FASCIST HOBBITS? A patently absurd notion, so absurd indeed that it could only be believed, as George Orwell once observed in connection with another absurdity, by intellectuals. Hobbits are shy, amiable, chubby little creatures who prefer to be left alone in their own company. No nasty adventures or ambiguous entanglements with unpredictable foreigners--just long, lazy mornings and afternoons filled with a succession of tea and seedcakes, watching the hair grow on one's toes, puffing on one's pipe, and talking of nothing more threatening than tomorrow's weather.

But, then, what is the point of bringing into such peaceful surroundings these monstrous black--or, even worse, brown--herrings? And how is a fascist to be defined if the term can be stretched to include hobbits? Not surprisingly, given the apparently pacific nature of hobbits, there have been practically no discussions of Tolkien's fiction that link it in any way, either positively or negatively, with fascism. One of the very few exceptions is Robert Plank, who interprets the penultimate chapter of *Lord of the Rings* ("The Scouring of the Shire") as a negative depiction of a fascist (or possibly communist) take-over of the Shire, even though, as he acknowledges, Tolkien specifically warned against any such interpretation (111 and 114). Plank never really defines what he means by fascism (neither does Tolkien, for that matter, when he disclaims any links to it), as is evident from Plank's uncertainty as to whether the evil wizard Saruman and his thugs are to be seen as fascists or communists.

Since the precedent is so good and even endorsed by Tolkien himself, I will follow it here by not providing a definition either. Yet I will in the course of this essay argue that certain social traits and/or ideas can and even should be looked at as fascist in tendency, specifically the idea that the group or community takes precedence over the individual or that certain groups or communities are innately or by nature superior to others, especially when headed by strong leaders, and that, further and most disturbing, the superior groups are justified in seeking to exterminate the inferior ones. These ideas, to be sure, were already fairly widespread before the onset of specifically fascist movements in Italy and Germany, as was the case for example in certain strains of imperialist thought (notably those linked to Leopold II's Congo Free State) but by the late 1930s when Tolkien published the first of his hobbit books they were generally discredited and disavowed in most mainstream writing in the English-speaking world. In other words, while these ideas precede the rise of fascism in Europe and therefore are not to be specifically identified with fascism, once fascism was established in Italy and
Germany anyone expressing or endorsing such views ran the risk of being described as fascist, as for instance George Bernard Shaw, William Butler Yeats, and T. S. Eliot, among other notable contemporaneous literary figures, more or less deliberately and notoriously did. (See Shaw, O'Brien, Ricks, Julius, and Eliot.) These ideas are also, as I hope to show, implicit in some of Tolkien's most popular work. Part of my argument in fact is that the very popularity of Tolkien's work suggests that his anti-democratic, elitist, and even genocidal stance reflects a similar outlook among his British readers and even in Western society in general, an outlook, however, which could only become popular when it was cloaked, as it were, by means of a ring of invisibility.

Judging by the response even today of most readers of The Hobbit, including just about all of my students for whom it has been assigned reading for a number of years, the extermination of nasty working-class trolls or even nastier goblins and spiders is something to be greeted enthusiastically. Why? Because they are never explicitly associated (except indirectly perhaps the trolls) with contemporaneous events. These evil beings, it would appear, are purely creatures of fantasy, so that nothing horrible that happens to them can have any possible relevance to the so-called real world inhabited by Tolkien's readers, and therefore we who take pleasure in their variegated demise cannot in any way be held responsible for their genocide. At any rate that's what Tolkien repeatedly asserted and obviously wanted us to believe. Besides, being inexorably evil, these fantastic creatures amply deserve the harsh treatment that is meted out to them. Nevertheless, as I hope will become clear in the course of my discussion, the explicitly "good" hobbits--or at least Bilbo Baggins, the titular hobbit of the first of Tolkien's fantasy novels, The Hobbit (1937), to which book most of the discussion that follows is confined--are not merely good-natured, comfort-loving, seedcake-eating hedonists but can become, especially when in the company and under the influence of a powerful wizard and a group of assorted warlike companions, very different sorts of beings whose actions are at times reminiscent of some of the worst phenomena of recent European history.

What I am not arguing, of course, is that hobbits are fascists in the sense that they would have qualified for (or desired) membership in either Mussolini's Fascist party or Hitler's Nazi party. What I am saying, however, is that hobbits and their various associates (wizards, dwarfs, heroes, etc.) can sometimes behave, especially in extreme circumstances, like fascists, i.e. like some of the adherents of Italian fascism or German Nazism. This is, it goes almost without saying, certainly not a point Tolkien thought he was making. On the contrary, Tolkien's explicit point is a very different one, as is evident from the loving, Jefferies-like evocation of the peaceful landscape of the Hobbity Shire; or from the faint but unmistakable suggestion that the hobbits are affectionately satiric metamorphoses of an archetypically rural bourgeoisie. They are, in intention at least, the hirsute progeny of Squire Western and Mr. Pickwick, not of Benito Mussolini or, God forbid, Adolf Hitler.
Tolkien himself acknowledged that he was himself a sort of hobbit, fond of smoking a pipe, gardening, eating plain but plentiful food, donning colorful waistcoats, staying at home, and telling unsubtle jokes. Bilbo Baggins, as it were, "c'est moi." As Humphrey Carpenter points out in his biography, Tolkien went even further and explicitly identified Bilbo's comfortable home, "Bag End," with his Aunt Jane's similarly named Worcestershire Farm, and also provided an actual local habitation, though not in this ease a homologous name, for the imaginary Hobbiton by claiming as its original the Sarehole on the outskirts of Birmingham where he had spent several happy years as a boy (176). The Shire is, so it would appear, a sentimentalized place to be found primarily in the artistically fertile soil of Tolkien's childhood memories, a mostly imaginary place rooted in a version of past reality, rather like the roughly contemporaneous depiction of a once idyllic, semi-rural Lower Binfield in George Orwell's contemporaneous novel, Coming up for Air (1939).

Tolkien thought of himself as an English patriot, not a British one. He was definitely not a Tory imperialist or in favor of engaging in military adventures abroad. His views about the Allied conduct of the Second World War are, in retrospect at least, unconventional. Writing to his son, Christopher, at the end of 1943, he told him that he found "this Americo-cosmopolitanism very terrifying"—that is, the prospect of the homogenization of the world to conform to American "culture"—and went on to maintain that he wasn't sure "that its victory is going to be so much better for the world as a whole and in the long run than the victory of--." (The blank, which is in the published text, presumably refers to Germany.) Earlier in the same letter he had mentioned seeing a photograph of the Allied leaders at the Teheran conference, which led him to conclude that "our little cherub W.S.C. [Churchill] actually looked the biggest ruffian present" (Letters, 65). The word "ruffian," it should be noted, gains added meaning when read in connection with the "ruffians" who, under the direction of Saruman, the wizard turned bad, take over the Shire at the conclusion of the final volume of The Lord of the Rings.

The only other "ruffian" or leader besides Churchill whom Tolkien mentions by name in his letter is Stalin. Six months later, he told his son that he thought the Allied effort to defeat Germany was like "attempting to conquer Sauron with the Ring. And we shall (it seems) succeed. But the penalty is, as you will know, to breed new Saurons, and slowly turn Men and Elves into Orcs." When hostilities ended in Europe, Tolkien viewed with "regret and disgust" the prospect of what "British or American imperialism" would soon be undertaking jointly in the Far East, and predicted an "Americo-Russian War" in a year's time (Letters, 78 and 115).

Tolkien's conscious intention in The Hobbit, if one wishes to reduce it to that level, seems to be to show how the very ordinariness—not so say, mediocrity—of this class and "race" of creatures, their lack of imagination (and ambition), their materialism and smug self-satisfaction, make the hobbits uniquely suited to assuming positions of the highest responsibility and power. They are apparently the very opposite of the
assortment of "ruffians," both east and west, who were threatening the stability of the world in the 1930s. This golden mediocrity is an aspect of hobbitry that is developed more fully and explicitly in the *Lord of the Rings*, but it is already evident in the original version of *The Hobbit*. It can perhaps be most succinctly defined as the "banality of goodness," the obverse of Hannah Arendt's influential argument that some of the chief Nazi perpetrators of the Holocaust were human manifestations of the "banality of evil."

Unlike other, clearly more gifted and remarkable beings like Gandalf the wizard or Thorin the chief dwarf, Bilbo Baggins the hobbit can carry the ring without any fear of being corrupted by it. "Ordinary goodness," in this view, cannot be subverted in the way that "extraordinary goodness" can. Perhaps this is why Iris Murdoch, a fellow inhabitant of, and fellow professor at, Oxford, as well as a novelist and moral philosopher extraordinaire, once sent Tolkien "a warm fan-letter" (*Letters*, 353). As far as Bilbo is concerned, the ring not only does not harm him but it helps transform him into a hero by the end of the novel, something he could not have become without its possession. Indeed, in the context of the original 1937 *Hobbit*, there is no indication that the ring has any real power beyond making its wearer invisible, though there are possible hints of its future ability to act on its own, as when it seems to deliberately change owners (by getting lost in the dark underground passages) or when "by accident" it happens not to be on Bilbo's finger just as he is about to escape through the back entrance of the cavern of the goblins. (In the 1937 version Gollum actually plans to give the ring to Bilbo, as a forfeit for having lost the riddle game, again an indication that possession of the ring is not--even for Gollum--the moral danger it later comes to represent in *Lord of the Rings*. See *The Annotated Hobbit*, 128-31.) Significantly, in the 1937 version Bilbo too never suffers any deleterious moral effects from wearing the ring. On the contrary, his most altruistic act, the voluntary sacrifice of his share of the dragon treasure by making a spontaneous gift of the immensely valuable Arkenstone to Bard and the King of the Woodelves, is only rendered possible through his use of the ring. All of this seems anything but fascist. It is rather more appropriate to the Christian--and specifically Catholic--emphasis on the selfless performance of good works. And in this respect, at least, another well-known contemporaneous Oxbridge novelist, C. P. Snow, would certainly have been sympathetic, for he too was convinced of the ultimate moral excellence of the average human being.

Taking into account this overt background is essential to grasping the moral tensions that make for a good deal of the interest of Tolkien's novel. But to understand it without also taking the covert context of *The Hobbit* into account is to fail to see the very different world that lies beneath the surface morality of the novel, a world that is informed by a very different set of moral assumptions. Bilbo Baggins is a hobbit, it is true, but he is also a "Tookish" hobbit (as well as a "Baggins" hobbit), a hobbit, in other words, as both his mother's and father's surnames imply, who has "taken" and "bagged" his loot. (The name "Took" almost certainly also refers to the German "tückisch," or "tricky," as Gollum calls Bilbo.) So that even before Gandalf broaches his somewhat shady proposition to the future burglar, we can already guess why Bilbo is nominally
well qualified for a job of this sort, a job that, as a Marxist critic might add, the bourgeoisie has had many years of experience in performing. Indeed, Bilbo's first demonstration of predatory skill takes place at the expense of three yokel trolls whose rude accents unmistakably reveal their working-class origins. So that the burglar is also, and not least, a middle-class entrepreneur.

But an infinity of burglaries on this or that side of the Running River do not necessarily a fascist make. More suspicious is the "joint-venture" aspect of the dragon-raiding enterprise, the shared comraderie of the adventurous "gang." Here we can see traces of the so-called "Bundesroman" (which may be awkwardly translated as the "League Novel"), a popular form which flourished in Germany in the late eighteenth century—in other words, at roughly the same time when the first Tolkienians were emigrating from Germany to England—and exercised a profound influence on the development of the German novel in subsequent centuries (e.g., Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* or even Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*; or, especially, Hesse's *Die Morgenlandfahrt*).

According to Theodore Ziolkowski's *The Novels of Hermann Hesse*, the *Bundesroman* is usually built around a quasi-supernatural leader figure who is intensely admired and followed by a closely knit community or association of friends, all of whom are involved in some sort of quest. In this type of novel, the mysterious leader is not necessarily obeyed blindly or abjectly by his followers, but he does function as a model to be imitated. It is, I think, precisely this kind of cult-like preoccupation with leaders and with the shared life of groups and their powerful, non-rational bonding that helps to explain why both Tolkien and Hermann Hesse came to be so phenomenally successful in the United States during the nineteen-sixties and early seventies, a time when groups as diverse as the Kennedys, the Green Berets, the Beatles, and the Weathermen became focal points for the social imagination of the young.

The mere fact of group allegiance, even of partaking in a *Bund*, is certainly no sign of fascism. Hermann Hesse's hatred of the Nazis was early, intense, and unabating. Nevertheless, it is necessary to remember that fascism, in its root meaning, insists on identity in community, always under the direction and inspiration of a strong leader. When this kind of emotional and psychological need for the group and its leader is linked with racism and genocide, it therefore becomes difficult to avoid labeling it as fascist or at least proto-fascist. Lest I be misunderstood, I want to make it quite clear that my argument here is not that Hesse or Tolkien ever consciously endorsed fascist doctrine; on the contrary, there is no doubt that they both consciously and consistently denounced it as false and dangerous. What I am arguing, however, is that to some significant degree both nevertheless unconsciously absorbed (or at least at times displayed) several underlying fascist ideas, especially those relating to the importance of races and groups. Furthermore, I am also hypothesizing that a medievalist specializing in Germanic languages and literatures—a field much touted by Nazi propaganda—would have been more exposed and perhaps also susceptible to such
unconscious absorption than a pessimistic modernist writer like Hesse.

As Tolkien the philologist must have known full well, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* --for which he had in fact himself worked for a couple of years after the First World War--the Latin word *fascis* referred to that "bundle of rods bound up with an axe in the middle and its blade projecting" which was "carried by lictors before the superior magistrates at Rome as an emblem of their power." By extension, the *fasces* (plural) symbolized, both for the ancient Romans and for Mussolini's fascists in more modern times, the fact that, while an individual rod or branch might easily be snapped, when bound together in bundles or *fasces* they became virtually unbreakable. Strength, in other words, was to be found in community or groups, rather than in individuals. One recalls in this connection Tolkien's lifelong fondness for groups such as the TCBS and, later, the Inklings.

Does a link between groups, racism, and genocide exist in *The Hobbit*? Yes, I'm afraid it does, and in a quite central and unmistakable manner. In *The Hobbit* --and, for that matter, in *The Lord of the Rings*--race is an integral aspect of identity. This is obvious in the distinctions that are drawn between, say, hobbits and dwarfs, dwarfs and elves, or elves and humans. These different "races," to be sure, appear to belong--as of course humans do as well to a single species since they are able to marry and produce (fertile?) offspring. So, we are told that Elrond of Rivendell is part elf and part human, and that Bilbo is a descendant of a mixed marriage between a fairy (or elf) and a hobbit. It is even possible that the ores (or at least some ores) may be partly human, though this may be a notion that only occurred to Tolkien after completing *The Hobbit*. (There are no ores in *The Hobbit*.) So, in *The Two Towers* Treebeard speculates about Saruman's orcs: "Are they men he has ruined, or has he blended the two races of ores and men?" (96).

Nevertheless each representative of the good "races" not only looks different but also has innately different characteristics and abilities. But no matter what their abilities, they are all absolutely--not relatively--inferior to certain extraordinary superbeings like Gandalf and Beorn, whom they admire and obey (and even fear a little) but whom they are only conditionally fitted to understand. Within each race there is also an accepted leader, who usually obtains and retains his authority by a mixture of inherited right and native ability. There is, in fact, a strong implication that these qualifications are ultimately identical, that political power is not so much a matter of conscious choice as it is of genetic predisposition. This is certainly true of Thorin, and of Bilbo as well, who becomes a member of the expedition in the first place partly because of his "Tookish strain."

The innate or biological basis of leadership, however, is most clearly seen in the "grim" Bard, the human hero who finally succeeds in killing the dragon, Smaug. Bard is the direct descendant of Girion, Lord of Dale, and as such is racially (Tolkien actually uses
the word) endowed with the ability to understand the warning given by the aged Thrush who has overheard Bilbo's account of Smaug's vulnerable spot. As a natural leader he is also perceived to be superior to the cowardly and democratically elected Master of the Lake Town of Esgaroth, a man whose principal preoccupation is the making of money rather than the killing of hated enemies. Tolkien had very little use for democratic institutions. When, towards the end of 1944, Anthony Eden ventured to praise Greece as the "home of democracy," Tolkien vented his anger in a letter to his son, Christopher, inquiring rhetorically if Eden was "ignorant or insincere?" Didn't he know, he went on to wonder, that the word democracy "was not in Greek a word of approval but was nearly equivalent to 'mob-rule'. . . . And the great Greek states, esp. Athens at the time of its high art and power, were rather Dictatorships, if they were not military monarchies like Sparta!" (Letters, 107). What is more, the races of hobbits, dwarfs, fairies and men, together with the superbeings who guide and control them, are by nature morally superior to certain other races, such as trolls, goblins, orcs, and dragons. To kill one or many or even all members of these despised, inferior races is to perform an act of valor and virtue, something that will be remembered to one's credit forever after. Nor is there any need to be squeamish about how one exterminates them. Gandalf, especially, is good at devising innovative means of genocide. He engineers the escape of the adventurers from the main goblin cavern by attacking the goblins with "piercing white sparks" that burn holes in their skins, so that "the yells and yammering, croaking, jibbering and jabbering; howls, growls, and curses; shrieking and shrieking, that followed were beyond description. [Though Tolkien manages to describe it nevertheless, as can be seen in the following sentence.] Several hundred wild cats and wolves being roasted slowly alive together would not have compared with it " (111; my italics). Indeed, the wargs (or the race of intelligent but malevolent wolves) soon have the opportunity to prove the accuracy of this comparison, when Gandalf lets them have a sample of his "most horrible and uncanny" fire, much to the joy of Bilbo and the dwarfs. From the top of a tree, Gandalf bombards the wolves with flaming pine cone missiles, whose sparks "stuck and burned into them, and unless they rolled over quick they were soon all in flames. Very soon all about the glade wolves were rolling over and over to put out the sparks on their backs, while those that were burning were running about howling and setting others alight, till their own friends chased them away and they fled off down the slopes crying and yammering and looking for water" (149). And, of course, biting the dust.

For the master races never take prisoners, unlike the goblins, who do. It is in fact only the sight of the dreaded sword, Orcrist (or Biter), that so enrages the Great Goblin that he resolves to kill Thorin rather than condemn him along with the remaining "prisoners" to work in the mines. As far as the "superior" races are concerned, however, the only good warg or goblin is a dead warg or goblin. At one point in the novel, the mistrustful shape-changer Beorn rounds up a stray warg and goblin and subjects them to questioning in order to confirm the truth of the adventurers' story. '"What did you do with the goblin and the warg?' asked Bilbo suddenly. 'Come and see!' said Beorn, and they followed round the house. A goblin's head was stuck outside the gate and the warg-skin
was nailed to a tree just beyond" (182). So much for the rules of war. After the great Battle of the Five Armies, the defeated goblins are ruthlessly pursued and driven into the Running River to drown or "hunted into the marshes about the Forest River; and there the greater part of the last fugitives perished, while those that came hardly to the wood-elves' realm were there slain or drawn in to die in the trackless dark of Mirkwood. Songs have said that three parts [that is, three-quarters] of the goblin warriors of the North perished in that day, and the mountains had peace for many a year." Death brings peace; the more death, the more peace.

Tolkien was of course aware that some readers might object to such a supposedly "simple-minded . . . fight between Good and Evil, with all the good just good, and the bad just bad," though these objections were being made in the context of Lord of the Rings and not of The Hobbit, to which, however, they apply with at least equal force—or lack of it. After pointing out that his good characters, such as the Elves, were "not wholly good or in the right," and that the same was true of the men of Gondor, he went on to argue that "in any case this is a tale about a war, and if war is allowed (at least as a topic and a setting) it is not much good complaining that all the people on one side are against those on the other" (Letters, 197).

Tolkien's argument here is not only unpersuasive, it is disingenuous. That all the people of one side are against all the people of the other side does not quite describe the Battle of the Five Armies, which is rather a ease of one totally bad side fighting against another side that is almost entirely good. This is not a war between people and people. There are "people" on one side only; the other side consists exclusively of various kinds of demons and monsters. What is more, Tolkien himself ought to have remembered how once upon a time he had acted kindly and sympathetically towards German prisoners during the First World War, and that, in later years, he had specifically disclaimed any identification of the goblins with the Germans during that war. John Garth quotes him as saying that "I've never had those sort [sic] of feelings about the Germans. I'm very anti that sort of thing" (Tolkien and the Great War, 192 and 219). Near the close of the Second World War, as the Russians were preparing for their final assault on Berlin, he wrote to his son Christopher about how "people [English people] gloat to hear of the endless lines, 40 miles long, of miserable refugees, women and children pouring West, dying on the way. There seem to be no bowels of mercy or compassion, no imagination, left in this dark, diabolic hour. By which I do not mean that it may not all, in the present situation, mainly (not solely) created by Germany, be necessary and inevitable. But why gloat! . . . The destruction of Germany, be it 100 times merited, is one of the most appalling world-catastrophes" (Letters, 111).

Nevertheless, there's no feeling of pity while killing the fleeing goblins after the Battle of the Five Armies—perhaps because there are no women or children among them. (Are there in fact any female or infant goblins? And do goblin warriors actually have mothers?) Cheering on Gandalf as he sets the wargs on fire, as Bilbo and the dwarfs
do, or singing songs about the virtual extermination of goblins after the Battle of the Five Armies may not be quite the same as gloating, but one may be forgiven for saying that it is sometimes hard to tell the difference.

Even more to the point perhaps is the fact that from the very beginning of literary depictions of warfare in the Western Literary tradition, that is, since Homer's *Iliad*, warriors on opposing sides have not always or even usually been divided into good and bad in any simple-minded way. Homer the Greek is not against the Trojans simply because Homer is insisting on his Greek identity. In fact, for Homer, Hector the Trojan is arguably a greater hero than his Greek counterpart (and killer), Achilles. That is something that Tolkien should have known and, of course, did know. He also should have known, and should have admitted in his reply to his critics, that whatever might be true of the potential moral ambiguity of his "good" characters, just about all of his "bad" characters were utterly and irredeemably bad. So, while it might be true that some good people--elves and men--might turn more or less bad (that is, deteriorate morally), it was never possible for such bad "people" as goblins, wargs, and orcs to become in any way good. He would have done well to take to heart the distinction that one of his sometime pupils at Oxford, W. H. Auden, later pointed out with specific reference to Tolkien, that a "good person always enjoys one advantage over an evil person, namely, that, while a good person can imagine what it would be like to be evil, an evil person cannot imagine what it would be like to be good" (7).

Tolkien's rousing description of the vast battle that forms the real climax of his novel suggests that he may have had something else in mind than just the extermination of wargs and goblins. Indeed the whole eastward movement of the adventurers' expedition, with its basis in a rationalization of the recovery of lost territories and properties, must have struck a suspiciously responsive chord in the minds of mostly middle-class adults reading this story to their children in the late nineteen-thirties. Such a response on the part of contemporaneous readers has nothing to do with Tolkien's explicit denial that either *The Hobbit* or the "sequel" on which he was working at the time was to be read allegorically (*Letters*, 41). The trolls with their working-class accents; the aggressive underground goblins, ambushing even wary travelers; the wolves with their associations of roaming the northern woods and steppes; the great dragon who devastates the countryside and jealously guards his expropriated wealth--all these were too close to widespread, contemporaneous British middleclass perceptions of the Soviet Union to be purely accidental, even if they were not deliberate fabrications on Tolkien's part. What is more, Tolkien is putting out a message here that resonates with political relevance, a fantasy of bourgeois wish-fulfillment that in its strategic details at least was to be strikingly prophetic of the coming war, but with Hitler's Germany instead of Stalin's Soviet Union as the enemy. This is especially true of air-power superiority (the eagles) as one of the crucial deciding factors in the Battle of the Five Armies. In this connection it is also worth noting that Gandalf's "uncanny fire" anticipates the phosphorus bombs of the Second World War. Significant too is the fact that, according to Humphrey Carpenter, at the time of the 1938 Munich crisis, "Tolkien,
like many others at the time, was suspicious not so much of German intentions as of those of Soviet Russia; he wrote that he had 'a loathing of being on any side that includes Russia,' and added: 'One fancies that Russia is probably ultimately far more responsible for the present crisis and choice of moment than Hitler'" (189). Later, towards the end of 1943, Tolkien wrote his son Christopher that he "smiled a kind of sickly smile" on hearing of "that bloodthirsty old murderer Josef Stalin inviting all nations to join a happy family of folks devoted to the abolition of tyranny & intolerance!" (Letters, 65).

So the hobbits--along with the dwarfs, elves, Gandalf and Beorn--are fascists after all? Goose-stepping all the way back to the shire? No, I confess I really don't think so. To call them fascists is both ungenerous and exaggerated. Exaggerated, yes, but not farfetched, for, as we have seen, there are unmistakably fascist elements in The Hobbit, with the obsession about killing supposedly inferior races being the most ominous.

Some of this glorification of killing on Tolkien's part may originate in his interpretation of the old Germanic warrior ethic, as memorably described in his classic essay on "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics." There Tolkien contends that the old Germanic worldview was a Manichean one in which good and evil struggled incessantly, with now one, now the other side gaining the upper hand, though in the end good was foredoomed to lose the struggle. In this larger metaphysical context, the only honorable course of action was to fight for the good and destroy as much of the evil as possible, thereby helping to stave off inevitable defeat for a little while longer (21ff). The relevance of this ethic to the racial framework of The Hobbit is obvious.

All of the foregoing should not, of course, be construed as suggesting that Tolkien was a fascist or in any conscious way sympathetic to fascism, especially not in its Hitlerian form. In a moving letter written to his son Michael in early June 1941, Tolkien specifically denounces "that ruddy little ignoramus Adolf Hitler" for "[r]uining, perverting, misapplying and making forever accursed, that nobler northern spirit, a supreme contribution to Europe, which I have ever loved and tried to present in its true light" (55-56). When in the summer of 1938, the German publishing house, Rütten & Loening, wrote to him about a proposed German translation of The Hobbit, at the same time requesting proof of his "aryan" ancestry, Tolkien replied indignantly that, though in the past he had regarded his "German name with pride . . . if impertinent and irrelevant inquiries of this sort are to become the rule in matters of literature, then the time is not far distant when a German name will no longer be a source of pride" (Letters, 37-38). It is undoubtedly to Tolkien's credit that, according to Peter Grosvenor and unlike some other British intellectuals professionally involved in the middle ages--notably A.J. Penty--he did not conclude that fascism was the embodiment of guild revivalist ideas, or generally endorse the Mussolini regime, or support aspects of Nazi economic policy, or become a follower of Oswald Mosely and the British Union of Fascists. He did, however, like Penty, ardently support Franco's side in the Spanish Civil War, and was full of
praise for the Catholic poet and fellow South African Roy Fuller who had joined Franco's side and "among other things was in the van of the company that chased the Reds out of Malaga in such haste that their general (Villalba, I believe) could not carry off his loot . . ." (Letters, 96).

But Tolkien's adaptation of what he thought of as the Germanic warrior ethic is only part of the explanation for the violence of his fictions. For Tolkien is not alone among modern writers of fantasy in glorifying the extermination of supposedly innately evil creatures who differ in appearance, behavior, or opinions from "ourselves." One thinks of Mark Twain's A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court (1889), with its bloodthirsty portrayal of the massacre of the feudal aristocracy in the name of scientific progress; or G.K. Chesterton's Napoleon of Notting Hill (1904), which finds equal joy in doing the precise opposite; or Tolkien's friend, C.S. Lewis's planetary trilogy (1938-45), in which wrongdoers are summarily "unbodied." Even the gentle Hermann Hesse's Steppenwolf depicts with considerable relish (in the "Magic Theater" segment of the novel) the destruction of all motorized vehicles and the killing of their drivers and passengers. And, of course, this "moral" and self-righteous bloodlust for the extermination of hated, demonized enemies is exploited to the hilt in the most popular and biggest-grossing" fantasy films of the seventies and eighties, such as the Star Wars trilogy or the Terminator series. To discover just what the sources are for this lust for genocide in modern fantasy fiction and film would lead us beyond the scope of this essay, though one can conjecture that it probably has much to do with the apparently universal psychological need to find some category of being whom we can all love to hate.

WORKS CITED


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