

Critique audience experience from a narrative set in a built world. How can you compare this with another example to show a more effective transformation of an actual world phenomenon?

Student ID Number: 1702525

BA Course Title: Illustration

Word Count: 2031

Tutor: Scott Smith

In this essay I will be comparing the treatment of elves from Dragon Age (origins (2003)⁽¹⁾/2 (2011)⁽²⁾/Inquisition (2014)⁽³⁾) and Fellowship of the Ring⁽⁴⁾ , The Two Towers⁽⁵⁾ ,The Return of the King⁽⁶⁾ and The Hobbit⁽⁷⁾. I want to highlight the ways in which they relate to discrimination in the reality. I will talk about how poorly the elves from Dragon age are treated and how different it is in the way the elves from Lord of The Rings are treated. Both show different aspects relating to our society which I will analyse.

Elves from Dragon age were once the dominant race of Thedas. However they were conquered by the Tevinter Imperium and forced into slavery. All heritage was lost for the elves, even when they tried to rebuild somewhere else, they fell to the Chantry. Since then, the elves split into two groups. City elves which live alongside humans who have adopted their customs but work as slaves in Tevinter where they've started praying to The Maker (human god.) Then there are the Dalish elves. That live as outcasts with their own kind to keep their culture alive and worship the elven gods to avoid slavery. Dalish keep to themselves and their clans, and are very wary of other races. They are seen as savages who steal children (they do not) by the rest of society and even their kin from the city. Elves are allowed to be free but are looked down upon and mocked. They're kept in alienages, hunted by Shems (elven word for humans) and sometimes refused commerce in towns. This treatment can be linked to dehumanization with the way that humans try to overpower them.

Elves from Lord of The Rings are shown much taller than humans, with a similar build and average size eyes. These elves are treated with respect and live in palaces. They have their own cities and govern themselves. They own huge plots of land and are viewed as equals, sometimes superior in ability, included in state affairs, fairly represented in councils and able to rule over their own people and beliefs. These elves view themselves as a higher power, they rarely dabble in other race affairs if they can help it and they have the finer clothes, jewellery and military than most races. Even one of the "Holy Ones" was captivated by them as stated in 'The Silmarillion (1990) "Orome looking upon the elves with wonder, as though they were beings sudden and marvellous and unforeseen" ⁽⁸⁾

Firstly, elves in Dragon Age are treated worse than the elves from Tolkien's portrayal. They are treated like lower class, unable to join organisations or have decent jobs due to prejudice and used as slaves and hunted those elves who chose to live in solitude with their own kind are hunted by humans. Here I have inserted a painting of 'The Old Plantation' 'by John Rose (1790-1800)⁽⁹⁾ which shows African slaves around shed like houses while nicer houses stand in the background. I placed this painting here because it depicts slavery from real life. However, before elves separated themselves, they lived alongside humans, but when elves found out that exposure to humans and mating



with them only created human children and that their immortality depleted so that they started to live as long as humans, they cut all ties. Now the elves which were once immortal have the same life expectancy as humans. After the separation and blood magic came into use, the land the elves owned was taken by force and

the city elves live in run down alienages and the Dalish live in the wilderness with no claim to any land with their culture wiped out. Tolkien's elves are treated as mystical beings and shown respect from other races. The elves give off a vibe that they see themselves as a higher power compared to everyone else. Living safely in their elven cities such as Mirkwood and Rivendell, they don't seem to age or die of old age (but can be killed from physical injury or grief). They tend to keep to themselves and not dwell on other species' matters unless necessary or benefits them. They are definitely a force to be reckoned with because of their huge armies and even bigger wealth. Compared in this way, Tolkien's elves are more privileged than Dragon Age elves. One has had their entire culture wiped out and the others are thriving and growing with strength in numbers and very wealthy.

Culture and religion in games can often be a very interesting part with how someone can imagine up a whole new religion and gods to create a new culture to go with them but, as it says in 'The Oxford Handbook of Virtuality' "*Many issues await to confront us: potential confusion between what is the past and what is history; the issue of realism when applied to the simulated portrayal of history and heritage*" ⁽¹⁰⁾ I can understand that

With Dragon Age elves, the culture has been split in two with the separation of elves (city elves and Dalish elves). City elves are heavily discriminated against, they live in alienages where a lot of crime happens. The ones that try to make friends or work with humans are looked down upon and called "flat ears". Due to the fact that they cannot

obtain good jobs, they will often sell themselves into slavery to earn a living. City elves follow the religion of Andraste and the Maker (the human gods) and have completely abandoned the elvish faith much to the Dalish Elves' annoyance. The Dalish still firmly believe in the Elven gods. They want to preserve everything to do with their heritage which to them the city elves have forgotten too hastily. A quote taken from 'Dragon Age: The World of Thedas vol.2' "The names of many ancient elven heroes have been lost to ages of cultural oppression. Dalish keepers do their best to pass on what little is remembered"⁽¹¹⁾. Even with all the difference in opinion on religion, City elves and Dalish elves still act positive towards each other. With Tolkien he does not elaborate on religion in middle earth. There is no mention of elven gods and it seems that the elves do not worship and there doesn't seem to be any religious buildings. Given this, Dragon age elves believe in a higher power and Tolkien's elves do not and they, in my own opinion see themselves as the higher power with the way they carry themselves. Dragon Age elves do worship gods. Dalish use them as warnings with sayings like "be good or the dread wolf will take you" the dread wolf is the elven god of mischief Fen'Harel. Agents of Fen'Harel are Dalish elves that infiltrate human cities and kill exceptionally bad people that go against the elves.

I pictured the painting made by Artemisia Gentileschi (1614-20)⁽¹²⁾ which portrays Judith (an Israelite) slaying Holofernes an Assyrian General who wanted to attack jewish people for not believing in the "One and Only God". They leave gifts at shrines for the gods to appease them in hope that they favour the elves in return. Then city elves celebrate Andraste and The Maker by prayer and going to the chantry (their version of chapel). I see it as, the elves from Lord of The Rings do not hail to a god because they like to think that they themselves are the the purest form. As well as being different culturally and spiritually, both portrayals of the elves are treated differently by the other races too. Tolkien's elves are treated as mystical beings by humans and those alike, except by dwarves who view them as vain and pompous for understandable reasons. Then the Dragon Age elves are treated like vermin by most humans who see them as either slaves or targets, however, it isn't really highlighted on whether it is just humans who think this way or if dwarves and qunari (the other races of Dragon Age) feel the same way. In my experience on playing the game it is only humans that act aggressively toward them.



One real world phenomenon that I can relate this treatment with is discrimination and racism. With the way humans treat the elves in Dragon Age, it reminds me of how people in the real world use the privilege that they were born with to get ahead in life. An example is how white people earn more than minorities, like how elves from Lord of the Rings live such lavish lifestyles, as I found out in a research paper named 'The Ethnicity Pay Gap' which stated "*The ethnicity pay gap is a longstanding phenomenon. Previous research has shown that people from ethnic minorities tend to earn less, overall, than White people. This is often associated with social disadvantage and is arguably also caused by discrimination.*"⁽¹³⁾ Within the game, if you choose to play as an elf it will affect your gameplay and story. You will be called slurs by random characters in the street, people will distrust you more easily and your court approval which is vital in one important quest starts lower than a human avatar. As you can play as a human/elf/dwarf/qunari in the game it lets you understand that not every race gets the same privileges and spread understanding to the real world. "Racism comes in many different forms. Sometimes it's subtle, and sometimes it's overt. Sometimes it's violent" (Jordan Peele, 2017)⁽¹⁴⁾ The subtle racism in the game being the name calling and low approval ratings. The the violent being forced into slavery and massacred.

Another link with a real world phenomenon is slavery. I didn't come across any type of slavery in Lord of the Rings that included the elves however there is orc slavery. Dragon Age however has a mass of elvish slaves. Another quote taken from Dragon Age: The World of Thedas Vol:2 "*The legions captured the fleeing elves, and a vast new population of elven slaves was brought into the Imperium almost overnight.*"⁽¹⁵⁾ This can relate to when Europe colonised Africa in the early 15th century. Another phenomenon is the argument over religious figures. Humans and most other races believe the Maker is the only God and all others are blasphemous for saying otherwise and then the elves believe that the elven gods are the only ones to call gods. In the real world religion is one of the biggest causes of war. One being Israel vs Canaan.

The last phenomenon I can relate is dehumanization. In the real world some still some favour one type of race over another and will act hostile towards said race in order to show the superior race. It's just like how humans treat the dragon age elves, this quote I found in an article about dehumanisation reads, "Indeed, dehumanization often paves the way for human rights violations, war crimes, and genocide. For example, in WWII, the dehumanization of the

Jews ultimately led to the destruction of millions of people. Similar atrocities have occurred in Rwanda, Cambodia, and the former Yugoslavia."⁽¹⁶⁾

In conclusion, the treatment of elves in the world of Dragon Age reflects discrimination and slavery from reality. They portrayed the colonisation of natives and how they were forced into slavery by humans. Then without the human privilege they were born with, which can be seen as white privilege from the real world, they are treated as lesser beings and looked down upon. The elves from Tolkien's world are shown as the ones with white privilege, in their palaces and large amount of fortunes only passed through birthright. They are the better beings because they were born elves and the elves from Dragon Age are the lower class because of the same race. Dragon Age also portrays real world religious war with most believing in The Maker and others believing in The Elven Gods. Some of those who believe in The Maker attack and kill those who believe in The Elven Gods just because they have different beliefs which happens in the real world too often.

Reference List

- ⁽¹²⁾Artemisia Gentileschi. (1614-20). *Judith Slaying Holofernes* [oil on canvas] Capodimonte Museum, Italy.
- ⁽¹¹⁾Ben Gelinas (2015). *Dragon Age: The World of Thedas vol:2*. Milwaukee: Dark Horse Books. 38.
- ⁽¹⁵⁾Ben Gelinas (2015). *Dragon Age: The World of Thedas vol:2*. Milwaukee: Dark Horse Books. p.45.
- ⁽³⁾Bioware (2014) *Dragon Age: Inquisition*. [DISC] PlayStation 4. Canada
- ⁽¹⁾Bioware (2009). *Dragon Age: Origins*. [DISC] PlayStation 3. Canada.
- ⁽²⁾Bioware (2011). *Dragon Age: 2*. [DISC] PlayStation 3. Canada.
- ⁽⁹⁾John Rose. (1790-1800) *The Old Plantation* [watercolour]. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, Virginia.
- ⁽¹⁴⁾Jordan peele (2017) "*Racism comes in many different forms. Sometimes it's subtle, and sometimes it's overt. Sometimes it's violent*"
- ⁽⁸⁾J. R. R. Tolkien (1990). *The Silmarillion*. United Kingdom: Random House. 48.
- ⁽¹³⁾Longhi, S. and Brynin, M. (2017). *The Ethnicity Pay Gap*. Equality and Human Rights Commission Research Report Series. Manchester, p.7.
- ⁽¹⁰⁾Mark Grimshaw (2015). *The Oxford Handbook of Virtuality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 269.
- ⁽¹⁶⁾Michelle Maiese. (2003). *What it means to Dehumanise*. Available:
<https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/dehumanization>. Last accessed 9th Dec 2018.
- ⁽⁴⁾*The Fellowship of the Ring*. (2001). [DVD] Directed by P. Jackson. New Zealand: New Line Cinema.
- ⁽⁷⁾*The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*. (2012). [film] Directed by P. Jackson. New Zealand: New Line Cinema.
- ⁽⁶⁾*The Return of the King*. (2003). [DVD] Directed by P. Jackson. New Zealand: New Line Cinema.
- ⁽⁵⁾*The Two Towers*. (2002). [DVD] Directed by P. Jackson. New Zealand: New Line Cinema.

Further Reading

Ben Gelinas (2015). *Dragon Age: The World of Thedas Vol:1*. Milwaukee: Dark Horse Books.

J. R. R. Tolkien (1954). *The Fellowship of the Ring*. United Kingdom: George Allen & Unwin.

J. R. R. Tolkien (1937). *The Hobbit*. United Kingdom: George Allen & Unwin.

J. R. R. Tolkien (1955). *The Return of the King*. United Kingdom: George Allen & Unwin.

J. R. R. Tolkien (1954). *The Two Towers*. United Kingdom: George Allen & Unwin.

The Hobbit: Battle of the Five Armies. (2012). [film] Directed by P. Jackson. New Zealand: New Line Cinema.

The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug. (2013). [film] Directed by P. Jackson. New Zealand: New Line Cinema.