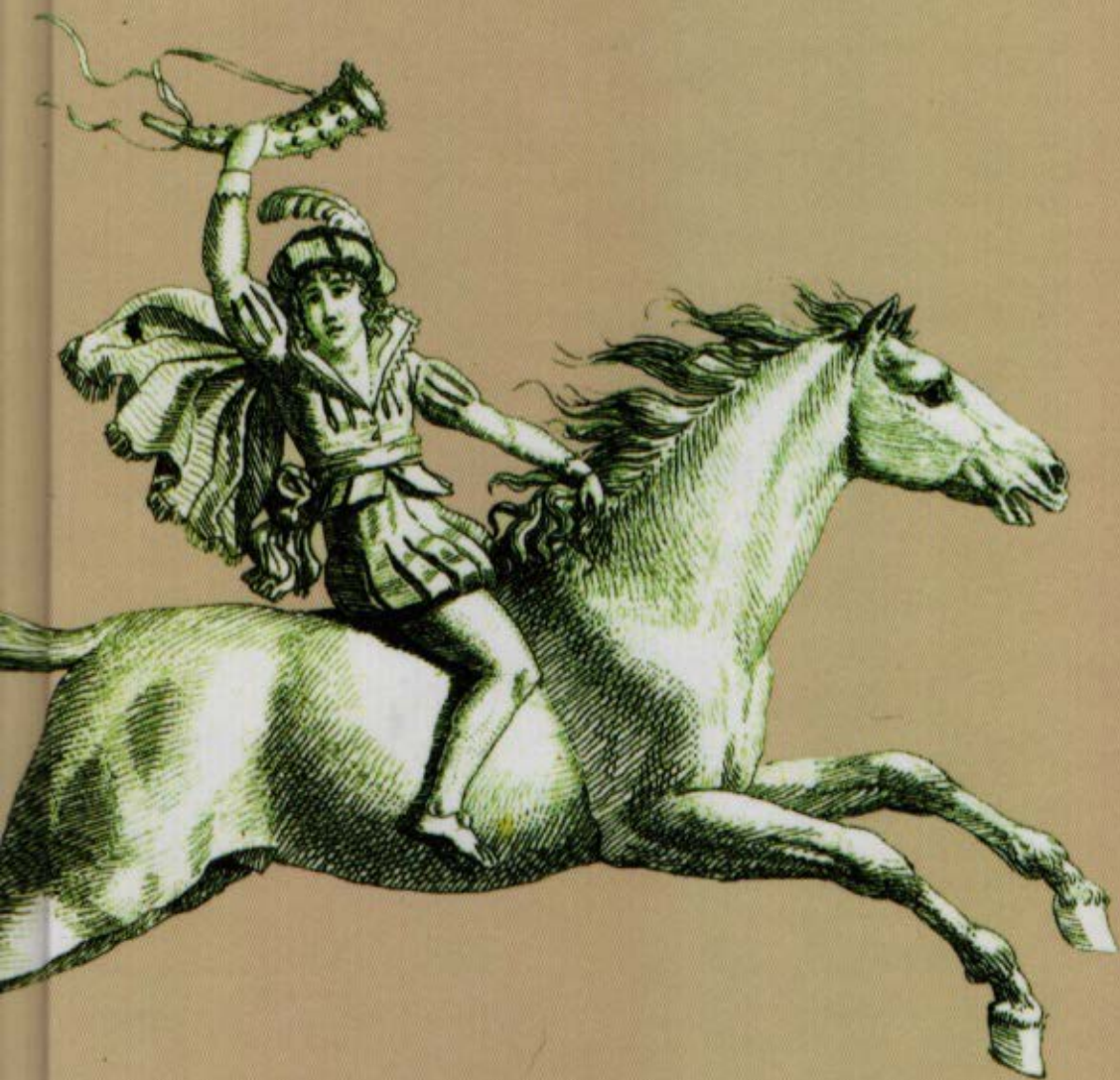


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Medievalism and Discrimination

Freedom to Discriminate

Helen Young

White supremacist misappropriations of the European Middle Ages have been increasingly visible and difficult to ignore for scholars of medievalism and medieval studies and the general public alike in the past several years with the mainstreaming of far-right politics in the western hemisphere and beyond. There have been, particularly in the last two years or so, numerous public-facing articles and statements by medievalists correcting and condemning racist misappropriations of the European Middle Ages,¹ following more than a decade of published scholarship critiquing racialized medievalisms.² In a social climate of overt racism, it is perhaps not surprising that discrimination within medieval studies has also become more visible to more of us. Medievalists of color have spoken and written of their experiences of being discriminated against in professional settings from conferences to job interviews.³ Numerous professional organizations have made statements

¹ A very few examples are: David Perry, "Yes, There Were People of Color in Pre-Modern Europe," *Pacific Standard* (2017), <<https://psmag.com/education/yes-there-were-poc-in-medieval-europe/>>, last accessed August 15, 2018; Matt Gabriele, "Five Myths about the Middle Ages," *The Washington Post* (2016), <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/5-myths-about-the-middle-ages/2016/09/22/>>, last accessed August 15, 2018; The Public Medievalist, "TPM Special Series: Race, Racism and the Middle Ages," *The Public Medievalist* (2018), <<https://www.publicmedievalist.com/race-racism-middle-ages-toc/>>, last accessed August 15, 2018; "Medievalists Respond to Charlottesville," *The Medieval Academy Blog* (2017), <<http://www.themedievalacademyblog.org/medievalists-respond-to-charlottesville/>>, last accessed August 15, 2018.

² See, for an early example, *Race, Class, and Gender in "Medieval" Cinema*, ed. Lynn T. Ramey and Tison Pugh (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Numerous medievalist publications are included in Jonathan Hsy and Julie Orlemanski, "Race and Medieval Studies: A Partial Bibliography," *Postmedieval* 8.4 (2017): 500–31, <<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41280-017-0072-0>>, last accessed August 15, 2018.

³ Recent public statements include: Nahir Otaño Gracia, "Lost in Our Field: Racism and the International Congress on Medieval Studies," *Medievalists of Color* (2018), <<https://medievalistsofcolor.com/uncategorized/lost-in-our-field-racism-and-the-intern>

asserting their support for diversity and inclusion: the Medieval Academy of America, for example, aims "to foster an environment of diversity, inclusion, and academic freedom for all medievalists."⁴

Freedom from discrimination is, in current political contexts, nonetheless often trumped by the freedom to discriminate. Responses from within the academy have tended, particularly but not exclusively in the US, to link resistance to racism and other forms of discrimination to academic freedom: the capacity and right of individual academics to choose what material they study, and how – that is, to discriminate among material, approaches, and methods. The far-right itself asserts that "political correctness" limits academic freedom by challenging hate speech and racism (among other forms of resistance to discrimination) with a discourse that goes back to at least the 1960s.⁵ As historian Eve Haque points out: "particular conceptions of academic freedom can overshadow issues of justice for racialized members of the academy."⁶ Haque argues that "issues of explicit and systemic institutional discrimination" must be overcome for academic freedom to be reconceptualized in ways that do not reinscribe marginalization of scholars of color.⁷ Those forms of discrimination and marginalization and the ways they are perpetuated must be recognized before they can be challenged. For medieval studies this includes the long history of racisms with which our disciplines are entangled. We have collectively in medievalism and medieval studies generally been less willing to challenge the structural racisms of our disciplines and the ways they continue to shape our scholarship and professional experiences than we have to comment on misappropriations of the European Middle Ages outside the academy.⁸ As I have written before in this journal, "institutional and disciplinary boundaries [...] work to prevent medievalism from engaging directly

with whiteness" or race-thinking more broadly.⁹ The rest of this essay is a personal account of my own scholarship that seeks to be illustrative, although not exemplary, of the ways that disciplinary background, and an underlying assumption of academic freedom that privileges the ethics of knowledge for the sake of knowledge over justice, can reproduce in scholarship the status quo that discriminates against marginalized scholars.

Having challenged other scholars of medieval studies and medievalism to reassess their disciplinary and individual practices and methods to better acknowledge and change structural and systemic racism on multiple occasions in the past several years, it seems now fair to reflect on my own experience of having done so. I have argued both that *The Lord of the Rings*, one of the most influential of modern medievalist texts, is not racist and, some years later, that it is. In both pieces (the former a 2010 journal article, the latter a chapter in my 2015 monograph) I drew on Tolkien's medievalism in my argument. Robin Anne Reid's recent, insightful bibliographic essay on race in Tolkien studies offers a useful reference point for understanding how disciplines influence scholarly processes of discriminating that shape our arguments and conclusions. Reid argues that conflicts around whether or not Tolkien's works are racist and whether approaches developed by postmodernists or medievalists are better stem principally from "assumptions associated with two sets of methodologies."¹⁰ One set, associated with postmodern approaches, "focuses on questions concerning interactions between the text and primary work, drawing on methods from history and the social sciences"; the other "focuses on interpreting primary sources [...] developing interpretations based on aesthetic or structural evidence [...] [and] uses literary methods of close reading and explication."¹¹ Reid also points to a "third option that involves a synthesis of the methodologies."¹² The following account is not exemplary but is, I hope, illustrative of the ways that both academic training and personal inclination orient us towards making particular choices about our methodologies and interpretations.

My undergraduate training in an English department focused heavily on postcolonial literature and theory; only two units had a medieval-studies

ational-congress-on-medieval-studies/>, last accessed August 15, 2018; Seeta Chaganti, "Statement Regarding ICMS Kalamazoo," *Medievalists of Color* (2018), <<http://medievalistsofcolor.com/uncategorized/statement-regarding-icms-kalamazoo/>>, last accessed August 15, 2018; and Mary Rambaran-Olm, "Anglo-Saxon Studies, Academia and White Supremacy," *Medium* (2018), <<https://medium.com/@mrambaranolm/anglo-saxon-studies-academia-and-white-supremacy-17c87b360bf3>>, last accessed August 15, 2018. Many others have been made, particularly on social media.

⁴ Medieval Academy of America, "Statement on Diversity and Academic Freedom," *Medieval Academy of America* (2018), <<https://www.medievalacademy.org/page/Policies>>, last accessed August 15, 2018.

⁵ Arnold Lockshin, "Racism and Academic Freedom," *The Harvard Crimson* (1969), <<https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1969/2/26/racism-and-academic-freedom-pt0-the/>>, last accessed August 15, 2018.

⁶ Eve Haque, "The Singular Freedom of Academic Freedom," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29.1 (2016): 112–25 (113), <<https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12120>>, last accessed August 15, 2018.

⁷ Haque, "The Singular Freedom," 123.

⁸ Some recent, notable exceptions include Matthew Gabriele, "Why the History of Medieval Studies Haunts How We Study the Past," *Forbes* (2018), <<https://www.forbes.com/>

sites/matthewgabriele.com/2018/07/14/history-medieval-studies-haunts-study-past/#34fb69ae6b52>, last accessed August 15, 2018; Rambaran-Olm, "Anglo-Saxon Studies."

⁹ Helen Young, "Whiteness and Time: The Once, Present, and Future Race," *Studies in Medievalism XXIV: Medievalism on the Margins*, ed. Karl Fugelso with Vincent Ferré and Alicia C. Montoya (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015), 39–49 (41).

¹⁰ Robin Anne Reid, "Race in Tolkien Studies: A Bibliographic Essay," in *Tolkien and Alterity*, ed. C. Vaccaro and Y. Kisor (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 33–74, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-61018-4>>, last accessed August 15, 2018.

¹¹ Reid, "Race in Tolkien Studies," 34.

¹² Reid, "Race in Tolkien Studies," 34. My 2010 article discussed below is one of the examples Reid gives of this "third option."

component, and two others included medievalism. My PhD thesis used modern postcolonial theory in readings of Middle English romance, taking the Norman Conquest as colonial trauma. I was friends with people of color (although I did not yet know the term) from early high school. I was very sure I was not racist, and that I knew all about colonialism, postcolonialism, and power. I knew the word "privilege," and I knew that I had it. I was (and remain) politically left-wing. My personal and scholarly background and credentials, I thought, made me able to think and write ethically, to make the right choices so that I did not discriminate.

After I graduated from my PhD program in 2007, I worked, as so many of us have and do, in countless casual university positions, teaching in fields I knew next to nothing about, from journalism to the history of mass communication media, and doing research-assistant work in everything from religious studies to urban planning, education, and nursing. Three years after graduation, I had applied for more lectureships and research fellowships than I cared to count, had just turned my thesis into a book,¹³ and had realized that I would not get anything other than casual academic work with a CV that branded me a medievalist for postcolonial jobs and a modernist with a suspicious liking for theory for medieval jobs.¹⁴ My interest in the Middle Ages had grown, in part at least, from a life-long love of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*; my father read the former aloud to my sister and me before I was old enough to read, and the latter before I was old enough not to get nightmares about giant spiders and Black Riders. I had shelves of fantasy literature, most of it inspired by if not an actual imitation of Tolkien's work: David Eddings, Raymond E. Feist, Guy Gavriel Kay, and Katherine Kerr featured heavily alongside Anne McCaffrey. It seemed quite obvious to me, then, that I should reposition myself as an expert on fantasy literature, and I began to think and write about diversity in that genre.

Also in 2010, I was contracted to proofread and edit a collection on cosmopolitan education. The editor was desperately short of a chapter and asked me if I would like to contribute. I had been thinking about fantasy literature and drafted a chapter comparing J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and Katherine Kerr's Deverry series, arguing that both constructed a kind of cosmopolitan society and that fantasy literature could be used in high-school classrooms to foster discussions of diversity and inclusion. The initial draft was too long for the book and became two publications: I excised

¹³ Helen Young, *Constructing "England" in the Fourteenth Century: A Postcolonial Interpretation of Middle English Romance* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2010).

¹⁴ I knew the postcolonialism had not been embraced by medieval studies, but failed to fully grasp the reasons, which have been articulated by Sierra Lomuto in "White Nationalism and the Ethics of Medieval Studies," *In the Middle* (2016), <<http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2016/12/white-nationalism-and-ethics-of.html>>, last accessed August 3, 2018.

the sections on Tolkien, leaving only a passing comment that *The Lord of the Rings* included "intercultural co-operation of a kind that can be fruitfully read as tending toward cosmopolitanism."¹⁵ The sections on Tolkien I re-wrote as the 2010 article for the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* mentioned above, arguing that *The Lord of the Rings* "is ultimately a cosmopolitan work because it provides a model of society in which common ground and a united purpose not only allow diversity, but require it."¹⁶ Five years later, in a monograph that was the major output of a three-year research fellowship on race and popular fantasy, I argued that the genre "formed habits of Whiteness" partly through imitation of Tolkien's Eurocentric medievalist world of Middle earth.¹⁷ That medievalist world is structured by race: "some [...] peoples are inherently and essentially superior to others; both [Tolkien's] hierarchy and the underlying construction of human difference invoke race-thinking."¹⁸ My different conclusions do not derive directly from methodological change; both pieces use Reid's third methodological option. Rather they result from several factors: direct engagement with critical race-theory; better knowledge of the history of medievalism (Anglo-Saxonism in particular) and the historical connections of philology and western race-thinking; and my own process of discrimination in weaving together evidence from primary and secondary sources.

The core of my 2010 argument was that although Middle earth includes racial stereotypes, its "Good" peoples – humans, hobbits, elves and dwarfs – must overcome historical enmities and racial and cultural differences to defeat the evil of Sauron. My conclusion that "*The Lord of the Rings* may be read as a vision of a modern racially and culturally diverse world" is flawed not because of what was included in my argument so much as what I failed to see: that "diverse world" was entirely Eurocentric.¹⁹ Six years later I wrote: "the Good peoples of Middle earth are marked as White" by references to real-world concepts of race and culture, while Sauron's servants are "collected together within the single Othering category of non-European, non-White."²⁰ One difference is in the footnotes: the earlier article cited no history of modern concepts of race because at the time I had not read

¹⁵ Helen Young, "Diverse Lessons: Cosmopolitanism and Fantasy Fiction Inside and Outside the Classroom," in *Education Without Borders: Diversity in a Cosmopolitan Society*, ed. Loshini Naidoo (New York: Nova Science, 2010), 145–57 (149).

¹⁶ Helen Young, "Diversity and Difference: Cosmopolitanism and *The Lord of the Rings*," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 21.3 (2010): 351–65 (352).

¹⁷ Helen Young, *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 10.

¹⁸ Young, *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature*, 23.

¹⁹ Young, "Diversity and Difference," 362.

²⁰ Young, *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature*, 23.

them; the latter did.²¹ Through such readings I recognized that what I had termed "diversity" derived from the intra-European race-thinking of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that created hierarchies within hierarchies of race, such that *homo europeus* – European Man – contained subsets of whiteness.

Through the same readings, and others,²² I knew more of the intensely racial and racist history of the Anglo-Saxonism and philology that shaped Tolkien's world. In the accounts of Tolkien's philology that I had read by 2010, notably that in Tom Shippey's *The Road to Middle Earth*,²³ no mention was made of "the deep investment of philology in the concept of race."²⁴ Dmitra Fimi's *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History*, which was highly influential on my knowledge and thought in later years, had been published in 2009 but was frustratingly out of reach, as it was not held in any university library in Sydney where I lived, and I did not have access to interlibrary loans.²⁵ I noted its existence in the 2010 article, but had no idea what it said. To imply, however, that I had no way of knowing about the links between race thinking and philology would be entirely false: Edward W. Said's *Orientalism*,²⁶ which I read as an undergraduate, makes them very clear.

My 2010 argument acknowledged that "Tolkien's medievalism almost certainly provided him with some of the material that is commonly criticized because of its apparent racial stereotypes," and argued that descriptions of

²¹ Robert J. C. Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008); Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: Norton, 2010); and Tommy Lee Lott, *The Invention of Race* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999).

²² Including Reginald Horsman, "Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain before 1850," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37.3 (1976): 387–410; Hugh A. MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History: Trojans, Teutons, and Anglo-Saxons* (Montreal: Harvest House Press of New England, 1982); and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "Roots, Races, and the Return to Philology," *Representations* 106.1 (2009): 34–62, <<https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2009.106.1.34.34>>, last accessed August 15, 2018.

²³ T. A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle Earth* (London: HarperCollins, 1982). Shippey's book argues that Tolkien's academic medievalism, particularly his philology, profoundly shaped his myths. It is one of the founding texts of both Tolkien studies and medievalism.

²⁴ Harpham, "Roots, Races, and the Return to Philology," 41.

²⁵ Dmitra Fimi, *Tolkien, Race, and Cultural History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Fimi's book links social and intellectual movements and events from Tolkien's lifetime to the development of his legendarium. Fimi explores the influence of nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideas about race on what she terms Tolkien's "hierarchical world" in chapter ten (pp. 131–59).

²⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1995). *Orientalism*, first published in 1978, is a foundational text of postcolonial studies that details the eponymous western practices of representation of the people, cultures, and societies of the Middle East, North Africa and Asia. Said sheds light on the colonialist and imperialist ideologies embedded within scholarship from the days of the early modern academy, including but not limited to philology.

Sauron's armies draw on medieval romance representations of Saracens.²⁷ Influenced by Geraldine Heng's *Empire of Magic*,²⁸ I commented on the long history of Orientalist Othering in western literature, and suggested that "the racialized religious conflict [of the Crusades] [...] provides a background and set of influences [...] that is certainly potentially troubling to a contemporary audience, and [...] cannot be simply dismissed."²⁹ The decision to make this point about racial stereotyping in representations of evil but to then claim to "examine the full sweep of his [Tolkien's] engagements with diversity" evinces my own white privilege in that I had the option to not consider race and racism – even in an article that addressed them – when it did not suit. The privilege is not merely mine, however; the decision was shaped by disciplinary disengagement with race in medieval studies and in Tolkien studies.

What, then, was the shape of published research on race in Tolkien's writing before 2010? Writing the article, I chose not to engage with most of the work on Peter Jackson's films beyond noting that race was a topic of discussion in scholarship on them and citing a few examples of such work; this reflects the methodological divide Reid outlines in its privileging of the primary text, its sources, and aesthetics. This decision meant that I did not encounter either Sean Redmond's or Lianne McLarty's chapters on whiteness in *The Lord of the Rings* films, the only two chapters that were then published on the topic.³⁰ Some of what had been published I could not get access to or did not know of.³¹ Exclusion of material from library collections and scholarly databases is another means of perpetuating disciplinary and institutional power structures that marginalize perspectives and scholars. I cited a number of works that discussed race and accusations of racism,³² although not those

²⁷ Young, "Diversity and Difference," 360–61; see also Margaret Sinex, "'Monsterized Saracens,' Tolkien's Haradrim, and Other Medieval 'Fantasy Products,'" *Tolkien Studies* 7 (2010): 175–96.

²⁸ Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

²⁹ Young, "Diversity and Difference," 361.

³⁰ Sean Redmond, "The Whiteness of the Rings," in *The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Daniel Bernardi (London: Routledge, 2008), 91–101; Lianne McLarty, "Masculinity, Whiteness, and Social Class in the *Lord of the Rings*," in *From Hobbit to Hollywood: Essays on Peter Jackson's The Lord of the Rings*, ed. Ernest Mathijs and Murray Pomerance (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 173–88.

³¹ Fimi, *Tolkien, Race, and Cultural History* is an example of the former; Pascal Nicklas, "The Paradox of Racism in Tolkien," *Inklings: Jahrbuch für Literatur und Ästhetik* 21 (2003): 221–35 is an example of the latter.

³² For example: Christine Chism, "Racism, Charges Of," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, ed. Michael D. C. Drout (London: Routledge, 2007), 558; Christine Chism, "Race and Ethnicity in Tolkien's Works," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, 555–56.

that linked *The Lord of the Rings* to racist extremist ideologies.³³ Whether the latter was a conscious omission or not I do not know and consider a moot point; at least one was easily available in the nearest university library.³⁴ The three articles that frame my argument most significantly all acknowledge the racialized taxonomies of humanity in Middle earth, but argue that they are part of a complex world that promotes acceptance;³⁵ this was, as noted above, the broad shape of my own argument in 2010. Anderson Rearick, for example, suggested attention to the "overall message of the work rather than [...] particular battles or physical description" in his argument that Tolkien's work was not racist.³⁶ The arguments we make are our own, but we do not make them in a vacuum.

Patterns of citation "shape what we are able to think about a given field," are themselves shaped by racial exclusion, and "can be explained away as the personal failings of unproductive researchers rather than the result of systematic exclusion."³⁷ As I noted above, my reading and references expanded significantly between 2010 and 2015. To the best of my knowledge the only scholar of color I cited in 2010 was Sue Kim, whose work on films I merely noted,³⁸ but in 2015 I cited and engaged with scholars of color; that engagement opened up new ideas and knowledge. Between 2010 and 2015 I also read literally hundreds if not thousands of posts about race, *The Lord of the Rings*, fantasy, and the Middle Ages on fan forums, blogs, and social media. I had read and cited some in 2010 as evidence of the discussions about race sparked by Tolkien's work. Many were deeply and thoughtfully critical of

³³ Christine Chism, "Middle-Earth, the Middle Ages, and the Aryan Nation: Myth and History in World War II," in *Tolkien the Medievalist*, ed. Jane Chance (London: Routledge, 2003), 63–92; and Peter E. Fircchow, "The Politics of Fantasy: *The Hobbit* and Fascism," *The Midwest Quarterly* 50.1 (2008): 8, 15–31.

³⁴ Chism, "Middle-Earth."

³⁵ Jane Chance, "Tolkien and the Other: Race and Gender in the Middle Earth," in *Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance and Alfred K. Siewers (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 171–86; Anderson Rearick, "Why Is the Only Good Orc a Dead Orc? The Dark Face of Racism Examined in Tolkien's World," *Modern Fiction Studies* 50.4 (2004): 861–74; and Sandra Ballif Straubhaar, "Myth, Late Roman History, and Multiculturalism in Tolkien's Middle-Earth," in *Tolkien and the Invention of Myth*, ed. Jane Chance (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 101–17.

³⁶ Rearick, "Why Is the Only Good Orc a Dead Orc?," 872.

³⁷ Victor Ray, "The Racial Politics of Citation," *Inside Higher Education* (2018), <<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2018/04/27/racial-exclusions-scholarly-citations-opinion>>, last accessed August 15, 2018. My thinking on citation, and throughout this essay generally, owes much to Sara Ahmed's *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

³⁸ Sue Kim, "Beyond Black and White: Race and Postmodernism in *The Lord of the Rings* Films," *Modern Fiction Studies* 50. 4 (2004): 877–907. Kim's article explores how Jackson's films "function within and reproduce the logic and process of postmodern, neoliberal capitalism, both drawing on and burying issues of race" (p. 876).

its racial politics; others celebrated them. In 2012 I encountered the "High Fantasy and Lord of the Rings" forum on the notorious white-supremacist website *Stormfront.org*; the forum was begun with the express purpose of recruiting fans to that ideology.³⁹ The combination of scholarship, fandom, and ideologies made it clear to me that deciding to put aside race in Middle earth in a discussion of diversity and difference side-stepped a most pressing point. Proper attention to primary and secondary sources revealed the fundamental, structuring role race plays in Middle earth. Race can be ignored or elided in readings of *The Lord of the Rings*, but doing so results in a limited, inherently privileged understanding.

Why, then, do we make our decisions as we do? The statement "Medievalists Respond to Charlottesville" that circulated and was supported by numerous medievalist scholarly groups and associations in the wake of the 2017 white extremist "Unite the Right" rally states: "Every generation of scholars creates its own interpretations of the past. Such interpretations must be judged by how well they explain the writings, art, and artifacts that have come down to us."⁴⁰ Those judgments, whether they are of a particular publication, or a generation's or centuries' worth of scholarship in a discipline, are never based purely on empirical evidence and the logic of an argument. As Carolyn Dinshaw argues, even among "academically disciplined, historically minded scholars [...]" some kind of desire for the past motivates all our work. [...] love and knowledge are as inextricable as the links in chain mail.⁴¹ As I have written before, my 2010 article was shaped by my desire for *The Lord of the Rings* to not be racist.⁴² My above narrative about a childhood love of something medievalist that fed later scholarly interests will be reminiscent for many. As Dorothy Kim and other medievalists of color have observed, in person and on social media, it is a narrative that is particularly available to white medievalists. Cord Whitaker writes, reflecting on a childhood dream of fighting a dragon: "little black boys from Philadelphia are not supposed to concern themselves with knights and ladies."⁴³

My desire for *The Lord of the Rings* not to be racist was intimately personal. I did not want the books I loved to encode an ideology that I rejected.

³⁹ Michael Barbaro, "The Daily Transcript: Interview with Former White Nationalist Derek Black," *The New York Times* (August 22, 2017), <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/22/podcasts/the-daily-transcript-derek-black.html>>, last accessed August 15, 2018.

⁴⁰ "Medievalists Respond to Charlottesville."

⁴¹ Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), xiv.

⁴² Helen Young, "Medievalfail," *In the Middle* (2017), <<http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2017/08/medievalfail.html>>, last accessed August 15, 2018.

⁴³ Cord J. Whitaker, "Race-Ing the Dragon: The Middle Ages, Race and Trippin' into the Future," *Postmedieval* 6.1 (2015): 3–11 (3), <<https://doi.org/10.1057/pmed.2014.40>>, last accessed August 15, 2018.

I would have been unable to reify that desire in peer-reviewed academic argument by discriminating among my sources and evidence without white privilege and the long disciplinary traditions that allowed me to not only put race aside, but also provided models of how to do so. It is worth pointing out that the journal in which I published was edited by a white man, and that fantasy studies, from which field peer-reviewers were likely drawn, has few scholars of color working in it and a track record of engagement with its own habit of whiteness that was commensurate with that of medieval studies in the first decade of the 2000s. During the social media storm that followed the Leeds International Medieval Congress themed "Otherness" in 2017, I suggested that one reason for the strong resistance to change in medieval studies is that "we don't want to hear that the field we have invested our time, effort, thought and parts of our identities (professional and otherwise) in is structured by racism and has been since its inception."⁴⁴ At the time I was reflecting in part on my 2010 article on *The Lord of the Rings* and the narrative justifying my scholarly interests that I had constructed around love of Tolkien's writings.

Philology, in its great urgency to claim a place as one of the sciences, indeed as premier among them, insisted on the rationality of its methods and approaches in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, founding the myth of objective scholarship separate from the personal ideologies and affections of the scholar. Rationality in that same period was linked to whiteness in a false connection that is still used to preserve the status quo of racial inequality by dismissing people of color as over-emotional and over-reacting. The ethical and moral arguments for absolute academic freedom depend on the idea that pure scholarly rationality is not only possible but universally present in scholarly practice. This is manifestly not the case for individual scholars, the disciplines that structure their thought, or the institutions that employ them. Although much of this essay is written in a confessional mode, my intention is not self-flagellation or a desire for forgiveness. Rather it is to illuminate the ways that our training and disciplinary contexts directly shape the processes through which we, as individual scholars, make our arguments and draw our conclusions, and to point out that we are not circumscribed by our contexts if we allow ourselves the freedom to be genuinely intellectually and affectively open. If we do not, our freedom to discriminate between ideas will always be predicated on discrimination against people.

⁴⁴ Young, "Medievalfail."