself but a lessening of the Being inherent in the created order' (Kocher 78). Evil is thus not an autonomous force by itself but has its origin in a larger and greater entity, in this case, good. The Orcs were crafted from the fair elves and presently they are the slaves of Sauron but this does not mean they are eternally evil without the ability of demonstrating and achieving some form of transcendence beyond their evil portrayal. As discussed by C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity, the concept of Dualism or Manichaeism is not possible in our worldview today because:

No one "likes badness for its own sake...just because it is bad." They like it because it gives them something, whether that is sensual gratification (in the case of sadists), or something else, "money, or power, or safety." But these latter are all good things in themselves. Wickedness is always, according to Lewis, "the pursuit of some good in the wrong way". But

since “goodness is, so to speak itself” while “badness is only spoiled goodness”, then it follows that the two equal and opposite powers of the Dualist worldview cannot exist. The evil power, the Dark Power in which Lewis firmly believed, must be a mistake, a corruption, not an independent and autonomous force...This opinion is of course very firmly built into Tolkien’s whole mythology.’ (Shippey 185)

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

And there is something more to be said about the parallels between this aspect of the story and Christian theology. We noted before that evil is parasitic upon the good: it has an awful power, it corrupts and destroys, and yet has no true reality of its own. So it is with Tolkien’s depiction of evil. The ring-wraiths represent some of the most horrifyingly evil agencies in literature. They are wraiths, only half-real... Their touch brings a dreadful coldness, like the coldness of Dante’s hell. And yet they are finally insubstantial... Similarly, just as the devils of Christian mythology are fallen angels, so all the creatures of the Dark Lord are hideous parodies of creatures from the true creation: goblins of elves, trolls of those splendid creatures the ents, and so on (p. 507). Evil is the corruption of good, monstrous in power yet essentially parasitic. (Gunton 132-133)

## 1.7 The Predicament of The Orcs

Tom Shippey, in discussing the various characters in Tolkien's The LOTR, observes that the Orcs do not have an inverted morality but a sense of knowing good that is only limited. The Orcs are able to recognise goodness when it benefits them or their race and are able to exhibit positive actions at times but are unable to sustain this till the end because evil, in the Boethian angle, is '...internal, caused by human sin and weaknesses and alienation from God...' (Shippey, Tolkien: Author of the Century 135)

The Orcs recognise the idea of goodness but:

Orcish behaviour, whether in orcs or in humans, has its root not in an inverted morality, which sees bad as good and vice versa, but in a kind of self-centredness that sees indeed what is good—like standing by one's comrades or being loyal to one's mates—but is unable to set one's own behaviour in the right place of this accepted scale. (Shippey 188)

In debating this, one must realise the world of the Orcs is different from the world of the elves, their mortal enemy. The Orcs consider anyone who is against the will of Sauron their adversary as well and their cause to be the one and only undertaking. They obey Sauron primarily out of fear for him. And because Sauron's evil hold on them is so strong, the Orcs are unable to break free from the mental clutches of their Master. The Orcs adhere to self-serving goodness and from the complexities of their creation, splinters of their former self, the elves, remain a part of the Orcs that cannot be erased.

This corruption is evident when Frodo tells Sam as they embark from the Tower of Cirith Ungol.

The Shadow that bred them can only mock, it cannot make: not real things on its own. I don't think it gave life to the orcs, it only *ruined* them and *twisted* them (my emphasis); and if they are to live at all, they have to live like other living creatures. Foul waters and foul meats they'll take, if they can get no better, but not poison. (LOTR 893)

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

Tolkien's universe encompasses an unresolvable tension between two views of evil: one, the Boethian (and Catholic) view that evil is only the absence of good, and the other the pagan (and Manichaeic) view of evil as an active and malign force in the world. The narrative constantly pulls us in both directions: we overhear orcs who wish for creature comforts, who demonstrate a sense of justice (even if self-serving and depraved) and who

long for the war to end; and we also sympathise with the Rohirrim who overtake a party of orcs and slaughter them without mercy. (Hayden)

And as the Orcs are cast in this mould, they remain the 'brutalized infantry' of Sauron who are mockeries of the elves. Their 'bond' only intensifies their mutual hatred for one another. The Orcs cannot be blamed for their predicament because they were 'created' to be considered always a lesser and degenerate race, living a fearful existence according to the will of the Shadow that has 'ruined' and 'twisted them'. To be living like 'other living creatures' will be indeed hard for the Orcs as they are caught between battling the better version of themselves (the elves) and handling a tyrannical and monstrous embodiment of evil in the shape of Sauron whom they fear and hate. The Orcs are then creatures of circumstances that are manipulated by Sauron for his own gain at the expense of the Orcs themselves.

It is interesting to note that to an extent, Tolkien did not regard Orcs as evil in their own right, but only as tools of Melkor and Sauron. He wrote once that 'we were all orcs in the Great War' indicating perhaps that an orc for him was not inherent-build-up of personality, but rather a state of mind bound upon destruction. ([Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopaedia](#))

In addition, Joseph Pearce, in his book [Tolkien: Man and Myth](#) notes that 'The orcs, therefore are seen by Tolkien as victims of the Fall, as is Man, with the difference that their corruption of the Orcs by Tolkien's Satan was much worse than that of Man'

(95). Thus, the corruption of the Orcs has relegated them to be killing machines of Sauron that only widens the antithesis between Orcs and elves. Hence, the use of contrasts by Tolkien has the effect of putting the race of the Orcs forever in the shadow of darkness, to be always a foil to the greater elves. The elves then seem to be made the most perfect and noble race of Middle-earth, an almost flawless race blessed by Ilúvatar himself. Perhaps this is Tolkien's intention, to contrast the Orcs to the elves and in doing so, to highlight the chosen race of Middle-earth. The Orcs must be made to be persistently evil for the sake of the elves and this is why the Orcs can only exhibit limited affirmative values that are not sustainable to the end. Tolkien has given the Orcs some 'space'; he has not permanently portrayed the Orcs as an absolutely evil race but neither can Tolkien afford to show the Orcs ultimately redeeming themselves. Hence, the Boethian perspective is utilized to demonstrate a slight blurring in the characteristic of the Orcs. To show a total transcendence in the Orcs would be impossible. This serves to pinpoint the importance of the Orcs as a means by which Tolkien uses as a foil to the Elves. With this comes some form of pity for the Orcs because they are the most miserable race of all of Middle-earth. Though they are merely slaves, one cannot help but have compassion for the Orcs because of their plight, as Paul Kocher observes:

The poor brutes are so plainly the toys of a mightier will than theirs. They have been conditioned to will whatever Sauron wills. 'And for me', exclaims Gandalf, 'I pity even his slaves'. Aragorn at Helm's Deep includes them in his warning against the Fangorn huorns, which are marching to crush them, but the orcs do not listen. Never in Tolkien's tale

are any orcs redeemed, but it would go against the grain of the whole to dismiss them as ultimately irredeemable. (71)

What I am advocating is not that the Orcs are good (a word that by now should be considered subjective in its meaning) but that we should view them in a holistic perspective, one that encourages the view of evil in a broader perspective and not something that is finite, pure, and unadulterated in its form. Both the Orcs and the elves could then be possibly described as 'two sides of the same coin' in terms of their origin, troubled history and animosity. Thus the race of the Orcs, as the most common denominator of evil in The LOTR from the time of the Valars to the Battle of Pelenor Fields, share the same source of existence with the elves. Just as the latter's existence represents the forces of good in its most ethereal design, the Orcs represent the existence of evil in its most basic and common form. It acts as a counter-balance to maintain the equilibrium of the plot and as a possible technique whereby the protagonist of the story is not an elf warrior or a powerful wizard cum king but a three-foot high halfling race called the Hobbits. The Orcs then provide the necessary *rites de passage* for the character of Frodo Baggins to emerge as the eventual quest hero of the tale. Besides this, Tolkien must maintain the consistent existence of both images of good and evil, (the elves and the Orcs) forever pitting them in never-ending battles with tragedies for the elves and, finally, with no race getting the upper hand until the stalemate is broken by Sauron's foolishness in not guarding the borders of Mordor. Herein lies the challenge for Tolkien to portray the triumph of good over evil as 'historically possible, not a daydream' (Rosebury 31).



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

### **1.8 Conclusion**

Tolkien's Orcs appear to be the most common image of evil in all his major works, they seem to rank low in terms of importance and intelligence but their function, organisation, versatility, and commitment are highly commendable for a race that is ignored by many. Their involvement in every single battle from the beginning heralds their ever-increasing importance and also as Tolkien's method of maintaining a vast, consistent, well-wrought Middle-earth mythology. This is achieved by using tightly woven plots with uniform characters like the Orcs. The use of such an image of evil guarantees the consistency of conflict, evil, plot, and character build-up, and not merely a means to provide 'a continual supply of enemies' (Shippey, Road to Middle-earth 174) to the saga. Simple and downtrodden they may; but the Orcs are symbolic of a race that is part of the fabric of Middle-earth. Theirs is a secondary and nebulous existence that is of primary importance in showing how the generic image of the Orcs is well established

among the various other images of evil to support the overall structure of the saga. The existence of the Orcs is essential to the entire saga; they are not a separate entity but very much dependent on the forces of good, in this case the elves. I hope that this chapter has also proven the importance of the Orcs in redirecting our focus onto the elves as the standard bearer of goodness; a race so pure and good that perhaps it is Tolkien's intention for the rest of the races of Middle-earth to emulate the elves. The Orcs are then made to be intrinsically complex characters, persistently evil to a certain extent with a hint of consciousness and the capability to comprehend good. They have the ability to recognise and demonstrate affirmative actions, a temporary transcendence, though not sustained to the end, speaks well of their complexity and involvement as a foil to the elves. In them we see a race torn apart with splinters of past consciousness, the present Boethian struggle, and multiple binaries that shape the Orcs as a race worthy to be researched in the space granted to us by Tolkien's The LOTR.