



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 21 | Number 2 | Issue 80, Winter

Article 35

Winter 10-15-1996

Tolkien the Anti-totalitarian

Jessica Yates

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore>



Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Yates, Jessica (1996) "Tolkien the Anti-totalitarian," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 21 : No. 2 , Article 35.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol21/iss2/35>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.



Mythcon 50

Looking Back, Moving Forward

San Diego, California

August 2-5, 2019

Tolkien the Anti-totalitarian

Abstract

A number of critics have looked for a political message in *The Lord of the Rings*, their dislike of the work, in some cases, apparently leading them to accuse Tolkien of holding extreme, usually right-wing, political views and making *The Lord of the Rings* a vehicle for them. These critics are particularly vehement about the danger of young people emerging from a reading of Tolkien's book with extreme right-wing views. I select some examples from my collection of political views, including the opinions of Robert Westall, E.P. Thompson, and Fred Inglis, together with a viewpoint from a member of the Communist Party.

Additional Keywords

Communism; Fascism; Robert Giddings; Fred Inglis; intolerance; left-wing politics; literary criticism; racism; right-wing politics; E.P. Thompson; totalitarian states; war; Robert Westall

Tolkien the Anti-totalitarian

Jessica Yates

Abstract: A number of critics have looked for a political message in *The Lord of the Rings*, their dislike of the work, in some cases, apparently leading them to accuse Tolkien of holding extreme, usually right-wing, political views and making *The Lord of the Rings* a vehicle for them. These critics are particularly vehement about the danger of young people emerging from a reading of Tolkien's book with extreme right-wing views. I select some examples from my collection of political views, including the opinions of Robert Westall, E.P. Thompson, and Fred Inglis, together with a viewpoint from a member of the Communist Party.

Keywords: Communism, Fascism, Robert Giddings, Fred Inglis, intolerance, left-wing politics, literary criticism, racism, right-wing politics, E.P. Thompson, totalitarian states, war, Robert Westall

From the first publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, critics have not only judged it lacking in literary merit, but simplistic, even dangerous, in the political attitudes it is supposed to enshrine. I illustrate this aspect of Tolkien criticism with examples from 1955, 1973, 1980, 1981, and a debate about Tolkien and fascism which ran in several British Tolkien-related fanzines in the mid-80s.

There are two features of these attacks which I would emphasise: one, their superficial nature, which would often be refuted by a close study of the text, and by reading Tolkien's *Letters* (which were not, of course, available until late 1981); and two, the possibility by private correspondence or letters to an editor, of negotiating with these critics and modifying their attitudes, sometimes with a follow-up letter or article published in the same magazine.

As I may only present here a selection of critical arguments about Tolkien's politics, I have searched for rare material from newspapers, journals and fanzines, rather than give you extracts from material you are well-acquainted with, such as C.S. Lewis's reviews of *The Lord of the Rings* and Tom Shippey's detailed analysis in *The Road to Middle-earth*. So I begin with a very rare item indeed, discovered by me in the archives of Allen and Unwin, the transcript of the BBC Home Service review of *The Lord of the Rings* by Arthur Calder-Marshall in his *Talking of Books* programme, broadcast on 30th October 1955. This is an enthusiastic review by a writer who had a long literary career and died in 1992 aged 83 – it is a pity he did not give us some more permanent appreciation of Tolkien.

. . . it is possible without falsification to interpret the allegory of *The Lord of the Rings*; its subject is exactly what one would expect a modern magical romance's subject to be, the nature of power. The One Ring is power. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. If you want to make a crude simplification: Sauron, the Lord of Darkness, is the Dictator and the

Black Riders his secret police.

But that would be an oversimplification. It is rather that in the land of Romance and Faerie, which lies in the magical Department of our mental State, there are enacted dramas which are similar to those of our daily lives in their emotional content . . .

Each age has its contemporary myth, reflecting the dominant moods of the period; and *The Lord of the Rings* is as contemporary in its concern with the nature of power as *Animal Farm* or *Darkness at Noon*. It is a deliberate and successful attempt to use the fairy story as a literary form in order to say something about a contemporary problem without the complication of actual people, places and political systems. There is no attempt at any parallelism between the story and actual events. The parallelism is of a much subtler type; as when Frodo, for example, pursued by the Black Riders, is so frightened that to escape them, he puts on the Ring. But instead of becoming invisible, he becomes plainer to the Black Riders, the Ring having the same nature of evil as they have. I do not think Tolkien himself would object to my concluding that the parallel to this in the modern world is when one nation, convinced of the justice of its cause, employs a weapon of terror against its enemy, and in doing so becomes possessed by the very evil that it is fighting to destroy in the enemy.

A rare item of Tolkien criticism, and if you know Tom Shippey's book you'll recognise several of his points, made some twenty-five years earlier by the late Arthur Calder-Marshall.

My next example is an extremely hostile one. To commemorate Tolkien's death, several periodicals published tributes, among these being one in *The Listener*, the now-defunct magazine of the British Broadcasting Corporation. The academic J.W. Burrow's appreciation of *The Lord of the*

Rings (1973) was followed by an attack on the book by Tom Davis of Birmingham University (Davis, 1973a).

Regarding Burrow's exoneration of Tolkien from the need to portray complex characters in the manner of the modern novel, Davis writes:

Literary critics don't demand that books written now should contain "inner conflicts and complex emotional interactions", only that they should not simplify dishonestly or be simple-minded, that they should say something of use to those who read them: us, now. It is not that Tolkien doesn't speak to the needs of a modern audience, or describe a modern world: he does (he couldn't do otherwise), but he pretends not to, and they are the wrong needs. For instance, Burrow notices that the book is about a confrontation between East and West, and that the "moral geography is decidedly European". To stop there is to compound the dishonesty or the simple-mindedness. In the East, says Tolkien, lives a race alchemically-created: androids. They are rather like ants. They have no souls. Oddly enough, they have lower-class urban (Cockney) accents. And this soulless urban proletarian collective Eastern society must be wiped out, without mercy to individuals or even recognition of them as individuals. As a statement about the modern world, this is, to put it nicely, simple-minded, and the needs it speaks to are not admirable . . .

Good fairy-tales are about another world and this one: the interaction appeals to and encourages the child's maturity. Tolkien's novel is about arrested development. It appeals to the childish in adults. The hobbits are patronised as children, but allowed to wave "real" swords and do their share of slaughtering the orcs. These underdeveloped adults were among the heroes and models of the hippy movement, that impressive tribute to the concept of oral fixation. It is rare for literary criticism to have its judgements so massively validated.

When a critic of Tolkien adopts such an unpleasant, personal tone, it is difficult to pen an effective refutation which does not bring further attacks in its train. And so it happened. Three letters appeared disagreeing with Mr. Davis, including one by Burrow. One correspondent, Diana Reed, wrote that as the orcs had been corrupted beyond redemption, and were "a threat to other sentient life, why should killing them be considered morally wrong?" and that Davis had simply demonstrated his own "ignorance and intolerance" in his attack on *The Lord of the Rings*.

Yet another correspondent ridiculed Davis's use of "urban", "proletarian" and "collective" to describe the social structure in Mordor, where there were no towns or cities, no urban proletariat – instead orcs were soldiers, slaves or overseers, and far from being collective, it was a "class-conscious, super-feudal society" (Broomhead, 1973).

Tom Davis responded to his critics in pugnacious mood, determined to win the argument. He asserted that one kind of childishness he had in mind was "the feeling that the

problems of the world can be solved by bombing one's enemies back into the Stone Age, (which is roughly what happens when the Ring is incinerated)". He insisted that Tolkien's portrait of Mordor was influenced by the Cold War attitude to Eastern Europe – moreover with

interesting analogies with 1984: hideous punishments (Shelob), a debased language and a central power that has his Eye on you. However, Orwell's depiction is painfully realisable, and he doesn't suggest that the solution lies in "Onward Christian Soldiers". But he was writing for adults . . . Those who think that my letter depicted the novel as an allegory, or who want me to explain why Tolkien could write as he did when C.S. Lewis didn't, have put themselves beyond the reach of reasonable controversy.

(Davis, 1973b).

A crushing conclusion indeed, which is, I believe, an unfair way of winning the argument.

We cannot be sure whether Tom Davis thinks that Stalin's Russia has been unfairly treated by cold warriors, but that is the impression I receive. He detests *The Lord of the Rings* because he thinks it might encourage the Cold War between the USA and USSR, or even World War III, but of course he completely misreads the book when he equates the destruction of the Ring with "bombing one's enemies back into the Stone Age". Having destroyed the Ring, the Western Allies may fight or make peace with the other races of Men in Middle-earth on an equal footing; and of course, Tolkien hated aerial bombing and denounced the atom bomb as soon as he heard of Hiroshima.

I need to make another point about George Orwell, apart from the insult that Orwell was writing for adults, which implies that Tolkien wasn't: Orwell was also writing about Eastern Europe, but Davis does not seem to mind *his* criticism of the Soviet Union in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which includes the pessimism of "a boot stamping on a human face – for ever" and concludes with Winston Smith's capitulation to Big Brother.

The Burrow-Davis controversy illustrates that there are some critics who are impervious to negotiation and possible compromise. I would like now to cite briefly a case where I felt confident enough to intervene, where I had a long letter published which disputed the critic's arguments, and eventually, I believe, won his respect. I am not going to quote extensively from his article or mine, because my letter was eventually expanded into an article for *Mallorn*, with his blessing.

In *Use of English* for Autumn 1980, Andrew Stibbs, a lecturer in education at Leeds University, published an article, "For Realism in Children's Fiction", in which he complained about a fashion which I too regretted – for using ghost stories as teaching material in secondary schools (which educate British children between the ages of 11 and 16). Stibbs advocated using children's fiction written in the realistic mode: novels like *Carrie's War* by Nina Bawden or Alan Garner's *Stone Book Quartet*. Stibbs then moved on to wonder if the popularity of children's fantasy was the result of the Tolkien cult, and chose for examination the chapter

"The Scouring of the Shire" which he found snobbish in its view of Sharkey's ruffians.

My response, published in *Use of English*, Summer 1981, followed up Stibbs's argument that books which teachers recommend should be books which improve their readers' personal development, with first a look at the healing qualities of fantasies by Ursula Le Guin and Diana Wynne Jones, and then a more detailed analysis of how *The Lord of the Rings* might be used to alert young readers to political and international evils such as the arms race or the police state. Finally, a pleasant letter from Stibbs in the Autumn 1981 issue accepted some of my points, and we had an occasional correspondence until I published my article "In Defence of Fantasy" in *Mallorn* 21 (Yates, 1984), when he gave us his blessing for quotations, thanked us for his complimentary copy, and did not even claim a right of reply.

Now I move to Robert Westall, whose criticism I shall examine in more detail. In January 1981 *Signal*, a thrice-yearly British children's literature magazine, published "The Hunt for Evil" by Robert Westall, who was then, and has remained, one of our leading novelists for older children and teenagers. Sadly, the news of his death reached me the very day that I typed these words for the editors of the *Proceedings*.

Westall's theme was: stereotyping in children's fiction, television and cinema, and the danger of influencing young people to stereotype other people whom they might see as enemies, as irredeemably evil. Examples from popular literature were *Dracula* – and the shark in *Jaws*. Examples from real life were Robert Mugabe and his guerilla soldiers in Zimbabwe; and concentration camp guards who loved their children. Based on a talk given to teachers, the article is vigorous, not intended to be scholarly. Westall criticises the "hunt for evil" theme in some of his own novels, asking, "How much am I doing to blind children to the fact that there is evil in the best of us, and good in the worst?", and then turns to *The Lord of the Rings* (mistakenly calling it a children's book), which, he says, is one of his favourite books, especially soothing when he falls ill.

. . . when I look at it from the hunt-for-evil angle, it becomes the worst book of all. No wonder it is so soothing. Good and evil are separated like oil and water; utterly polarized. From the Dark Lord of Mordor to his humblest orc, the enemy are totally evil. The Dark Lord's only emotion, apart from rootless, reasonless hate, is fear for his own safety. He is much worse than Hitler . . .

The orcs do not weep or bleed; Tolkien does not even allow them the virtue of courage . . . In all of *The Lord of the Rings* you will not find one halfway praiseworthy deed by the enemy. The orcs are simply hero-bait, to be slaughtered ad infinitum, piled in heaps and burnt. They are given a lower status than rats, although they are human in shape, think and talk like humans . . . A child brought up on a non-stop diet of Tolkien would be very inclined to see Robert Mugabe as the Dark Lord and the boys-in-the-bush as orcs.

Nor do we find any evil within the goodies. If they

do stray off the straight and narrow, it is not their own fault; they are under the spell of the Dark Lord's Ring. Even so, even when repentant, death is their only possible end. Either a heroic end, like Boromir, shot full of orc arrows, or a dreadful end like Denethor in the flames. Nobody is allowed to live on, a sadder and wiser being; a subtler and more enlightened mixture of good and evil. Tolkien's world is a world without mercy: Be ye perfect or go into the flames. The only compassion I can find in the whole book is in the treatment of the baddy Gollum. Only in Gollum do we see good and evil striving inside the same soul. But the moment passes, and Gollum goes down into the eternal flames as well . . .

To sum up I think that, on the whole, *The Machine-Gunners* [Westall's first published novel, Macmillan, 1975] was a helpful, Jungian kind of book. And I think *The Devil on the Road* [Macmillan, 1978] was a destructive, intolerant, racist kind of book. Like *The Lord of the Rings*. In the 1930s we had many such books, in which the villains were always inscrutable Chinese or blacks or evil dagoes. That is no longer possible. But it is still possible if you change "dago" into "orc". The message is the same: hate the alien; destroy the deviant. That is the evil message of the Hunt for Evil.

Westall went on to vent his anger at so much T.V. science fiction which seemed, according to him, to parade a series of "execrable monsters . . . always dealt with by total annihilation". As I was to point out to him later, he can't have watched very much *Star Trek*, which promoted a much more humane attitude towards alien life forms.

When I read Westall's article I wanted to defend Tolkien in *Signal* magazine, but I suspected that the editor would not wish to carry an article devoted to a book which had not been written for children. I jotted down my first impressions and sent them off to the editor anyway, who forwarded them to Westall. Soon I received four handwritten pages from Westall defending his views together with some personal information about his life, for example, that he was not a pacifist and did his National Service in 1954. Other information, and my advance reading of Tolkien's *Letters* in summer 1981, gave me cause for hope that I could modify his views by reference to the *Letters* – given time – but this would be a matter for private correspondence.

Meanwhile another children's book critic, Neil Philip, had published a letter in defence of Tolkien in *Signal*, May 1981, and Westall had right of reply in the same issue, whereupon the correspondence was closed, leaving me to respond privately to Westall about his letter as well as his article. How can I boil down about forty pages of correspondence into a few pages of this conference paper?

I agreed with Westall about the dangers of stereotyped literature when read by immature readers, but I argued that *The Lord of the Rings* was in a different class from Sven Hassel's war novels – though I would be concerned if young readers were misreading Tolkien. I argued that we were not meant to identify any one race in the real world with the orc.

Orcish tendencies are twofold: to vandalism and crude violence, and to blind fanaticism. Orcs follow their leaders because they have been brainwashed. Tolkien symbolises in the orc all mindless crowds who chant slogans and are ready to kill other people because their leader tells them so. When Westall wrote that he disliked the message "hate the alien; destroy the deviant" he was close to Tolkien; but it is the orcs, not the Westerners, who are filled with unreasoning hate for others who are different. In distancing the orcs from his other created races, Tolkien indicated that they symbolised human tendencies – and surely it cannot be denied that what is recorded of humans is far worse than what Tolkien describes of orcish behaviour. Several years ago I read Martin Gilbert's massive history, *The Holocaust* (Gilbert, 1986), and in great sorrow established for myself the truth of that assertion.

I sent Westall a copy of Nan Scott's fine article "War and Pacifism in *The Lord of the Rings*" (Scott, 1972), and urged him to read Tolkien's *Letters* (Tolkien, 1981) to discover that Tolkien and he felt exactly the same way about aerial bombing, Dresden and Hiroshima. I disagreed with Westall about Gollum's fate: Tolkien had declined to say whether Gollum had been consigned to eternal damnation.

I then turned to Neil Philip's letter in defence of Tolkien, and Westall's reply, which I found far easier to refute, it having probably been written at rather short notice. Neil Philip started a new hare, which ran for several years, by denying that *The Lord of the Rings* was a "Nazi tract", a fascist book. In fact Westall had not said that the book was "Fascist" – "racialist", yes, but he had used the term "fascist" to describe another popular author, in his words, "Dennis Wheatley . . . the hunt-for-evil man, a leading fascist of the 1950s, with his clichéd horrors of sinister 'negroes' and the international Communist plot." Even here, Westall was using the term very loosely: Dennis Wheatley supported the Allies as a patriotic Briton, writing thrillers throughout and after World War II which denounced German aggression.

But returning to Neil Philip, I quote from his defence of Tolkien:

The complex triangle defined by Frodo, Sam and Gollum gives the lie to any view of the book as a Nazi tract . . . while *The Lord of the Rings* is in no sense a coherent religious allegory, Frodo and Aragorn are both to a certain extent types of Christ . . . They are not S.S. officers . . . what is the Ring? Power rooted in cruelty and tyranny, not love and service; power taken but not earned; power without responsibility; fascism . . . does Robert Westall see no significance in Frodo's rejection of violence in "The Scouring of the Shire"? . . . Tolkien's achievement has been to sensitize a generation to the nature and appeal of heroic literature, not to feed a new fascism . . .

(and so on)

I will now quote from Westall's riposte, inserting my own comments as I go, the gist of which I sent to Westall in a long letter of June 1981.

I think Neil Philip hits the nail on the head when he writes "Middle Earth . . . is an ordered, 'whole'

universe, and ours is a fragmented, morally unsettled age which desires above all things order and moral clarity".

That's the one drug we must not offer people . . . It wasn't adulterers, drunkards or speculators who burnt 20,000 witches in Toulouse in the 16th century, or promoted the Albigensian crusade. It was the Holy Catholic Church in search of order and moral clarity. Hitler, too, promised a "New Order" and *great* moral clarity.

Was there ever a time of "order" that did not thrive on the mute helpless suffering of vast numbers of the submerged masses?

Westall went on to cite the dwarves in C.S. Lewis's *The Last Battle*, who refused to join "our heroes" and preferred to mind their own business. "Needless to say Lewis swiftly condemns the dwarves. We must all take part in his Last Battle – which is the same as the War of the Ring – both are 'holy' wars, and a 'holy' war is the worst war of all."

I replied that I objected to the constant references to modern events which either Tolkien wasn't aware of, or, if he was, he probably held the same opinions as Westall about them anyway. I'll allow that Tolkien doesn't say anything about witch-hunts, but if anyone exemplifies the attitudes of witch-hunters, it is the orc. It was Saruman who spoke of a new Order when he tempted Gandalf, Saruman who stands for the politician who leads people into revolution, promising a better future.

Westall's phrase about the suffering of the masses is actually a very good description of Sauron's kingdom of slaves, or what the Shire would have been under Saruman – and Tolkien, of course, attacks both. Westall expresses sympathy for minority groups such as African peasant women – but just so do the hobbits represent ordinary, powerless people. The unemployed and the under-privileged are both victims of the profit motive – the spirit of Saruman. Frodo went to Mordor for the sake of the Shirefolk, not to seek personal glory.

I disagree with Westall's concept of "holy" war. Westall had agreed with me that Britain's role in World War II was necessary. Now, in Middle-earth, Sauron and Saruman are the aggressors, so war against them must be a "just", not a "holy" war. In each conflict described in the book, the good characters are usually, if not always, attacked, and always outnumbered.

As for Narnia, surely the Calormenes have invaded it, and have been told that they are fighting for their god Tash against the evil lion Aslan: thus the "holy" war is waged by the Calormenes against the Narnians. Moreover, as we read in Tolkien's *Letters* (Tolkien, 1981, no. 183, p. 243) "Sauron desired to be a God-King and was held to be this by his servants", so the War of the Ring could also be seen as a "holy" war waged by Sauron and his orcs against the West. Thus Lewis and Tolkien would have agreed with Westall about the evils of "holy" war!

Returning to Westall's critique: "And if Tolkien's achievement has been to 'sensitize a generation to the nature and appeal of heroic literature' isn't it time we asked exactly

what 'heroic' literature consists of? Do the heroes of heroic literature cure people, teach people, wash people's feet, ask very awkward questions of entrenched hereditary rulers . . . or do they simply have a divine right to ordain things 'evil' without consultation or negotiation, kill people who get in the way, and summon up innocent bystanders to die painfully and unquestioningly?"

These points are easy to refute. There are two contrasted heroes in *The Fellowship of the Ring* – boastful Boromir, conscious of his rank as heir to Gondor, and discreet Aragorn. Look how Aragorn does not "pull rank" during the journey South: although he automatically assumes the leadership after Gandalf falls in Moria, he never orders Boromir about, and always behaves courteously to him. Aragorn *does* cure people: it is a sign of his kingship. He also *teaches* the hobbits some of the history of Middle-earth. He would also have posed a very awkward question to an entrenched hereditary ruler (Denethor) if that ruler had still been alive when Aragorn entered Minas Tirith. And Frodo also overthrows an entrenched ruler, Sauron.

As for killing people who get in the way, and summoning up innocent bystanders to die, this is a very good description of Sauron and Saruman. Finally, if we look at scenes where Aragorn takes a new step forward, we note that he always asks his companions if they want to come with him, for example on the Paths of the Dead and the last march to Mordor.

Faramir is a different kind of hero. He accepts war as his duty and is skilled in fighting and strategy, but would not choose it as his life's work.

Westall continued:

of course, Frodo and Aragorn are not S.S. officers. They are British officers, pre-war vintage. They would never put Jews in camps (though they might exclude them from golf clubs). Like good British officers, they have a great concern for the welfare of ponies. However, they have no more concern for the flesh and blood of orcs than British officers had for the civilian populations of Hamburg and Dresden. As for their attitude towards coloured or eastern races, is it any coincidence that the only coloured or eastern people in *The Lord of the Rings* are "the cruel dark men of Harad" who play an ignominious part on the side of the Dark Lord?

First to the point about excluding Jews from golf clubs – an analogy which is fairly irrelevant to Tolkien's own life. We can see from Tolkien's *Letters* that he was disgusted with Nazi persecution of the Jews, and on page 229 he says that he had modelled his dwarves on Jewish culture. In Book Two of *The Fellowship of the Ring* and onwards, in the character of Gimli we see a figure who is constantly subject to snide remarks and discrimination from the people the Companions meet – from the Elves, from Treebeard, and from the Riders of Rohan who begrudge him a horse. When the Companions enter Lórien the Elves want to blindfold Gimli, who protests. Aragorn solves the impasse by agreeing to be blindfolded as well, with all the Company. How could such a man be the type to ban Jews from a golf club!

Especially considering Aragorn's position: betrothed to Arwen Half-elven, granddaughter of the rulers of Lórien, he yet risks Galadriel's displeasure by bringing a dwarf, their hereditary enemy, into their secret kingdom.

Tolkien's opinions on race relations are best seen through his treatment of the conflict between dwarves and elves. In *The Silmarillion*, as in the First World War, we see a futile struggle which should never have happened. As for the bombing of Hamburg and Dresden, as I said earlier, Tolkien's views are clear from his *Letters*, as they are on Hiroshima (Tolkien, 1981, no. 102, p. 116) and British nuclear tests (Tolkien, 1981, no. 135, p. 165).

The coloured and eastern races are recruited to Sauron's side because they are geographically close to Mordor, not because Tolkien was colour-prejudiced in the traditional sense. They are offered peace after Barad-dûr falls. Sam pities the dead Southron.

Westall continued: ". . . I cannot rejoice in the death even of orcs. The only death I could ever rejoice in is 'That a man lay down his life for his friends'."

Apart from the deaths of orcs – which should really be laid at Sauron's door (or Morgoth's) because it was he who corrupted their ancestors, and we may mourn their wasted potential if we like – there are in fact many deaths and near-deaths where leading characters risk their lives for their friends: Boromir, Théoden, Dáin and Háma die; near-deaths include Gandalf, Éowyn, Faramir, Pippin, Merry, Frodo and Sam. Surely this pattern of sacrifice must inspire some positive ethical response in young people, whose moral education concerns Westall so strongly.

Westall concluded:

And I still love the book, because I am a *very* corrupt person. As Professor Berne says . . . "Every human being seems to have a little fascist in his head . . . in civilised people it is usually deeply buried beneath a platform of social ideals and training, but with proper permissions and directives, as history has shown again and again, it can be liberated into full bloom . . . a fascist may be defined as a person who has no respect for living tissue and regards it as his prey . . ."

I am increasingly afraid that *Lord of the Rings* along with *Starsky and Hutch* is issuing our children with just such permissions and directives.

That was Westall's last word on Tolkien (apart from comments he has since made in the occasional interview), and the last word in *Signal*, for I never wrote a defence of Tolkien in those pages. Westall duly received a block-busting letter from me, and responded most generously, conceding some points and holding to others. He wrote to me:

I do admit being unfair to Tolkien . . . Many of the sins I accused him of were not his own personal sins, but sins of his culture, sins of his times . . . I did under-estimate the peace-loving propensities of the Hobbits . . . I always looked on the Hobbits as being the "light relief" rather than the true carriers of the message . . . I didn't take into account the fact that the

West was always on the defensive . . . However, where I am not prepared to give way is on the nature of the Orcs . . . I do free Tolkien from the charge of preaching “holy war”.

So we parted friends, and kept up an occasional correspondence. In 1985 I sent him the articles in Tolkien Society fanzines inspired by his pieces in *Signal*, and he replied to say that he had read Tolkien’s *Letters* (Tolkien, 1981) and had changed some of his opinions about him, especially finding him not guilty of fascism.

However, the association with fascism has persisted, not only via Westall, but other critics who have independently attached the label to Tolkien. I turn now to E.P. Thompson’s misgivings about Tolkien, another mini-controversy of 1981. The critics I have already cited – Tom Davis, Stibbs, Westall – have all had at the back of their minds some notion that for young people to read the “wrong” books at a susceptible age is somehow a threat to world peace. Young people might grow up with racist attitudes; it might be easier to persuade them of the inevitability of war, and even that nuclear war might be a good thing, according to the old slogan “Better dead than red”. These ideas came into focus when the historian and peace campaigner E.P. Thompson accused some aggressive American defence analysts of having been influenced by *The Lord of the Rings* towards more hostile attitudes to the USSR. Thompson had once been a communist, had left the British Communist Party when the Russians invaded Hungary in 1956, and since then had been a member of the British Labour Party.

In 1980 there was a tremendous upsurge of concern over the escalation of Anglo-American nuclear weapons, after Margaret Thatcher led the Conservative Party to election victory in 1979 and became Prime Minister. She made public the modernisation of Polaris missiles which had been approved by the Labour Government a few years before, and announced that Britain was to buy Cruise missiles and Trident submarines from the United States. The debate about civil defence in the face of nuclear weapons was revived, and Thompson wrote a best-selling pamphlet *Protest and Survive* (Thompson, 1980), in its title a parody of the government’s official booklet *Protect and Survive*.

With his pamphlet Thompson succeeded in making thousands of young people very worried about the dangers of World War III. He also tended towards presenting the USA and USSR as parallel threats to humanity, in contrast with an anti-American element in the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament which had tended to belittle the “Soviet threat” and as a result discredited the British peace movement, which was seen as the dupe, or even the tool, of Moscow in its secret plan to take over Western Europe – one way or another.

I became a great admirer of E.P. Thompson after reading this pamphlet and other writings, and was taken aback to read in the *New Statesman* (Bird, 1981) that he had revised his pamphlet for American readers and published it as a special issue of *Nation* magazine under the new title *America’s Europe: A Hobbit Among Gandalfs* (Thompson 1981a). Throughout his introductory paragraphs he

interspersed references to *The Lord of the Rings* to suggest that the warmongering postures he detected among American defence analysts and Ronald Reagan’s advisers derived from their having read Tolkien in youth, with the result that they saw the USSR as Mordor.

Taking issue with the Winter 1981 issue of *Daedalus*, the journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, which was mainly devoted to articles on “U.S. Defense Policy in the 1980s” written from a hawkish point of view, Thompson described this special issue as “chapters of bad advice from Satan’s Kingdom”, and offered this opinion of the authors:

The expertise of the authors – for they are, all of them, undoubtedly very great experts – is contained within an infantile political view of the world, derived, I suppose, from too much early reading of Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*. The evil kingdom of Mordor lies there, and there it ever will lie, while on our side lies the nice republic of Eriador, inhabited by confused liberal hobbits who are rescued from time to time by the genial white wizardry of Gandalf-figures such as Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski or, maybe, Richard Allen.

That is an overstatement, for in fact the contributors to this issue say little about politics at all. A manichaeian, black-white, world view is assumed, and the rest is politically null. That is, perhaps, what a top-flight “defense expert” is: a person with a hole in the head where politics and morality ought to be, who can then get along all the better with moving around the acronyms, in a vocabulary of throw-weight, delivery-systems, megatons and the extrapolation of ever-more-tenuous worst-case scenarios.

It is ironic that although Thompson is suspicious of Tolkien’s influence on American military policy, in his own attack on this policy, he uses Tolkienian metaphor. Having described the volume of *Daedalus* as “chapters of bad advice from Satan’s Kingdom”, he entitled the third part of his own essay “Overthrowing the Satanic Kingdom” (by which he means not only U.S. militarism but also Russian super-power domination), and in his final exhortation he seems to have adopted a Tolkienian world-view:

I doubt whether we can succeed: nothing less than a worldwide spiritual revulsion against the Satanic Kingdom would give us any chance of bringing the military riders down.

Doesn’t that summon up the image of hobbits being menaced by Black Riders?

Thompson’s suggestion that American defence analysts had been over-influenced by Tolkien, having been reported in the *New Statesman*, was requoted with glee by Robert Giddings when reviewing the BBC Radio 4 dramatisation of *The Lord of the Rings* in *Tribune* (Giddings, 1981). This view of Tolkien as a cold warrior was on the way to becoming commonplace in British political life, and since Tolkien would have been horrified at such a misuse of his work, to fuel the cold war instead of negotiating peace, I felt that there was something I could do.

I wrote letters to the *New Statesman* and *The Nation* in refutation of Thompson's suggestions, quoting Tolkien's revised Foreword to the second edition, and offering a new interpretation of *The Lord of the Rings* from the viewpoint of a novice peace campaigner – myself – who had found Tolkien an inspiration, not a handicap. My letters were not printed and so, a couple of months later, having received a copy of *The Nation* from an American Tolkien fan, I sent Thompson a two-page letter arguing for a different interpretation of Tolkien's book. By this time I had read the *Letters* (Tolkien, 1981) in proof, so could let him know Tolkien's views on aerial bombing and Hiroshima. I suggested that as the American Tolkien cult was active in the latter '60s, the mass of Tolkien fans would (in 1981) be in their early 30s, but that President Reagan's military advisers would belong to an earlier generation, that had had its attitudes to the Soviet Union and Communism moulded by the experience of the Korean War, not by reading Tolkien.

I reminded him of how the text of *The Lord of the Rings* contained many warnings about how, if the leaders of the West had used the Ring, they would conquer Sauron, but replace him with another evil. Emphasis was placed on the rightness of fighting one's enemy face to face. It was always Sauron or Saruman who initiated superior technology in the battle scenes.

I quoted Tolkien's words from the revised Foreword, a comment on the real-life cold war: "In that conflict both sides would have held hobbits in hatred and contempt: they would not long have survived even as slaves." I added to that, Frodo's question to Faramir, which might suggest nuclear holocaust to the modern reader:

Shall there be two cities of Minas Morgul, grinning at each other across a dead land filled with rottenness?
(Tolkien, 1967b, p. 302)

In another newspaper article Thompson had recently identified the enemy of peace as "the military and political establishments of both blocs", and so I offered him an alternative application of *The Lord of the Rings* for 1981:

- Hobbits – ordinary people everywhere, in the East, West or Third World;
- Gandalfs – leaders of the peace movement, for example, Thompson himself;
- Saurons – World leaders, sabre-rattlers – Mrs. Thatcher, President Reagan, President Brezhnev, plus their military advisers;
- Saruman – Economic imperialism: the power of the USA, USSR, nuclear power;
- Orcs – anyone who takes advantage of their uniform to inflict physical pain on another, could be a soldier, policeman, thug, neo-Nazi, doctor in psychiatric hospital, guard in labour camp;
- The Ring – Weapons of mass destruction and indoctrination; ideologies based on the ideas prominent in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that your enemy is totally evil – as Thompson wrote in *Protest and Survive* and *The Nation*:

We think others to death as we define

them as the Other: the enemy: Asians: Marxists: non-people. The deformed human mind is the ultimate doomsday weapon – it is out of the human mind that the missiles and the neutron warheads come.

I didn't expect a reply – but I did receive a postcard reading "Thank you for your Tolkien letter which I will inwardly digest – Edward Thompson". Since then I believe that he has only once used Tolkien to provide a metaphor for military aggression, and otherwise turned to cinematic sources for his allusions, such as *Star Wars* and *Rambo*.

However, the quotation printed in the *New Statesman* survived to be utilised among the various political critiques of Tolkien collected by Robert Giddings in his commissioned anthology *This Far Land* (Giddings, 1983). Giddings recalled Thompson in his Introduction, which attempted to set Tolkien in the context of spy and conspiracy literature and films.

I will return to *This Far Land* after looking at an earlier critique of Tolkien by one of Giddings's contributors, Fred Inglis, at that time an academic at Bristol University, and now at Warwick University. He first came to my attention with his critical study of children's literature, *The Promise of Happiness* (Inglis, 1981). Inglis is not primarily a children's book critic, and brings to that discipline the perspective of a socialist intellectual, an educationalist and critic of adult literature, and a parent concerned about transmitting his cultural heritage and guiding his children safely to responsible adulthood. "Novels for children" he writes, "are adult messages, bidding the children farewell into the future" (Inglis, 1981, pp. 44-5), and again, "If it is not a duty, it is surely a necessary virtue in children's novelists to offer their readers confidence and hope in the future" (Inglis, 1981, p. 297).

Inglis believes that children who have read the best books grow up to be better people, and like Westall he is concerned about popular fiction in comics, television and the cinema. "Only a monster," he writes, "would not want to give a child books she will delight in, which will teach her to be good" (Inglis, 1981, p. 4). For him, the best books are *The Wind in the Willows*, *The Secret Garden*, the *Alice* books, *The Railway Children*, and books by Arthur Ransome, Rosemary Sutcliff and William Mayne – he also has good words for *The Hobbit* and *A Wizard of Earthsea*.

But when he turns to *The Lord of the Rings* it is in chapter 8, "Cult and culture", a chapter comprising a study of Enid Blyton, Tolkien and *Watership Down*. I want to look at three aspects of Inglis's attack on *The Lord of the Rings*: his inconsistency as I see it; his abuse of what he knows of Tolkien's biography; and his association of Tolkien's epic with fascism.

Recalling his own youth as a reader in the 1950s, Inglis speaks warmly of Buchan, Sapper, Kipling and Haggard, though admitting in the first two cases their "snobbery . . . incipient Fascism, their arrogance and brutality" (Inglis, 1981, p. 52). He feels he was not tainted by their bad qualities, but inspired by their appeal to patriotism which

“remains a strong potential for good” (Inglis, 1981, p. 58). Elsewhere he laments the way that the modern novel has lost its public dimension, whereas children’s novelists still accept the duty “to show the way the world goes, and how [children] should act in it” (Inglis, 1981, p. 297). And apropos of great fiction, with the examples of *Watership Down*, *Treasure Island*, *The Jungle Book*, *Right Ho, Jeeves*, and “the best *Dr. Who* stories”, he writes that their relation to our world is that of “metaphor to reality . . . they permit us to carry their scheme of interpretation back to the real world and to use it to see that world as potentially different” (Inglis, 1981, p. 155).

Had *The Lord of the Rings* also formed part of Inglis’s beloved reading as an adolescent (he went to boarding-school in 1950, when he would have been aged 13, so his school library is unlikely to have acquired the three-volume set, published between 1954 and 1955, before he left school aged 18 or 19) – had he read it, as well as his beloved Kipling and Buchan, I think he would have been more enthusiastic about it, and fitted it into his approved reading-list of books which appeal to patriotism, courage and the desire for heroism, and which relate to our world as “metaphor to reality”. Instead of which, he praises a sportsman in a boys’ comic for his “chivalrous and knightly” qualities (Inglis, 1981, p. 49), but criticises Tolkien for his “literary, bookish and stilted” diction (Inglis, 1981, p. 193). He allows Tolkien “insistent heroic uplift” and “knightly high-mindedness”, but balances this with “the vulgar simplicity of his ethics” and “a thinness of moral and physical substance, a lack of experienced content, which complement much of the insubstantiality of modern life” (Inglis, 1981, pp. 192-3).

Now for Inglis’s ridicule of Tolkien’s fans and home life:

[Tolkien’s] cult status is diminishing now (in 1980) but until very recently was signalled not only by the apparatus of quasi-marketing which followed his books in the form of calendars, lapel-buttons, posters, records . . . even dictionaries, but also by Middle-Earth societies on a hundred Midwest campuses and by bony, bearded thirty-five-year-olds careening along on Esalen and Meditation, and calling themselves Gandalf. (Inglis, 1981, pp. 191-2)

And of Tolkien himself:

Tolkien, as his biographer tells us Auden said, lived in a “ghastly house”. The Branksome Chine suburban lived in a house with switch-on logs and fussy fittings. While you can hardly judge a man by pelmets and lampshades alone . . . (Inglis, 1981, p. 192)

Would it have been any use to point out that the house furnishings were conventional middle-class of the period, chosen by Tolkien’s wife, and that Tolkien didn’t move to Branksome Chine until 1968, not only because relentless fans drove him away from Oxford, but also because his concern for his wife’s health and happiness prompted the move to a bungalow in Bournemouth? Auden visited Tolkien’s house in Headington, Oxford, not Bournemouth: Inglis has confused the two.

I decided not to respond to Inglis, as the reviewers dealt with him quite satisfactorily, and any letter from a Tolkien fan might have afforded further ammunition for future attacks. In particular I was pleased to see his reference to Fascism taken up by a reviewer. Here is Inglis:

for once it makes sense to use that much-abused adjective, and call Tolkien a Fascist. Can the word be used, just momentarily, in a quite non-hostile sense? Fascism . . . speaks up for “the individual against the machine”, and . . . his tribal structures . . . his yeoman hero and freeman servant, his rituals and ceremonies and fealties, all belong to the hornbooks of a non-historical, romantic Fascism . . . the hills of Mordor and Mount Doom look very like the headquarters of the dirty, rough-spoken, brutal proletariat, just as Gandalf whisked away from one corner of the battle by the great eagle, Gwaihir the Windlord, reminds us irresistibly of a US marine general in his Cobra helicopter. Sometimes the rotund prose and heady chivalry look as though they are called to put down modern Socialism rather than the Last Enemy.

The Lord of the Rings is a heady book . . . The child who reads it will be puzzled and stirred, and that is right. The adult who turns it into cult has shut himself in a rather grander version of Mistletoe Farm, and is trapped accordingly. Tolkien offers no key to the way out.

(Inglis, 1981, p. 197)

(N.B. The allusion to Mistletoe Farm is a reference to Enid Blyton, the most popular and prolific children’s author of the twentieth century, whose qualities and defects Inglis (pretty accurately, in my opinion) discusses just before turning to Tolkien.)

The critic Claude Rawson denied Inglis the possibility of using the term “Fascism” in a complimentary sense, though without, sadly, defending Tolkien against more of Inglis’s charges. He spoke of Fascism in general, noting that the reason why the individual is held to be superior to the machine is because the well-tuned machine extended “man’s speed and force and power to destroy”. I would also like to emphasise Claude Rawson’s warning about the misuse of the term “Fascism”: “It’s a foolish and imprecise term outside its precise political sense” (Rawson, 1981, p. 838)

Despite his pleasure in scoring cheap points, Inglis is still an honourable critic, and in his second critique of Tolkien, in *This Far Land*, he footnoted an acknowledgement to Rawson for setting him right about Fascism, and concluded his article with “Tolkien is no Fascist, but his great myth may be said, as Wagner’s was, to prefigure the genuine ideals and nobilities of which Fascism is the dark negation” (Giddings, 1983, p. 40).

I shall not deal with *This Far Land* in detail, as I assume most serious students of Tolkien will have a copy; I shall make a few observations and pass on. Fred Inglis yet again plays the game of describing the typical Tolkien fan: this time it is an ex-teacher setting up in England’s West Country to sell water-colour paintings while his wife serves cream

teas to tourists! But Tolkien fans may also be cold warriors: the peace movement headed by E.P. Thompson was underway, and several contributors introduced the threat of nuclear war into their critiques of Tolkien, including Giddings, who quoted Thompson's speculations in *The Nation* two years earlier.

Here is Kenneth McLeish in *This Far Land*:

. . . carrying a Ring to dump into a volcano against all odds . . . is a very poor allegory for how we should run our century . . . it was precisely this Edwardianly cosy view of human affairs in real life that cost Britain its Empire, cost Europe millions upon millions of its young men, and, unless we abandon it right now, will quite possibly cost us this planet and everything on it. (Giddings, 1983, p. 133)

. . . we live in a nasty, dangerous and brutal world, and dressing up in elven-cloaks, baking lembas and writing poems in Entish, though a commendable and delightful game, is a way of avoiding, not finding, the truth of life. (Giddings, 1983, p. 134)

Other contributors, however, appear themselves to be avoiding "the truth of life", by the way they belittle military aggression such as Hitler's or Stalin's. McLeish accuses Tolkien of ignoring "Dachau, Hiroshima and the closing of the Iron Curtain" (Giddings, 1983, p. 133), but still holds, in his allusion to nuclear war, that that is the only war the world has to fear. He and the other contributors do not seem to believe in war caused by a warlord's evil aggression, or communal violence (as in the Partition of India) caused not, I believe, by psychopaths, but tragically from fear that the other side, the ethnic aliens, must be removed from the territory altogether, or they would threaten one's own tribe out of revenge for previous violence.

So Derek Robinson writes, "It is assumed that the Enemy has no plan or purpose except enslavement, exploitation and a permanent diet of woe" (Giddings, 1983, p. 124). Would it not be better if he asked himself why the Chinese are oppressing the Tibetans, and why the atrocities in Cambodia and East Timor took place: then he would realise that Tolkien only hints at the reality of man's inhumanity to man (and woman and child). I have only found one allusion to orcs wreaking atrocities on civilians: Théoden to Saruman: ". . . what will you say of your torches in Westfold and the children that lie dead there?" (Tolkien, 1967b, p. 185).

Leaving now *This Far Land*, I have had the situation in the former Yugoslavia much in mind while preparing my talk and then in the months following the Conference. It is ironic that some liberal voices have found it necessary to justify their denunciation of the Serbs by calling them "fascist" and "racist" (Letters to *The Guardian*, 5th and 13th August 1992): we do not need these labels to condemn the evils we have heard about, provided that the reports are, sadly, true.

The President of Serbia rose to power through the Communist Party, so technically should not be labelled as a fascist; this goes to show that a leader doesn't have to be a card-carrying fascist to carry out territorial expansion and racial persecution, though some political activists on the Left

would hold that racism and genocide are entirely the product of right-wing political regimes.

As I type this, more examples arrive. *The Sunday Times*, a newspaper on the political Right in Britain, attacks the British government for its inaction over Bosnia, using terms to shame the Left for its past silences over evils committed by communist regimes: "a new fascist regime is on the march . . . genocidal onslaughts . . . stop the holocaust now". In other words, it doesn't matter about the political affiliation of the murderers: it is what they do which defines them, not their Party cards.

Martin Jacques, the former editor of *Marxism Today*, writes about the Balkan tragedy in the same issue of *The Sunday Times*. This left-wing intellectual has come to terms with the fact that genocidal atrocities can be committed by the heirs of a communist regime: "Milosevic . . . has engaged in the most horrific acts of racist slaughter Europe has seen since Nazi Germany . . . redolent of the experience of fascism in the 1930s . . . Communism has been replaced by nationalism . . . the Muslims are being threatened with genocide by the Serbs" (Jacques, 1993).

These contemporary events and comments illuminate, though in the most tragic context, the debate about Tolkien and fascism which took place in several Tolkien-related fanzines in the early 1980s, a debate begun by Iwan Rhys Morus of the Cambridge University Tolkien Society, who had read Westall's article in *Signal* and wanted to refute it from his own political perspective, one of being a Marxist himself, and a member of the Young Communist League.

In *Anor 3*, published in 1983, Morus's article "Tolkien the Fascist?" was published. First of all he told us that certain "liberal" critics had accused Tolkien "of being a Fascist and of subjecting young people to right-wing propaganda in his works." Morus then went on to refute a number of Westall's accusations, such as that characters in Tolkien's works are either good or evil with nothing in between. Then, looking particularly at the chapter "The Scouring of the Shire", Morus proved to his own satisfaction that since Tolkien presented hobbit society as an "ideal society; a rural community based on a great deal of mutual co-operation and very little governmental restriction", this shows both that Tolkien was no fascist, and also

much nearer to Marxist Communism than he knew. Not of course that Tolkien was a Marxist: the few times he mentions such things in his letters make it obvious that Tolkien knew very little of Communism, and that what he knew was mostly mistaken . . . The nature of the takeover of the Shire . . . is unmistakably Fascist.

(Morus, 1983)

In *Anor 4* (late 1983) Brin Dunsire commented on Morus's article. Tolkien, he believed, was more of a conservative, and disliked forms of state control. He questioned whether Westall had actually used the term "Fascist", and whether anyone else had. He pointed out that Westall *did* use the term "racialist", and justified this use because commentators on children's books genuinely fear that the misreading of Tolkien by juveniles may lead them into stereotyping, and the equating of Russians and Black people with Orcs.

Dunsire further discussed whether the characters in *The Lord of the Rings* are “black or white” (metaphorically speaking) and questioned Morus’s assertions about Tolkien’s affinity to Marxism. He agreed that the Sharkey regime resembled Fascism, and was “undeniably evil”.

In *Anor* 5 Morus supplied three paragraphs to close the correspondence. He returned to Westall’s article, suggesting that Westall believed that the seeming prejudice and stereotyping he perceived in Tolkien were not the result of misreading, but were the author’s deliberate intention. Then he admitted that Westall did not use the term “Fascist”, and that it was Westall’s term “racialist” which Morus equated with “Fascist”. Finally, he reiterated his view that Tolkien’s beliefs were close to Marxist Communism.

We have already established the usage of “fascist” in the *Signal* articles: Westall used it of Dennis Wheatley; Neil Philip picked up the allusion hoping to refute Westall, with the phrases “gives the lie to any view of the book as a Nazi tract” and “not to feed a new fascism”. Finally, Westall quoted Professor Berne on the fascist inside every human being. So both Philip and Morus jumped to conclusions over whether Westall explicitly called Tolkien a fascist – he didn’t. Morus would have done better to have looked at Inglis as well; in a report in *Amon Hen* 52 (Yates, 1981a) entitled “Tolkien: corrupter of youth” I summarised the views of John Carey (reviewing the BBC radio serial), E.P. Thompson, Westall and Inglis, and referred to Inglis’s use of the term “Fascist”.

I concluded my long letter to Westall by commending the Berne quotation as a good description of tendencies to orcishness, to Sauron- and Saruman-hood: exactly the evil which Tolkien was describing. Reading him aright, we ought to identify and reject such attitudes as stemming from Mordor, I said. And, as I have already written, after Westall read Tolkien’s *Letters* (Tolkien, 1981) and received copies of the *Anor* articles, and my response to them, he wrote to me to exonerate Tolkien of charges of fascism.

My response to Morus, entitled “Tolkien: the anti-totalitarian” was published in Brin Dunsire’s fanzine *Laurinquë* 5, March 1985. I conclude this paper with an adaptation of my text for *Laurinquë*. My theme was the irrelevance of the term “fascism”, when there have been, and are today, evil regimes on the political Left which have also committed atrocities.

It is not as if the critics who attack Tolkien do themselves deny the existence of evil. They have their own picture of evil, and assert that Tolkien’s picture is wrong. Yet when one finds them, for instance, denouncing Fascism, they use extreme rhetoric, condemning whole countries for their government’s policies, and have little sympathy for the ordinary soldier, possibly a conscript and unaware, because uneducated or subject to censorship, of the moral issues involved in what he does. Yet these same critics, as we have seen with Westall, denounce Tolkien for creating the character of an evil warlord, out to conquer the whole world and in command of an unstoppable army – as if nothing like that ever happened in the real world!

In *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien raises the issue of how

one should act, if faced with the fact that such evil things are happening that it is one’s Christian duty to intervene, and even to use force to save the innocent. His answer is that one might have to fight evil, face to face, but without using the ultimate weapon which would ensure one’s victory – but at the cost of one’s integrity. It should be clear from the *Letters* (Tolkien, 1981) that it was Tolkien’s Christian beliefs, together with his reading of history and his life-time’s experience of politics, which moulded his personal philosophy, and Morus does not consider how the Catholic doctrine of Original Sin contributed to Tolkien’s view of good and evil.

With regard to the use of the term “fascism”, I cannot agree entirely with the statement in *Anor* 3 that “The nature of the takeover of the Shire by Saruman’s Ruffians is unmistakably Fascist”, despite the evidence of the article “The Scouring of the Shire: Tolkien’s view of Fascism” by Robert Plank (Plank, 1975), an article which was not mentioned by the *Anor* contributors. Nor can I agree with the way “Fascism” is equated by Morus and Westall with Evil in the real world, as if no other system brought with it the seeds of evil. Every religion and ideology is run by fallible human beings, and evil deeds may be committed in their names.

Whereas the Concise Oxford English Dictionary sticks to the historical definitions of Fascism, as first of all describing Mussolini’s regime; then similar regimes elsewhere; and finally “system of extreme right-wing or authoritarian views”, the definitions given in *Anor* 3 and 5 are so wide that they could apply to other political systems altogether and could lead simply to the use of the word as a term of abuse. *Anor* 3 has:

Fascism as a philosophy . . . is based on the right of one small group or class of society to absolute power and authority. All opposition is silenced brutally and without any regard to justice.

While *Anor* 5 has: -

Loosely defined, a fascist is one who believes that the supposed superiority (moral, intellectual, cultural, etc.) of one particular class or race gives sufficient grounds for that class or race to impose its will on others with no loss of moral integrity. If that definition is accepted then the term “racialist” quite clearly implies “fascist”.

Surely many nations throughout history have behaved in domineering, belligerent ways. During the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, Tudor monarchs persecuted Catholic and Protestant “heretics”, and the Spanish Inquisition was even more notorious. The phrase “Reign of Terror” derives from the French Revolution, an uprising which ended by executing its own leaders. All these persecutions and massacres – and why not include the African slave trade, and the murder and dispossession of native Americans and Australians – were evil, but why do we have to go through the intermediate stage of defining such behaviour as “fascist” before we condemn it for being evil? Can’t we just call it evil and rest our case? The *Anor* definitions ought, in my opinion, to be applied not to “fascism”, but to my preferred term, “totalitarian evil”. The concept of evil is narrowed by

suggesting that only fascist states can be thus, and that only those states feature small dominant groups tyrannising the rest of the population!

The use of the term “fascism” as a synonym for evil camouflages the absolutely identical evil committed by so-called “socialist” states. If a ruling power assumes the right to dominate its citizens by terror, and to persecute ethnic, cultural, religious and intellectual minorities in the name of its “superior” ideology, then whether that ideology be Christian, Marxist, or Islamic, then by the *Anor* definitions that ruling power must be Fascist. And if a “revolutionary socialist state” assumes the right to dominate other countries in order to spread the revolution, then it too must be Fascist.

The editorial in my professional journal, *The Library Association Record*, for September 1980 (Usherwood, 1980, p. 393), stated, “Book burning, as history tells us, is a Fascist activity”, but I have collected examples of book-burning by pressure groups in the USA as well as this country, and in “socialist” regimes such as that of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Imprisonment of authors, and the banning of their books, has been commonplace in Eastern Bloc countries. One practical and relevant test might be to determine in which countries *The Lord of the Rings*, either in the original text or (better) in translation, is available to ordinary purchasers. One might then ask whether countries which do not feature Tolkien in their bookshops might be defined as “Fascist”?

I would prefer not to use that term, but to describe, say, both the Hitler and Stalin regimes as “totalitarian”, with the refinement of “Stalinism” (not “Communism”) for Stalin’s regime alone, under which as many civilians were murdered as under Hitler. Then for the modern USSR until 1991, either “totalitarian” again, or its own technical term “Marxist-Leninist”. “Communism/ist” (used in *Anor*) has been so widely used and abused that I prefer to avoid it, for it suggests that people whom I knew well, sincere members of the British Communist Party for instance, could have something in common with the Soviet regime under Stalin.

Finally I would reserve “socialism” only for those cases where I am sure I am describing the genuine article – which means it is more likely to be used for utopian socialism than for a real-life regime. It is significant that the 1984 Institute of Contemporary Arts exhibition (in London) on William Morris did not display any photographs from the Eastern Bloc, to show either the triumph or betrayal of Morris’s ideals. Instead they had photographs from the new socialist state of Nicaragua!

It must be clear now that I totally disagree with the statement in *Anor* 3 that what Tolkien knew of Communism was “mostly mistaken”. Here is that ambiguous word “Communism”. If it means “theoretical Marxism”, yes, certainly Tolkien wouldn’t have read much of that, beyond some acquaintance with William Morris’s non-fiction. But “Communism” can also mean “socialism-in-practice”, and

how can anyone suggest that Tolkien was mistaken when he wrote that Josef Stalin was a “bloodthirsty old murderer” (Tolkien, 1981, No 53, p. 65).

But if Tolkien’s opinion of Stalin was unreliable, what about Orwell’s? He knew Socialist theory, he was a committed Socialist, and he was utterly scathing about Stalin’s betrayal of Socialism in his two novels *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

So, to conclude, back to Saruman and “The Scouring of the Shire”: is this chapter really an indictment of Fascism? The character of Saruman has “clear modern relevance”, as Tom Shippey indicates in *The Road to Middle-earth* (Shippey, 1982, p. 129). After his allusion to *Animal Farm* itself “an age which has seen many pigs become farmers” (Shippey, 1982, p. 104), Shippey links Saruman with Socialism on page 129:

Saruman nevertheless does have one distinctively modern trait, which is his association with Socialism. His men say they are gathering things “for fair distribution”, though nobody believes them – a particularly strange compromise of evil with morality, for Middle-earth, where vice rarely troubles to be hypocritical.

However, Saruman also stands for “technological man”, for capitalism and industrialism, and as the *Anor* contributors agree, for the Nazi occupation of Europe. But Saruman’s association with technology is surely not specifically a “fascist” trait – as Plank points out, industrialisation is a vice of the democratic West, while we have heard much in the last few years of the horrors of environmental pollution in the Eastern Bloc (for example Millinship, 1992).

In his revised Foreword to *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien says that if he had written an allegory of the real war, then “Saruman . . . would . . . have found in Mordor the missing links in his own researches into Ring-lore, and before long he would have made a Great Ring of his own”, i.e. like Stalin, whose scientists produced nuclear weapons after the War¹.

People tend to forget that although Western Europe was liberated from the Nazis, Eastern Europe was only “liberated” by the Russians, and countries which had hoped for independent freedom were once again enslaved by the regime which claimed to have freed them. Tolkien’s grave in Wolvercote Cemetery is set among the graves of Polish Catholics who came to Oxford during the War. Why did they not return to Poland after the War, since Fascism had been defeated? Could it be that they, like Tolkien, rejected all forms of totalitarian evil?

I conclude my paper as I did my original article in 1985, though I must of course note that the Eastern Bloc countries have moved away from totalitarianism, and that, sadly, new tyrannies have arisen. A love of *The Lord of the Rings* is incompatible with tyranny, and Tolkien fans should condemn totalitarianism wherever and whenever it occurs.

¹ See Shippey, 1982, note 12 to chapter 5, p. 238.

References

- Benchley, Peter and Gottlieb, Carl. 1975. *Jaws*, film. Zanuck-Brown.
- Bird, Kai. 1981. "Diary" in *New Statesman*, 24th April 1981, p. 15.
- Blinn, William (created by). 1975-9. *Starsky and Hutch*, television series. A Spelling-Goldberg Production for ABC, 1975-9.
- Broomhead, Susantony. 1973. Letter in *The Listener*, 29th November 1973, p. 748.
- Burrow, J.W. 1973. "Tolkien lives?" in *The Listener*, 8th November 1973, pp. 634-6.
- Calder-Marshall, Arthur. 1955. "Talking of Books". British Broadcasting Corporation, Home Service, 30th October 1955.
- Critics' Forum*. 1981. Gillian Reynolds (chair), John Carey, Chris Dunkley and Stuart Hood (discussion of BBC Radio 4 production of *The Lord of the Rings*). BBC Radio 3, 4 April 1981.
- Daedalus*. Winter 1981, journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.
- Davis, Tom. 1973a. "Tolkien lives?" in *The Listener*, 22nd November 1973, p. 704.
- Davis, Tom. 1973b. "Tolkien lives?" in *The Listener*, 6th December 1973, p. 780.
- Dunsire, Brin. 1983. "Tolkien and Fascism" in *Anor* 4 (late 1983).
- Giddings, Robert. 1981. "Conspiracy theories" in *Tribune*, 15th May 1981.
- Giddings, Robert (ed.). 1983. *This Far Land*. London: Vision Press, 1983; Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble.
- Gilbert, Martin. 1986. *The Holocaust*. London: Macmillan.
- Home Office, The. 1980. *Protect and Survive*, various editions, reissue. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, May 1980.
- Inglis, Fred. 1981. *The Promise of Happiness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jacques, Martin. 1993. "Timely clarion call puts the Balkans on moral high ground" in *The Sunday Times News Review*, 18 April 1993.
- Koestler, Arthur. 1940. *Darkness at Noon*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Lewis, C.S. 1956. *The Last Battle*. London: Bodley Head.
- Lucas, George. 1977. *Star Wars*, film. Lucasfilms.
- Millinship, William. 1992. "Mother Russia's poisoned legacy" in *The Observer Review*, 31st May 1992, pp. 49-50.
- Morus, Iwan Rhys. 1983. "Tolkien the Fascist?" *Anor* 3, 1983, pp. 8-9.
- Morus, Iwan Rhys. 1984. "Tolkien the Fascist?" in *Anor* 5, Spring 1984, pp. 14-15.
- Orwell, George. 1945. *Animal Farm*. London: Secker and Warburg.
- Orwell, George. 1949. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. London: Secker and Warburg.
- Philip, Neil. 1981. Letter in *Signal* 35, May 1981, pp. 126-7.
- Plank, Robert. 1975. "'The Scouring of the Shire': Tolkien's View of Fascism", in ed. Jared Lobdell, *A Tolkien Compass*. La Salle, IL: Open Court, pp. 107-15.
- Rawson, Claude. 1981. "The exaltation of childhood" in *Times Literary Supplement* (Children's Books Supplement), 24th July 1981, pp. 837-8.
- Reed, Diana. 1973. Letter in *The Listener*, 29th November 1973, p. 748.
- Roddenberry, Gene (created by). 1966-69. *Star Trek*, television series. Desilu/A Norway Production/Paramount Television.
- Scott, Nan C. 1972. "War and Pacifism in *The Lord of the Rings*" in *Tolkien Journal* 15, Summer 1972, pp. 23-25, 27-30.
- Shippey, T.A. 1982. *The Road to Middle-earth*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Stallone, Sylvester and Cameron, James. 1985. *Rambo: First Blood Part Two*, film. Anabasis Investments NV/Buzz Feitshans.
- Stibbs, Andrew. 1980. "For Realism in Children's Fiction" in *Use of English*, Autumn 1980, pp. 18-24.
- Stibbs, Andrew. 1981. "Unrealism and Fantasy" in *Use of English*, Autumn 1981, pp. 65-67.
- Sunday Times, The*. 1993. "The shame and the slaughter", leader in the *News Review*, 18th April 1993.
- Thompson, E.P. 1980. "Protest and Survive Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, 1980" in eds. E.P. Thompson and Dan Smith, *Protest and Survive*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Thompson, E.P. 1981a. "America's Europe: A Hobbit Among Gandalfs" in *Nation*, 24th January 1981, pp. 68-93.
- Thompson, E.P. 1981b. "Can Europe halt the next world war?" in *The Sunday Times*, 9th August 1981.

- Tolkien, J.R.R. 1967a. *The Fellowship of the Ring*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. 1967b. *The Two Towers*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. 1967c. *The Return of the King*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. 1981. *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Usherwood, Bob. 1980. "War and peace" in *Library Association Record*, September 1980, p. 393.
- Westall, Robert. 1975. *The Machine-Gunners*. London: Macmillan.
- Westall, Robert. 1978. *The Devil on the Road*. London: Macmillan.
- Westall, Robert. 1981a. "The Hunt for Evil" in *Signal* 34, January 1981, pp. 3-13.
- Westall, Robert. 1981b. Letter in *Signal* 35, May 1981, pp. 127-9.
- Yates, Jessica. 1981a. "Tolkien: corrupter of youth" in *Amon Hen* 52, October 1981, pp. 9-10.
- Yates, Jessica. 1981b. "In defence of fantasy" in *Use of English*, Summer 1981, pp. 70-73.
- Yates, Jessica. 1984. "In Defence of Fantasy" in *Mallorn* 21, 1984, pp. 23-8.
- Yates, Jessica. 1985. "Tolkien: the anti-totalitarian" in *Laurinquë* 5, March 1985, pp. 3-7.