James Madison University
JMU Scholarly Commons

Spring 2018

Of the silmarils and the ring: J. R. R. Tolkien's fiction and the importance of creation and art

Michael Hartinger
James Madison University

Recommended Citation

Of the Silmarils and the Ring: J. R. R. Tolkien's Fiction and the Importance of Creation and Art

_____

An Honors College Project Presented to

the Faculty of the Undergraduate

College of Arts and Letters

James Madison University

_____

by Michael Connor Hartinger

Accepted by the faculty of the English Department, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

FACULTY COMMITTEE: HONORS COLLEGE APPROVAL:

_____   _____
Project Advisor: Dr. Mark Rankin,   Bradley R. Newcomer, Ph.D.,
     ,   Dean, Honors College

_____
Reader: Dr. Dabney Bankert,
     ,

_____
Reader: Dr. Sofia Samatar,
     ,

_____
Reader: ,
     ,

PUBLIC PRESENTATION

This work is accepted for presentation, in part or in full, at the Honors College Symposium on April 18th.

James Madison University Honors Capstone Thesis:

Of the Silmarils and the Ring: J. R. R. Tolkien's Fiction and the

Importance of Creation and Art

by Michael Hartinger

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Mark Rankin

Thesis Readers:

Dr. Dabney Bankert

Dr. Sofia Samatar

Abbreviations of J. R. R. Tolkien's Major Works:

LotR: *The Lord of the Rings*

Sil: The Silmarillion

FS: On Fairy Stories

BoLT I: The Book of Lost Tales, Part One

BoLT II: The Book of Lost Tales, Part Two

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction - Creation, Artistry, Enchantment, and the Machine

A capacity for narrative is something that distinguishes Human beings from all other known forms of life. We learn a great deal about ourselves from how we decide to create and tell stories. The Fantastic is a dominant strain of Human storytelling and has engulfed the majority of media in the world today. People deliberately tell stories that envision the world differently from how we assume it to be; we create different realities to see a reflection of our own therein. Fantastic storytelling, stories that knowingly react against a mimetic approach to artistic representation, has become an essential feature of collective Human culture and experience.

Fantastic storytelling has always been present within human culture, but it has grown considerably in popular culture recently. The growing availability and diversity of media in the current age has helped to solidify the Fantastic in the public consciousness. Media like film and video games have become consumed in fantastic storytelling as they have grown. J. R. R. Tolkien and his landmark works *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-5) have influenced all subsequent fantastic storytelling in the West and have catalyzed its surge in popularity. Fantastic storytelling had always existed and had increased in popularity since the nineteenth century, but its popularity surged even more in the wake of Tolkien's fiction. The popularity and influence of Tolkien's fiction has caused a Renaissance of the fantastic in our time. Certain entertainment franchises such as J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) or George Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977-83) would not exist if Tolkien had not opened the floodgates that popularized this form of storytelling.

I.   A Summary of Tolkien's Fiction

The study of Tolkien's fiction requires an understanding of the general history of his invented mythology and history. Dedicating some attention to the progression of Tolkien's writings will reap rich rewards in understanding the ideological content of those writings. Tolkien's invented world, Arda, is contained largely within three primary works: *The Silmarillion* (1977), *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. Time and history are divided into Ages in Tolkien's fiction, with the First, Second, and Third Ages of the Sun consuming the majority of narrative action; the entirety of Tolkien's narrative ends with a new Fourth Age that is never explored further. These ages describe time after the Sun and Moon were made, but there were many ages that passed in Arda under the light of the Two Trees before the Sun and Moon. *The Silmarillion*, edited and published posthumously by J. R. R. Tolkien's son Christopher, recounts the earliest chronological events in Arda from the creation myth of the world to the end of his legends and stories. *The Hobbit* was Tolkien's first substantial published work dealing with Middle Earth, a continent within Arda, and follows a short period of history during the Third Age of Tolkien's world. *The Lord of the Rings* was published as a sequel to *The Hobbit* and deals primarily with the end of the Third Age of Middle Earth.

In Tolkien's creation myth several key characters and ideas are introduced that shape the rest of his fiction. In the beginning there was the one God, Eru Ilúvatar, who created other powerful angelic beings from his thought called Ainur, some of whom entered into the world and were later called the Valar by the Elves. In addition to fourteen Ainur, Ilúvatar made a host of lesser spirits or Maiar that aid them in their labors. Ilúvatar commanded the Ainur to make a great Music about his halls to enrich their glory. The Ainur made music to harmonize with the designs of Eru, but one among them brought discord into this paradise. Melkor, the mightiest

Ainu, rebelled against Eru and the other Ainur out of a desire to have complete mastery over his work and even over the work of his brethren. When making this cosmic music, Melkor seduced and coerced many of the Maiar to his cause. Eventually, Ilúvatar ceased the music and shamed Melkor for his rebellion but also illustrated that no being can alter the Music of Ilúvatar and that no idea or act of creation can be made that does not have its source in him as the creator. Eru then showed forth the Music of the Ainur and gave it physical form, which became the world of Arda that contains Middle Earth and was suspended within Eä or the universe. The Ainur are invited to descend from the Void down into the physical world and order its processes and fulfill its vision of beauty as foretold in the Music. The Music of Ilúvatar binds the fate of the world and the hope of its inhabitants.

With the creation of the world, the Valar inhabit it and begin to fulfill the beauty of their labors in the Music. The Valar strive against Melkor, who claims the world as his own by right upon entering into it. Melkor struggles against the Valar and is filled with jealousy and hate for the glory of the works that they create, such as beautiful lands, the lamps that light the world, and so forth. The Valar continually rebuild their works because Melkor destroys them out of envy. Eventually, the first of the two kindreds is born to the world: the Elves. The two kindreds, the Children of Ilúvatar, are beings that were foretold to come, and they would possess their own wills, and their own creativity. When the Elves awaken many of them make a great pilgrimage to the West of the world to reach the land that the Valar have established for themselves. The Valar also make war on Melkor, destroy his fortress of Utumno in the Northern reaches of Middle Earth, and imprison him to safeguard the Elves as they journey across Middle Earth. It was during this time that the Valar made Two Trees that lit all of Valinor and which lived with inner light. The Elves journey across Middle Earth to reach the sea and then cross to Aman, the

Blessed Realm of the Valar. Over several generations the Elves travel through the world and are displaced and separate into different communities. These communities either fail or give up their quest to find the land of the Valar and become estranged from their brethren culturally and linguistically. Large portions of the Elves reach Valinor, the city of the Valar, and live with them in happiness.

Melkor is imprisoned for many years and the Elves flourish under the protection and guidance of the Valar, but this bliss eventually ends. After Melkor's term of imprisonment ends the Valar try his case anew and deem that he had repented and reformed his ways so they set him free. Melkor's seeming change was a fair semblance he used to gain freedom and wreak havoc through deception and subtlety rather than force. So Melkor spread lies throughout Valinor and whispered that the Valar kept the Elves as thralls because they feared their potential. Many Elves heeded these lies and suggestions and turned against the Valar in their hearts. One Elf, the greatest Elf in all of Tolkien's history, Fëanor, came to believe these lies despite his deep hatred of Melkor. Melkor hated Fëanor as the greatest and most beautiful of the Elves, who was capable of the most beauteous works of art and skill. For Fëanor had made three holy jewels that shone with inner light and life, the Silmarils, from the divine light of the Two Trees, and these were the most beautiful of all Elvish works and were coveted by Melkor.

Eventually, Melkor conspired to end the bliss of Valinor and regain his full freedom in Middle Earth as well as gain the Silmarils that he lusted for. Melkor fled to the south and sought the aid of the evil spirit Ungoliant, a spirit of darkness and gluttonous lust that consumes recklessly and without end. With Ungoliant's help, Melkor descends upon Valinor and kills the Two Trees and casts darkness upon the world; the two demons then flee North, kill Fëanor's father and steal the Silmarils before escaping across the grinding ice into the Northern realms of

Middle Earth. Fëanor is wracked with grief and rage at this news and musters his kindred of

Elves, the Noldor, to abandon Valinor, escape the supposed thralldom of the Valar, and return to

what they see as their true home of Middle Earth, so as to wrest the Silmarils back from Melkor.

Him they now name Morgoth, the Black Foe of the World. Fëanor and his seven sons swear an

eternal oath to Ilúvatar to reclaim the Silmarils from any being within the walls of the world that

seeks to keep them from themselves, their rightful owners. The love that Fëanor holds for the

Silmarils had become possessive and drives him and his people to commit kinslaying of another

kindred of Elves, the Teleri. However, eventually the Noldor return to Middle Earth and begin

their siege of Morgoth's fortress, Angband, but Fëanor is killed early in the fighting.

Tolkien develops hundreds of years of history from this point that largely concern the war

of the Elves against Morgoth, the coming of Men into the world, the different servants of

Morgoth such as Sauron and Orcs, and various legends and tragedies of this age of heroism. One

legend tells the story of a mortal Man, Beren, who falls in love with an immortal Elf maiden,

Lúthien, and the ensuing quest that he must complete to gain permission to marry her. Lúthien's

father, Thingol, challenges Beren to brave the hell and fire of Morgoth's realm and to recover a

Silmaril from his iron crown. Beren agrees to this task and sets out to reclaim the jewel. The

couple has many adventures and survives many perils, including being imprisoned by Morgoth's

chief lieutenant, Sauron, a shape-shifter, and (as we will see) an embodiment of the calculated

evil of technology. Eventually Beren and Lúthien come before Morgoth's throne, put him to

sleep with magic, steal a Silmaril from his crown, and make a narrow escape. Beren loses his

hand clutching the Silmaril to a gigantic wolf, but the couple manages to return to Lúthien's

home kingdom of Doriath. Lúthien's father, Thingol, and Beren hunt the wolf that maimed him

and slay it, though Beren is wounded and dies in the process. The Valar restore life to Beren and allow the couple to live as mortals until they die together.

Through hundreds of years of struggle Morgoth is eventually overthrown and ousted from the created world. The Valar give the Men who aided the Elves against Morgoth a beautiful island kingdom, Númenor, to rule and call their own. The Men of Númenor are powerful, live long lives beyond the span of other mortals, and come to conquer and explore all regions of Arda, the created world, except for the Blessed Lands of Valinor in the West. The Númenoreans are forbidden from sailing west into the Undying Lands and come to resent this ban. The Men of Númenor fight against Sauron in Middle Earth. During this time Sauron helps Elves make rings of power with the intention of eventually enslaving them all. However, Celebrimbor made the Three Elven Rings in secret and received no help from Sauron. The purpose of these rings was to preserve and glorify the beauty of creation around them (*Letters* 152). Eventually, Sauron's intentions became clear and he forges One Ring to rule all others, and enslave all who own a ring of power that he had tainted with his hand. Thus a new Dark Lord arose in Middle Earth, and the Númenoreans helped to resist him. However, Sauron humbled himself before the might of Númenor, surrendering himself as a hostage to be brought back to the island nation as a servant of their great king, Ar-Pharazôn the Golden. Through flattery and seduction Sauron rises to be the king's most trusted advisor and leads him and the kingdom to abandon Eru Ilúvatar and come to worship the Dark, and Morgoth who is its lord. Sauron prompts this noble race of men to succumb to pride and attack Valinor, and after this rebellion they are all punished and Númenor destroyed. A remnant of Númenoreans who remained faithful to Eru and the Valar escape the destruction of Númenor and establish the great kingdoms of Men in Middle Earth, Gondor in the

south and Arnor in the north. Sauron loses his ability to appear beautiful and returns to Middle

Earth as a shadow that will eventually reclaim a form of horror and tyranny.

Hobbits, Halflings or the Little People, later find the Ring of Power, and the wise

determine that it must be destroyed as a wholly evil object that is dangerous to even exist. The

Hobbit Frodo journeys through darkness and torment to reach the one place where the Ring can

be unmade, the fires where Sauron first forged the Ring. This last chapter of Middle Earth's

history is largely familiar and exhibits many facing temptation from the Power of the Ring and

making good or bad choices about how to respond to these temptations.

II.   Tolkien, his Influences and the Creative Endeavor

Creation and artistry are absolutely central to all of Tolkien's fiction and become focused

around created objects within his literary world. Tolkien has said that his fiction is "mainly

concerned with Fall, Mortality, and the Machine. With Fall inevitably . . . with Mortality,

especially as it affects art and the creative (or as I should say, the sub-creative) desire . . . [which

is] wedded to a passionate love of the real primary world" (*Letters* 145). Created objects occupy

the center of his fiction as manifestations of creation and the creative or artistic endeavor. Two of

these objects, the Silmarils and the One Ring of Power, occupy the core of Tolkien's mythology

and have come to define this body of fiction for readers. Tolkien uses these objects to address

modern concerns about the nature of art and beauty in the world.

Many aesthetic theories informed Tolkien's views on art and contextualize his ideas in a

broader conversation. Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the*

Sublime and Beautiful (1757) explores how art affects the mind and also proposes possible

purposes and functions for art. In places Burke argues that overarching objectives for art are the

glorification of God and his triumph over Satan (Burke). John Ruskin's essay "The Seven Lamps of Architecture", later expanded in *The Stones of Venice* (1851-3), argues for social reform through aesthetic values that revalue beauty as an important idea. Ruskin argued that the industrial revolution had shifted Man's focus away from the beautiful and toward the functional; people had ceased to glorify God in their architectural designs and should look to older examples in Medieval architecture to make true art that did not deceive with hidden supports or façades (Curl 668). Ruskin's essays illustrate the active debate between those who value beauty and those who value functionality. Overall, an active debate sought to find art's place and function in an increasingly modern society. This debate is reflected by the Arts and Crafts Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Arts and Crafts Movement sought to reform how goods are made in society and appealed to older models of craftsmanship that involved manual labor rather than mechanical expertise (Pevsner 38). Artists like William Morris argued that industry is toxic and creates craftsmen who do not love their work like they supposedly did in ages past; Morris, whose fiction later influenced Tolkien's, called for social reform that would restore the craftsman-designer as one who enjoys his work and is not usurped by mechanical production (Pevsner 42). Artists and thinkers became more concerned with the role of technology as it grew in importance for manufacturing and leisure pursuits.

Tolkien shared a commitment to social reform through art and beauty with thinkers like Ruskin and Morris and was spurred towards these ambitions by the horrors of mechanical production and warfare. In a 1916 letter to his friend G. B. Smith, Tolkien laments the death of their friend Rob Gilson. These friends had been members of a school society called the Tea Club and Barrovian Society, which united around beautiful literature from the past and encouraged each other to pursue creative writing (*Letters* 8). In this letter Tolkien tells his friend that

> the greatness I meant [we were meant to achieve] was that of a great instrument in
> God's hands – a mover, a doer, even an achiever of great things, a beginner at the
> very least of large things . . . the TCBS had been granted some spark of fire –
> certainly as a body if not singly – that was destined to kindle a new light, or, what
> is the same thing, rekindle an old light in the world; that the TCBS was destined to
> testify for God and Truth in a more direct way even than by laying down its
> several lives in this war
>
> *Letters* 9-10

From these words it is clear that Tolkien saw a grand mission before the T. C. B. S. that would

lead to a renaissance of beautiful art modeled after the works they found so inspiring. Tolkien

and his schoolmates recognized the current attitudes toward art and sought to revive an older

way of viewing art and beauty as inherently valuable and even transformative for people. These

young men "through the power of beauty . . . believed they could reform their nation, leaving

'England purified of its loathsome insidious disease'" (Coutras 11). Simple and pure beauty has

the power to nourish and heal people on its own merits according to Tolkien (*Letters* 109). These

young writers resolved to attack the same suffocating Utilitarian sentiments that Charles Dickens

confronted in his novel *Hard Times* (1854) (Mydla 49-50). Tolkien saw the same prevalence of

Utility and sought to heal this societal sickness by reinstating beauty as a valuable and

worthwhile pursuit through his fiction. A commitment to social reform was present in Tolkien

from as early as 1916 and consumed his entire artistic and academic career.

Tolkien's landmark essay "On Fairy Stories" illuminates his aesthetic attitude towards art

both today and in the ancient and medieval world. The essay repeatedly addresses the modern

hostility towards Fairy Stories and the Fantastic as unfounded and confused. Opponents of Fairy

Stories often attack them as escapist and instead promote ugliness and brutishness as more

realistic and therefore more mature or important than any story that deliberately subverts the

commonly accepted conventions of realism (*FS* 67). Tolkien argues that an attitude that favors

realism above any other form of storytelling is misguided and misunderstands Fairy Stories or

the Fantastic along with the truth and beauty they can contain (*FS* 67). Essentially, Tolkien

advocates for the modern reinvented Fairy Stories of today as well as their counterparts in

antiquity and argues that they contain a fundamental disagreement with how art is treated in the

modern age.

In his autobiographical short story, *Leaf by Niggle*, Tolkien portrays the modern attitude

towards art as cruel and unsentimental. Niggle, a little man concerned with painting a beautiful

tree, is eventually compelled to go on a journey and make himself useful to modern society. An

Inspector arrives at Niggle's house and rebukes him for not repairing his neighbor's roof despite

having all the necessary materials, indicating the canvas and paint he uses for his picture (*Tree

and Leaf* 101). Niggle recoils with horror at the suggestion that his picture be used to patch a

hole in a roof and exclaims "'My picture!' . . . 'I dare say it is,' said the Inspector. 'But houses

come first. That is the law'" (*Tree and Leaf* 101). The Inspector, representing the attitudes of

society in the modern age, dismisses Niggle's artistry and foolishness that should be abandoned

for more practical pursuits. After Niggle has died his neighbors remember him in conversation,

saying

> 'Then, you don't think painting is worth anything, not worth preserving, or
> improving, or even making use of?'
> 'Of course, painting has uses,' said Tompkins. 'But you couldn't make use of his
> [Niggle's] painting. There is plenty of scope for bold young men not afraid of new
> ideas and new methods. None for this old-fashioned stuff. Private day-dreaming.
> He could not have designed a telling poster to save his life. Always fiddling with
> leaves and flowers. I asked him why, once. He said he thought they were pretty!
> Can you believe it? He said *pretty*! "What, digestive and genital organs of plants?"
> I said to him; and he had nothing to answer. Silly footler.'
>
> *Tree and Leaf* 116-7

Twentieth-century society (or Tolkien's contemporary world) placed so much emphasis on

practicality that fundamental values like beauty are entirely dismissed as foolish. Tolkien is

identifying a modern attitude that sees art as nothing but a means to achieve some end. Just as

Tompkins identifies the only worthwhile painting as that which can convey practical information, like a telling poster, so do moderns treat art merely as a receptacle for ideology that they can use to their ends.

Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935) highlights many anxieties about technology that Tolkien embeds into his fiction. Benjamin identifies a shift in art's use as the mechanical age progresses; as art and crafts become more easily reproducible mechanically they begin to lose their aura of unique existence and instead become commodities (1054). The work of art was originally made in order to serve religious purposes (to glorify God or creation) while it has since become separated from it's "cult value" by its mechanical reproducibility (Benjamin 1057-8). Art changes in nature due to technology because it loses its uniqueness and therefore its aura and ceases to truly be art (Benjamin 1060-1). Benjamin illustrates that the ultimate result of these changes is the "aestheticizing of political life" under fascism and the politicization of art under Communism (1070-1). These final two results Benjamin identifies are expressions of what Tolkien labels the Machine. Benjamin illustrates that technological innovations in production have transformed art into a commodity that has become subject to larger forces. Ease of access and the overwhelming availability that mechanical reproduction offers ultimately degrades society's appreciation for art. Art is no longer seen as profound or even necessary for societal health or personal enrichment. Technological reproducibility degrades art to either a distraction or a tool that can be utilized to exert power over those who consume it. Fascists cast political life with artistic inflections to glorify their mission while communists politicize art to achieve the same goal. Benjamin even characterizes imperialist war as "an uprising on the part of technology, which demands repayment in 'human material' [in exchange for] the natural material [that] society has denied it.

Instead of draining rivers, society directs a human stream into a bed of trenches . . . and in gas warfare it has found a new means of abolishing the aura" (1071). Mechanical production has in a sense turned the world into a commodity and made men slaves of the machine that demands payment to keep going. Machines have ceased to serve men, men now serve machines.

Tolkien works in opposition to this modern hostility towards art and beauty and instead recapitulates the strange beauty and truth that can be found in older artistic practices such as Fairy Stories. These older artistic modes revel in the beauty of creation as inherently valuable. Tolkien calls true art "Enchantment" that "in its purity it is artistic in desire and purpose" unlike Magic (*FS* 64). Magic is part of what Tolkien calls the Machine and is wholly opposed to true art or Enchantment. Tolkien argues that when "uncorrupted, [Enchantment] does not seek delusion, nor bewitchment and domination; it seeks shared enrichment, partners in making and delight, not slaves" (*FS* 64). The fantastic storyteller "who allows himself to be 'free with' Nature can be her lover not her slave" (*FS* 69). Essentially, Enchantment seeks to glorify and enrich the beauty of reality through subcreation or artistic endeavor. *Subcreation* is Tolkien's own term for the artistic process of created beings; while the creator God engages in primary creation, humans engage in subcreation that complements the reality they inhabit as created beings. Tolkien contends that "fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker" (*FS* 66). Humans create because we are created beings that fall in love with the world around us and try to imitate our Maker out of our nature and out of love. The Silmarils are the perfect example of Enchantment within Tolkien's fiction, as they constitute the greatest works of subcreation by the Elves, who are "the representatives of sub-creation par excellence" (*Letters* 146 note). However, this creative impulse can be corrupted to coercion and malice that Tolkien calls the Machine.

The Machine is the opposite of Enchantment, and is evil in Tolkien's eyes, for it perverts what subcreation should be. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *machine* as "a contrivance for the sake of effect; a supernatural agency, personage, or incident introduced into a narrative; the interposition of one of these," and as "a material structure designed for a specific purpose, and related uses" ("machine n." *OED Online* II.4.b, III). This is the sense that Tolkien uses the term *Machine,* to refer to artifice and goal-oriented, somewhat autonomous devices of intelligent design. This sense of Machine is not limited to digital technology and encompasses all human technology, from shoes to language and books. Tolkien says that with the term *Machine* he intends "all use of external plans or devices (apparatus) instead of development of the inherent inner powers or talents – or even the use of these talents with the corrupted motive of bulldozing the real world, or coercing other wills," and he links the idea to magic (*Letters* 146). Magic in turn is different for the Elves and for the Enemy, highlighting different attitudes toward art and creation.

While for the Elves, "'magic' is Art . . . the Enemy in successive forms is always 'naturally' concerned with sheer Domination, and so the Lord of magic and machines," i.e. contrivances used to impose a will upon the world (*Letters* 146). In contrast to Enchantment, Magic or the Machine "produces, or pretends to produce, an alteration in the Primary World . . . it is not an art but a technique; its desire is *power* in this world, domination of things and wills" (*FS* 64). The Machine is artifice that creates in *rebellion against* nature and reality rather than in harmony with it. True art and subcreation loves the natural order of things, while the Machine actively seeks to subvert the natural order and gain power over the real waking world. Enchantment is enamored with creation; the Machine is in conflict with nature and attempts to change reality according to its own whims. An applied example of these two concepts might

involve a comparison between the paintings of Claude Monet and the films of Leni Riefenstahl. Monet's celebrated paintings use impressionism to capture a subjective view of nature, while Riefenstah's films make groundbreaking innovations in film editing and cinematography that are still used today, but all in service of Adolf Hitler's propaganda machine. While Monet's paintings enrich and celebrate the beauty of the natural world, Leni Riefenstahl's films like *Triumph des Willens* (*Triumph of the Will*) (1935) *uses* groundbreaking and powerful conventions of film art to *manipulate* and *coerce* its audiences to subscribe to Nazi ideology. Monet's paintings supply a new perspective on the beauty found in the natural world. Riefenstahl's films seek to change reality and make their hateful ideology true by coercing and manipulating all those who watch.

Enchantment is creative art made to glorify and harmonize with the natural order of creation. There are five main principles of the created cosmos in Tolkien's fictional world: the cosmos has a divine creator, creation is good and has inherent worth as something beautiful, the purpose of creation is to bring pleasure to its inhabitants and creator, the natural order and the Children of Eru are vulnerable against the evil influence of a malevolent force (Melkor), and the mission of those who dwell in creation is to acknowledge the goodness of the natural order and to restore it from evil (Dickerson and Evans 24). These five principles of the created world formulate the will of Eru and all harmonize with the endeavor of Enchantment and oppose the Machine. Enchantment enriches and glorifies creation and seeks to further the will of Eru, while the Machine constitutes open rebellion against the natural order and the will of Eru. I argue that the Silmarils express the beauty of Enchantment while the One Ring embodies the Machine, the shadowy and wicked reflection of righteous artistry.

III.   Tolkien and Art in Broader Scholarship

Many critics have considered issues surrounding creation and artistry within Tolkien's fiction, but most of these academics do not focus on created objects themselves. Tolkien's metaphysics and ethics of creation are often considered in relation to characters and larger powers but not in relation to works of art or devices of evil that these characters create. Matthew Dickerson and Jonathan Evans argue that Tolkien constructs his universe to make creation itself inherently valuable (11). The Valar are characterized as stewards of Arda and creation appointed by Eru to protect and enrich creation (Dickerson and Evans 8). Dickerson and Evans also argue that the "works of creation are independent of any practical or utilitarian purposes they may have for Men or Elves. Their importance inheres in nature for its own sake" (11). The value of creation and artistry is inherent and self-justifying; Tolkien constructs his universe to oppose utilitarian views toward art and instead reaffirm art's inherent value along with the inherent value of creation. This is embodied by Tom Bombadil, who embodies the spirit of loving and appreciating things for their own sake (Dickerson and Evans 21). Dickerson and Evans also emphasize the beauty of simplicity in Tolkien's fiction primarily exhibited by the Hobbits, who love simple joys in life and who "turn away from the sort of power over others – enslavement and war making – that technology affords" (17-18). Essentially, Tolkien establishes his entire cosmic order to complement and encourage created being to engage in subcreation. While Dickerson and Evans do not explicitly apply these ideas to created objects like the Ring or the Silmarils, the principles they establish are illuminating.

Maria Alberto focuses primarily on the role and origin of evil in relation to a wholly good created world in Tolkien's fiction. She concludes that evil has no Manichean status and cannot be thought of as equal in power to the goodness of Eru (64). Manichaeism is the belief that the

source of evil is a being equally powerful to God, and who generates evil, while God generates good; but because Melkor is the source of all evil in Arda and is a being created by Eru he cannot be equally powerful with Eru. Alberto contends that the source of evil is murky but that its function is clearly to seduce or pervert goodness to its own designs (64-5). Sauron is the ultimate seducer who uses his ability to create fair things and appear fair to mortals to lead them into evil (Alberto 71). The natural gifts given to Sauron by Eru are perverted and bent to pursue evil ends (71). Evil rebels against the natural order, the goodness of Eru, and bends the fabric of reality to serve its own ends of pride and domination. Sauron achieves domination by perverting the act of subcreation through creating the Ring of Power.

Anna Slack argues that particular actors influence the goodness or evil of created objects rather than the objects themselves embodying these virtues or vices. Certain utterances like oath taking or song making reveal these elements of the ethics of subcreation. For instance, Beren and Thingol become entangled with the ill fate of the Silmarils because they both swear oaths by, on, and about these gems (Slack 67-8). According to Slack "this demonstrates that it is not the created object itself which is good or evil, but the way in which it is treated by historical actors" (68). Just as the Silmarils recall the light of creation and the light of the Two Trees, Lúthien's song recalls the Music of the Ainur that forged the world; linking instances of subcreation to their ultimate origin in Eru and the Valar highlights the loss of beauty through history in a Fallen world (Slack 76-7). Created objects are themselves neutral, though Slack does not consider the Ring of Power, and are constructed as tragic reminders of lost beauty in the world. Instances of subcreation also serve to enrich creation and further glorify its beauty by making new things out of the old.

Matthew Bardowell contends that the principles that Tolkien uses to assign value to artistry in his fiction are derived from one of his biggest influences: the Finnish *Kalevala*. In both mythological systems "singers earn their merit not by how creative their songs are but by the degree to which their songs adhere to some truth or wisdom outside of themselves" (Bardowell 96). Artistry is valued for its own sake, but artistry is only truly good if it reflects truths about the world. Subcreation can only be considered righteous "by the degree to which it conforms to Ilúvatar's theme" in the Great Music (Bardowell 99). Both the *Kalevala* and Tolkien's fiction affirm the derivative nature of righteous subcreation; good artistry celebrates its link to the past and does not rebel against its influences in order to establish newness for its own sake (104). Tolkien's ideal image of subcreation is one that celebrates God-given reality and emphasizes the beauty of the natural order, while evil subcreation or the Machine seeks to disrupt and demolish the natural order and establish itself as the new standard.

Verlyn Flieger argues that the three major created objects in Tolkien's fiction, the Silmarils, the Arkenstone, and the Ring, all have different effects on their possessors that express Tolkien's anxiety about "the danger of uncontrolled desire" (66). However, Flieger argues that the Silmarils are internally inconsistent because they embody the pure goodness of light yet corrupt almost every single being they touch (66). This element of Flieger's argument remains unconvincing because she fails to consider the possibility that this corruption comes from within those who possess the jewels. This is curious because Flieger considers this possibility with the One Ring, arguing that the temptation of the Ring foregrounds Frodo's "own inner darkness, his own desire" (75). Both the Silmarils and the Ring are active participants in the world and characters must resist their influence on all fronts (Flieger 70-6). Ultimately, these objects function in order to reflect Tolkien's fear of "covetousness grown to obsession" and embody

these fears in his characters (Flieger 66). While these anxieties permeate Tolkien's fiction, the Silmarils and the Ring have their own nature that Flieger fails to consider; these items certainly expose the dark recesses of created beings but they also have a positive value that elicits these responses in agents.

Lisa Coutras argues that Tolkien's entire universe is strucurally concerned with the beautiful and the transcendent. Tolkien's created world is "founded on a transcendental understanding of reality [where] . . . ancient myth does not divide the material from the transcendent but presents them as inseparable from one another" (32). Coutras argues that "the beauty of [Tolkien's fictive] world draws upon the presupposed reality of an actual ancient world in the fullness of its being; its transcendent quality is inherent to the world itself" (51). Creation itself and instances of subcreation exhibit the light of being or the "underlying transcendence inherent to the material world" and emphasizes the divine source of all things and all creativity (Coutras 52). This light of being is embodied by the Flame Imperishable, which establishes the ontological primacy of the created world and shines forth from the Two Trees, if in a derived manner (Coutras 53-4). However, this unsullied light eventually becomes poisoned by evil when the Trees are killed, their light is diminished and only lives on through the Silmarils (Coutras 58). The beauty that Tolkien instills into his world is an expression of divine power and glory that is corrupted and destroyed by evil in certain instances.

While works of art like the Silmarils shine with the light of being, that expresses God's glory, certain objects exist specifically the pervert that light and replace it with horror. Coutras directly contrasts the nature of good and evil in Tolkien's world and concludes that

> Goodness is primary and independent; it does not require evil in order to exist. Existence itself is good, for it is derived from God's Being, the source and foundation of reality. Evil, on the other hand, is parasitical in nature and cannot exist without the good: it is a perversion of that which exists.

Evil works of subcreation do not have the same ontological status as righteous works of

subcreation because evil cannot make anything new, it can only twist what already exists.

Coutras uses Ungoliant, the giant evil demonic spider who aids Melkor in destroying the Trees,

as a prime example of this; the black vapors and "unlight" that Ungoliant spews forth do not

have a unique existence, these vile clouds are perversions of light itself (128). The One Ring is

also subject to this rule as a negation of positive subcreation. The Ring itself is not new primary

creation but rather a demonic desecration of subcreation that is repurposed to coerce reality and

created beings. The Machine is not a new creation but an evil rewrite of what already exists.

IV.   Argument

The ensuing investigation shows that both the Silmarils and the One Ring are subcreated

objects within Tolkien's fictional universe and therefore have the potential to express Tolkien's

ideas about subcreation. Tolkien embodies the competing concepts of Enchantment and the

Machine through the Silmarils and the One Ring of Power as instances of righteous and evil

subcreation, respectively. The Silmarils (Enchantment) and the One Ring (Machine) challenge

modern attitudes toward art as either practically useful or foolish, and instead look backward and

learn from past attitudes toward art that value beauty and grace as inherently valuable. In order to

show this, I will first examine the Silmarils as the principle example of good and righteous

artistry. First, I will establish the centrality of the Silmarils in *The Silmarillion.* In this

examination I will analyze the different conventions and nature of *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord

of the Rings* and the implications these have for approaching each created object. Next I will

examine the relationship the Silmarils have to creation itself and the tragic effects they appear to

have on those who encounter or possess them. I will consider how their maker relates to them, how their various possessors approach them, and ultimately how the forces of evil lust for them and why. Finally, I will explore the life that the Silmarils possess as created yet *living* objects.

Next, I will consider the One Ring as the preeminent manifestation of the Machine in Tolkien's fiction. First, I will establish the paramount importance of the Ring in *The Lord of the Rings* and separate the Ring from the Silmarils as an instrument that is goal-oriented rather than a piece of art that exists simply to be beautiful. Second, I will show how the Ring, and the evil it represents, betrays Tolkien's degenerative view of history that places the Ring closer to the modern age. Third, I will consider the agency of the Ring and the implications this has for the Machine and how humans relate to powerful and living creations. The agency of the Ring has serious consequences for characters in Tolkien's fiction, but this has even more important implications for the Machine and how it works on humans within the real world. Lastly, I will examine the nature of Sauron as a creator and the creator of the One Ring in order further to understand the evils of the Machine. I will conclude this study by considering the broader implications of technology and art that become more intertwined as time moves forward. Ultimately, I will conclude that it is a human choice to become enslaved to our machines or to use and refine them to enhance our creative capacities while remaining ourselves and still pursuing art for its own sake. My investigation will go further than recent scholarship, and will apply Tolkien's aesthetic theories to created objects in his fiction.

Chapter Two: The Silmarils and *The Silmarillion*

The Silmarils are arguably Tolkien's most significant objects among all the cursed jewelry, precious gold, and possessed weapons in his fiction. Tolkien titled his life's work and greatest ambition after these jewels: *The Silmarillion*. The Silmarils outrank the One Ring in that they absorb the entire title of their work, whereas *The Lord of the Rings* really refers only to Sauron and all the rings of power. Enchanted jewels made in the deeps of time by the legendary Elf Fëanor, whose name means Spirit of Fire, the Silmarils are three crystals that shine the radiant light of creation upon all who behold them (*Sil* 63). This Light of creation comes from the Two Trees of Valinor that were sung into being by the Earth-mother, Yavanna. The Trees are luminous plants and are living manifestations of pure and beautiful creation in the world and provide light for the world before the Sun and the Moon were made. The One Ring lives as a compelling image of evil in popular culture; a ring of gold forged by the evil and Satanic demon Sauron that gives its wearer the power to dominate other wills, the One Ring is the totalitarian evil of the modern era incarnate. Tolkien's Ring is a physical manifestation of the evil that most art in the twentieth century has envisioned: coercive, exploitive, reckless, and unholy domination.

Some may argue that the Silmarils rival the One Ring in significance and place them as equals among created objects in Tolkien's fiction. The Silmarils certainly rival the One Ring within the narrative world or diegesis as absolutely monumental works of craftsmanship, objects that drive entire segments of history, and as items coveted to the point of violence and war. But do the Silmarils occupy the same significance to *readers* as the One Ring? One must appeal to the nature of both *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* to determine whether the Silmarils should be considered rivals or even equals to the One Ring.

The Silmarils become just as important as the One Ring as one reads Tolkien's fiction, despite their initial inaccessibility. Those who favor the Ring often point to the monolithic status of *The Lord of the Rings*, the 'authority' of this text, and the ideological applicability of the Ring to our modern existence. To begin with, *The Lord of the Rings* has redefined storytelling in the modern and now postmodern eras and exploded the market of Fantasy across all mediums (Shippey vii). Tolkien's fiction has inaugurated a renaissance of fantastic storytelling that can be seen from literature to television and video games. Peter Jackson's film adaptation of Tolkien's seminal work (2001-3) has only strengthened its presence in popular culture. It is nigh impossible to consume popular media today without encountering the influence Tolkien's fiction has had.

The public consciousness has a far greater image of the Ring than the Silmarils due to the widespread cultural success of *The Lord of the Rings*. In addition, critics and reader will often consciously or otherwise ascribe greater authority to *The Lord of the Rings* than to *The Silmarillion* mostly because J. R. R. Tolkien published the former while the latter is a compendium published posthumously by his son Christopher Tolkien. Christopher Tolkien compiled *The Silmarillion* out of various drafts and versions of stories and attempted to distill from these drafts a coherent account of the early history of Middle Earth (*Sil* "Foreward" v-vi). *The Silmarillion* is the most complete and coherent version of the legends of the First Age of Middle Earth according to Christopher Tolkien. The different nature of each text leads readers to assign greater legitimacy to *The Lord of the Rings* because J. R. R. Tolkien published it within his lifetime and therefore must have been confident in its clarity of vision. Contrastingly, *The Silmarillion* never reached the level of clarity and cohesion that Tolkien desired it to have. This

is both simplified and further complicated when one considers Tolkien's unfinished drafts in *The History of Middle-Earth* series.

When readers approach *The Silmarillion*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The History of Middle Earth* (1983-96), the implied author is understandably different between them if only because of Christopher Tolkien's commentaries on his father's work. *The Lord of the Rings* can seem a miracle and *The Silmarillion* can appear rough when examined alongside these early writings. The material Christopher Tolkien compiled for the *History of Middle Earth* is often diffuse and difficult to interpret because of J. R. R. Tolkien's editing process. For example, many of the tales contained in *The Book of Lost Tales* (1983-4) contain small gaps in the discourse because J. R. R. Tolkien's handwriting was illegible on the manuscripts at that particular instance. While Christopher Tolkien does limit his editorial intention in *The History of Middle Earth*, readers inevitably need J. R. R. Tolkien's early works to be contextualized in relation to how he wrote and what relationships these "drafts" have to their more accessible counterparts in *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Because *The Lord of the Rings* was "finished" enough to go through the process of publication, it possesses a greater sense of finality and authority that the unfinished *Silmarillion* does not possess in the minds of readers. The sheer volume of writing in *The Silmarillion* tradition can cause readers to feel that there is no singular voice or prevailing ideology to unify it.

Lastly, readers and critics will often appeal to the Ring itself as a more compelling symbol because of the perceived greater relevance it has to our experience of the twentieth century and the problems we are left with in the twenty-first century. The Ring is a uniquely modern image of evil that is intensely relatable to multitudes of readers who either lived under or could not conceivably escape from hearing about the tyranny of the modern age. While Tolkien's

fiction began before the horrors of the Second World War, many of his writings began during the First World War; Tolkien's aesthetic ideas were certainly influenced by the technological monstrosities seen in the modern age, but not necessarily directly by the totalitarian regimes usually associated with the twentieth century. Readers connect Tolkien's imagery and symbolism to the major events of the time when he wrote, namely the major atrocities of the twentieth century. There have always been tyrants in the world, but the regimes of the twentieth century are unique for the scope and magnitude of their barbarity and for the mechanical means they used to achieve their ends. The wounds of these regimes are also fresh in the minds and cultures of almost the entire world. The Silmarils appear remote and inaccessible in comparison to the totalitarianism of the Ring.

While the Ring and *The Lord of the Rings* loom large, there are a number of compelling arguments in favor for the heightened status of the Silmarils. The Silmarils lie arguably at the heart of everything that Tolkien wrote, primarily because of the importance *The Silmarillion* held for Tolkien, and the centrality of the Silmarils to Tolkien's unified philosophy of creation. It is not an understatement to say that *The Silmarillion* was Tolkien's life's work and greatest ambition after his created languages. The very first writings of Middle-Earth are all contained in what is now called *The Silmarillion*. The sheer volume of drafts written on these stories outweighs anything else Tolkien ever wrote. It may be fair to say that *The Silmarillion* was never published because Tolkien could never finish refining it; this body of literature never stopped evolving and growing in his mind. Thus, *The Silmarillion* has gone through more rigorous revision and been hammered and tempered to a greater degree than *The Lord of the Rings* despite its seemingly unpolished quality. Secondly, the Silmarils provide the *ideal* image of creation that is countered by the Ring. The Silmarils exist as examples of the heights of glory and beauty that

righteous subcreation can achieve, while the Ring exists as the prime antithesis to righteous creation or as the horrible inverse of all that creation should be. Works like "On Fairy-Stories," "Mythopoeia," and *Leaf by Niggle* illustrate how central the theology and philosophy of creation are to all of Tolkien's writing. Because creation and art are central to everything Tolkien wrote, the greatest work of subcreation in his fiction (the Silmarils) must automatically be elevated to the same level of significance as the Ring. The macrocosmic importance that these jewels hold in Tolkien's ideas of creation and art give them whatever edge they may have been missing before. The Silmarils, I argue, stand as equal in importance and in striking contrast to the Ring of Power.

I.   The Silmarils and Creation

The Silmarils have cosmic importance because they are analogous to creation, Eä, itself. At the moment of their creation, the Valar or Powers immediately recognize the glory of their creation and bind them to the life of the world. The Valar are Tolkien's gods who govern Middle Earth and who were born from the one God Eru Ilúvatar. The Valar, at the request of Ilúvatar, sang the created world, Eä, into being; this is often called the Music of the Ainur and is the creation myth of the world. The Music begins as a history or story of the world that Eru then actualizes through his power to create as the Supreme Being. In this sense, the Music is almost like the fate of the world and has a set course or structure to it. The Valar of Fate and Death, Mandos, declares that the "fates of Arda, earth, sea, and air, lay locked within [the jewels]" (*Sil* 69). This line, among others, illustrates that Fëanor's gems have captured the essence of the created world through their light and glory. The Silmarils are implicitly compared to the primordial song of creation or Music of the Ainur through their purity and goodness.

Fëanor's jewels are also compared directly to creation itself through their efficient cause: the Two Trees of Valinor. The Trees act as living representatives of creation as an act. Yavanna sings the Trees into existence just as the world was created through the Music. Using music to create living beings of such beauty asks readers to compare the Trees to creation itself because they were both born through the same means. The Trees are also living things that react to stimuli and have a life independent of their creator, just as the Valar and Eä are connected and sustained yet autonomous from Eru. The Light of the Trees lives on in the Silmarils even after the Trees are destroyed; this Light further elevates the Silmarils as living things that possess the same significance as creation itself.

In *The Book of Lost Tales* the making of the Silmarils is even more closely related to the Trees and therefore to the Light of creation itself. Where in *The Silmarillion* Fëanor vaguely captures the light of the Trees, in *The Book of Lost Tales* he takes opals from the seas and "[?bathed] them in phosphorescence and the radiant dew of Silpion [Telperion the Silver Tree], and but a single tiny drop of the light of Laurelin [the golden Tree] did he let fall therein" (*BoLT I* 128). Fëanor makes this single Silmaril, gazes at its beauty, and then decides to make two more (*BoLT I* 128). In the earlier version of their creation the Silmarils still possess the same ontological status as all of creation. The light that they contain is derived directly from the Trees through their dew and is allowed to mingle and create a new light that sustains the gems. Chistopher Tolkien identifies a space on his father's manuscripts where Tolkien asks "what became of the Silmarils after the capture of Melko? [early name for Melkor] (*BoLT II* 259). Christopher Tolkien argues that this question is "a testimony to the relatively minor importance of the jewels of Fëanor, if also, perhaps, a sign of his [J. R. R. Tolkien's] awareness that they would not always remain so, that in them lay a central meaning of the mythology, yet to be

discovered" (*BoLT II* 259). These remarks from Christopher Tolkien illustrate that while the ideas may not be as explicit as they later grew, one can still detect the essential meanings behind the Silmarils in the earlier versions of these legends even if they were unconscious to J. R. R. Tolkien at the time. Even if the Silmarils were not the narrative focus of early legends, they certainly grew to the heart of Tolkien's fiction and aesthetic philosophy.

The jewels of Fëanor become the greatest and most pure instance of subcreation within Eä and succeed in capturing the light and essence of creation itself. The narrator says that Varda, the goddess of light, blesses the jewels so that "thereafter no mortal flesh, nor hands unclean, nor anything of evil will might touch them, but it was scorched and withered" (*Sil* 69). The reader will compare these words to Ilúvatar's comment to Melkor that explains that only Ilúvatar can change the Music. These objects created by Fëanor are completely pure and magnificent and capture the original majesty of Eru's creative act and the Flame Imperishable or pure force of creation. The beauty of the Silmarils rivals the beauty of the entire created world because they contain the pure light of creation. Like the Music, the beauty of the Silmarils cannot be touched by evil will or changed to serve evil ends.

The Satan figure of Tolkien's mythology, Melkor, covets the Silmarils because they are emblems of creation itself. Melkor lusts for these jewels more than any other object in Arda, furthering their association with creation itself. The created world is the ultimate object of Melkor's lust, and he does eventually use the Silmarils as a symbol that represent his control as the Master of Arda. Within one page of their creation the narrator signals Melkor's desire to possess them, highlighting the jealous heart of Melkor as well as the magnitude of beauty that the Silmarils are. After stealing the Silmarils Melkor protects them from the relentless maw of Ungoliant, saying "I name them unto myself for ever" (*Sil* 85). Again, the careful reader will

recall Melkor's first words after entering Arda: "this shall be my own kingdom; and I name it unto myself" (*Sil* 10). Melkor is said to "covet" Arda and to "lust" for the Silmarils, perhaps implying a greater attraction to the jewels than to creation itself (*Sil* 23, 69). The Silmarils are coveted by many beings in Eä, but Melkor's unending lust for the jewels elevates them to the same status as creation itself. Melkor lusts for the jewels as fervently as he lusts for the whole of Eä and the power to create primary reality.

The Silmarils are so successful as subcreated objects because they were made in accord with the will and intention of Ilúvatar. Just as the Valar singing in the Music of the Ainur, Fëanor's work is successful because it engages in righteous subcreation. The jewels were created to preserve and further glorify the world that Ilúvatar created and are therefore fantastic works of art. Fëanor's intention is to preserve the light of the Two Trees in an unbreakable chamber of adamant and thus immortalize the beauty of this primordial light (*Sil* 68). It is significant that this preservation is described as "imperishable" like the Flame Imperishable; this adjective signals readers to compare the light of the Trees, the Silmarils, and the will of Fëanor in this creative act to the primary force of creation that resides in Ilúvatar (*Sil* 68). Fëanor's pure intentions arise from inspiration in and a love for Eru's primary creation and make the Silmarils perfect paradigms of good and just subcreation. These jewels are also purely *intrinsic* goods rather than instrumental objects. The Silmarils are valued as things in themselves that are intrinsically good; they are not valued as an instrumental good like a machine or tool would be. Fëanor's entire motivation is the simple preservation and further glorification of the beauty he already sees in the world; the gems do not have any practical purpose and are valued even more for this fact. Fëanor's motives behind making the Silmarils align with the ideal practice of subcreation that Eru exhibits in the Music of the Ainur.

Fëanor succeeds in making these jewels to such a degree that their light surpasses the Two Trees created by Yavanna, the Earth-Mother. The Silmarils "rejoiced in light and received it and gave it back in hues more marvelous than before," unlike the Trees, which revel in their own light and mingle beautifully (*Sil* 68). Fëanor has created a new light or contributed something new and unique to the existing light of the Trees as well as preserving that light. The light of the Silmarils, like their creator, takes existing light and reflects it back in a grander fashion. The Silmarils have the ability to *enrich* already existing creation through how they reflect and return light they are given. This is perhaps the most important quality that subcreation can possess: the ability further to glorify primary creation by enriching that creation through its artistry. The gems of Fëanor engage in almost subcreative acts through how they reflect light. The ability of the Silmarils to enrich creation through the life of their light elevates them as perfect creations in accord with the will of Eru.

One can also glimpse the power of these jewels through their effect on their creator. Fëanor is the most glorious, powerful, and beautiful of all the Elves who ever lived in Arda; the Silmarils "held his heart in thrall" and come to dictate his actions (*Sil* 74). The most powerful of the Children of Ilúvatar is captured and controlled by his own work. Fëanor's reliance on the Silmarils simultaneously heightens the status of all created objects in Tolkien's fiction and speaks to the unique relationships they hold with their makers. All of Tolkien's creator characters become bound to their work, unable to separate their being from it either through a strong emotional link or a stronger metaphysical bond to the work of their hands. Fëanor's birth is a clear example of this metaphysical link between the maker and his creation. When Fëanor is born his mother soon dies, "for strength that would have nourished the life of many has gone forth into Fëanor" (*Sil* 63). Míriel, Fëanor's mother, dies because a great deal of her spirit passes from

her into her son. The same is also true of Sauron and the One Ring; makers become bound to what they create because there is a clear metaphysical link between the power they use to create and the life that sustains that created work.

With the loss of the Two Trees through the malice of Melkor and his aid Ungoliant the evil spider, the Valar devise a way to save the light of the Blessed Land through using Fëanor's Silmarils. Yavanna, the Earth mother goddess, pleads that "even for those who are mightiest under Ilúvatar there is some work that they may accomplish once, and once only" (*Sil* 82). Creating the Two Trees cannot be replicated and is an act that Yavanna can only perform once in the Music of Ilúvatar. Yavanna turns to Fëanor for this reason and pleads that "had I but a little of that light I could recall life to the Trees," but Fëanor refuses her by citing the same limitations of all craftsman and their attachment to their works (*Sil* 82-3). The bond between craftsman and art is so strong that Fëanor is compelled by his love for the Silmarils to refuse Yavanna and allow the light of the Two Trees otherwise to vanish from the world forever. This episode also illustrates that there is a certain amount of freedom within the Music of the Ainur or fate of the world. Eru seems to have left space for other makers and agents to direct the course of the created world by their decisions. Note that Tolkien reminds readers that the Trees are *living things* that now exist independently from their creator. Fëanor not only refuses to help repair a prized possession and object for Yavanna but also allows a life to perish in favor of the Silmarils. The jewels have a life of their own, and Fëanor is bound to them because he created them. Part of his being has passed into them. Fëanor's decision to preserve the jewels over the Trees is understandable because he is like a father to his work. This is, however, all secondary to the rest of the actions that Fëanor takes until he dies.

Fëanor, upon learning that Melkor has stolen his jewels, swears a fearsome oath with his

sons never to rest until they are wrested from Melkor (now named Morgoth: the Black Foe of the

world) and returned to Fëanor or his sons, their rightful owners. The narrator calls Melkor's theft

"the rape of the Silmarils" directly before Fëanor addresses the Noldor (*Sil* 87). This description

is placed within a series of sentences that relate Fëanor's internal anguish at his situation and

characterizes the description of "rape" as both subjectively belonging to Fëanor and formally to

the narrator. Tolkien uses free-indirect discourse to legitimize Fëanor's anguish at losing the

Silmarils with the authority of the narrator. Fëanor urges his race, the Noldor, to pursue Morgoth

– "war shall he have and hatred undying" – and exact vengeance on him both for slaying their

king and for stealing his treasure (*Sil* 88). He proclaims that "when we have conquered and have

regained the Silmarils, then we and we alone shall be lords of the unsullied Light, and masters of

the bliss and beauty of Arda. No other race shall oust us!" (*Sil* 88). The Noldor are to pursue the

Silmarils for their perfection, but this pursuit has a possessive and jealous strain to it. The

Silmarils are not only valued almost as Fëanor's children but as the last living representatives of

the hallowed Light of the Flame Imperishable that rested inside the Two Trees. Fëanor and his

sons swear to pursue Morgoth to the ends of the Earth as well as *any being in Arda who dare*

keep a Silmaril from their possession. Where before the beauty of Arda (represented in the Light)

was valued intrinsically as something for all to enjoy and glorify, now Fëanor and his sons seem

to view it as an instrumental good that will elevate or maintain their status as the greatest of

mortal beings through possessing it. In this way, Fëanor and his sons move closer to Morgoth

even while swearing vengeance against him, as they value creation above the laws of Eru.

In this case, while the Silmarils are alive and intensely beautiful, Fëanor and his sons

clearly value these possessions above the lives of others. There is a strong sense of hubris in their

oath because it invokes the creator Eru and everlasting darkness to destroy them should their

claim to the Silmarils (and the Light) be ignored or withheld from them. An earthly being makes

everlasting claim to the jewels, which he did create, as well as the Light within them that he did

not create. Fëanor does have a legitimate claim to the Silmarils because he did create them, but

he does not have a legitimate claim to the light within them because Eru and the Valar created

that unsullied Light. Despite the fact that the claim is partly invalid, these Elves determine to

aggressively pursue these jewels against all who would oppose them be they "good or evil" and

irrespective of being (*Sil* 89). The possession of the Silmarils is placed higher than morality or is

rather treated as an unquestionable claim that is immoral to oppose; Fëanor and his sons own the

Silmarils rightfully and none can question this. This oath becomes the driving force behind the

majority of action in *The Silmarillion*, placing these jewels as the central and all-important

objects that become an obsession to many characters. It is because the Silmarils are so

powerfully representative of creation itself that they are placed in the center of the overall

narrative and that they hold such sway over all beings in Arda.

II.   The Value of the Silmarils

The Silmarils are valued in a variety of ways by different characters in *The Silmarillion*.

However, in the context of Tolkien's ideology of creation, one can see the significance of the

Silmarils in his fiction. Tolkien explicates the importance of valuing art and beauty *for its own*

sake in "On Faerie-Stories" to react against attitudes of his time that placed the ultimate value on

practicality over beauty. These competing ideologies bubble to the surface of *The Silmarillion*

and become attached to the various ways that characters view the jewels. Ultimately, Tolkien's

narrator wants readers to value art, and the Silmarils, as things of beauty that are self-evidently good and worthwhile apart from any practical purpose they might serve.

Fëanor creates the jewels in order to preserve the Light of the Two Trees forever. Fëanor engages in the most laborious craft that is ever done by Elves in order to crystalize the Light of Valinor. Engaging in such feats with the simple purpose of preserving the Light immediately implies that the Light is valued for itself. The narrator does not attach any practical concern to Fëanor's craft, but only the unconscious fear that the Light of the Trees might perish from the world and be lost forever (*Sil* 68). The Light of the Trees illuminates all of Aman, a clear practical virtue they supply that the narrator ignores entirely because their beauty is the focus of their existence. Every being in Aman is immediately "filled with wonder and delight at the work of Fëanor" (*Sil* 68). The Valar and the Elves delight in the *existence* of the jewels and in their beauty. Referring to the Silmarils as "the work of Fëanor" emphasizes the craft by which they were made as well as the product itself. Emphasizing Fëanor's creative process illustrates that the creation of these jewels is valued for its own sake as well as the jewels themselves. Fëanor's love for his jewels is initially benevolent and righteous because he values their beauty for its own sake and creates them in order to enhance the creation of Eru. However, Fëanor's love for the Silmarils eventually sours and becomes a jealous desire to possess them for their power and emblematic functions. The Elf begins to see his jewels as a status symbol and values them instrumentally rather than as things inherently valuable. Melkor immediately lusts for the jewels and begins weaving lies and deceptions to poison the hearts of the Elves specifically about the "maker's power that Ilúvatar had bequeathed [to] them" (*Sil* 69). The Silmarils are the preeminent emblem for the greatest potential of creation as well as representatives of creation itself. The glory of Fëanor's feat leads all to see the Silmarils as emblematic of creating as well as

creation. Melkor continues to warp how the Silmarils are valued and leads Fëanor to "love the Silmarils with a greedy love" and to forget that "the light within them was not his own" (*Sil* 70). The lies of Melkor influence Fëanor and his kin to become possessive, jealous, and weary of one another. Melkor's deceptions do not change the nature of the jewels, but they do coax the Elves to become possessive of them.

Artistry and creating are valued as part of the nature of those beings who create. Aulë, the father of smiths and preeminent god of craftsmanship, argues to Eru that "the making of things is in my heart from my own making by thee; and the child of little understanding that makes a play of the deeds of his father [does so] because he is the son of his father" (*Sil* 38). The nature of Eru's created beings predisposes them to value artistry *as created beings*. Tolkien's characters create through the law that made them. Beings that are created necessarily have the desire to create things themselves because it is essential to their nature as created beings. The cosmic value placed on artistry and creation for its own sake points to the true value of the Silmarils as the shining and perfect example of artistic expression. The jewels are valued for their beauty, their place in the Music of the Ainur, and the skill used to create them.

The Silmarils are valued for their artistry and beauty, yet the conditions in which they were made are also valued as an essential ingredient. In *The Book of Lost Tales* Fëanor actually attempts to make more Silmarils after they are stolen by Melkor but fails because he does not have the power to remake them and because his bliss has been stolen. Manwë, the chief god among the Valar, bids the Elves dismiss Melkor's theft and violence and return to their artistry in order to confound the evil of Melkor (*BoLT I* 149). However, Melkor had also killed Fëanor's father in order to steal the Silmarils; Fëanor rejects Manwë's advice saying "Yea, but who shall give us back the joyous heart without which works of loveliness and magic cannot be? – and

Bruithwir [my father] is dead, and my heart also" (*BoLT I* 149). Fëanor mourns his father and rightfully shows that the evil of Melkor cannot be confounded because a joyous heart is necessary to fulfill the greatest artistry as he did through the Silmarils. Melkor robbed the jewels and the joy of Valinor by killing Bruithwir. Neither Fëanor nor any Elf would be able to make art as beautiful as the Silmarils without a joy, which Melkor robbed from the land. In this case, Tolkien illustrates that the proper disposition of an artist is required to achieve his greatest works and that the Silmarils are valued for the time in which they were made. Fëanor will now look back on his gems as relics from when his father was still alive and value them for that reason.

Similarly, other episodes in *The Book of Lost Tales* are designed to show the evil behind overvaluing a particular piece of art just as many obsess over the Silmarils. For instance, when Beren and Thingol hunt Karkaras to find the Silmaril in his belly, Tolkien specifically constructs the episode in order to place greater value on the life of an earthly being than on the life of the jewels. In defeating the giant wolf, Beren is crushed by his weight but King Thingol and his companion Mablung immediately search the wolf and find the Silmaril within his half-melted insides (*BoLT II* 39). When Mablung draws forth the Silmaril, "holding it out he said: 'Behold O King,' but Tinwelint [early name for Thingol] said: 'Nay, never will I handle it save only if Beren give it to me.' But Huan [their hound companion] said: 'And that seems like never to be, unless ye tend him swiftly, for methinks he is hurt sorely'; and Mablung and the king were ashamed" (*BoLT II* 39). This small episode shames the king and his companion for immediately searching for the Silmaril before they even checked to see if Beren was alive and unhurt in his battle with the giant wolf. In this case, Tolkien illustrates that while the Silmarils are valued as perfect works of art, they are ultimately worlds less than the life of an earthly agent.

These values directly oppose the perversions of Melkor and his brethren regarding the Silmarils. Melkor values the Silmarils in a more nuanced and complicated manner that conforms to and reacts against how the jewels are valued by Tolkien's virtuous agents. Hayden Head argues that Melkor's ultimate desire is to imitate and *become* Eru as the supreme creator of all (140-1). Melkor desires to be the supreme creator because this will make everything serve to glorify him and inflate his pride (Head 141). The same is true of Melkor's desire for the Silmarils – he lusts for them as emblems of his supreme status because they represent all of creation. The narrator reveals that Melkor's initial feelings toward the Silmarils simultaneously conform to the virtuous model and depart from it; Melkor desires the Silmarils for themselves (for their beauty and purity) but also for the power that they represent. Melkor "lusted for the Silmarils, and the very memory of their radiance was a gnawing fire in his heart" (*Sil* 69). Tolkien's use of fire imagery aligns Melkor's desire for the gems with his desire for the Flame Imperishable. The fire of creation lies at the heart of the Silmarils as representatives of creation itself just as the Flame Imperishable lies at the heart of the world (*Sil* 9). Tolkien establishes Melkor as a jealous figure who desires to create just as Eru does; Melkor desires to create beauty and glory like his fellow Valar but only succeeds in destroying and mocking what others create. Melkor's jealousy and pride motivates all creation he attempts. All of Melkor's works are abominations because they desire to coerce and control in order to further glorify him rather than to serve Eru and his purpose. The Silmarils become a tangible and concise token for the created world as well as the primary force of creation for which he lusts so strongly. The lies that Melkor initially spreads in Valinor also betray this desire for a maker's power; Melkor sows dissent among the elves, telling them that the Valar had imprisoned them in Valinor because "of their jealousy, fearing . . . the beauty of the Quendi [Elves] and the makers' power that Ilúvatar had bequeathed to them" (*Sil*

69). These lies reveal Melkor's true desire for the Silmarils' beauty and for the power behind their creation.

However, Melkor eventually perverts the Silmarils beyond their normal righteous nature into objects of instrumental rather than intrinsic value. Melkor forges an iron crown after Angband is built and names himself "King of the World," and "in token of this he set the Silmarils in his crown" (*Sil* 86). The Silmarils are now status symbols of Melkor's lordship over the earth. Placing these jewels in a crown necessarily involves them in the function of that object as a symbol of his (in this case false) power of kingship. Melkor twists the value of the Silmarils from an intrinsic good to an instrumental one, using them for their powerful connotations of lordship over creation itself rather than simply as beautiful and perfect manifestations of that creation and beauty. Once Melkor loses a Silmaril, readers see that he only ever valued the Silmarils as status symbols and not for themselves. Melkor "in his black thought laughed, regretting not the one Silmaril that he had lost, for by it as he deemed the last shred of the people of the Eldar should vanish from Middle-earth" (*Sil* 293). Against his jealous possessive character, Melkor actually rejoices in the effects of losing one Silmaril: the bloodshed and kinslaying motivated by the Oath of Fëanor. Despite the fact that he has lost a jewel from his crown, the symbol of Melkor's lordship over earth, he prefers that the gem serve him as an instrument to sow discord among the Elves and bring them to ruin. Melkor values the Silmarils as purely instrumental goods that serve to glorify him either through possessing them or through creating unrest among his enemies.

III.   The Oath of Fëanor

There are forces throughout *The Silmarillion* that attach terrible consequences to handling

the Silmarils. The Oath of Fëanor is one such force; Fëanor and his sons swear to always

ruthlessly pursue any who attempt to keep the Silmarils from them. The curse of Glaurung is

another force that seems to infect the jewels. The curse of Glaurung the dragon seeps into the

hoard of treasure when Nargothrond (Elvish city) is sacked and destroyed and twists the fate of

all who possess this gold to evil. For example, Dwarves from the Blue Mountains are invited by

Thingol the Elven king of Doriath to join the Silmaril with the Nauglamir (a priceless necklace

from the hoard of Nargothrond). The Dwarves "were filled with a great lust to possess [the jewel

and the necklace]" as soon as they look upon them (*Sil* 279). The narrator does not mention the

curse or the nature of the Silmaril in this instance, but the reader knows that these forces must be

influencing the Dwarves.

The Oath of Fëanor similarly warps the minds of the sons of Fëanor and leaves the reader

to eventually see the jewels as symbols of doom. These forces do not change the jewels

themselves; their holy light is entirely good and cannot be changed. However, the way that

characters interact with the Silmarils becomes tragic and destructive. Towards the end of *The*

Silmarillion the sons of Fëanor become weary of their oath and desire to abandon it regardless of

the consequences. When Maedhros and Maglor (the only two surviving sons of Fëanor) debate

how to obtain the jewels they do not mention the value of the gems and focus only on how to

escape their oath (*Sil* 304-5). Maglor even suggests that because the Valar deny their claim to the

Silmarils that they should surrender them to the Valar and thus be released from their oath (*Sil*

304). The sons of Fëanor eventually come to view the Silmarils as instrumental goods that they

will use to fulfill their oath. The Oath has immense power over its prisoners and even compels

them to commit atrocities of kinslaying throughout *The Silmarillion*. The herald of Manwë

claims that the sons of Fëanor can no longer claim the Silmarils because "of their many and

merciless deeds, being blinded by their oath, and most of all because of their slaying of Dior and

the assault upon the Havens" (*Sil* 304). Dior is the son of Beren and Lúthien, and the sons of

Fëanor killed him in order to obtain the Silmaril; after the jewel eludes them again they slaughter

a number of Elves at the ship Havens of Círdan and attempt to murder Elwing, the elf woman

who holds the Silmaril at the time. The sons of Fëanor are tragic figures because their

possessiveness leads them to pride, murder, and arrogance. The Oath of Fëanor changes how

readers view the jewels because the Silmarils always bring despair through the sons of Fëanor.

The reader views these gems as dangerous, but their beautiful nature remains constant regardless

of how agents in the world view them.

It seems as if the jewels generate temptation even if it is unconscious; the nature of the

jewels comes under threat from the terrible oath of Fëanor. Verlyn Flieger argues that the

Silmarils fail as symbols because their nature is internally inconsistent in this manner. The

Silmarils fail because their nature as pure and benevolent manifestations of the Light of creation

conflicts with their terrible potential to work harm on those who possess them or seek them (67-

8). However, I contend that Flieger misses important nuances in this area of inquiry. Flieger's

argument relies on the assumption that if the Silmarils cause evil then they must be the source of

that evil. This is mistaken as she herself quotes from Tolkien that the light of the Silmarils was

"derived from light before any fall" (67). When a Silmaril enters the Elvenking Thingol's

possession it begins to poison his mind. Once Thingol obtains the jewel he is glad and "every

day that he looked upon the Silmaril the more he desired to keep it for ever; for *such was its*

power" (*Sil* 223 emphasis mine). The narrator explicitly states that the jewels have the power to

magnify their presence in the minds of those who look upon them and perhaps even corrupt them to jealousy and possessiveness. This would appear to support the notion that the Silmarils are not entirely benevolent because their nature generates sin in others. However, I contend that this power the narrator refers to is not some inherent ability that *places* jealousy into the hearts of Elves and Men but a natural side-effect of their purity and beauty that *brings out* jealousy and obsession in earthly beings. Tolkien had stressed his interest in the Fall of both Men and Elves and had said that this is one of his three main themes throughout his work (*Sil* "From a Letter" xiii). An interest in the fallibility of humans suggests that whatever evil the Silmarils encourage rests in whoever beholds them rather than in the jewels themselves.

While the Silmarils do not become evil or do not place evil into the hearts of earthly beings, they have serious side effects because of their purity and brilliance. The most righteous and brilliant beings in Eä, Beren and Lúthien, are hastened toward death in their second life *because* of the brilliance of the Silmarils. Dior is saddened by the news of his parents' death, "but the wise have said that the Silmaril hastened their end; for the flame of the beauty of Lúthien as she wore it was too bright for mortal lands" (*Sil* 283-4). The Silmaril decreases the lifespan of Beren and Lúthien not out of malice or any taint that the curse or the Oath had caused but because the glory of its light is too beautiful when joined with the divine beauty of Lúthien. It is not any malign force that has infected the Silmarils, it is the nature of these jewels and of the Light within them that quickens Beren and Lúthien's life. Anna Slack contends that Lúthien represents "the unadulterated strength of the Ea" or creation and has immense power to perform and inspire subcreation within the world (71). The Silmaril responds to Lúthien so strongly because they are both created lives that have the same ontological status as creation itself. Lúthien, the child of the great spirit Melian and the great Elf King Thingol, exhibits the beautiful

light of being just as the Silmarils do; she is so beautiful and graceful that she can be compared to the raw light of existence itself. Both Lúthien and the Silmaril are pure distillations of perfect subcreation and they are thus blinding together. The pure Light of creation is too strong and raw for them to endure for long.

IV.   The Life of the Silmarils

The Silmarils are alive from the moment of their creation; the jewels are "indeed living things, they rejoiced in light and received it and gave it back in hues more marvelous than before" (*Sil* 68). The narrator explicitly describes the Silmarils as living things and illustrates that they have agency and choice. Fëanor's jewels handle light and amplify its glory and delight in this act. Varda, the goddess of the stars, hallows the jewels so that no evil entity might mar them with its touch (*Sil* 69). However, the narrator characterizes this power to burn corrupt hands as an active ability rather than a passive trait. If the jewels take pleasure and produce beauty through touching the holiness of light, then their ability to scorch evil actively points to their light as living holiness. In this initial description, these objects appear to have as much agency as any corporeal being in *The Silmarillion*.

The Silmarils continue to show signs of life throughout their presence in the whole of *The Silmarillion*. To begin with, Fëanor is ensnared by his jewels and becomes wholly bound to them, as discussed above. The jewels "held [Fëanor's] heart in thrall" and appear to actively engage their maker (*Sil* 74). Tolkien uses active verbs to characterize the Silmarils; the gems "hold," "rejoice," and "scorch" the unworthy. The first and last of these three verbs can conceivably be applied to inanimate objects like machines, but verbs like "rejoice" betray the agency and understanding within these jewels. The Silmarils *reflect* on experiences as well as

respond to them. The narrator gives the Silmarils agency and personality, explicitly confirming their status as living things.

The Silmarils respond openly and strongly to Lúthien's presence because of her grace and beauty because she shines bright with the light of being, possessing unparalleled beauty. When Lúthien dances and sings before Melkor's court and puts it to sleep with a spell, the Silmarils in Melkor's crown "blazed forth suddenly with a radiance of white flame" and became a burdensome weight for Melkor to bear (*Sil* 213). The song inspires the jewels to burst forth with light yet compels the flames in the room to fade and die (*Sil* 213). The evil fires of Melkor have no life and no power to resist Lúthien's song, while the Silmarils *respond* to her call as equally or similarly graceful and beautiful beings. The Silmarils are the only living things in the room to respond to Lúthien in this way; even Beren, though a righteous character, falls asleep just as easily as the evildoers of Melkor's court. The gems respond to Lúthien so strongly because they contain a similar spirit to Lúthien's and respond to her beautiful song with excitement and vigor. The earlier version of this tale in the *Tale of Tinúviel* does not contain this enthusiastic response from the Silmarils (*BoLT II* 33). However, the Silmaril still blazes and flames with its own agency even if it is not responding to Lúthien Tinúviel. When Beren confronts the gigantic wolf Karkaras the gem "blazeth with a white and hidden fire of its own nature and is possessed of a fierce and holy magic . . . and it doth not tolerate the touch of evil flesh or of unholy hand" (*BoLT II* 34). The narrator uses "tolerate" to illustrate that the gems are living agents that have the power to accept or reject those that touch them. The narrator ascribes an active verb to these jewels and asks readers to treat the Silmarils as living beings that act on their own. Even the very early versions of the tale of Beren and Lúthien highlight the agency of the Silmarils as agents of holiness that *choose* to reject evil touch. The agency of the Silmarils points to the grand

metaphysical power that Tolkien ascribes to the act of creation. The purpose of Enchantment is to enrich and complement what creation already exists. The agency of the Silmarils embodies this aspect of Enchantment by allowing these works of art to speak for themselves, and explicitly enrich reality around them.

V.　　Conclusions

The nature of the Silmarils as the most beautiful and successful examples of subcreation in Middle Earth reveal Tolkien's metaphysics of creation and art. The ultimate fate of these jewels illustrates that the sheer beauty achieved through the Silmarils is too great for even the Elves to possess let alone Men. Each jewel passes into inaccessible regions in the sky, the ocean, and the earth below. It seems as if the Silmarils return to their rightful place: the heart of Eä that nourishes them as ontologically equivalent works of art. The Silmarils "could not be found or brought together again unless the world be broken and remade" (*Sil* 305). The narrator illustrates that the life of the Silmarils is now utterly bound to the life of the world itself. The jewels can no longer be possessed by anyone, yet they remain a part of the waking world. Tolkien seems to be revealing the nature of pure and perfect art in the material world: art as equal to the material world itself. Perhaps Fëanor's subcreation was so perfect and beautiful to the point where it rivaled the primary creation of Eru and therefore had to be removed from earthly hands. The effects of subcreation are wide and diverse, just as the Silmarils touched the lives of so many characters in a multitude of ways. The life of these jewels reveals the beauty of subcreation, the potential weakness of earthly creatures when handling art and creating it, and the terrible consequences that abound when art is valued or pursued for the wrong reasons.

Chapter Three: The One Ring and *The Lord of the Rings*

Just as in *The Silmarillion*, J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* places the major

created object – the Ring – at the center of his work. Both major works contain a significant

created object in its title. While the title of *The Silmarillion* points to the history of the Silmarils,

the title of *The Lord of the Rings* points to the master of the Rings of Power, Sauron. The title

'*The Lord of the Rings*' tells readers a great deal about the function of the Ring of Power and its

possessor. Tolkien's title draws upon the traditional image of a benevolent king in Northern

Europe during the Middle Ages who was seen as a father figure and a distributor of wealth. This

title characterizes Sauron as a false ring-giver, a figure of a king who perverts his traditional

duties out of lust for power. Anglo-Saxon authors in particular refer to great kings as ring-givers

or ring lords because they generously distributed wealth to their subjects and receive undying

loyalty in return. However, Sauron's title as The Lord of the Rings perverts the image of a

generous king by inverting the function of treasure. Sauron distributes and helps create many

Rings of Power with the sole intention of enslaving those to whom he "gifts" the Rings. He does

not give many rings, but he controls them all but the Three Elven Rings. The ironic title of *The*

Lord of the Rings casts the Ring of Power as a collar rather than as a symbol of reciprocal loyalty

and love between a ruler and his subject. The Ring of Power is secondary to Sauron in the title of

The Lord of the Rings, but this is only because the Ring is essentially an extension of the malice

that Sauron represents.

I. From Artistry to Technology

The Ring of Power is the ultimate expression of the degenerative nature of history within

Tolkien's imagined world. The evil of the Ring marks a shift from glorious art to base

technology. The general trajectory of Tolkien's imagined history moves from splendor to a fallen and less beautiful world that has been marred by evil. Tolkien's fiction is widely regarded as anti-industrial and critical of technological advancements and the reliance on machines. Part of Tolkien's project in his fiction is to react against a perceived modern attitude that worships the Machine. Tolkien writes that the Machine is defined as "all use of external plans or devices (apparatus) instead of developments of the inherent inner powers or talents – or even the use of these talents with the corruptive motive of dominating: bulldozing the real world, or coercing other wills" (*Letters* 146). The Machine is dangerous because society has developed an unhealthy fascination with it. The Ring of Power is Tolkien's preeminent example of the Machine made physical and of the tragic decline of civilization's greatness into darkness. The Ring is made by the most powerful sub-creator in Middle Earth, but is technology rather than art.

The Machine is directly tied to Magic but has essential differences that Tolkien uses to distinguish artistry from technology in both the Elves and Sauron. To begin, Tolkien explicitly states "the Machine . . . [is] more closely related to Magic than is usually recognized" (*Letters* 146). Both technology and art are linked by a creative impulse and are akin in that respect, but the technology that Tolkien fears has a malicious, coercive, and manipulative will behind it. Magic and the Machine are seen clearly by Frodo and Sam when they encounter the Mirror of Galadriel, a beautiful pool used by Galadriel (one of the oldest of the Elves in Middle-Earth) to see into different times. When Galadriel asks the Hobbits if they desire to look into her mirror, she encourages Sam by reminding him that "this is what your folk would call magic, I believe; though I do not understand clearly what they mean; and they seem to use the same word of the deceits of the Enemy. But this, if you will, is the magic of Galadriel. Did you not say that you wished to see Elf-magic?" (*LotR* 362). Galadriel indicates that there is a reason to be confused

with a word that includes both Elvish activities and the devices of Sauron and his servants. This episode simultaneously leads readers to conclude that the word *magic* is inadequate for describing the works of both Elves and Orcs. There is a difference between how the Elves use magic and how Orcs use it. The Elves use their powers to preserve and further glorify the created world through brilliant works of art such as the Silmarils; Enchantment is the work of the Elves who love the created world. The Orcs and those who enslave them use their magic to increase their power and to control others; their magic is the Machine that warps reality and undermines the natural order. Tolkien constructs this episode to reveal the difference between the Machine of evil magic and the artistry of righteous subcreation.

The Elves use their magic primarily in artistic pursuits to make beautiful things and to revel in creation; it is only logical that all their works, magic or otherwise, are valued as beautiful things of intrinsic worth. During a council convened to discuss the Ring, Elrond the wise Elf leader of Rivendell describes the Three Elven Rings of Power and the circumstances of their creation. Elrond says that "they were not made as weapons of war or conquest: that is not their power. Those who made them did not desire strength or domination or hoarded wealth, but understanding, making, and healing, to preserve all things unstained" (*LotR* 268). Here Tolkien illustrates that the greatest works of the Elves were made to pursue the worthwhile ends of healing, preservation, creative expression, and knowledge. The magic of the Elves and of the Enemy are both dazzling to mortals and allow the wielder of this power to affect reality. The Elves are able to slow the march of time and preserve beauty that they see in the natural world through Enchantment, while the Enemy is able to cause massive destruction and mayhem through the magic of the Machine. Magic is similar to Enchantment in some respects, but the goals of the Elves and the Enemy are diametrically opposed. The Three and the One differ from

each other except in one regard; the only substantive similarity between the two is their ability to amplify their bearer's power beyond what he or she is given normally.

Unlike the Three Elven Rings, the One Ring of Power was made for evil purposes of domination and coercion, yet it shares certain similarities with many works of the Elves and with the Three. The Rings of power were all created through Sauron's help except for the Three Elven Rings; all of these Rings "enhanced the natural powers of a possessor - thus approaching 'magic', a motive easily corruptible into evil, a lust for domination" (*Letters* 152). All the Rings of Power share this ability to amplify one's personal power. This can lead to an addiction to that power and create a desire to dominate. While the Three were made to pursue enrichment, the One Ring was made to master the others and "contained the powers of all the others, and controlled them, so that its wearer could see the thoughts of all those that used the lesser rings, could govern all that they did, and in the end could utterly enslave them" (*Letters* 152). The One is called the Ruling Ring because that is its function: to rule the others, "to bring them all and in the Darkness bind them" (*LotR* 254). The Ring is created and used for entirely wicked ends and is thus placed in direct opposition to the works of the Elves such as the Three. However, many characters regard the One as if it were intrinsically valuable and beautiful, as one would expect them to treat the works of the Elves that are directed at enriching and preserving beauty for its own sake. For example, when Gandalf suggests that Frodo destroy the Ring, Frodo looks at it, and the narrator reports, "the gold looked very fair and pure, and Frodo thought how rich and beautiful was its colour, how perfect was its roundness. It was an admirable thing and altogether precious" (*LotR* 60). After a concerted effort to fling the Ring into his fireplace, and to force himself to recall all the evil that it had wrought and the fundamentally twisted nature of its being that Gandalf had described, Frodo finds himself putting it back in his pocket rather than attempting to destroy it

(*LotR* 60). Even after learning the Ring's inextricable evil, Frodo still concludes that it is an admirable, even beautiful thing. The same can be seen in Isildur's account of the Ring from thousands of years before Frodo's time. Isildur, the mortal king who helped defeat Sauron in an earlier battle and cut the Ring from his finger, wrote that he "will risk no hurt to this thing: of all the works of Sauron the only fair. It is precious to me, though I buy it with great pain" (*LotR* 253). When he first held the Ring, its residual heat from Sauron's hand burned Isildur; this burn is a burden that Isildur carries with him throughout the rest of his life, similar to how Melkor is burned by the light of the Silmarils (*LotR* 252-3 *Sil* 85). Despite many dying at Sauron's hand, including his father, Isildur still treasures the Ring as a beautiful and precious thing. The beauty of the Ring makes it comparable to the gorgeous works of the Elves and to the Three Rings. These examples illustrate that the One masquerades in a similar beauty to the Three but employs these fair attributes in order to seduce and corrupt. The Three otherwise differ from the One; the One exhibits a demonic beauty that appropriates the beauty of the Three.

There is a seductive element to magic both as art and as technology. While the Three and the One have utterly opposed ends as tools, characters value the One Ring as if it were a product of artistic endeavor. The Ring is a subcreated object, but it is not art; it was created as a tool designed to control others and wear the guise of art. Characters regard the One as beautiful and intrinsically valuable even after learning the wicked uses to which it is put. The fact that individuals approach the Ring just as they do beautiful works of art indicates that the Machine is far more insidious then initially thought. The Machine replicates the beauty of art but uses it to enlarge itself in the minds of those that apprehend it.

II.   The Life and Agency of the One Ring

The living potency of the Ring speaks primarily to the unique danger it poses as an addictive manifestation of the Machine. The Ring as an agent uses all the trappings of beauty and purity to seduce and coerce its victims to evil. However, any corruption caused by the Silmarils reveals that each victim or possessor must have some innate quality that responds to the seduction of the Ring. The Ring is the most potent and malicious corruptor besides Sauron himself, but even Sauron requires his prey to be tempted by the evil he presents. The evil that the Ring exhibits is addictive and wholly coercive from within. This is how the Machine operates in the real world according to Tolkien.

The One Ring has a life and will of its own, as do the Silmarils, but its life is entirely tied to its maker and it is a slave to its master, and an extension of his will. Throughout the opening chapters of *The Lord of the Rings*, characters refer to the Ring as if it were an active participant in the action, saying that it holds sway over others, that it actively grows in the mind and appears at times as an eye watching (*LotR* 12, 34). Besides these more indirect characterizations, Tolkien explicitly reveals the agency of the Ring once Gandalf confirms that Bilbo's ring is indeed the One. Gandalf says that the Ring is "so powerful that in the end it would utterly overcome anyone of mortal race who possessed it. It would possess him" (*LotR* 46). While the Silmarils' are active through the light they receive and create, the Ring becomes active through possession and domination. It is necessary for an entity to be an agent in order for it to own something or someone. After Gandalf tells this to Frodo the Ring takes on a larger and more active role in the narrative that manifests itself in different ways.

The One Ring of Power possesses agency and approaches the Silmarils in that both it and they live with an independent life. Gandalf says that the Ring has the ability physically to shrink

and expand at will in order to stay or leave the hand of whomever happens to be wearing it. When Gandalf asks Frodo to give him the Ring for a moment, Frodo is reluctant to comply, a thought that comes to Frodo either from himself or from the Ring itself (*LotR* 49). Tolkien deliberately identifies a possibility that the Ring itself feels reluctance to leave Frodo's grasp and that perhaps the Ring has already begun to latch itself to Frodo's mind and to build its influence there. Previously, The One had imposed its influence on Gollum and "was eating up his mind . . . and the torment had become almost unbearable" (*LotR* 55). Tolkien explicitly identifies the Ring's power not only to influence but also unhinge and erase or consume the psyche of beings in Middle Earth. Where the agency of the Silmarils often transfixed the minds of those who beheld them, the jewels never exerted influence over those minds; the Silmarils and the Ring speak to some root of evil within characters, however dormant, but only the Ring can exert willing influence over the minds it chooses to corrupt by actively warping their perception, destroying their mental faculties, and building its own stature within those minds. The Machine performs its task and begins to master people's wills and minds by actively unhinging and rewiring them.

The One Ring does not only have an active will of its own, it has a coercive will that denies and shapes the wishes of those whom it controls. Gandalf says early on that

> A Ring of Power looks after itself, Frodo. *It* may slip off treacherously, but its keeper never abandons it. At most he plays with the idea of handing it on to someone else's care – and that only at an early stage, when it first begins to grip. But as far as I know Bilbo alone in history has ever gone beyond playing, and really done it. He needed all my help, too. And even so he would never have just forsaken it, or cast it aside. It was not Gollum, Frodo, but the Ring itself that decided things. The Ring left *him*.
>
> <div align="right">(LotR 55 italics Tolkien's)</div>

Gandalf says that a Ring of Power is the true master of its own affairs. Because Gandalf's account refers to the Rings of Power in general one can conclude that agency is essential to the

nature of Rings of Power and is not unique to the One Ring alone. It is also significant that Tolkien chose to italicize precise moments of Gandalf's speech that emphasize the mastery of the Ring's will over Gollum. The two italicized words are "*it*" and "*him*" and are used to bookend the same point. Gandalf says that the Ring chooses to come and go as it pleases and that Gollum has no control over whether the Ring abandons him or not. Gollum, and every Ring Bearer, *must* possess his ring, yet the ring itself may choose to come and go at will. The agency of every Ring Bearer is sublimated to the rings; the bearer has no choice in the matter. Unlike the Silmarils, which actively absorb and then create new radiance as the exemplar of Enchantment that enriches reality, the Ring actively masters and subjugates other wills because that is its design and partly because that is its nature as a Ring of Power and a manifestation of the Machine. The Silmarils are constructed as active agents in order to express their enriching activities while the One Ring's agency characterizes the Machine as an insidious and coercive force that exerts power over its victims.

There are several moments where Frodo feels compelled by an external force to don the Ring, and these point toward the Machine's power as a coercive force. When Frodo and his company are hiding from the Black Riders or Nazgûl, who are the chief servants of the Dark Lord, he is overcome with the desire to put the Ring on, either to escape or make sure it is safe. The first instance is clearly focalized through Frodo's consciousness and therefore seems to be a desire or thought rising from within. While hiding, Frodo "felt that he had only to slip it on, and then he would be safe. The advice of Gandalf seemed absurd. Bilbo had used the Ring" (*LotR* 75). The first of these three sentences is thought summary or report and comes from within, but the second and third sentences in this passage constitute free indirect discourse that overlays Frodo's thoughts with the diction of the narrator. Tolkien uses free indirect discourse to remove

layers of mediation between Frodo and the reader and heighten the intensity of the moment. Instead of focusing on what the Black Rider does in this scene, Tolkien's narrator enters Frodo's mind and illustrates that his desire to use the Ring seems to come from within, at least at first. The nature of the Ring in this instance is undetermined and rests between a Manichean and Boethian understanding of evil. A Manichean view of evil envisions it as a force equal with goodness, the two of which create each other. Contrastingly, a Boethian vision of evil characterizes it as a force of non-existence or something that has presence but no true ontological status. The Ring is powerful as a symbol because it operates in both a Manichean and Boethian manner. Tom Shippey argues that the Ring both exerts influence over its victims *and* amplifies their own deep desires for power (136). The reader is not sure if the Ring is causing evil or if Frodo's will is reaching out to the Ring; ultimately, this ambiguity establishes that the Machine coerces its victims, but it must have a ready will to work well.

Soon Frodo's desire to use the Ring appears to come from some external force and perhaps from the Ring itself. This is suggested as early as his second encounter with a Black Rider, when the desire to use the Ring "was stronger than before. So strong that, almost before he realized what he was doing, [Frodo's] hand was groping in his pocket" (*LotR* 78). Tolkien deliberately suggests that Frodo is almost responding to a command, his desire to use the Ring, before he has thought about the consequences of using it. This becomes overt when Frodo accidentally uses the Ring at an inn when he slips off of a table. Frodo "wonder[s] if the Ring itself had not played him a trick; perhaps it had tried to reveal itself in response to some wish or command that was felt in the room" (*LotR* 160). If the narrator is to be believed, not only does Frodo acknowledge the possibility that the Ring has made decisions for him, but he also

recognizes the will and agency of the Ring in its capacity both to control him and respond to external commands, which come from those it detects as friends of its master.

The desire to use the Ring grows strong quickly throughout the early stages of Frodo's journey until he is outright commanded to put it on. When confronted by the Black Riders on Weathertop, Frodo is again overcome with temptation to use the Ring. In response to the terror of the Nazgûl, Frodo feels "a sudden temptation to put on the Ring. The desire to do this laid hold of him, and he could think of nothing else . . . something seemed to be compelling him to disregard all warnings, and he longed to yield. Not with the hope of escape, or of doing anything, either good or bad: he simply felt that he must take the Ring and put it on his finger" (*LotR* 195). First, the narrator acknowledges that this desire appears to have an external source that may come from either the Nazgûl or the Ring itself. Second, Frodo's desire to put the Ring on has no practical purpose even in this dire situation and seems to be a desire for the Ring's presence on his finger without any value other than putting it on for its own sake. Given that the Ring possesses the ability to warp and change minds and the ability to enlarge itself in minds, the Ring is here exerting its influence over Frodo. The Ring uses its agency to occupy and hold Frodo's mind, tormenting him until he submits to its will. The Machine has begun making serious advances on the freedom of its victim. The Ring's battles with Frodo clearly illustrate its nature as a pure manifestation of the Machine that not only coerces wills but also addicts them. Frodo's extended exposure to the Ring addicts him to its power. Tom Shippey says that the "very urge to use it is what is destructive," and that anyone who claims the Ring or uses it "would come to enjoy having their intentions achieved, the use of power itself, and would end as dictators over others, enslaved to themselves, unable to give up or go back" (119). Using the Ring, being near the Ring, addicts and corrupts because of the unnatural power it bestows on its "possessors," who

eventually become slaves to this object. The Machine allows one to alter reality, to gain undue

power, and thus bends and warps one's being until one becomes a slave to that addictive power.

When Frodo and his companions pass the fences of Mordor, the Ring tests him again,

revealing its malevolent will. While hiding in a pass above the fortress of the Nazgûl, Minas

Morgul, the Ring appears to call out to the Lord of the Nazgûl, who responds with an icy

command for Frodo to put the Ring on. Frodo felt this pressure to put on the Ring, and "great as

the pressure was, he felt no inclination now to yield to it. He knew that the Ring would only

betray him, and that he had not, even if he put it on, the power to face the Morgul-king – not yet.

There was no longer any answer to that command in his own will" (*LotR* 706). Frodo does not

only recognize the fact rather than possibility that the Ring has issued commands to him, but he

knows that these commands are contrary to his designs. It is hence clear that while the Ring has

its own will and ability to suggest and push its possessors toward choices, it needs a responsive

will to work effectively and it takes time for it to entirely dominate and possess an agent.

Tolkien illustrates near complete possession by the Ring as Frodo and Sam come closer

to Mount Doom, the fire-mountain where the Ring was forged and the one place it can be

destroyed. As the Hobbits move closer to their desperate goal they deteriorate physically and

mentally, until Frodo's mind becomes so preoccupied with the Ring that he can no longer recall

the touch of grass or other cheerful things because, he says, "there is no veil between me and the

wheel of fire. I begin to see it even with my waking eyes, and all else fades" (*LotR* 938). Frodo

begins to see the Ring as a wheel of fire even as he walks in the waking world with open eyes;

the Ring has used its potent will to master Frodo to the extent that it literally occupies his mind

and obscures his waking sight. The Ring has mastered Frodo's senses and even begun to alter and

erase his memories of cheerful things, replacing them only with its own presence. The Machine enlarges itself in the mind of its victim and usurps their will.

The Ring eventually seems to take total control over Frodo and obscure his will entirely to the point where it speaks through him. After Gollum attempts to wrest the Ring from Frodo, Sam sees Frodo as "stern, untouchable now by pity, a figure robed in white, but at its breast it held a wheel of fire. Out of the fire there spoke a commanding voice" (*LotR* 944). This heightened image of Frodo is interesting because the voice that addresses Gollum comes *out of the fire* and not from the robed figure clutching that wheel of fire. This suggests that the wheel of fire, or the Ring, is the one speaking at this time. This suggestion is strengthened by the pitiless quality of the robed figure because it contrasts with Frodo's initial great pity when he first encountered Gollum and still had mastery over his mind. This sudden shift from dangerous pity to resolute disgust further suggests that the voice commanding Gollum is either the Ring itself or Frodo's voice used by the Ring, which has overcome his mind and now possesses him almost entirely. Before it is destroyed, the Ring "shone now as if verily it was wrought of living fire" (*LotR* 946). Describing the Ring as "living fire" not only furthers its sense of agency and independent life but also draws a connection with the Flame Imperishable of Eru. It is almost as if the Ring is the physical and raw manifestation of domination and power. The life of the Ring burns brightest at the moment before it is extinguished forever. The Machine has become fully animate and utterly enslaved Frodo at this point and speaks through him and uses his body to move about. Frodo has become addicted to the technology of power and is ultimately controlled by this addiction and by the Ring itself.

III.   The Addiction of Technology

The Ring of Power is so insidious because the power is offers is addictive and corrupting. Those who hold the Ring are given power, but there is a pleasure in submitting to the will of the Ring that comes to dominate a person and lead him to surrender his will and very being. Frodo finds it increasingly difficult to resist the Ring because the power it offers is addicting. While the purity of the Silmarils elicits evil in beings that possess them, they do not actively seek that corruption and do not intentionally catalyze it. The Ring offers a unique set of qualities that are seductive, addictive, dominating, and ultimately destructive. There are certain qualities that the Ring shares with the Silmarils, but its status as a tool or instrument bestows an entirely new set of problems that do not exist in the sacred jewels. The Silmarils are a manifestation of Enchantment and do not function as does the Ring as a tool and a Machine.

Tolkien suggests early in *The Lord of the Rings* that Frodo's use of the Ring grows easier, more addictive, and enlarges the Ring in his mind over time. Frodo first uses the Ring in the House of Tom Bombadil, a benevolent forest spirit that is his own master and is thus entirely unaffected by the Ring. Tom is unaffected by the Ring because he is his own master and is content with limiting his sphere of power to his own being (Dickerson and Evans). When Tom toys with the Ring and causes it to vanish momentarily Frodo becomes upset and tests his newly returned Ring to be sure that he has not been tricked. Frodo puts on the Ring and turns invisible, startling his companion Merry, much to his delight (*LotR* 133). Immediately after Frodo playfully deceives Merry, he "got up and crept quietly away from the fireside towards the outer door," but he is stopped by Tom, who exclaims "'Hey there!' . . . glancing toward him with a most seeing look in his shining eyes. 'Hey! Come Frodo, there . . . take off your golden ring! . . . Leave your game and sit down beside me!'" (*LotR* 133). The Ring has no power over Tom, who

can see Frodo the entire time he performs low-level mischief. After Tom calls to him, "Frodo laughed (trying to feel pleased)" (*LotR* 133). This first time Frodo uses the Ring produces pleasure; Frodo is so amused by Merry's startled reaction that he immediately resolves to leave the room and cause further mischief. When Tom spoils his fun Frodo is naturally annoyed because the power to do mischief has been revoked against his will. The easy and elevating power Frodo feels at the simple act of disappearing becomes immediately addictive. The joy that Frodo receives from disappearing is the power it gives him over those around him, a power easily obtained through the Ring.

The addictive power of the Ring is potent and easily obtained. Utilizing the true potential of the Ring requires strength of will, as one would have to challenge Sauron to lay complete claim to the Ring, but its lesser uses are easily accessed and employed. Frodo uses the Ring for the second time in the Prancing Pony inn by accident, when he slips and falls, but Tolkien deliberately indicates that Frodo had a desire to use the Ring earlier in this scene. After Frodo interrupts a conversation he "suddenly felt very foolish . . . he felt the Ring on its chain, and quite unaccountably the desire came over him to slip it on and vanish out of the silly situation" (*LotR* 157). The reader can sympathize with Frodo's desire to vanish from an awkward social encounter, but the fact that he is specifically tempted to use the power of the Ring to escape such mundane and banal troubles illustrates that the power of the Ring is beginning to enlarge its importance in his mind. Frodo considers this option because of how easy it is to use the Ring to achieve this end. The ease of the technology of the Ring makes the righteous or normal methods of achieving one's goals seem either impossible or far too difficult. In this case, Frodo has the desire to use technology to escape an awkward situation, and is unwilling to do so on his own; the former is easy and the latter requires effort and perhaps embarrassment. Tolkien is

illustrating the problems that technology creates even as it attempts to solve various problems. The Ring is certainly not designed to escape social interactions, but the principle of using a contrivance to do so still speaks to the corruptive and addictive influence of contrivances. The Ring stands for all technology and artifice. The Machine of pure power, the Ring, is so addictive because it gives one the power to achieve essentially anything that one desires. That absolute power corrupts and becomes easier and easier to use.

Sauron's design of the Ring embodies its seductive and deceptive nature as an addictive piece of technology. Gandalf says that "the Nine, the Seven, and the Three . . . had each their proper gem. Not so the One. It was round and unadorned, as it were one of the lesser rings; but its maker set marks upon it that the skilled, maybe, could still see and read" (*LotR* 252). Sauron, one of the proudest beings in Tolkien's fiction, deliberately breaks the norms of ring making and fashions his Great Ring after the lesser and more mundane rings. The Ring has a simple pure gold design that masks its true nature as the most powerful of all the rings of power and an utterly evil thing. The writing that appears on the Ring betrays its true nature as highly wrought and craftily made with wise malice. The Ring burns with the message "One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them," written in letters of fire on its band (*LotR* 50). Instead of a gem that openly advertises its immense power, the One Ring contains writing that only the wise and skilled can read in the correct circumstances. The possessive text is incongruent with the simple design of the Ring and speaks to the dual nature of the Ring as something deceptively simple and the most evil created object in Middle Earth.

The Ring's power surely corrupts, and Tolkien firmly establishes that it is impossible to use the Ring for good because all its works are twisted to evil. Elrond, the Elven lore master,

says that it "is altogether evil . . . the very desire of it corrupts the heart . . . if any of the Wise

should with this Ring overthrow the Lord of Mordor, using his own arts, he would then set

himself on Sauron's throne, and yet another Dark Lord would appear" (*LotR* 267). Many

characters recognize that using the Ring is morally wrong, and that its use corrupts all who wield

and all that is done with it. It is as if the principle of using this technology of power and coercion

is fundamentally wrong and should be rejected at every turn. Even powerful beings that hold the

best intentions, such as defeating Sauron and restoring freedom to Middle Earth, will eventually

become addicted to the Ring's power and become possessed by it in the end. Elrond remarks,

"nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so" (*LotR* 267). Those who plan to use the

Ring for good are not evil at first but eventually fall into darkness and evil because of the

addiction that the Ring presents. Elrond's remark leads readers to wonder whether the Ring itself

was evil to begin with. The principle that nothing is evil in the beginning does not seem to apply

here because the function of the Ring, the danger that its technology presents, is utterly evil at its

core. The Ring of Power is addictive and leads individuals to forget themselves and become

slaves to the power it initially bestows upon them, and then eventually comes to wield through

them. The Machine is evil as a device that destroys freedom and enslaves those that use it.

     The wise in Middle Earth almost always recognize the evil of the Ring but sometimes

they do not. Saruman, the good wizard who falls to evil, is a clear example of how the wise fail

to fully anticipate the dangers of the Machine. When visiting a group of Elves, Frodo offers the

One Ring to the Lady Galadriel, a wise and ancient Elf Queen who possesses one of the Three

Elven rings of power. Once Frodo offers the Ring to Galadriel she does "not deny that my heart

has greatly desired to ask what you offer . . . the evil that was devised long ago works on in many

ways, whether Sauron himself stands or falls. Would not that have been a noble deed to set to the

credit of his Ring, if I had taken it by force or fear from my guest?" (*LotR* 365). Galadriel here recognizes the evil of the Ring as a corrupting object with the dangerous potential to sow great discord among peoples who should be close friends. The Elf Queen observes that wresting the Ring from Frodo and claiming it as her own would only harmonize with the entirely evil nature of the Ring because this action would be a grim betrayal and an evil act. Galadriel even refers to Frodo as her guest in this sentence and reminds the reader that she has an obligation to protect him as his host. Stealing the Ring from Frodo would violate his right to safety as her guest. However, Galadriel only at this moment fully sees the true threat that the Ring presents as an easy and seductive evil. While she may have been aware of the Ring's presence, Galadriel had not anticipated ever having the Ring offered to her freely and earnestly, but this is exactly how the One Ring operates as a corruptive and addictive evil. The Ring presents itself easily, without opposition, and removes any mediating barriers that would prevent someone like Galadriel from claiming it. Frodo offers the Ring freely, changing the nature of the Ring's temptation from one seemingly inaccessible because it would require transgressing serious social and ethical boundaries to the simplest and most innocent of decisions that would plunge the world into chaos. The Ring presents itself as an easy and free solution that is tempting because it offers Galadriel surety of success in the struggle against Sauron when compared with every other option, but the Ring is also horrific because of the evil it inevitably brings with it. The Ring is the most tangible and successful seduction that Sauron imposes on the peoples of Middle Earth (Alberto 73n). The temptation that this technology of power presents is perilous because it is so easily obtained. The danger of the Machine is that it is pleasurable and removes all barriers of submission for the user.

Throughout *The Lord of the Rings* there is one solution to the temptation and addiction that the technology of the Ring presents, and it is for characters to remind themselves of their due place and reject all thought of greater power. When Frodo and Sam encounter Men of Gondor near the borders of Mordor they are anxious that their captain, Faramir, will learn that they have the Ring and take it from them. Faramir consoles the Hobbits and assures them that "I would not take this thing, if it lay by the highway. Not were Minas Tirith falling in ruin and I alone could save her, so, using the weapon of the Dark Lord for her good and my glory. No, I do not wish for such triumphs" (*LotR* 671). This Captain of Gondor would not use the Ring even in the direst need to save his home and the city that he loves. Faramir rejects the Ring on principle because of its unnatural power that defies the correct order of things according to Eru. The Man of Gondor rejects the thought of the Ring because he knows his rightful place and his due power in the walls of the world; the Ring would elevate him above his natural place and upset the natural order, so he rejects it. Later when the Ring is fully revealed to Faramir he abides by his word that he would never take the Ring and says "I am wise enough to know that there are some perils from which a man must flee" (*LotR* 681). Faramir recognizes his own susceptibility to the Ring's temptation as a mortal Man even though he does not have a character predisposed to use it. Unlike Boromir, who tries to claim the Ring, Faramir is able to recognize the corruptive and addictive nature of the Ring as well as its intrinsic evil and actively reject it on principle.

Sam rejects the power of the Ring when he is tempted upon first entering Mordor. Characters reject the Ring in order to illustrate how the reader should react to the Machine in reality. The Machine should be rejected on principle. During a brief period where Sam carries the Ring in Frodo's place he is confronted with a vision and temptation to claim the Ring for his own. Upon entering Mordor Sam feels the power of the Ring expand

> and it became more fell, untamable save by some mighty will . . . he felt himself
> enlarged, as if he were robed in a huge distorted shadow of himself, a vast and
> ominous threat halted upon the walls of Mordor. He felt that he had from now on
> only two choices: to forbear the Ring, though it would torment him; or to claim it .
> . . Already the Ring tempted him, gnawing at his will and reason. Wild fantasies
> arose in his mind; and he saw Samwise the Strong, Hero of the Age, striding with a
> flaming sword across the darkened land, and armies flocking to his call as he
> marched to the overthrow of Barad-dûr. And then all the clouds rolled away, and
> the white sun shone, and at his command the vale of Gorgoroth became a garden
> of flowers and trees and it brought forth fruit. He had only to put on the Ring and
> claim it for his own, and all this could be.
>
> (*LotR* 900-1)

From the moment that Sam's two choices are articulated he is aware which path is the more

difficult. Sam can either claim the Ring or resist it while it torments him. The Ring tempts Sam

both through its enticing illusions and its ease of access. Part of the temptation that the Ring

presents is simply the desire to submit to it as a greater will. The Ring gnaws on Sam's will and

reason through its visions and suggestions. Because the Ring is magic and undoubtedly has the

ability to bestow great power, it is regarded as a superior will, or rather its suggestions are taken

to offer an appealing alternative to the hard road of resistance. The Ring appeals to its audience,

emphasizes the glory that Sam could achieve as a gardener with its power, and tempts him with a

garden kingdom and lordship over it.

Sam's response to this temptation is Tolkien's best example of how to deal with the power

of corruptive technology. The unnatural power of the Ring tempts Sam but is ultimately impotent

and is defeated by Sam's simple good nature:

> In that hour of trial it was the love of his master that helped most to hold him firm;
> but also deep down in him lived still unconquered his plain hobbit-sense: he knew
> in the core of his heart that he was not large enough to bear such a burden, even if
> such visions were not a mere cheat to betray him. The one small garden of a free
> gardener was all his need and due, not a garden swollen to a realm; his own hands
> to use, not the hands of others to command.
>
> (*LotR* 901)

The ultimate solution to the Ring's temptation is to reject any possibility of attaining power beyond what one is due by the law of nature. Both Sauron and the Ring operate under the assumption that most beings desire to possess things and have power over them. Tolkien uses Sam to illustrate that one should not reach for power beyond one's due and rather recognize and accept what one is and be content. Sam understands that he is a gardener and servant to his master, and he finds joy in the work of his own two hands, and not in any ownership he could aspire to. In short, the Ring seduces by tempting with grand power that is not naturally due and can therefore be rejected if one reaffirms one's place in the world and his proper allotment of power. This response to the evil of the Machine is comparable to engaging in true art or Enchantment. Enchantment is firmly rooted in one's place in the world, and firmly acknowledges the limits of one's power. It is because the Hobbits "are able to take delight in . . . simple things for their own sake . . . that they are able to resist the seductive influence of the Ring for so long" (Dickerson and Evans 13). The Hobbits value creation as it is and do not wish to bend it to their will. Knowing one's place breeds a love of the natural order and allows one to resist the temptation of the Machine and of power.

IV.   <u>The Nature of Sauron</u>

Understanding Sauron is integral to fully appreciating the evil of the Ring as a technological horror. Sauron presents a distinctly modern image of evil throughout all of Tolkien's fiction; he is similar to Morgoth but his character points specifically towards the threat of modern technology and a utilitarian outlook. Certain qualities of Sauron's evil are not found in any other character or are at least most compelling in him. The demon Sauron is not a moral

utilitarian but a being that is interested to use all means available to him. Sauron is only interested in the utility that something can provide to increase his power.

Sauron is described as a fell shape-shifter and image crafter who deceives and coerces through deceit. In *The Silmarillion* Sauron uses his physical form to seduce, terrify, and deceive all who oppose him. While hunting for a leader of men named Barahir, Sauron ensnares the Man Gorlim with image making and deceit. When Gorlim visits his house to lament the loss of his captured wife Eilinel, he looks through the window and sees "Eilinel, and her face was worn with grief and hunger, and it seemed to him that he heard her voice lamenting that he had forsaken her" (*Sil* 190). Immediately after Gorlim cries out to Eilinel, Sauron's servants catch him, and the vision of his wife vanishes. Eventually Gorlim offers information on Barahir to Sauron in exchange for being set free with his wife, whom he believes is merely captive, but in reality she is dead. Sauron agrees to this bargain and receives Gorlim's information. When Sauron reveals that what Gorlim had seen was "only a phantom devised by wizardry to entrap him" he says, "nonetheless I will grant thy prayer . . . and thou shalt go to Eilinel, and be set free of my service" (*Sil* 190). Gorlim is cruelly put to death, allowing Sauron ironically to uphold his end of the bargain. This scene illustrates Sauron's irreverence towards things that should be sacred. For example, Sauron uses language as a technology rather than as a system of meaning. Sauron only makes empty promises because words are tools to him and do not have deeper meaning beyond what they can accomplish for him. Sauron uses language as nothing more than a system of signs that is arbitrary, as Ferdinand de Saussure theorized (Halliday 113). Saussure argued that there exists no meaningful link between signified and the signifier in language, which he said should be understood in functional terms (Halliday 113). Language is used by Sauron as a tool to manipulate, while Gorlim trusts in language as a system of meanings that are

not arbitrary. Gorlim does not expect Sauron to use language as a tool to trick him and expects him to keep his word. The image of Eilinel is another mechanism that Sauron uses irreverently to achieve his ends. Sauron warps language to become the Machine that manipulates Gorlim and creates a false reality in his mind (that his wife is safe). Language and rhetoric become tools and vehicles to achieve Sauron's will. Sauron recognizes that language is generally thought to have a truthful correspondence to reality and exploits this by manipulating the minds of his victims with false words. Sauron uses magic as technology to achieve his ends.

Sauron also uses rhetoric as technology or as a tool to his ends when seducing the Númenoreans to evil. When the glorious civilization of Númenor demands Sauron to halt his aggression and humble himself before the King of Númenor, Sauron does exactly that, for "he was crafty, well skilled to gain what he would by subtlety when force might not avail . . . [he] smoothed his tongue; and men wondered, for all that he said seemed fair and wise" (*Sil* 324). Sauron attains what he wants using whatever means is appropriate to the situation. The narrator specifically identifies "subtlety" or rhetoric and deception as a means that Sauron employs when force does not appear practical. No shred of Sauron's being uses subtlety because he believes in it as anything other than a tool to serve his ends. Sauron stands apart from other deceivers in Tolkien's fiction because he uses his own spirit as a means. Sauron often shifts his physical form to appear wise and lovely to Elves and Men and seduce them to evil. After Númenor falls, Sauron loses his ability to appear fair before the different races of the world (*Sil* 336). Sauron even sees his physical appearance as a means that he can employ to manipulate and coerce the people of Middle Earth. Sauron also uses his own spirit as a means to his end of domination. Sauron pours the power of his spirit into the One Ring in order to make his evil dominating will physically present and potent within the walls of the world (*LotR* 879). The Dark Lord

commodifies his own spirit as a means to an end and creates the most potent machine of power

yet devised. Sauron is a maker only concerned with using his creations to dominate the world

and those who dwell in it.

V.   <u>Conclusions</u>

The Ring of power is similar to the Silmarils in that it encourages darkness to grow in

those that possess it and that it occupies the mind of its possessor. The Silmarils do not

encourage evil growth in their possessors, but they are so precious that this is the ultimate result.

However, the Ring is an instrument and is not valued inherently but rather as either a means or as

an addictive mechanism. The Ring operates as a seductive and easily used mechanism that

quickly addicts its users and eventually comes to possess them through its malevolent will. It

appears that the only solution to the corruption the Ring presents is to reject it and its unnatural

power entirely. Because the Ring encourages beings to reach for power beyond their natural

station, it is a manifestation of the Machine and is the grossest example of evil creation in

Tolkien's fiction.

Conclusions

J. R. R. Tolkien's fiction exhibits the dangers of the Machine as well as the glories of Enchantment and beautiful subcreation. This fiction has inspired generations of storytellers and artists across mediums to either harmonize with or react against these principles of artistic expression. Many have considered Tolkien's aesthetics holistically but have failed to apply these aesthetic principles to instances of creation within Tolkien's world. The objects themselves are so significant that they have been incorporated into popular culture. Tolkien's work has helped reveal the problems machines create such as deforestation. Some have even described him as the first Green writer because of his anti-industrialist leanings. Artistry and beauty have likewise become mammoth in the popular imagination; medievalism has exploded in popularity and has placed items like magic rings, cursed swords, and mythic treasure back in the center of public consciousness. With the immense power of these narratives comes the responsibility to consider the source and message of that power for Tolkien.

There is an entire world of art and subcreation within Tolkien's fiction that should be considered in light of his creative ideals of Enchantment and the Machine. Understanding these ideas unlocks a myriad of implications surrounding each created object. If anything this study shows that these ideas are central to everything that Tolkien wrote and envisioned as important for his fiction. The Silmarils and Enchantment opens readers minds to the beauty Tolkien saw in works like *Beowulf* and the *Kalevala* and provide important insight into his motivations for writing. Tolkien's fiction as a whole is a testament to his love of ancient myth and legend, while the Silmarils and Enchantment provide essential context for understanding what drives his creative projects and why they are valuable in his eyes. The One Ring and the Machine allow readers to properly understand everything that Tolkien stood against and actively resisted with

his art. Rampant industrialization is one of the tragic byproducts of the Machine, but the Machine itself explains why people are coerced into subscribing to horrific systems that mar man and nature. The One Ring and the Machine reveal the character of artistic expressions of political power through propaganda that littered the twentieth century and flooded both World Wars. Both Enchantment and the Machine contextualize Tolkien's fiction such that they fundamentally change readers' perspectives on the purpose and scope of his achievement. These ideas have not entirely been addressed by critics but are no less essential for understanding the vision behind Tolkien's artistry.

Bibliography

Alberto, Maria. "'It Had Been His Virtue, and Therefore Also the Cause of His Fall': Seduction

    as a Mythopoeic Accounting for Evil in Tolkien's Work." *Mythlore*, no. 2, 2017.

Bardowell, Matthew R. "J. R. R. Tolkien's Creative Ethic and Its Finnish Analogues." *Journal of*

    the Fantastic in the Arts, no. 1 (75), 2009, pp. 91-108.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility." *The*

    Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, edited by Vincent B. Leitch, 2nd ed., W.W.

    Norton and Company, 2010, pp. 1051–1071.

Carpenter, Humphrey. *J.R.R. Tolkien: a Biography*. Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

Coutras, Lisa. *Tolkien's Theology of Beauty: Majesty, Splendor, and Transcendence in Middle-*

    Earth. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Curl, James Stevens. *A Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture*. 2nd ed., Oxford

    University Press, 2006, p. 668.

Dickerson, Matthew, and Jonathan Evans. "Varda, Yavanna, and the Value of Creation." *Ents,*

    Elves, and Eriador: The Environmental Vision of J.R.R. Tolkien, University Press of

    Kentucky, 2006, pp. 3–36.

Fisher, Jason. "Three Rings For—Whom Exactly? And Why?: Justifying the Disposition of the

    Three Elven Rings." *Tolkien Studies*, 2008, p. 99-108.

Flieger, Verlyn. "II: Answering Questions: The Jewels, the Stone, the Ring, and the Making of

    Meaning." *Tolkien in the New Century*, June 2014, pp. 65-77.

Halliday, M. A. K. "Ideas About Language." *The Collected Works of M.A.K. Halliday*. Edited by

    Jonathan J. Webster, 1st ed., vol. 3, Continuum, 2002.

Head, Hayden. "Imitative Desire in Tolkien's Mythology: A Girardian Perspective." *Mythlore*,

    no. 1-2, 2007, p. 137-148.

Mydla, Jacek. "The Utility of Poetry? Rhetoric in Dickens's Quarrel with Utilitarian

    Philosophers." *Reflections on / of Dickens*, edited by Ewa Kujawska-Lis and Krawczyk-

    Łaskarzewska, Cambridge Scholars, 2014, pp. 42–50.

Noel, Ruth S. "Part V: Things." *The Mythology of Middle-Earth*. Houghton Mifflin Company,

    1978. pp. 149-173.

Pevsner, Nikolaus "From Eighteen-Fifty-One To Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement."

    Pioneers of Modern Design: from William Morris to Walter Gropius, 4th ed., Yale

    University Press, 2005, pp. 36–56.

Shippey, T. A. (Tom A.). *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*. Houghton Mifflin, 2001

Slack, Anna. "Moving Mandos: The Dynamics of Subcreation in 'Of Beren and Lúthien'." *The

    Silmarillion: Thirty Years on*, Allan (ed. and preface) Turner, Walking Tree, 2007, pp.

    59-79. Cormarë Series (Cormarë): 15.

Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Book of Lost Tales, Part One*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien, vol. 1, Harper

    Collins, 2002.

--. *The Book of Lost Tales Part, Two*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien, vol. 2, HarperCollins,

    2002.

--. "Leaf by Niggle." *Tree and Leaf: Mythopoeia ; The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth,

    Beorhthelm's Son*, by J. R. R. Tolkien, HarperCollins Publishers, 2005, pp. 91–118.

--. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien: a Selection*. Edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher

    Tolkien, Houghton Mifflin Co, 2000.

--. *The Lord of the Rings*. 50th Anniversary ed., HarperCollins, 2004.

--. *The Silmarillion*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien, Harper Collins Publishers, 2013.

--. *On Fairy-Stories*. Edited by Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson, Expanded ed., Harper

      Collins Publishers, 2014.