Othering and Diversity in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy

A Positive Presentation of Difference

"Othering" och mångfald i J.R.R. Tolkienens *Sagan om ringen* trilogi
En positiv presentation av olikhet

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Abstract

The Lord of the Rings trilogy is greatly diverse in species, races, and ethnicities which is a fact that over the decades has engendered great scholarly discussions about hidden racism in the literary work. Therefore, an analysis of intercultural matters and encounters realized throughout the story is relevant for detecting a possible racist ideology. By applying the postcolonial concept “Othering,” which is an act of differentiation, this essay analyzes racist instances in the story, and the result of or opposition to those, in order to indicate the presence of an anti-Othering ideology in the trilogy. The analysis is conducted through discussion of Othering of other species/races/ethnicities caused by blind trust in one’s own group, Othering inside one’s own group, Othering of other species/races/ethnicities, and discussion about instances of multicultural acceptance. Considering Tolkien’s relationship to nature, this discussion also extends to Othering of nature. Consequently, this essay concludes how The Lord of the Rings trilogy arguably is against Othering since the story generally presents the act as negative to others, oneself, and/or one’s beloved as well as contains instances which simply convey a positive view of multiculturalism.

Sagan om ringen trilogin är väldigt mångfaldig i arter, raser och etniciteter vilket genom årtionden har genererat storskaliga akademiska diskussioner om förekomsten av en dold rasism i det litterära verket. Därmed är en analys av de interkulturella angelägenheter och möten som tar plats under berättelsens gång relevant för att upptäcka en möjlig rasistisk ideologi. Genom att applicera det postkoloniala konceptet ”Othering”, vilket är en differentieringsakt, analyserar denna uppsats rasistiska instanser i berättelsen och resultatet av eller oppositionen till dessa för att indikera förekomsten av en motståndsideologi till ”Othering” i trilogin. Analysen genomförs genom diskussioner om ”Othering” av andra arter/raser/etniciteter orsakade av blind tilltro till ens egen grupp, ”Othering” inom ens egen grupp, ”Othering” av andra arter/raser/etniciteter och diskussion om instanser av multikulturell acceptans. Med tanke på Tolkiens relation till naturen sträcker sig även denna diskussion till ”Othering” av naturen. Denna uppsats drar följaktligen slutsatsen att Sagan om ringen trilogin är emot ”Othering” eftersom berättelsen generellt sett presenterar actionen som negativ för andra, en själv och ens älskade, såväl som innehåller instanser som helt enkelt förmedlar en positiv syn på multikulturalism.
J.R.R. Tolkien’s trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (*LotR*) has been praised and criticized ever since it was first published between 1954 and 1955. Even though the story is set in a fantasy world, and the author furthermore has claimed the story to be non-allegorical (Shippey, as cited in Young 354), the trilogy still has engendered great debates about Tolkien’s view on various societal themes. A particularly interesting point of discussion has been, and still is, the presence of a hidden racist ideology. This discussion point is of relevance because the story includes such a wide range of different ethnic groups, races, and species (elves, dwarves, hobbits, wizards, orcs, ents, men, etc.). Many critics have claimed that the trilogy has a hidden racist agenda because the light-skinned characters are favored and presented as “the good guys” while the dark-skinned characters are portrayed as “the bad guys” (Chism, “Racism, Charges of” 558). Others claim that *LotR* includes racism embedded in a hierarchical structure of the species and races, for instance elves are presented as above dwarves, which is a racism independent of skin color (Rusó). Furthermore, some claim that there exists ethnic racism inside of the races, for instance between the two ethnicities Men of Gondor and the Rohirrim (Chism, “Race and Ethnicity” 555). Thus, there supposedly exist many different kinds of racism in the trilogy, all of which can be explained by the concept of Othering.

Othering refers to the tendency to judge others as different from oneself based on race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, class, cultural beliefs, customs, etc.. This act of judgment facilitates the process of understanding one’s own identity and simultaneously creates opportunities for bonding with people who are alike (Tyson 426). The tradition of Othering derives from the European colonial custom of viewing anything different from European characteristics as inferior and possibly threatening to oneself and the group one identifies with (Tyson 401). Therefore, Othering can be perceived as a discriminatory tradition which generates animosity instead of cooperation. When relating Othering to *LotR* one can, as indicated by the above mentioned claims of racism, detect a great many occurrences of the act throughout the story. However, if one is observant, it also appears that the survival of Middle-earth (the world treated in the story) depends on the characters overcoming their prejudices and unreasonable opinions of each other. That is, in order to defeat the evil forces of the story, it seems that the characters need to cooperate instead of Othering each other. It also appears that the well-being of all living things depends on mutual respect. Thus, the trilogy conveys the impression that Tolkien has created a conflict in the story with a purpose of bringing to light the Othering that exists between the story’s people in order to make the characters realize that they cannot stay in their static, xenophobic and/or proud way of thinking forever if they want success and happiness in life. Therefore, this essay
argues that the LotR trilogy is against the act of Othering as it demonstrates the adverse effects of the act as well as conveys a positive attitude toward diversity. The argumentation will be carried out through a further definition of the concept of Othering in order to provide a clearer background for the argumentation, followed by discussions of examples from the trilogy both of Othering and its consequences and of simply anti-Othering indications.

Firstly, then, the characteristics of Othering will be explained in further detail. A psychological explanation for the tendency of Othering can be found in psychoanalyst and cultural theorist Jacques Lacan’s theory of the “Other.”¹ According to Lacan, the Other “is important in defining the identity of the subject” (as cited in Ashcroft et al. 155). That is, we perceive ourselves according to what/who we are not. Next, Lacan states that the Other “designates the other who resembles the self” (as cited in Ashcroft et al. 155). That is, the Other must be similar enough to the observer in order to be recognized as somehow related to him/her, yet different enough to engender in the observer a feeling of the possibility of mastery of the Other, of making the Other fully alike to oneself. This theory explains the tendency to Other since the Othered character can be viewed as similar to the Othering character - for example, both parties look like humans - but different enough for the Othering character to feel the urge to master the Othered character - for example, the Othered character is dark- instead of light-skinned and/or appear more primitive (Ashcroft et al. 155). In the following argumentation, most instances of Othering can be explained by this theory to varying degrees since it can be argued that all creatures of humanlike intelligence in the story are viewed as similar enough to the Othering character.

Secondly, “Orientalism” is a type of Othering which refers to the tendency to contrast the East (Oriental) and the West (Occidental) of our world, and where the former obtains negative connotations (Tyson 401). This contrast is built on Eurocentrism: a belief that European culture (the Occidental) is the standard to be followed since Europeans originally are more developed (realized during the colonial era) and therefore fully human, while other cultures are more primitive and therefore ought to be viewed negatively in comparison (Tyson 400-01). Thus, in order to protect this positive, superior view of Western cultures, Orientalism functions as a way for the West of projecting onto the Eastern cultures “all the negative characteristics it doesn’t want to believe exist among its own people” (Tyson 402). To maintain the Western superiority it is also common to value previous “knowledge” of the Orient over actual (modern) empirical evidence and to view Oriental culture as static.

¹ Lacan names two versions of the Other, but this essay will focus on the one most relevant for the argumentation.
(Said 300-01). In other words, the Oriental characteristics are invented by the Western cultures, providing a stereotypical and often untrue representation of the Oriental peoples; thus, the characteristics say more about Western power than of the actual Oriental (Said, as cited in Ashcroft et al. 153).

Lastly, Othering can take many forms. The concept “Worlding” refers to the tendency of colonizers to impose their presence on, and power over, the colonized by not recognizing the colonized’s territory as part of the world until it is under the colonizers’ domain. Discourse is a power tool used by the colonizers to remap and rename the colonized people’s territory since naming something equals knowledge of it which in turn enables control of it. However, Worlding can also be done in more discrete ways. One way is for the colonizer to simply be in the colonized area. This way the colonizer forces the colonized people to acknowledge his/her dominance and that their land is no longer theirs (Spivak, as cited in Ashcroft et al. 226). Connection to this type of Othering will be made as well in this essay.

The first thematic argument to support the thesis that the trilogy opposes Othering is through its negative representation of the type of Othering caused by blind trust in one’s own species or ethnic/racial group. Christine Chism points out that the trilogy is not (ethnic) racist because “good” and “evil” in LotR cannot be generalized as to be inherent in certain species or races. The reason, she argues, is that there are bad people even among the preferred races of men in the story (“Racism, Charges of” 558). The relevance of this argument is elucidated in the following example from The Two Towers (TT). Upon reaching the kingdom of Rohan, home to the Rohirrim which can be seen as one of the preferred races of men, the wizard Gandalf is not welcome. The reason for the wizard’s cold reception is that he is perceived as the Other, which in this case implies a man of strange and mighty powers and bringer of woe (Tolkien, TT 669). The king has adopted this Othering view by choosing to trust the xenophobic and derogatory words of his advisor Gríma Wormtongue. That is, the king is committing Othering due to trust in the excellence of his own people without consideration of the possibility of them having individual character flaws that could affect their behavior. Gríma will prove to be a traitor who almost causes the destruction of the kingdom, as later clarified by the king: “‘Your leechcraft ere long would have had me walking on all fours like a beast’” (Tolkien, TT 678). He thus embodies an example of evil among the preferred races of men, and as such proves the negative effects of blind trust in one’s own species or ethnic/racial group. The damaging effect that the Othering of other races/species caused by this trust could have had is presented by the fact that Gandalf, who is
of another species, ends up being the savior of the kingdom. With the help of magic Gandalf returns the king to a clear state of mind which makes the king realize the evil of Gríma and the need of preparing the kingdom for war (Tolkien, *TT* 673-75). In other words, the kingdom could have been ruined without Gandalf’s help, a help which might not have been offered due to the king’s Othering treatment of the wizard. The reason why it might not have been offered is that, as mentioned before, Othering generally generates animosity, not cooperation. Hence, this intercultural encounter illustrates how dangerous Othering based on an unquestioned positive view of one’s own species or racial/ethnic group can be.

Another example of the negative possibilities of trusting blindly in one’s own group, or a group that is perceived as very similar, is the White Council’s trust in Saruman. The White Council is a counterforce to Sauron and consists of mighty elves and wizards. As such it is a group consisting of what is perceived as the wisest among the humanoid beings of Middle-earth. They are considered the wisest firstly because the elves bear the closest physical and mental resemblance to the Valar, the creators of Arda (the world Middle-earth is part of), and have existed the longest of all humanoid creatures and thus have most experience (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 44). Secondly, the wizards are believed to be emissaries of the Valar in the West having come to help all creatures of Middle-earth become more valiant and defeat Sauron; hence, the wizards possess great powers and intelligence (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 326). Consequently, the composition of the White Council gives an indication of Othering since it conveys that these groups of people only consider their two species intelligent and mentally strong enough - superior to the other humanoid species - to be part of the council, even though the matter of defeating Sauron concerns all species of Middle-earth. As a result of the Council’s high appreciation of themselves, they trust blindly in each other, as implied by the fact that Gandalf the Wizard went directly to see Saruman the Wizard when he was called for, even though for long he had felt that something was amiss regarding Saruman, as indicated in *The Fellowship of the Ring* (FR): “‘I could only watch and wait. I might perhaps have consulted Saruman the White, but something always held me back’” (Tolkien, *FR* 63). Once again, though, Chism’s argument about “good” and “evil” not being inherent in certain species or races is applicable since this blind trust proves ill-founded. Saruman has sided with Sauron and imprisons Gandalf. Consequently, as the hobbits are then put in danger by Gandalf’s absence, so is the entire realm of Middle-earth since Frodo carries the One Ring with him. Hence, Saruman’s betrayal makes the council realize that not even the strongest, allegedly superior, people are without fault:
“We cannot use the Ruling Ring. That we now know too well . . . Its strength, Boromir, is too great for anyone to wield at will, save only those who have already a great power of their own. But for them it holds an even deadlier peril. The very desire of it corrupts the heart. Consider Saruman . . .” (Tolkien, FR 348)

This realization, and the consequences of the blind trust described, can thus be said to convey the message that Othering by believing one’s own group to be superior to other groups, and therefore trust blindly in one’s own group, can be very dangerous.

Contrary to the negative possibilities of Othering by trusting blindly in one’s own species, race or ethnicity, the story also indicates the importance of abstaining from Othering inside one’s own group. The concepts of nation and nationalism can often be seen as interrelated with Othering. Deciding upon what defines a certain nation, what core characteristics and traditions define its people, is often done by the dominant group of that nation. Thus, the diversity that often exists within a nation is overlooked. Many ethnic groups are therefore marginalized, expected to simply conform to the decided nation characteristics in order to qualify for being called the nation’s “people”. Consequently, the concept of nation is generally connected to domination and exclusion (Ashcroft et al. 135-36), and its connection to Othering is clear since excluding some groups of people when defining a nation equals considering them and their characteristics and traditions inferior. This belief in turn indicates that these people should try to become more alike to the superior people. When relating the problem of nation definition to the Shire in LotR, its Othering connotations become evident. Jane Chance states that “the Shire exudes a pastoral innocence that masks the seeds of its potential destruction” (19). She claims that the reader is somewhat deluded by the jolly presentation of the Shire and that there is not actually any big difference between hobbits and the rest of the population of Middle-earth since the hobbits are just as liable to judgmental acts and desire for power as the rest. Chance argues that clearly pointing out differences between hobbits, especially with the aid of powerful words, is one typical way of the hobbits to obtain or divest power (26). Chance’s observation accords with the problem of nation definition since both point to the importance of power within a nation and the presence of Othering within what is considered to be the same people. That is, the hobbits have created their nation, the Shire, to represent the hobbits to the outer world. With this nation they have naturally created a definition of what it means to be of the Shire-people, to be a true hobbit.

However, the hobbits are not all alike since they originally derive from different breeds, each with their respective values and customs (Tolkien, FR 4). Therefore, by choice of
the most powerful of the Shire hobbits, the definition of being a true hobbit has come to exclude some hobbit characteristics of the less influential hobbits. That is, some hobbits are being Othered by being considered similar to the powerful hobbits, but different enough as not to have their characteristics included in the “true hobbit” definition. For instance, the hobbits of Hobbiton Other the hobbits of Buckland by not considering them to be “hobbitlike” because the Bucklanders do not fear the water and because they have chosen to live close to the mystical outside world in living next to the Old Forest: “‘You’re right, Dad!’ said the Gaffer. ‘Not that the Brandybucks of Buckland live in the Old Forest; but they’re a queer breed, seemingly. They fool about with boats on that big river - and that isn’t natural. . . .’” (Tolkien, FR 29). The Baggins’ who live in Hobbiton are also the subject of Othering because they are not considered “hobbitlike” since they have continuous contact with the outside world: “‘And look at the outlandish folk that visit him: dwarves coming at night, and that old wandering conjuror, Gandalf, and all. You can say what you like, Gaffer, but Bag End’s a queer place, and its folk are queerer’” (Tolkien, FR 31). In other words, these powerful choices of wording - “queer” and “not natural” - indicate that these groups of hobbits do not qualify for the definition of what a true hobbit is. The Othering parties thus assert their own power and divest the power of the Bucklander and Baggins’ through condescension. This presence of Othering among the hobbits might seem to aid the argument that the whole LotR trilogy is permeated with (ethnic) racism, and that it thus approves of Othering since the story presents the hobbits’ Othering as a natural part of daily life and society. However, considering how well received the four hobbits of the fellowship company are when they return to the Shire, enabling the inhabitants to liberate their country from the ruffians’ colonization, one can perceive a different approach to Othering. Upon their return, the four hobbits, which include the already Othered Frodo Baggins and Merry Brandybuck, have become even more estranged from the Shire hobbits. For example, they have a new clothing fashion, and Merry and Pippin have made a considerable growth spurt. Nevertheless, now they are praised for their difference. This becomes evident for instance when the four hobbits, all dressed up in the war gear from their journey (which indicates their combat skills), have awoken the whole village and gathered them for war: “Sam found Frodo and his friends by the fire talking to old Tom Cotton, while an admiring crowd of Bywater folk stood round and stared” (Tolkien, RK 1320, my emphasis). In other words, instead of appraising Frodo and Merry as negatively queer as the community normally would have done, they now admire them and trust their guidance. If the community still would have Othered the two hobbits by considering them inferior, they would have risked losing the only help available in liberating their home. Hence,
this example is anti-Othering because it provides evidence of the importance of viewing difference as something positive and as something that should be subject to inclusion.

A second thematic indicator of the anti-Othering agenda of the trilogy is apparent in the Othering of other species, races or ethnicities. As Chism explains, Tolkien’s use of different species, races and ethnicities was a way for him “to explore both the exhilaration of understanding across cultural difference and the need for mutual respect” (“Race and Ethnicity” 556). This claim can be proved accurate by the following example. One of the ethnicities of men, the Rohirrim, have long hunted the Woses, also called the Wild Men of the Woods, because they believe them to be primitive and dangerous: “‘They still haunt Drúadan Forest, it is said. Remnants of an older time they be, living few and secretly, wild and wary as the beasts’” (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1087). However, had the Rohirrim not put aside their Othering view and accepted the Woses as guides in *The Return of the King* (*RK*), the Rohirrim would have perished before being able to aid their neighboring kingdom, Gondor, in the war. In turn, this loss of aid would have resulted in the victory of evil: “‘If the Stone-city falls, then we shall have no returning’” (Tolkien, *RK* 1090). In other words, the trilogy can be interpreted as not favoring Othering because, as this example shows, Tolkien’s purpose might have been to indicate the possible positive effects of intercultural cooperation.

Another indication that the trilogy is against Othering of other species, ethnicities and races can be found in Saruman and the ruffians’ colonization of the Shire. These people believe themselves to be superior to the hobbits and therefore worthy of colonizing them. This Othering view becomes evident in Saruman’s way to address the hobbits as “my urchins” (Tolkien, *RK* 1288), and in the following utterance: “‘This country wants waking up and setting to rights,’ said the ruffian . . . You need a bigger Boss. And you’ll get one before the year is out, if there’s any more trouble. Then you’ll learn a thing or two, you little rat-folk’” (Tolkien, *RK* 1315). The ruffians furthermore Other the hobbits through Worlding, that is, by imposing their presence on the hobbits and making it obvious that they rule the Shire now: “But it’s these Men, Sam, the Chief’s Men. He sends them round everywhere, and if any of us small folk stand up for our rights, they drag him off to the Lockholes” (Tolkien, *RK* 1311-12). However, Tolkien has presented this Othering treatment negatively since, ultimately, the ruffians are chased out of the Shire, hurt, or killed when the hobbits fight back with the aid of the newly returned combat competent hobbits from the fellowship (Tolkien, *RK* 1328-29). Moreover, Saruman (once again) loses his power as the hobbits drive him out of the Shire (Tolkien, *RK* 1334). Thus, through this colonizing example Othering is presented as harmful to both others and oneself.
Connected to Saruman and a negative view of Othering other species, races, and ethnicities is the result of Saruman’s Othering of Men. Astrid Winegar claims that “Tolkien’s portrayal of Saruman as an Orientalist imperialist academic is scathing” (7). The argument that Tolkien intended to negatively portray Saruman and his Othering behavior can be supported if one considers Saruman’s fate. Saruman clearly believes himself to be superior to Men as indicated when trying to convince Gandalf to side with him instead of associating with the King of Rohan: “But for you Gandalf! For you at least I am grieved, feeling for your shame. How comes it that you can endure such company?” (Tolkien, TT 758), and shortly after: “. . . you return to me in the company of the violent and the ignorant. . . . Are we not both members of a high and ancient order, most excellent in Middle-earth? . . . Let us understand one another, and dismiss from thought these lesser folk!” (Tolkien, TT 758). This Othering view is especially evident in his treatment of his servant Gríma Wormtongue, whom he treats as a slave even though Gríma originally chose to aid Saruman as a free man: “Get up, you idiot!” he shouted to the other beggar, who had sat down on the ground; and he struck him with his staff. . . . Get on, or I’ll give you no crust for your supper!” (Tolkien, RK 1288). However, firstly Saruman is punished for his Othering view of Men when his orc army is obliterated by the Rohirrim, and he thus becomes powerless as his plan to dominate or wipe out the Rohirrim is ruined (Tolkien, TT 707, 760). Secondly, Saruman is punished for his derogatory treatment as Gríma cuts his throat which ultimately ends his life (Tolkien, RK 1335). In other words, Saruman’s fate caused by his Othering treatment can arguably be interpreted as an anti-Othering message of the trilogy.

The trilogy also indicates the negative possibilities of Othering other species, races, and ethnicities by Tolkien’s choice of enemy forces. Many who claim that LotR is racist point to the fact that most of the allies of Sauron, the enemy, are of exotic appearance compared to the western look. In other words, many critics claim that Tolkien portrays non-westerners as evil (Chism, “Race and Ethnicity” 555) which is a typical Orientalist description. However, Chism argues that the enemies are not presented as intrinsically evil, but rather their choice of allegiance to Sauron is due to the historic feuds that exist between the Southrons and the Corsairs of Umbar and the Men of Gondor. That is, the kingdom of Gondor has previously carried out attempts to take over the Southrons and Corsairs of Umbar’s kingdoms, which has generated animosity (Chism, “Race and Ethnicity” 556). These historic feuds can be seen as clear products of Orientalism (although in this story the Oriental includes the people of the far south as well). First, typical negative characteristics often projected onto Eastern cultures are “cruel, sneaky, evil, cunning, dishonest . . . ” (Tyson 402).
Next, one can look at the way the general of Gondor (Western culture), Faramir, describes different ethnicities of Men: “And they made a truce with the proud peoples of the North, who often had assailed us, men of fierce valour, but our kin from afar off, unlike the wild Easterlings or the cruel Haradrim” (Tolkien, *TT* 886). This presentation makes the Orientalist view evident since Faramir describes the peoples from the east (Easterlings) and far south (Haradrim) as wild and cruel - negative characteristics - while the people from the north, who also have committed evil acts towards the Gondorians, are described with a more positive wording - fierce valour - simply because they originate from the same western/northern culture as the Gondorians. Tyson explains that the negative Oriental characteristics are consciously or unconsciously created by the West to “justify any acts of military or economic aggression it has found advantageous” (402). Thus, the historical feuds in the story between Gondor and the Southrons (Haradrim with another name) and the Corsairs of Umbar can be explained as the people of the West having created presentations of themselves as more sophisticated humans than the peoples of the East/South in order to have had a valid argument for expanding the western territory. Consequently, the result of Gondor’s Orientalism is to have added more enemies to defeat in the war against Sauron, which clearly presents evidence of the harmfulness of Othing. Thus, this example strengthens the argument that *LotR* is against Othing.

A fifth argument about the trilogy’s negative view of Othing other species, races, and ethnicities is found in the presentation of the fellowship hobbits. As hobbits are generally a peaceful race, devoted to pleasure and eating, interested in and understanding only simple matters and unconcerned about the matters of the big world (Tolkien, *FR* 1-2), they are somewhat devalued by the other species and races of Middle-earth. This Othing view is indicated in many instances, of which three examples here will be mentioned. Firstly, when deciding upon the members of the fellowship, the Elven lord Elrond is skeptical about including any more hobbits than the necessary ring-bearer and his faithful servant. Elrond considers the hobbits to be children who do not understand the dangers of the big world, and he would rather send them back home to the Shire “to do what they could, according to the fashion of their country” (Tolkien, *FR* 359-60). Secondly, Boromir of Gondor’s view of the hobbits as inferior is indicated as he tries to persuade Frodo to bring the One Ring to Gondor. He claims that the hobbits are fools who do not deserve to have the ring, and that it belongs to the line of Númenor (Tolkien, *FR* 520). He also expresses a view of Men as superior through pointing to size: “‘You can say that I was too strong and took it by force. For I am too strong for you, halfling’” (Tolkien, *FR* 521). Thirdly, the King of Rohan indicates that hobbits are
like children due to their size, and only good for entertainment as he makes use of Merry for storytelling (Tolkien, *RK* 1042), but as the king’s swordthain Merry is still denied the opportunity to partake in the battle at Minas Tirith: “And in such a battle as we think to make on the field of Gondor what would you do, Master Meriadoc, swordthain though you be, and greater of heart than of stature” (Tolkien, *RK* 1052). When Merry questions this decision, and the decision that made him a swordthain, the king answers that “I received you for your safe-keeping” (Tolkien, *RK* 1052). This statement proves that although the king cares for the hobbit, he views Merry’s race as children, as inferior to Men. All these Othering instances indicate that the reader should view hobbits as an inferior race and that it is natural to do so.

However, if one turns to cosmopolitanism, another view can be elicited. Cosmopolitanism is a concept which in brief refers to acceptance of difference and recognition of interdependence between different humanoid species and racial and/or ethnical groups, as well as refers to appreciation of difference and promotion of equality (Fine, as cited in Young 351; Lamont and Aksartova, as cited in Young 353). Helen Young argues that *LotR* can be read as a cosmopolitan trilogy because Tolkien presents diversity not only as accepted but as a vital component for the success of the quest (354). This argument appears tenable if one looks at how Tolkien counteracts this initial inferior view of the hobbit race. Despite being depicted as “not-warrior material,” Merry shows great courage by refusing to remain behind and thus ends up saving Éowyn, shield maiden of Rohan, and aiding in the killing of the Black Rider general in Minas Tirith (Tolkien, *RK* 1101-02). Also, Frodo and Sam display the value of the hobbit race as they, with great courage and determination, enters into the land of the enemy, Mordor, and are the ones who ultimately destroy the One Ring. Tolkien thus presents hobbits as the great heroes of the story, and shows that size or habits do not matter in the end, but the heart does. In addition, the hobbits are presented as mentally strong since Frodo does not fall prey to the desire of the One Ring until the very end. Also, Sam, who accompanies Frodo the entire journey and also carries the ring for Frodo when he believes Frodo to be dead, never becomes corrupted by the ring. In contrast, as previously mentioned, Boromir tries to take the ring from Frodo during their journey in the fellowship. This fact once again proves that one should not underestimate - consider inferior - another species or race based on simple facts. In conclusion, all these achievements of the hobbits prove that hobbits are not an inferior race and that the trilogy can be said to be cosmopolitan - and thus anti-Othering - since toward the end of the story, the other races/species realize the importance of having hobbits in their world:
But on the field where they now stood a great host was drawn up, in ranks and companies glittering in the sun. And as the Hobbits approached swords were unsheathed, and spears were shaken, and horns and trumpets sang, and men cried with many voices and in many tongues:

“Long live the Halflings! Praise them with great praise!” (Tolkien, RK 1248)

A more unusual type of Othering, and a warning about the harmfulness of the act, can be found between humanoid creatures and nature. During the colonial era of our real world, a typical way of justifying exploitation of nature for economic gain was to apply the then newly realized perception of nature as separate from humanity. That is, humanity and nature were no longer viewed as two interconnected forces (Adams 22, 24). Hence, what was inflicted upon nature would supposedly not affect humanity. In *LotR*, Saruman the Wizard possibly adopts this colonial way of thinking in his quest for power since he decides that he has the right to take over and transform the forest surrounding his stronghold Isengard by cutting down the forest trees. Saruman is thus possibly using Othering of nature as a way for his mind to facilitate his greed for power. However, Tolkien, who was a lover of nature and especially trees, detested mankind’s treatment of it (Carpenter and Tolkien 220). In other words, he hated the Othering of nature. Hence, one can interpret the story as Tolkien using sentient trees, Ents, to criticize this Othering of nature since the Ents strike back against Saruman, destroy Isengard, and consequently diminish Saruman’s power (Tolkien, *TT* 760). Chism supports this view as she claims that “Ents and Huorns speak for nature against the depredations of the other races and are a fitting nemesis for the industrialism of Saruman” (“Race and Ethnicity” 556). Winegar also shares this conception as she claims that “With the character of Saruman, Tolkien condemns the wholesale destruction of forests” (7). In other words, one possible interpretation of the conflict between Saruman and the Ents is that Othering of any kind, even of nature, should be refrained from for the sake of the well-being of all living things, including oneself.

Apart from demonstrating or indicating the negative possibilities of Othering, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy also contains parts that simply indicate an anti-Othering agenda. Such an agenda can be seen in the fact that different species develop close relationships. Firstly, apart from the inability to generalize certain species or races as “good” or “evil,” Chism also argues that specific species or race characteristics cannot be determined because each of Tolkien’s species and races include diversity of characteristics. That is, for example all dwarves are not the same, and neither are all hobbits (Chism, “Race and Ethnicity” 555).
Through Tolkien’s enhancement of character individuality the story can be interpreted as indicating that stereotyping a species or race, and consequently Othering everyone of that species or race as different from oneself, is too simplistic. For instance, elves originally Other dwarves by believing them to be an inferior creation which is too materialistic and preoccupied with wealth and insufficiently concerned with nature. This initial view is indicated in the following statement by the elven queen Galadriel when she learns that Gimli the Dwarf does not match their usual description of the dwarves: “‘Hear all ye Elves!’ she cried to those about her. ‘Let none say again that Dwarves are grasping and ungracious!’” (Tolkien, FR 490). As a result of the elves’ initial static view of dwarves as grasping, they mistrust them and have therefore previously treated them badly. In turn, this treatment has caused the dwarves to Other the elves by producing a static view of them as proud, condescending, and lacking empathy toward “lesser species”. This becomes clear when Glóin the Dwarf has difficulty believing that Gollum escaped the elves’ imprisonment because of their over-compassionate treatment of him (Tolkien, FR 332). Hence, as expected, the fellowship companions Legolas the Elf and Gimli the Dwarf dislike each other at the beginning of the story:

“Those were happier days, when there was still close friendship at times between folk of different race, even between Dwarves and Elves.”

“It was not the fault of the Dwarves that the friendship waned,” said Gimli.

“I have not heard that it was the fault of the Elves,” said Legolas. (Tolkien, FR 395)

As can be seen, an Othering view based on old data and applied to all individuals of a species is readily adopted by the two species, and it appears that the two fellowship companions will continue to promote this behavior throughout the story.

However, as the story progresses Tolkien slowly puts an end to the species’ Othering behavior as the two companions come to realize that they are more similar than they initially believed. For instance, upon entering the elven kingdom of Lothlórien, Gimli has to be blindfolded due to the mentioned lack of trust from the elves’ side. When he refuses, as usual feeling mistreated without a legitimate reason, Legolas accuses Gimli of being annoyingly stubborn and proud. On the other hand, when suggested that Legolas be blindfolded as well as a sign of companionship, Legolas strongly objects and thus creates an opportunity for the accusation to be returned (Tolkien, FR 452-53). Next, upon meeting the King and Queen of Lothlórien, Gimli demonstrates further similarities between himself and
Legolas as well as exemplifies the individuality that exists among dwarves when he shows a
greater appreciation of nature (Lothlórien) and an elf (the queen) than of his ancestral home
and jewels, which are most dear to the materialistic dwarf (Tolkien, FR 463-64). This
individuality among dwarves, and newly discovered similarities between the two companions,
might begin to be perceivable to Legolas and Gimli during their stay in Lothlórien since they
begin to spend more and more time together (Tolkien, FR 467). Consequently, upon leaving
the kingdom, they have come to develop a close friendship: “. . . and in the third [boat] were
Legolas and Gimli, who had now become fast friends” (Tolkien, FR 484). Gimli’s static view
of the elves presumably also slowly changes as he learns about their goodwill when they
harbor and equip the fellowship companions for their continued journey. Additionally, he
presumably realizes their loyalty when Legolas makes the rash decision to defend Gimli’s
head by threatening a Rider of Rohan even though the companions are outnumbered (Tolkien,
TT 563).

Legolas and Gimli’s relationship thus concurs with Winegar’s claim that
Tolkien is an anti-Orientalist: even though parts of his story might present Orientalist themes,
his characters learn about each other empirically” (1). As seen in this relationship example, the
two species originally express Orientalist views as they believe each other to be static, and
they base their beliefs on non-modern, non-empirical data. However, Tolkien then opposes
these Orientalist preferences when Gimli and Legolas are forced together in the quest of the
fellowship. As the story progresses the elves (Legolas and the elves of Lothlórien) and the
dwarf have to learn about each other empirically which results in a realization about their
ignorance of each other’s species. A further example of this healthy interspecies friendship
and Tolkien’s encouragement of empirical learning is Legolas and Gimli’s agreement to visit
the caves of Helm’s Deep and Fangorn forest together. Elves detest caves due to their lack of
life and the feeling of entrapment (Tolkien, TT 713), and dwarves fear Fangorn forest for its
mystical power and suspected ill will toward dwarves, ax-bearers as they are (Tolkien, TT
713). Thus, Legolas and Gimli’s agreement signifies willingness to learn more about the
interests and traditions of each other’s species as well as a view on difference as something
acceptable and mind-broadening rather than something negative. Their interspecies friendship
even develops to the stage where Legolas defends Gimli to the entmaster Treebeard who, as
the elves previously had done, Others Gimli for being a dwarf and therefore is skeptical of
allowing him to enter Fangorn forest (Tolkien, TT 764). That is, Treebeard considers dwarves
as static and does not consider the possibility of behavioral change over time or individuality
inside of the species. However, thanks to Legolas’ enlightening accounts of Gimli’s deeds and character, an end is put to Treebeard’s Othering view. A final, powerful, demonstration of how an initially Othering relationship turns into deep friendship is given when Gimli, in response to Legolas’ pondering on leaving Middle-earth, states about the elves: “...if all the fair folk take to the Havens, it will be a duller world for those who are doomed to stay” (Tolkien, RK 1143). In conclusion, Winegar’s observation that “[a]t its core, the trilogy is about healing and understanding the relationships between widely disparate peoples” (9) is demonstrated especially in the relationship between Legolas and Gimli, a relationship which can be interpreted as having been included in the story for the purpose of providing an anti-Othering argument.

Connected to the view of elves, the trilogy can also be said to be anti-Othering by the reoccurring occasions where the Elves of Lothlórien are defended against Othering views. The Men of Gondor fear the people of Lothlórien (Tolkien, FR 440), as do the Rohirrim (Tolkien, TT 562). They have created a view of these elves as dangerous and untrustworthy since they are somewhat magical creatures, and the view is based on tales. Thus, the Gondorians and the Rohirrim demonstrate Orientalist behavior. However, Tolkien presents these Orientalists as ignorant as he always makes some character rebut these false accusations: “But lore wanes in Gondor, Boromir, if in the city of those who once were wise they now speak evil of Lothlórien” (Tolkien, FR 440), and later: “You speak evil of that which is fair beyond the reach of your thought, and only little wit can excuse you” (Tolkien, TT 562). Moreover, the fact that Galadriel and Lothlórien are defended by Gimli, a dwarf who considering the history of his race should be one of the least appreciative characters of the elves, arguably further strengthens the message that Othering is wrong. In addition to these arguments, an anti-Othering message and a defense of the elves are arguably provided by captain Faramir of Gondor as he admits that Men, him included, often Other the elves without empirical data (Tolkien, TT 888).

Related to the non-empirical view on elves, another example of the ignorance Othering can be based on, and thus an anti-Othering argument, is found in the Rohirrim’s treatment of the Woses. A typical way of colonizers to justify their derogatory treatment of and rule over the colonized, to make their acts appear natural, is to conceive a binary opposition between the colonizers and the colonized. Such binary opposition is often based on concepts like primitivism and/or cannibalism (Ashcroft et al. 155). Accordingly, in the story, the Rohirrim can be perceived as having defended their aggressive treatment of the Woses (hunting them) by Othering them through the binary division of considering the Woses to be
primitive creatures. This view of primitivism is indicated in the following conversation between the Rohirrim and the Woses about the size of the enemy forces (Orcs):

“Very many, more than Horse-men.”
“How do you know that?” said Éomer.

The old man’s flat face and dark eyes showed nothing, but his voice was sullen with displeasure. “Wild Men are wild, free, but not children,” he answered. “I am great headman, Ghân-buri-Ghân. I count many things: stars in sky, leaves on trees, men in the dark. You have a score of scores counted ten times and five. They have more.”

“Alas! he speaks all too shrewdly,” said Théoden. (Tolkien, RK 1089)

According to this conversation, the Rohirrim believed the Woses to be unintelligent, primitive, beastlike creatures. However, by cooperating with the Woses the Rohirrim realize how ignorant they have been when Othering. Thus, this part of the story conveys a subtle ridicule of Othering by showing how wrong one can be in one’s racial prejudices. This ridicule, in turn, strengthens the argument that *LotR* is against Othering.

Next, the trilogy can be interpreted as anti-Othering because the One Ring, which can be seen as a symbol of Othering, is destroyed toward the end of the story. Jane Chance states that the ruler of the Ring allows for cultural diversity in Middle-earth, but only because the ring has the power to subjugate all species and races: collect them all under one darkness that will make them all behave alike, as seen in the inscription on the ring (23):

> “Three Rings for the Elven-kings under the sky,
> Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their halls of stone,
> Nine for Mortal Men doomed to die,
> One for the Dark Lord on his dark throne
> In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.
> One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,
> One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them
> In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.” (Tolkien, FR 66)

In other words, Sauron is driven by Othering when deciding to create the One Ring. He presumably considers himself superior to all other species and races and therefore deserves to dominate them. Chance is of the same opinion when she claims that the quest of the fellowship, the destruction of the ring, signifies rejection of homogeneity and a promotion of
cultural difference (23). That is, the fact that the subjugating One Ring is ultimately
destroyed, and the Othering Sauron is defeated, can be interpreted as an anti-Othering
message in the trilogy.

Yet another way the trilogy proves anti-Othering is by its intercultural
marriages. Straubhaar (102) claims that the Gondorians (one of the ethnicities of men of the
line of Númenor\(^2\)) consider themselves superior to other races/ethnicities of men:

“For so we reckon Men in our lore, calling them the High, or Men of the West, which
were Númenóreans; and the Middle Peoples, Men of the Twilight, such as are the
Rohirrim and their kin that dwell still far in the North; and the Wild, the men of
Darkness.” (Tolkien, TT 887)

This view, combined with an utterance from one of the Rohirrim’s maidens, Éowyn, to
Faramir, captain of Gondor, indicate that the Gondorians have an Othering view of the
Rohirrim: “And would you have your proud folk say of you: ‘There goes a lord who tamed a
wild shieldmaiden of the North! Was there no woman of the race of Númenor to choose?’”
(Tolkien, RK 1264). However, Straubhaar claims that the fact that Faramir asserts that he will
ignore what other people say about his choice to marry a woman of the Rohirrim is Tolkien’s
way of advocating intercultural mixing (103). This argument seems plausible if one also looks
at the following description of Faramir and Éowyn’s union: “And many indeed saw them and
the light that shone about them as they came down from the walls and went hand in hand to
the Houses of Healing” (Tolkien, RK 1264). This scene description can be interpreted as
advocating intercultural mixing since it presents the Rohirrim and Gondorian union with very
positive light imagery. Yet another example of the positive view of intercultural mixing can
be found in the marriage of Aragorn, King of Men, and Arwen, Princess of Elves. The elves
appear to Other men, even of such high status as Aragorn who is a descendant of the
Númenóreans. This Othering becomes apparent when the hobbit Bilbo and Aragorn co-create
a song which Bilbo performs to the elves, and the elves are asked to point out which parts of
the song were composed by whom:

“What!” cried Bilbo. “You can’t tell which parts were mine, and which were the
Dúnadan’s?”

“It is not easy for us to tell the difference between two mortals,” said the Elf.

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\(^2\) The Númenóreans are a bloodline descended from a mix between the Men of the West (outside of Middle-
earth) and the elves. As such the Númenóreans are generally considered higher in status among the
races/ethnicities of Men.
“Nonsense, Lindir,” snorted Bilbo. “If you can’t distinguish between a Man and a Hobbit, your judgement is poorer than I imagined. They’re as different as peas and apples.”

“Maybe. To sheep other sheep no doubt appear different,” laughed Lindir. “Or to shepherds. But Mortals have not been our study. We have other business.” (Tolkien, FR 308)

The fact that the elves compound mortals under a single term indicates Othering tendencies since a typical trait of Othering is that “the people to be othered are homogenized into a collective ‘they’” (Pratt, as cited in Ashcroft et al. 157). Moreover, an Othering tendency can be seen in the fact that the elves are uninterested in mortals, which indicates that they consider mortals to be too simplistic and unrefined to be of interest to their high culture. Nevertheless, at the end of the story the elves are still portrayed as open-minded enough to allow for an intercultural marriage. Straubhaar claims that Tolkien celebrates mixed unions and alliances in his work (116), and this argument can be proved valid by the positive account given of the marriage of Aragorn and Arwen, also called Evenstar3; “‘Now not day only shall be beloved, but night too shall be beautiful and blessed and all its fear pass away!’” (Tolkien, RK 1274). Thus, these examples of intercultural marriage are part of an anti-Othering agenda since they promote union and agreement instead of division.

In conclusion, the LotR trilogy provides evidence of how Othering can pose a threat to other living things. This argument is proved in many instances. Firstly, when Othering through blind trust in one’s own group where a kingdom respectively the ring bearer and thus Middle-earth are put at risk. Secondly, when Othering other species, races, or ethnicities where Woses are hunted, the hobbits are colonized and subjected to harsh treatment, the Rohirrim are attacked by an Orc army, Wormtongue is almost treated as an animal, and the Southrons and Corsairs of Umbar’s kingdoms are attacked. Thirdly, when Othering nature and consequently the forest is diminished. However, above all, it can be argued that the trilogy presents how Othering can pose a threat to oneself and one’s beloved. The validity of this argument lies in the many examples of Othering mentioned in this essay which have, or could have, affected the Othering character(s) negatively. A first example is how Othering through blind trust in one’s own group threatens the King of Rohan’s power (his kingdom) and his subjects, Gandalf is imprisoned, and the White Council’s secrets (power) are revealed. A second example is how Othering inside one’s own group could have

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3 Arwen is called Evenstar since she represents the elves’ closeness to the night and its beauty.
risked the hobbits’ chance of recuperating their home from the colonizers. A third example is how Othering other species, races, or ethnicities risks the life of the Rohirrim and the people of Gondor, the ruffians lose their power or their lives, Saruman loses his power and ultimately his life, and the Gondorians obtain more enemies in the war (the Southrons etc.). Lastly, a fourth example is how Othering of nature diminishes Saruman’s power. In addition to all these apparent negative examples of Othering, the trilogy also provides examples of an anti-Othering agenda through pointing to the willingness to, and positive effects of, accepting and appreciating difference. For instance, the trilogy makes one of the least imposing, and thus least valued, races (hobbits) the heroes of the story; it presents heart-warming interracial and interspecies friendships and marriages; it indicates the risk of ignorant behavior and thinking that Othering presents; and, lastly, it presents how the desire for power is less strong than the desire for a happy multicultural society. Hence, the trilogy is arguably presented as opposing Othering.

The question that this analysis has awoken, though, is if in order to express acceptance of the Other, there generally needs to exist a common cause to unite the culturally diverse people. Many of the arguments of this essay seem to indicate this. For instance, the hobbits of Hobbiton might not have accepted the even greater “queerness” of the fellowship hobbits upon their return from the quest had the Shire not been in danger and in need of people with combat skills. The elves and dwarves might not have repaired their relationship had it not been for both sides’ wish to exterminate the orcs. Lastly, the decision to destroy the One Ring might mostly have been due to fear of yet other people Othering oneself and the ones one loves. In other words, the trilogy presents humanoid creatures as generally ruled by self-preservation since they either choose to Other in order to protect their sense of self and their values, or they choose to accept difference apparently as a way of protecting themselves from other threats that put their sense of self or their values in danger. Nevertheless, even when considering this possible representation of humanoid creatures, Tolkien’s *LotR* trilogy more often than not presents Othering in a negative light and can therefore be said to be against the act.
Works Cited


