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Gregory Jeffers

Abilene Christian University, [gregory.jeffers@acu.edu](mailto:gregory.jeffers@acu.edu)

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## **Oppression and Resistance: Socialist Theory and Christianity in *The Lord of the Rings***

**Gregory C. Jeffers**

Abilene Christian University

Department of Language and Literature, Composition and Rhetoric

### *Abstract*

I have applied the work of Iris Marion Young (socialist theorist and political philosopher) and Walter Wink (New Testament scholar and Peace activist) to J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, arguing that although Young and Wink provide similar descriptions of oppression, their forms of resistance are largely divergent because Wink's, while far more radical and compelling as a story, requires the existence of the Christian God to work. I have read their prescriptions for resistance through de Certeau's concepts of *strategy* (concerted and active resistance) and *tactic* (reactionary resistance). *The Lord of the Rings* demonstrates the way that Wink and Young's theories of oppression go hand in hand. Both Wink's (who theorizes about oppression on a cosmic scale) and Young's (who discusses the specific oppressions present in Liberal welfare states) theories can make sense of the oppression in *The Lord of the Rings*, but Wink's theory of resistance is preferred by Tolkien over Young's.

Most political critical theory is indebted in some way to Karl Marx. Marx's basic concern with power relations serves as the starting point for critical theory that is concerned with power relations in social settings. While the West rejected Marx's medicine, it did offer a corrective in the form of the Welfare State. While Marx was responding to appalling labor conditions in an industrializing society, modern socialist theory responds to the injustices created by the Welfare State. Marx's critique centered around the dehumanization of persons that occurs when labor is bought and sold as a commodity. Contemporary socialist theory goes beyond the dialectic concern of class oppression to include a concern for the way complicated power relations and systems act unjustly and oppressively on persons. Work has been done that describes the way systems act on persons and the way persons exercise agency within systems.

Critical theory has also had an influence on Christian thought. The Protestant Social Gospel and Catholic Social Doctrine were Liberal in their critique of capitalism. They asserted, and continue to assert, that God cares deeply about the poor and the disenfranchised, and that the state has an obligation to care for "the least of these." This has tended to look like an expansion of the Welfare State. In South America, however, Liberation Theology developed, which asserts that God desires to free the oppressed wherever they may be found. Following Gustavo Gutierrez and others, the liberationists continue to borrow heavily from Marxism. Liberation Theology has been heavily criticized by established churches—in particular the Catholic Church—for only paying lip service to the traditional religious concern for spirituality. A third Christian perspective, however, deviates from both the Liberal and the Liberationist perspectives. It is tightly theological and spiritual, and yet directly comments on existing oppression. This third perspective emerges from within various Christian Peace traditions, like the Anabaptists, and from New Testament exegesis done without an explicitly contemporary political hermeneutic, but with attention to the text's original political context.

My goal is to compare Wink's and Young's theories to each other by focusing on two primary questions. First, what is oppression? Second, how do agents within systems of oppression resist? I interpret what Wink and Young say about resistance through de Certeau's concepts of *tactic* and *strategy*. I will conclude with an application of Young's and Wink's theories to J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. My thesis is that while Young and Wink describe oppression similarly, their forms of resistance are largely divergent because Wink's,

while far more radical and compelling as a story, requires the existence of the Christian God to work. *The Lord of the Rings* demonstrates the way that Wink's and Young's theories of oppression go hand in hand, but embraces Wink's theory of resistance over Young's. As fantasy, it is able to, by authorial fiat, assert the existence of a transcendent force for Good.

### **What is Oppression?**

While Wink begins his theory of oppression with a description of the oppressive powers according to his New Testament outlook, Young begins with an assertion of what a person is. She argues, "Individuals are not primarily receivers of goods or carriers of properties, but actors with meanings and purposes, who act with, against, or in relation to another" (Young 28). Young, writing from within the United States, writes in a context that must respond to the American idea of justice-as-distribution. That is, Young is seeking to challenge the Liberal corrective (the Welfare State) offered to Laissez-faire Capitalism. Liberal ideals of mere distributive justice "implicitly define human beings as primarily consumers, desirers, and possessors of goods . . . in presupposing such a possessively individualist view of human nature, the original liberal theorists hypostatized the acquisitive values of emergent capitalist social relations" (Young 36). This is problematic for Young because it presupposes "an understanding of human beings as primarily utility maximizers" (Young 36). Starting as she does, then, with an understanding of what a person is provides the basis for her view of oppression.

The Welfare State contributes to the continued oppression of persons within the system. Indeed, the Welfare State, with its attendant democratic notions, is at odds with itself in that it depoliticizes the mechanisms of distribution. It "constructs citizens as client-consumers, discouraging their active participation in public life" (Young 66). This is because the Distributionist Paradigm ideologically depoliticizes public life through stifling questions about the structures of distribution themselves. If people are mere objects for the reception of goods, and not actors with meanings and purposes, then that "leav[es] production and decisionmaking structures unquestioned . . . in both private and state sectors" (Young 71). Since such a view presupposes "that economic growth is the primary goal of government and business activity . . . government and business [a]re to have the authority to do whatever they judge necessary to promote that growth" (Young 70). Viewing an equitable distribution of goods as the concrete realization of justice, the Distributionist Paradigm divorces the satisfaction of material needs

from the satisfaction of relational needs, thereby dehumanizing persons by viewing them solely as receptacles for goods rather than as meaning-makers.

Instead of justice-as-distribution, for Young, another definition of justice is needed. Examining what values are inherent in the good life, Young argues,

as doers and actors, we seek to promote many values of social justice in addition to fairness in the distribution of goods: learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings; participating in forming and running institutions, and receiving recognition for such participation; playing and communicating with others, and expressing our experience, feelings, and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen. (Young 37)

The concrete realization of these values, while essential to humans being treated as such, is not justice. Justice “concerns the degree to which a society contains and supports the institutional conditions necessary for the realization of these values” (Young 37). That is, a society is more just the better able it is to help one “(1) develop and exercise one's capacities and express one's experience and (2) participate in determining one's actions and the conditions of one's actions” (Young 37). Oppression then is the opposite: the constraining by society of one's ability to develop these relational values. Oppression can take many forms, but it is almost always characterized by the dominant social group acting against a marginalized social group. Given that a person's humanity is realized in the exercise of relational values, so, too, she is dehumanized in the suppression of those values.

Wink does not focus on justice in the same way that Young does. Writing within a Christian framework, he presumes the doctrine of *Imago Dei*, and thus the basic moral worth of persons, assuming that it is the breath of God in each person that grants innate worth. He assumes what he calls an “integrated worldview.” That is, he sees “spirit—the capacity to be aware of and responsive to God—at the core of every institution” (Wink, *Powers* 13). Additionally, while Young writes in a self-described social and political context (the modern Welfare State), Wink writes in much broader terms. Young also falls well within a particular movement while Wink's work was groundbreaking in the field of New Testament Studies. The first book—in what became a series of scholarly works—was mostly an exegesis of the

scriptures in the New Testament, especially in St. Paul, that has to do with what is translated as “the powers” or “the powers and principalities.”

For Wink, the “spiritual Powers [are] not separate heavenly or ethereal entities, but the *inner aspect of material or tangible manifestations of power*” (Wink, *Naming* 104, emphasis in original). For instance, “a ‘mob spirit’ does not hover in the sky waiting to leap down on unruly crowds at a soccer match. It is the actual spirit constellated when the crowd reaches a certain critical flashpoint of excitement and frustration” (Wink, *Naming* 105). The Powers do not exist independent of material and physical institutions, but the physical and material portions of the institutions which humans interact with is only a manifestation of the Powers (Wink, *Naming* 105). We speak of the “soul” of a company or the “corporate brand.” We assume that Marxism or Nazism is not reducible to books, or even governments which adopt them, but themselves exist in some form. Wink would call such -isms, structures, organizations, -ologies, and systems Powers, in that they are integrated material and spirit. They have mythic form and exist well beyond our current historical, economic, and social locations.

While, prior to Wink, Liberation theologians did identify oppressive structures as the Powers, Wink argues that they (the Liberationists) “have, in the main, followed the reductionist path and treated the Powers as *just* institutions and systems, with little attempt to comprehend their spiritual dimension or take seriously their mythic form” (Wink, *Naming* 103, emphasis in original). For Wink, the powers are “the good creations of a good God, but all of them have ‘fallen,’ becoming more or less evil in their intent, and may even be set on the destruction of humanity” (Wink, *Naming* 104). While explicitly rejecting fundamentalist readings of the New Testament that reduce the Powers to demons and angels, Wink nevertheless affirms that Powers, like people, are made by God and are capable of agency.

In the same way that Young and other contemporary socialists have moved past Marx's dialectic of class warfare in order to discuss oppression, so too Wink posits the existence of a web of oppression which he calls the Domination System (Wink, *Powers* 36). Wink argues that the Domination System came into existence alongside the sprawling empires of Mesopotamia and Greece (what he calls the conquest state) because these “Powers emanated from the huge institutions and bureaucracies that were concentrating increasing power over the day-to-day lives of ordinary people” (Wink, *Powers* 38-9). The conquest state's sole goal was the use of warfare

to increase its control. The result was a violent, patriarchal system that benefited the established aristocracy on the backs of the poor and uneducated (Wink, *Powers* 40-41).

The Domination system is only able to maintain itself through the propagation of its myth: the myth of redemptive violence. That is, “the belief that violence saves, that war brings peace, that might makes right” (Wink, *Powers* 42). This myth was literally enshrined in pagan creation myths. In the Babylonian creation myth, in which the younger gods cede sovereignty to Marduk in return for the violent overthrow of Tiamat, violence is the direct cause of creation. In this myth, “Chaos (as symbolized by Tiamat) is prior to order (represented by Marduk, high God of Babylon). Evil precedes good. The gods themselves are violent” (Wink, *Powers* 45). Humans, then, are predisposed to violence—predisposed to chaos—and thus violent repression of Chaos by Order is always necessary. (Wink, *Powers* 46-47). Following René Girard (influential French literary critic and anthropological philosopher), Wink argues that the Domination System is able to keep the eruption of violent chaos at bay by the use of sanctioned, sacred violence against the other. This, of course, is called “scapegoating” (Wink, *Powers* 83-4).

The myth of redemptive violence is alive and well in contemporary society, and is utilized, still, by the Domination System to keep people in bondage. Our cultural productions (literature, film, etc) demonstrate this. Wink gives the example of the American western whereby the outlaws cannot be stopped by legal means, and so the only hope is for the sheriff/marshal/posse to exercise vigilante justice. The law, in such scenarios, is too weak to work in the midst of Chaos (Wink, *Powers* 50). Essentially, Wink argues, we want a violent messiah to save us. The myth is also directly present in our large political institutions and in our cultural institutions. The myth of redemptive violence “serves as the inner spirituality of the national security state. It provides divine legitimation for the suppression of poor people everywhere, and the extraction of wealth from the poorer nations” (Wink, *Powers* 57).

Thus, for Wink, the Powers, which conspire with each other in the Domination System, are cosmic in scope, evil in intent, and oppressive in function. The Powers are thus anti-human forces. Unlike Young, who limits her description of oppression to contemporary Western Welfare States, Wink's aim is to link all oppression together in a narrative of resistance. Young's criteria for a just society, however, could serve as an assessment for evaluating societies at any given point in time. Moreover, both Wink and Young encourage resistance to the prevailing systems,

though what they offer is very different from each other. I will read their ideas about resistance through de Certeau's notions of *tactic* and *strategy*.

### **How do agents within systems of oppression resist?**

Michel de Certeau, in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, insists that we are all trapped within a fluid system of control. We are born in a geographic place to a determined set of parents with a determined skin color, economic status, and native language. De Certeau maintains that it is possible to engage in resistance from within these systems. As an example, he puts forward the child who doodles on her assignment and, even though she is punished for it, still continues her resistance to the hegemonic power of the teacher (1249). Despite the fact that there are forces seeking to colonize our spirits, resistance is possible. De Certeau asserts two types of engagement with the systems.

The first type of engagement he calls “strategy.” Strategy is employed by those with significant enough cultural power to successfully “delimit one's own place in a world bewitched by the invisible powers of the Other” (de Certeau 1252). So, for instance, someone with enough money or political power may be able to employ strategy. Moreover, strategies are processes—ways of acting—that can be appropriated by those with enough power. Some strategies include science, the military, and politics (de Certeau 1252). The other type of engagement that de Certeau discusses is what he calls “tactics.” Tactics are those minor subversive acts in which a powerless or weak agent is able to exercise a small amount of control for a small amount of time (de Certeau 1253): the student sticking gum to the bottom of the table, the homeless man squatting in a house, etc. Tactics do not form a grand strategy—they are utterly reactive to the broader strategies to which they find themselves resisting. An example that de Certeau gives is of military force: it is impossible for a large army to invade a country sneakily since trickery is a tactic while the large force employs a strategy. But guerrilla fighters employ tactics to resist the advances of the military (de Certeau 1253). Tactics, then, are for the weak.

For Young, resistance is part of an overall strategy in which the major institutions of society are re-politicized. The politicization of institutions is, for Young, essential for the realization of a just society. The only way for the institutional structures to cooperate with the relational values is through their democratization, and thus their politicization. This is because the only way a person can exercise self-determination and self-development is through having a

real, effectual, actual voice in the institutions which act upon her. That is, equality “refers primarily to the full participation and inclusion of everyone in a society's major institutions” (Young 173). Thus, for Young, “to 'be just' . . . amounts to . . . a call to bring these phenomena of practical consciousness and unconsciousness under discussion, that is, to *politicize* them” (Young 152, emphasis in original). The only way for all to be truly included and permitted to participate is through what Young calls “the politics of difference.”

Traditional Liberalism has strived to treat each person as a bearer of equal moral worth, and to that end had tended to value colorblindness before the law and in other institutions. This is the root of anti-discrimination laws in the United States. Young argues, “We see a society in which differences of race, sex, religion, and ethnicity no longer make a difference to people's rights and opportunities. People should be treated as individuals, not as members of groups” (Young 157). However, “a politics of difference argues . . . that equality as the participation and inclusion of all groups sometimes requires different treatment for oppressed or disadvantaged groups” (Young 158). That is, groups that have been historically dominant or historically oppressed will need different treatment in a pluralistic and egalitarian society. It is a false assumption that persons can all be treated in the exact same way and justice result. Such a view presupposes the sameness of their experiences, but the assumption of this sameness is oppressive.

The assertion of difference is reserved for the oppressed group. The naming of difference by the dominant group always results in oppression in that the power differential causes the dominant group to name the minority group's difference as wrong and deviant. However, “by asserting a positive meaning for their own identity, oppressed groups seek to seize the power of naming difference itself, and explode the implicit definition of difference as deviance in relation to a norm” (Young 171). The creation, then, of the institutional conditions necessary for the realization the relational values requires radical contextualization according to self-identified group identity. The overall strategy of the politics of difference relies on the social, economic, and cultural capital of the oppressed groups. Especially as she encourages oppressed groups to form coalitions, she argues that the institutions of society can, themselves, be transformed though their forced politicization. Young thus holds a fairly positive view of the ability of oppressed

groups in Western Welfare States to create the institutional conditions necessary for a more just society.

Unlike Young, who espouses a fully formed strategy, Wink merely puts forward a list of tactics with which to react to the Powers. Given their cosmic influence, the Powers will not be reformed by the application of powerful strategies as argued by Young. For Wink, then, the only type of resistance to the Powers is the resistance of the weak: the use of tactics. Central to Wink's understanding, and the understanding of many Christians, is the creation of an alternative community (church) that is able to embody the humanizing values of God over and against the unrelenting Powers.

Most importantly for Wink's theory of oppression, he espouses the tactic of non-violence *always*. If the myth by which the Domination System remains in place is the myth of redemptive violence, then the use of non-violence is a direct denial of that controlling myth. "Jesus rejects violence" Wink argues "when his disciples request permission to call down fire from heaven on inhospitable Samaritans" and when a disciple attacks an arresting soldier and Jesus yells "No more of this" (Wink, *Powers* 68). Citing St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, Wink argues that the Apostle forbids the use of physical weapons against the Domination System, but instead encourages the use of the weapons of God (Wink, *Powers* 68). Jesus breaks the cycle of violence "by absorbing its momentum with his own body. And in his crucifixion Jesus refuses to use violence as a 'last resort' but instead trusts God with the outcome" (Wink, *Powers* 69). Non-violence as a tactic is especially important because the means used in resistance must be consistent with the ends. "Because armed struggles rely on a coercive hierarchical structure," Wink argues, "they set into place patterns not easily renounced when victory is won" (Wink, *Powers* 113). Becoming what we hate is a capitulation to the Powers.

Acting violently against the Other affirms the anti-human trajectory of the Powers. In order to realize this end, Wink warns that "there is spiritual work that needs to be done . . . Jesus is cautioning us not to return evil for evil" (Wink, *Powers* 122-3). For Wink, if love does not triumph over violence, then the possibility of overcoming the Powers is shot. For Wink, only when we accept the enemy as a gift—only when we view the enemy as totally human—is it possible to realize the Kingdom ethic of Jesus. Wink argues, "We are able to develop an objective rage at the injustices they have perpetuated while still seeing them as children of God.

The energy squandered nursing hatred becomes available to God for confronting the wrong or transforming the relationship” (Wink, *Powers* 171). Realizing that our enemies are trapped within the Domination System and that they “know not what they do” permits us to love, and thus, perhaps, to reform (Wink, *Powers* 171).

However, Wink is not content to merely espouse a set of tactics. He connects the exercise of the tactics of Jesus with the power of God. For Wink, the subversive and intentional use of tactics becomes a strategy capable of success. Moreover, the only way for resistance to succeed is to embrace the place of weakness and oppression for to do anything else is to conspire with the Domination System in the place of power. For the early church, who embraced the ethic of Jesus, “Jesus' death, they came to believe, had exposed and annulled the entire sacrificial system. His death ended temple slaughter and the necessity for sacred violence. Jesus' crucifixion laid bare the true nature of the sacrificial system” (Wink, *Powers* 80). Following Girard, Wink argues that the central way that redemptive violence was propagated as a myth was through the use of the scapegoat. By exposing the scapegoating mechanism, Jesus death exposed what the Powers had long hidden. Moreover, by rising from the dead, Jesus demonstrated that “the power of the Powers is not, after all, ultimate. There is another power at work in the universe that, like water, cuts stone: nonviolent love” (Wink, *Powers* 80). The cumulative use of the reactionary tactics of nonviolent love, then, form a cosmic strategy orchestrated by the cosmic power and creator of the universe we call God.

Wink's view of resistance, then, emphasizes and requires the use of the tactics of the weak to resist the violence of the Powers because any other sort of resistance capitulates to the way the Powers run the world. Moreover, the only way Wink's agents can have hope of success is because God is active in every tactical use of nonviolent love (this corresponds, naturally enough, to Wink's “integrated worldview”—in which all material institutions have a spiritual core—in that the spiritual core of nonviolent tactical resistance is God's overall strategy). Wink's view, then, presupposes the existence of the Christian God for it to have any sort of validity.

While such a force for good is consummately integrated into the universe of *The Lord of the Rings*, it is an act of faith to appropriate that same view into our world. Moreover, while Wink emphasizes the cosmic nature and scope of resistance and oppression, Young is focused on dealing with contemporary circumstances in a particular historical, social, and economic

location. Additionally, Wink is idealistic—as was Jesus—in his emphasis on nonviolent love and the concrete realization of the humanity of people—while Young explicitly rejects associating justice with the concrete realization of the humanity of people and, instead, insists that justice is a function of the structural and institutional aspects of societies.

### **Application of Theory to *The Lord of the Rings***

J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* serves as an exemplar text with which to demonstrate the ways that Young and Wink's theories interact with each other. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Wink's Domination System is clearly evident. In Tolkien's world, the most obvious Power is Sauron. He has always sought dominion over other agents. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Sauron is the most powerful being in Middle Earth. He is responsible for orchestrating the system of oppression in which the peoples of Middle Earth find themselves.

True to Wink's theory, however, other Powers also exist, such as Saruman, the Watcher at the lake who tried to kill Frodo and take the Ring (Tolkien, *Rings* 308-9), the Balrog of Moria who fought Gandalf and matched his power (Tolkien, *Rings* 330-1), Mt. Caradhras which tried to kill the Fellowship (Tolkien, *Rings* 288-9), “hounds of Sauron” that chased the Fellowship to Moria's gate (Tolkien, *Rings* 298-9), and, of course, the foot soldiers that made up the armies of the Powers: trolls, orcs, evil men, and Ring Wraiths.

While Wink explains the Domination system in detail, and while he explains that the reason the Powers act as they do is because they are fallen agents who are selfish (much like people), Young's theory of oppression uncovers a particular mechanism by which the Powers act on persons. Moreover, her theory adequately accounts for the worst of the dehumanization that takes place in *The Lord of the Rings*. Young's argument—that justice-as-distribution results in dehumanization because it suppresses the relational values—is clearly present in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Sauron's identity, and an identity that Saruman covets (Tolkien, *Rings* 259), is that of a ring-maker. That is, early on in his time in Middle-earth, Sauron aided the Elves in crafting their magical rings. He tried to ensnare the elves, but they proved too discerning. He did, however, make rings for both dwarves and men, and with these rings he ensnared others. He made seven rings for the dwarves and nine rings for men. These rings functioned to give each person what he wanted (for the dwarves that was wealth and for men that was prestige). However, slowly, the

rings he had given brought the people he had given them too under Sauron's control. In the case of the men, the nine became Ring Wraiths, his most feared servants (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 357-9). The giving of rings meant that the objects—the goods and services accumulated by possessors of the rings—were also gifts of Sauron. Sauron, then, is the source of distribution. He functions in the same way that the Welfare State functions.

For Young, the problem with both unregulated Capitalism and the Welfare State is that people are dehumanized: they lose their identities and become “essentially utility maximizers” (Young 36). The Ring Wraiths, by definition, have lost their identities. As Gandalf explains, “A mortal, Frodo, who keeps one of the Great Rings, does not die, but he does not grow or obtain more life . . . he *fades*: he becomes in the end invisible permanently, and walks in the twilight under the eye of the Dark Power that rules the Rings” (Tolkien, *Rings* 47). They are defined by the goods they have been given and as objects that use those goods. The result is total domination of the person by Sauron. Moreover, the orcs that fight in both Saruman and Sauron's armies completely lack identities.

Indeed, the only sorts of personality or identity manifested by orcs are in clashes between the orcs who serve Sauron and the orcs who serve Saruman (Tolkien, *Rings* 454-8). For instance, the orcs from Mordor fight a pitched battle with the orcs from Isengaard after Merry and Pippin have been captured, but even their clashes are fights over who will get to eat the goods (in this case, hobbits). Saruman's relationship to Sauron is clearly the result of mimetic desire. He both loves and hates Sauron and the Ring, and this is the result of the goods he has received from Sauron. Sauron sent him orcs, orders, and conferred upon him authority. Without those direct ties to Sauron, Saruman would have retained his identity. As it is, he tells Gandalf that he is no longer Saruman the White (the identity he had possessed from the beginning of his time in Middle Earth) but that he is now “Saruman the Wise, Saruman Ring-maker, Saruman of Many Colours!” (Tolkien, *Rings* 259). Dehumanization and loss of identity—the suppression of Young's relational values—is directly tied, in *The Lord of the Rings*, to the Distributionist Paradigm.

Moreover, the desire for objects—for Sauron's gifts—leads to dehumanization as well. Boromir is one good example, but by far the best example is Gollum. Gollum took the ring in an act of aggression against his cousin. The possession of such a “precious” birthday gift corrupts him. He starts to lie, cheat, and steal. He is excluded from his family of origin and spends the rest

of his life wandering the world with no relationships. He is not so totally dehumanized as the Ring Wraiths (he remains corporeal for one thing, and for another possess a—albeit split—personality), but he nevertheless is stunted in his ability to exercise Young's relational values simply because his hunger for the Ring drove him to distrust community of any kind. The Distributionist Paradigm thus requires that people stop being people in their most essential sense: “actors with meanings and purposes, who act with, against, or in relation to another” (Young 28). *The Lord of the Rings* thus displays the dehumanizing effects of viewing people merely as possessors of things. Tolkien thus demonstrates Wink's theory of the Powers and Young's theory of oppression. Tolkien does, however, part with Young on the response to oppression.

While Young maintains that the solution to oppression—what resistance should look like—is the re-politicization of the mechanisms of distribution through the politics of difference, Tolkien rejects her strategy and embraces, instead, Wink's tactics. That is, Tolkien demonstrates Wink's underlying theory that any sort of collaboration with the Powers—even with the means by which the Powers act—results in oppression. Only the use of the tools of the weak results in successful resistance to oppression.

The most important tactic that Wink espouses is nonviolence. This is because the myth of redemptive violence is the way that the Domination system maintains its power. While Tolkien does not reject the use of violence, he does reject using power in the way that Sauron uses power. That is, while violence is *the* essential feature of the Domination System in our world, that is not the case in Tolkien's world. By authorial fiat, Tolkien insists that there is redemptive violence. However, there is a direct parallelism between the use of the Ring for Tolkien and the use of violence for Wink. Thus, the essential feature of the Domination System in Tolkien's world is the use of the Ring. There is no redemptive use of the Ring, for to use the Ring in Tolkien's world is the same as using violence (for Wink) in ours.

Refusing to use the Ring to achieve the goal of freedom from Sauron is an ongoing theme throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. After Frodo has been captured by the Enemy, Sam retains possession of the Ring and it “tempted him” with “wild fantasies” such as him “striding with a flaming sword across the darkened land . . . he had only to put on the Ring and claim it for his own, and all this could be” but he ends up refusing to use it because he knew “that he was not large enough to bear such a burden” (Tolkien, *Rings* 901). Additionally, Frodo offers the Ring to

Galadriel, who refuses it because “In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night . . . All shall love me and despair” (Tolkien, *Rings* 365-6). Frodo also offers Gandalf the Ring once he finds out what it is, but Gandalf refuses it arguing, “With that power I should have power too great and terrible. And over me the Ring would gain a power still greater and more deadly . . . Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself” (Tolkien, *Rings* 61).

As Wink asserts in his argument against the use of violence by the oppressed, using violence means agents become like the Powers, which defeats the purpose of resistance. Indeed, as Gandalf tells the leaders of Gondor and Rohan, “Victory cannot be achieved by arms, whether you sit here to endure siege after siege, or march out to be overwhelmed beyond the River” (Tolkien, *Rings* 878). Beyond refusing to use the Ring to achieve victory, the strategy all along has been to outwit Sauron by doing the unexpected thing: sending the weak to destroy the one hope of success by force for “In great wisdom or great folly it has been sent away to be destroyed, lest it destroy us. Without it we cannot by force defeat his force” (Tolkien, *Rings* 880). As de Certeau maintains, tactics—such as trickery—are the province of the weak. Gandalf counsels that they must pretend like they have the Ring and that they intend to use it so that Sauron will be distracted from his imminent doom. By marching directly into the jaws of death, the weak and oppressed will subvert the system altogether because Sauron will see what he expects to see: the rashness and “the pride of the new Ringlord” (Tolkien, *Rings* 880). To use the Ring is to become the oppressor, and the result is the perpetuation of the Domination System. Destroying the Ring, then, restores the humanity of all.

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