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The Hobbit's Middle-earth: An Unrealistic World with Realistic Ecological Relationships

May the wind under your wings bear you where the sun sails and the moon walks
-Gandalf, pg. 113

Fantasy literature creates a variety of different opinions—some positive, some negative. It has been deemed as unrealistic genre, and therefore useless, non-educational, and unsophisticated. It has also been revered as creative, inspiring, and pleasurable. All opinions aside, Fantasy Literature, no matter how “unrealistic” it may seem, is rooted in realistic emotions, beliefs, and habits. It is because of this that readers can relate to the story in the first place, which, in turn, draws the audience even further in to mystical lands, such as J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth in *The Hobbit*. Within a made-up world created entirely in Tolkien's mind, there are examples of Tolkien's real life opinions of nature, and how certain species interact with it. The relationship between characters such as goblins, Bilbo the Hobbit, the Elves, and the Dwarves, and the environment in which they live in, can easily be correlated with the differing categories of environmentally aware and unaware people on Earth. It is in the contrasting treatment of nature between characters such as Bilbo, and the destructive treatment that we see in less favored characters such as the goblins, that relays Tolkien's love and appreciation for the natural world.

Goblins are, to put it simply, “the bad guys.” They are destructive, ungraceful in the sense that they are constantly stumbling and ripping through the forest and tunnels with no respect for their surroundings. It is in chapter four, when Bilbo is kidnapped by the goblins, that

they are first described: “Now Goblins are cruel, wicked, and bad-hearted... Instruments of torture, they make very well... They hated everybody and everything, and particularly the orderly and prosperous” (62). To match their evil tendencies, Goblins trek about through the forest in ways that do not express any respect or appreciation for the environment they walking through. After kidnapping Bilbo, “The Goblins began to sing, or croak, keeping time with the flap of their flat feet on the stone, shaking their prisoners as well” (60). Everything about the existence of the goblins is destructive, and Tolkien interweaves this terrible sense of being with unappreciative acts toward nature. The Goblins could be drawn parallel, perhaps, to natural destruction today via explosives and clear cuts that leave their remains untidily strewn about the forest floor.

Another species that is portrayed as more respectful than the Goblins, but less nature-conscious than characters such as Bilbo and the Elves, are the Dwarves. The Dwarves, in my opinion, draw a close comparison to a large population of humans today. Dwarves use nature for many of their hobbies and professions, such as mining for gold, blacksmiths, and stonework. They are somewhat destructive in nature, but not with malicious intent, like the goblins. The Dwarves, rather, are resourceful—whatever they take, they use it for a purpose:

*The dwarves of yore made mighty spells,
While hammers fell like ringing bells
In places deep, where dark things sleep,
In hollow halls beneath the fells...*

*Goblets they carved there for themselves
And harps of gold; where no man delves
There lay they long, and many a song
Was sung unheard by men or elves (14-15).*

Dwarves also have a somewhat weak relationship with other species in nature. They do not get along with goblins (who can blame them?), but they also are easily annoyed by Elves, and even

thought Bilbo to be useless at the start of their journey. Dwarves think highly of themselves, and consider themselves superior to other species—just as humans are commonly accused of doing: “Dwarves don’t get on well with them. Even decent enough dwarves like Thorin and his friends think them foolish (which is a very foolish thing to think), or get annoyed with them” (49). The tendency to clash with their environment, as well as with other species within that environment, shows a strong resemblance to a large percentage of the human population.

Last, but certainly not least, are Bilbo and the Elves. The Hobbits and the Elves have a special relationship with nature—the most respectful, and the strongest. Where Dwarves need certain aspects of nature to aid their existence, it is almost as if nature is intertwined in the existence of Hobbits and Elves. It *is* their existence, and what shapes many of their actions, capabilities, and emotions. There are many instances in *The Hobbit* where Bilbo’s capabilities are highlighted—even though his Dwarf peers often doubt him. One of Bilbo’s strongest traits is his ability to navigate nature: “Hobbits are not quite like ordinary people... They do not easily lose their sense of direction underground... Also they can move very quietly, and hide easily, and recover wonderfully from falls and bruises” (70). These agile abilities hint at a strong understanding of his surroundings, and the world in which he lives in. Perhaps this is also why Hobbits are revered as wise—wise in their actions, wise in their thoughts. In Tolkien’s description of Elves, he emphasizes the synchronization of the Elves movements with the flow of the water: “Elves know a lot and are wondrous folk for news, and know what is going on among the people of the land, as quick as water flows, or quicker” (50). Not only is their sophisticated connection with nature highlighted here, but with other species. They are the know-all, understand-all element of Middle-earth, and this power is accentuated with their strong co-existence. Elves and Hobbits relate to the smallest portions of human beings today, in my

opinion—being those that have inexplicably close relationships with nature and the world surrounding them. Fortune Tellers, Druids, or Native Americans are all examples of people that consider nature something they are, instead of something they live within.

In *The Hobbit* we have the complete destruction of the Goblins, we have utilization of natural materials by the Dwarves, and we have an interdependent existence, that is sometimes difficult to fully understand, by the Hobbits and Elves. All of these creatures are elements of fantasy—they are not real. This being said, their actions show a strong correlation to different types of human beings in everyday life. Tolkien wrote beautifully interesting fantasy, and although fantasy as a genre is often criticized, I think the critics are overlooking something: Fantasy can be realistically analyzed just as any other genre of literature. There are still themes and symbols that connect to human nature, and all the sub categories within it.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Hobbit*. New York: Ballantine, 1997. Print.