Power and Corruption

Evil in Tolkien’s Eä

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Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men… (Lord Acton. In Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*)

**Introduction**

The battle between good and evil is a central part of most works of fantasy and as such plays a large role in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, author of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, two seminal works in the genre. In his books evil takes many different forms, most of which exhibit a common trait, namely the struggle for dominion over the world and its peoples in a quest for absolute power. Tolkien wrote in a letter that “in the view of this tale & mythology Power – when it [power] dominates or seeks to dominate other wills and minds (except by the assent of their reason) – is evil” (Carpenter & Tolkien 237).

The purpose of this essay is to examine the connection between evil and power in some of Tolkien’s most famous works. In order to do so, I intend to look at some of the manifestations of evil in the books to explore its origin, its nature and its effects. I will also seek to analyse the reasons for certain characters’ fall into evil, what their ambitions are and what means they use to achieve their goals. Furthermore, I mean to explore the differences and the connection between good and evil, how they relate to each other and to the natural world, as it may help to illuminate the character of evil.

Tolkien is not the only one to have observed the corrupting influence of power. An example of this is the quote by Lord Acton from 1887, which serves as the epigraph of this essay. It also appears in Christian mythology, where it was the cause of Lucifer’s fall and led to his becoming the archetype of evil. John Milton’s epic *Paradise Lost*, which belongs in the British literary canon, builds on this myth. Tolkien himself was a Christian, a literary scholar and a Catholic as well as a linguist and an author and he wrote in one of his letters that although there are no direct references to religion in the book, “*The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work” (Carpenter & Tolkien 172). In order to further elucidate some of my arguments, I have chosen to use comparisons to Christian mythology as well as to *Paradise Lost* as part of my method.

There are other correlations to the correspondence between power and corruption in
these works. As Tom A. Shippey states in *J.R.R Tolkien, Author of the Century*, “Hints of correspondence between our history and the history of Middle-earth are in fact fairly frequent” (164). However, I have decided not to bring these aspects into this essay in order to prevent it from becoming too vast. The only exceptions to this, other than the parallels drawn to Christianity, are the occurrences of industrialisation in the books, which necessitate a reference to phenomena in the real world.

I have chosen to focus mainly on *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, as the essay would otherwise become too extensive. Consequently, the theories and inferences made in this essay are based on the contents of these two books and contain few references to alternative information that can be found in other sources, such as the *The History of Middle-Earth*-books. The cases that I bring up are not the only examples of the corrupting influence of power that can be found in the books, but I have tried to bring up the main instances of this occurrence. Rather than including details and explanations regarding the story and characters in Tolkien’s works in this essay, I have provided an appendix containing basic facts and information about names and terms that are specific to these stories and relevant to my study.

The essay will begin by examining the beginning of evil in the world and the rise and fall of the first Dark Lord, Morgoth. It will attempt to define some of the characteristics of evil and how it relates both to power and to goodness, especially with regard to the creation of the world, nature and various life forms. It will then proceed to discuss the development of Morgoth’s successor Sauron, especially with regard to his final corruption and struggle for dominion. This will centre on an examination of the Ruling Ring, mainly regarding the nature of its powers and its influence. Finally, it will explore the corruption of goodness that takes place in these works, both in people and in nature, and its consequences, as well as the possibilities of redemption and the occasional transformation of evil into good. In other words, the categories of good and evil are not absolute terms in the sense that they are distinct and can never blend into each other. Rather there is a continuum where absolute good and absolute evil make up the poles at the opposite ends. On this continuum, most characters exist closer to one or the other extreme. In such a manner, the creator and giver of life, Ilúvatar, can be seen to represent the side of absolute good, whereas Morgoth and his successor Sauron, who like Milton’s Satan have chosen to place themselves outside the reach of redemption, can
found by the pole of absolute evil. On this continuum, as I shall attempt to show, the subjects’ attitudes to acquiring and wielding power plays a decisive part in placing them near the good or the evil extreme.
The Characteristics of Evil

The desire for absolute power is a central theme in both The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings and it is a trait that many of the main antagonists share. In a letter to the editor Milton Waldman, Tolkien wrote, “‘power’ is an ominous and sinister word in all these tales, except as applied to the gods“ (Carpenter & Tolkien 152). The desire for power is the easiest identifiable root of evil and it almost inevitably leads to defeat and ruin.

It is sometimes difficult to distinguish good from evil in these tales, as they both have their origin in the creator Ilúvatar and so are two aspects of the same. Ilúvatar himself is above good and evil. He alone holds the absolute power that the dark forces desire. Like the Christian God, he is omnipotent, but he has chosen to give his Children the freedom to rule their own lives and make their own choices. Evil stems from the desire to take away that freedom and to appropriate the power that belongs to Ilúvatar alone. In “The Lord of the Hobbits: J.R.R. Tolkien”, Edmund Fuller observes,

> The primal nature of the sin of Pride, bringing the fall of angels before the seduction and fall of Man, is the wish to usurp the Primal and One source of Power, incorruptible in His nature because he is Power and Source and has nothing to usurp, in being All. (20)

It is significant to note that not all power seems to corrupt. As Agnes Perkins and Helen Hill write in “The Corruption of Power”, “Aragorn, becoming the High King, has extensive power, but it is important that this comes to him through hereditary right as well as long years of patient effort and great valor. … He is great because he has steadfastly fought against evil, not because he has set out to seek power” (64-65). The same applies to many other rulers of the Free Peoples of Middle-earth, such as Elrond and Galadriel. It is only the desire for power to which one has no claim and the wish to dominate others against their will that is evil.

The original evil in Tolkien’s world is represented by Morgoth, ‘the Black Enemy’. In the beginning, Morgoth is one of the Ainur and his name is then Melkor, ‘He who arises in Might’. Although he is the mightiest of the Ainur and inferior only to his maker Ilúvatar, this
is not enough for him. His desire for more power corrupts him and makes him go against Ilúvatar’s will. This is first noticed when the Ainur are singing the music through which the world is created and which is to dictate its future: “But as the theme progressed, it came into the heart of Melkor to interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar; for he sought therein to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself.” (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 4) The music of Melkor creates disharmony and makes the theme of Ilúvatar less beautiful, thereby changing the course of the future intended by Ilúvatar. It confuses some of the other Ainur and disrupts the previous unity, since “some began to attune their music to his rather than to the thought which they had at first” (´Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 4). Thus Melkor’s rebellion begins to spread to his peers.

Melkor and some of the other Ainur, of whom the most powerful are known as the Valar, are permitted to enter into Arda and given the task of preparing it for the creatures who are to inhabit it. But whereas the other Valar wish to make the world a beautiful place for the future children of Ilúvatar, Melkor wishes to own and rule it and its inhabitants, suppressing their freedom to his will: “For he coveted Arda and all that was in it, desiring the kingship of Manwē and dominion over the realms of his peers.” (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 23) Melkor is successful at first and takes control over large areas in the world, with the help of other, lesser spirits that have been corrupted by their desire for a share of his power, but as their power cannot compete with that of the Valar, Melkor is ultimately conquered and imprisoned.

Melkor’s attempt to rule the earth and set himself up against Ilúvatar bears a striking resemblance to Satan’s rebellion against God in Christian tradition. Tom Shippey reflects,

> The rebellion of Melkor, and his subordinate spirits, is analogous to the Fall of Lucifer and the rebel angels. Lucifer is by tradition *princeps huius mundi*, ‘the prince of this world’, and Melkor calls himself, perhaps truthfully, ‘Master of the fates of Arda’. The origin of the fall is also the same in both cases, for the sin of Lucifer was (according to C.S. Lewis) the urge to put his own purposes before those of God, and that of Melkor was ‘to interweave matters of his own imagining’ with the ‘theme of Ilúvatar [the Creator]’. (Author 238-239)
A comparison between Melkor’s fall and that of Satan in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* brings out these similarities. Both Melkor and Satan are induced by their excessive pride to rebel against the higher forces that have made them.

. . . his [Satan’s] pride

Had cast him out from Heaven, with all his host
Of rebel Angels, by whose aid aspiring
To set himself in glory above his peers,
He trusted to have equalled the Most High (Milton 8, lines 36-40)

They desire power at all costs, as shown by Satan’s statement in *Paradise Lost*,

To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven. (Milton 14, lines 262-263)

Several of the characters in Tolkien’s books share this sentiment, but it is most prominent in Melkor. When their makers detect their attempts to gain dominion, both Melkor and Satan are humbled by defeat. Satan is banished from heaven and made to dwell in hell, contemplating his downfall and disgrace, while Melkor is shown the futility of his revolt:

Then Ilúvatar spoke, and he said: ’Mighty are the Ainur, and mightiest among them is Melkor; but that he may know, and all the Ainur, that I am Ilúvatar, those things that ye have sung, I will show them forth, that ye may see what ye have done. And thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined.’ (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 5-6)

The humiliation creates desire for revenge in the two proud spirits. Their wish to corrupt the creations of their foes consumes them and becomes their sole task. Thus, though the desire for
power is their fundamental incentive, their means appear to originate in injured pride and envy. Satan expresses his intent in *Paradise Lost*:

> To do aught good never will be our task,  
> But ever to do ill our sole delight,  
> As being the contrary to his high will  
> Whom we resist. If then his providence  
> Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,  
> Our labour must be to pervert that end,  
> And out of good still to find means of evil (Milton 11, lines 159-165)

Melkor appears to have a similar notion, as he persistently counteracts the work of the other Valar, seemingly with the only purpose of thwarting them:

> … and they built lands and Melkor destroyed them; valleys they delved and Melkor raised them up; mountains they carved and Melkor threw them down; seas they hollowed and Melkor spilled them; and naught might have peace or come to lasting growth, for as surely as the Valar began a labour so would Melkor undo it or corrupt it. (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 12)

Melkor would not be content with simply being one of the rulers of the world that Ilúvatar has created. He wishes to reshape it and make it his own, since he lacks the power to create a new world. This inability to create is the most obvious sign of his inferiority and the most difficult for him to bear.

The distortion of Ilúvatar’s creation can also be seen in the evil creatures serving the Dark Lord. Only Ilúvatar can create life and when Melkor attempts to obtain this power, he fails. “Whereas Melkor spent his spirit in envy and hate, until at last he could make nothing save in mockery of the thought of others, and all their works he destroyed if he could.” (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 18) The evil servants of Melkor are not created by him, but are creatures created by Ilúvatar that Melkor has corrupted and subjected to his will. Some of his
servants are Men, whom he has lured into darkness. Shippey compares Melkor to Satan, bringing about the Fall of Man in the Bible, “The Silmarillion then does not contradict Genesis; but it does offer an alternative view of the origin of sin, in a desire not for the ‘knowledge of good and evil’, but in the desires for creation, mastery, power.” (Author 242)

The most prominent example of Melkor’s corruption of already existing beings, however, is the Orcs, who were thought to originally have been Elves that Melkor corrupted to evil1.

Yet this is held true by the wise of Eressëa, that all those of the Quendi who came into the hands of Melkor, ere Utumno was broken, were put there in prison, and by slow arts of cruelty were corrupted and enslaved; and thus did Melkor breed the hideous race of the Orcs in envy and mockery of the Elves, of whom they were afterwards the bitterest foes. For the Orcs had life and multiplied after the manner of the Children of Ilúvatar; and naught that had life of its own, nor the semblance of life, could ever Melkor make since his rebellion in the Ainulindalë before the Beginning: so say the wise. And deep in their dark hearts the Orcs loathed the Master whom they served in fear, the maker only of their misery. This it may be was the vilest deed of Melkor, and the most hateful to Ilúvatar.

(Tolkien, Silmarillion 47, emphasis added)

Melkor puts his own mark on his servants to separate them from the beings serving his foes and to make it clear that they belong to him. This corruption of already existing beings is the closest the dark characters get to the creation new life forms and it is the height of their evil. It contends with the natural laws set down by Ilúvátar and impairs creation in the worst fashion.

One of the most distinguishable differences between the good and evil forces is their attitude towards nature and Ilúvátar’s creation. The good forces aim to understand nature in order to defend it and maintain its beauty. Patricia Meyer Spacks observes in “Power and

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1 In a commentary to his father’s texts, Christopher Tolkien states, “this was only one of several diverse speculations on the origin of Orcs” (Tolkien, Unfinished 498). The true origin of Orcs remains uncertain: whether they were originally Men or Elves and whether it was Morgoth or Sauron who brought them into existence. However, since this essay mainly concerns The Lord of the Rings and The Silmarillion, I have opted to focus solely on this theory.
Meaning in *The Lord of the Rings*, “Goodness is partly equated with understanding of nature, closeness to the natural world” (54). The three Elven rings, which represent three of the natural elements, are instruments used for this purpose. The intentions of their makers differed from those of Sauron, the creator of the other Rings of Power, in that they did not desire power, but a greater spiritual proximity to the natural world. “Those who made them did not desire strength or domination or hoarded wealth, but understanding, making, and healing, to preserve all things unstained” (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 352). Two of the rings are kept by the wise and powerful rulers of the most beautiful realms in Middle-earth: Master Elrond of Rivendell and Lady Galadriel of Lothlórien. Through the power of the rings they preserve the timeless beauty of their lands and prevent the otherwise inevitable decline of their splendour.

The dark forces, on the other hand, exploit their lands ruthlessly, as intent on dominating nature as they are on dominating its inhabitants. According to Robert Plank in “‘The Scouring of the Shire’: Tolkien’s View of Fascism”, there is an “emphasis, quite unusual for its time, on what we would now call the deterioration of the environment” (112). This deterioration is invariably due to the presence of evil. The most noticeable effects of evil upon nature are found in and near Mordor, the country of Morgoth’s successor Sauron. As Patricia Meyer Spacks writes, “The Enemy’s territory, even its outskirts, is physically and morally a Wasteland; the implication is strong that the barrenness of nature here is a direct result of the operations of evil” (55). Mordor is a dead country, where no joy or beauty is to be found.

Here nothing lived, not even the leprous growths that feed on rottenness. The gasping pools were choked on with ash and crawling muds, sickly white and grey, as if the mountains had vomited the filth of their entrails upon the lands about. High mounds of crushed and powdered rock, great cones of earth fire-blasted and poison-stained, stood like an obscene graveyard in endless rows, slowly revealed in the reluctant light. (Tolkien, *Towers* 293)

The ground is polluted and devastated. Nothing can survive in the area. In those places where the last remnants of life still exist, the plants are tough and defensive. Like the land itself, they
are bent on survival and domination at all costs. They are parasitical, feeding on each other mercilessly in order to stay alive.

Upon its outer marges under the westward mountains Mordor was a dying land, but it was not yet dead. And here things still grew, harsh, twisted, bitter, struggling for life. … Some had long stabbing thorns, some hooked barbs that rent like knives. The sullen shrivelled leaves of a past year hung on them, grating and rattling in the sad airs, but their maggot-ridden buds were only just opening. (Tolkien, *Return*, 233)

The exploitation and depletion of natural resources is a common procedure of the forces of evil. Once the resources have been exhausted and the land is no longer of any use to Sauron and his minions, it is abandoned. Its exploiters move on to another area, where they repeat the process, killing that land as well. Nature, according to the forces of evil, is only there to serve their purposes. This attitude towards nature seems to exemplify what Tolkien in his letter referred to as “the Machine (or magic)”, which he 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 corrupted motive of dominating: bulldozing the real world, or coercing other wills” (Carpenter & Tolkien 145-146). The dark forces wish to rule and dominate nature, as they wish to rule and dominate all living beings, exploiting all their resources until they are wasted, discarded and replaced.
The Ruling Ring

The desire to coerce other wills, being a great part of the evil that Morgoth brought into existence, remains even after he has been vanquished by his former peers in the form of the ever-present hunger for power in the hearts and minds of the peoples of the world. A new Dark Lord arises: Sauron, the greatest of Morgoth’s servants, who according to Tolkien “represents as near an approach to the wholly evil will as is possible” (Carpenter & Tolkien 243). After his master’s fall, Sauron tries to redeem what he has done under Melkor’s dominion, and although he does it mainly out of fear, it seems to imply that his fall into evil is not yet absolute. His intentions are originally good, but his desire for power soon makes him resort to his old habits. Pride has seized his heart and when he is told to beg the Valar for forgiveness he finds himself unable to comply.

Sauron continues his master’s work, seeking to gain dominion over the world and its inhabitants. His entire being is ruled by his desire for power over others, whether he has any use for them or not. Gandalf tells Frodo about the danger the hobbits may be facing, “He [Sauron] does not need you - he has many more useful servants - but he won’t forget you again. And hobbits as miserable slaves would please him far more than hobbits happy and free” (65). This seems to confirm what W.H. Auden writes in “The Quest Hero” when he claims, ”the kind of Evil which Sauron embodies, the lust for domination, will always be irrationally cruel since it is not satisfied if another does what it wants; he must be made to do it against his will” (47).

In order to gain the power he desires, Sauron seduces his enemies with words and gifts, and so entices the Elves to forge the Rings of Power. Just as Morgoth bears a resemblance to Satan, Sauron can also be seen to exemplify one of the fallen Angels, as Edmund Fuller demonstrates,

“It is clear from the nature and powers of Sauron – not always evil, but become
so, and not himself the greatest of his kind – that he is a type of the fallen Angels. In the era of the making of the twenty Rings of the runic rhyme, even certain of the subangelic High Elves were for a time deceived by him and, with biblical and Faustian parallels, ensnared by ‘their eagerness for knowlege’ (I, 255).” (28)

The Elven smiths, tempted by Sauron’s promises of knowledge and power, teach him their craft, but he deceives them and uses the skills they have given him to gain control over the rings.

Now the Elves made many rings; but secretly Sauron made One Ring to rule all the others, and their power was bound up with it, to be subject wholly to it and to last only so long as it too should last. (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 344)

When Sauron forged the Ring, he instilled much of his own power into it to ensure that it would be powerful enough for him to achieve his ambitions. “And much of the strength and will of Sauron passed into that One Ring; for the power of the Elven-rings was very great, and that which should govern them must be a thing of surpassing potency” (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 344). Thus, as Fuller writes, “the Ring and its potencies are evil, conditioned by its maker and his motives. It participates in the essence of its maker” (20).

The Ring is an instrument of absolute power and it is evil manifest. All that is done with the Ring, no matter how good the intention may be, is turned to evil through its corrupting influence and eventually, so is the wielder. As Gandalf tells Frodo, “neither strength nor good purpose will last – sooner or later the dark power will devour him.” (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 62) Tom A. Shippey elaborates, “All seizures of power, no matter how ‘strong or well-meaning’ the seizors, will go the same way. That’s what power does.” (*Author* 116)

Through the power of the Ring, Sauron rules his country. Mordor is the ultimate

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2 According to Tolkien’s letter to Waldman, “very slowly, beginning with fair motives: the reorganisation and rehabilitation of the ruin of Middle-earth, ‘neglected by the gods’, he becomes a reincarnation of Evil, and a thing lusting for Complete Power - and so consumed ever more fiercely with hate (especially of gods and
dictatorship and Sauron’s power there is absolute. The people are his slaves and they are bred in millions to live and die according to his desire. The only purpose of their existence is to obey their master’s commands without question or hesitation. Their only joy lies in murder and torture, and they do not know any emotions but their innate hatred. They feel as little compassion for each other as they do for their enemies. Sauron’s will guides them completely and without it they are lost, lacking the ability to make their own decisions, which is proven when the Ring is destroyed and Sauron’s power over his people is lost.

As when death smites the swollen brooding thing that inhabits their crawling hill and holds them all in sway, ants will wander witless and purposeless and then feebly die, so the creatures of Sauron, orc or troll or beast spell-enslaved, ran hither and thither mindless; and some slew themselves, or cast themselves in pits, or fled wailing back to hide in holes and dark lightless places far from hope. (Tolkien, Return 271)

Never having had the freedom to make their own decisions, Sauron’s slaves do not know what to do with their freedom once they have obtained it. Patricia Meyer Spacks points out, “By using their freedom to choose evil, the wicked destroy freedom: emphasis is consistently upon the essential slavery of the servants of Sauron, who can no longer accept freedom when it is offered them.” (61) Being creatures bred to serve, Sauron’s slaves prefer death to the responsibility of ruling their own lives.

Even Sauron’s most powerful servants are ruled solely by his will through their connection with the Ring. They are the nine Mortal Men, to whom Sauron gave a Ring of Power each, knowing them to be greedy for power and craving immortality. Through the Rings he enslaved them and they became the Nazgûl or the Ringwraiths.

Those who used the Nine Rings became mighty in their day, kings, sorcerers, and warriors of old. They obtained glory and great wealth, yet it turned to their
undoing. They had, as it seemed, unending life, yet life became unendurable to them . . . And one by one, sooner or later, according to their native strength and to the good or evil of their wills in the beginning, they fell under the thraldom of the ring that they bore and under the domination of the One, which was Sauron’s. (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 346)

Mortal Men have ever been the easiest of the free races for Sauron to ensnare. Immortal races, such as the Elves, know that they have time to reflect. Mortals act more rashly and their decisions are based on desires and emotions, rather than wisdom and deliberation, although their intentions may be good. Shippey speculates,

They accept the gifts of Sauron, quite likely with the intention of using them for some purpose which they identify as good. But then they start to cut corners, to eliminate opponents, to believe in some ‘cause’ which justifies everything they do. In the end the ‘cause’, or the habits they have acquired while working for the ‘cause’, destroys any moral sense and even any remaining humanity. (*Author* 125)

The Nazgûl did not distrust Sauron’s intention in offering them the rings, nor did they contemplate the consequences. They saw an opportunity to achieve their ends quickly and easily, and they did not hesitate to snatch it. Their impetuosity became their ruin. They lost all that they had gained to Sauron, along with their very souls and identities, becoming nothing more than slaves to the Ring. When it is destroyed, they are also undone.

Because Sauron put so much of his own power into the Ring, his very life force is bound to it. Although he cannot die, the destruction of the Ring leaves him shapeless and powerless, having lost even those powers that were innate to him, since in his greed and arrogance he risked what he had and what was rightfully his, in order to gain more.

‘If it is destroyed, then he will fall; and his fall will be so low that none can foresee his arising ever again. For he will lose the best part of the strength that
was native to him in his beginning, and all that was made or begun with that power will crumble, and he will be maimed for ever, becoming a mere spirit of malice that gnaws itself in the shadows, but cannot again grow or take shape.’

(Tolkien, Return 178)

In order to protect the Ring, Sauron has made it nearly indestructible, not only through its exceptional resilience, which makes it impossible to destroy anywhere but in the fires of Sammath Naur, but also through its influence on its wielders, which, as we have seen, makes them loath to lose it. Blinded by his own desire for power, Sauron never imagines that anyone can resist the power it offers and destroy it.

‘But the only measure that he knows is desire, desire for power; and so he judges all hearts. Into his heart the thought will not enter that any will refuse it, that having the Ring we may seek to destroy it.’ (Tolkien, Fellowship 353)

His attention is therefore directed towards those powerful enough to wield it and he ignores all others. He does not even contemplate the possibility that his enemies may attempt to bring the Ring into his own country and cast it into the devastating flames until it is too late. Fuller points out, “the one move that he [Sauron] does not expect is that they would themselves convey it to his very threshold in an ultimate renunciation and destruction of its power” (22).

It is Sauron’s arrogance, causing him to ignore those less powerful than him, and his inability to believe others capable of acting differently from him that leads to his downfall. His only fear is that someone will replace him as Dark Lord and steal his power, which is why he only considers the mighty rulers of the West as threats. His pride becomes his ruin.

And far away, as Frodo put on the Ring and claimed it for his own, even in Sammath Naur the very heart of his realm, the Power in Barad-dûr was shaken, and the Tower trembled from its foundations to its proud and bitter crown. The Dark Lord was suddenly aware of him, and his Eye piercing all shadows looked across the plain to the door that he had made; and the magnitude of his own folly
was revealed to him in a blinding flash, and all the devices of his enemies were at last laid bare. Then his wrath blazed in consuming flame, but his fear rose like a vast black smoke to choke him. For he knew his deadly peril and the thread upon which his doom now hung. (Tolkien, *Return* 265)

However, Sauron’s fear that one of his most powerful enemies will supplant him is not entirely unfounded. The Ring’s allure affects even the very wisest, although they know to suspect and fear it, as Gandalf does when Frodo offers it to him:

> ‘Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself. Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good. Do not tempt me! I dare not take it, not even to keep it safe, unused. The wish to wield it would be too great for my strength. I shall have such need of it. Great perils lie before me.’ (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 81)

The Ring holds a greater danger and appeal for powerful people. A person without any power of his own would not gain by using it. Edmund Fuller observes, “It is the nature of the Ring to give power according to the stature of its user - petty powers to the unknowing or inconsequential, vast ones to the strong and adept.” (20) Consequently, Gollum does not gain any evident power even though he possesses the Ring for such a long time. All it does is prolong his life and corrupt his character. The beginning of this process can be seen in Frodo and Bilbo as well, but it does not progress as far in them, probably because the circumstances under which they obtain the Ring are more benevolent and also because they do not own the Ring for as long as Gollum. As Fuller writes, “Frodo, though subject to corruption like any creature, begins his guardianship of the Ring unwillingly and without ambition, accepting it as an obligation thrust upon him” (22). Therefore he is more impervious to the Ring’s corrupting influence, although in the end even he is unable to completely resist it. Frodo’s companion Sam has, according to Perkins and Hill, “been described as the only true hero of the book, because he alone gives up the Ring willingly” (64). He is the only one who sees through the Rings empty promises and realises that the
power it offers is too great for him.

In that hour of trial it was the love of his master that helped most to hold him [Sam] 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. (Tolkien, *Return* 206)

Love for his master and Sam’s natural humility enables him to resist the temptation of the Ring like no one else has, proving that those with no aspirations to power are also more difficult to corrupt.

The effect that the Ring would have on a more powerful person than the hobbits is illustrated by Lady Galadriel’s response when Frodo offers her the Ring,

‘You will give me the Ring freely! In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!’ (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 480)

Apparently the Ring does not create power, but only enhances it where it already exists. Its corrupting influence appears to increase according to the magnitude of the wielder’s own inherent power. It is the tool of absolute power, but only to those who have the means and potential to attain it.

It is not only the possession of the Ring that corrupts. The craving for it is almost as bad as the wielding of it. At the council of Elrond, Boromir brings up the idea of using Sauron’s ring against him. Elrond refuses, explaining why the ring is so dangerous to those powerful enough to gain from it,
‘Alas, no,’ said Elrond. ‘We cannot use the Ruling Ring. That we now know too well. It belongs to Sauron and was made by him alone, and it is altogether evil. Its strength, Boromir, is too great for anyone to wield at will, save only those who have already a great power of their own. But for them it holds an even deadlier peril. The very desire of it corrupts the heart. Consider Saruman. 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. And that is another reason why the Ring should be destroyed: as long as it is in the world it will be a danger even to the Wise.’

(Tolkien, *Fellowship* 351)

Boromir later proves Elrond’s words true, when his desire for the Ring makes him attempt to take it from Frodo by force. The Ring, which was created through sheer malice, has the power to corrupt the noblest person and turn the best intentions to evil. Shippey maintains, the very urge to use it is what is destructive: Elrond, or Gandalf, or Galadriel, or Denethor, if they owned it, would begin with the best of intentions, but would come to enjoy having their intentions achieved, the use of power itself, and would end up as dictators over others, enslaved to themselves, unable to give up or go back. (*Author* 119)

The Ring was crafted through deceit and it becomes as treacherous as its creator. Its sole purpose is to serve its master and enhance his power. When Sauron loses the Ring, its only intent is to be reunited with him. The Ring is not an inanimate object, but has a will of its own. Like its master, it manipulates and corrupts in order to exploit its wielders’ potential, until they are completely drained and the Ring no longer has any use for them. It then abandons them and searches for another means of achieving its goal.

One example of this is Isildur, who cut the Ring off Sauron’s hand. The Ring seduces Isildur and thus prevents its own destruction. However, once it is safe and no longer has any
use for Isildur, it betrays him and becomes his doom. Gollum finds it and keeps it safe for centuries until the spirit of Sauron awakens again. The Ring then leaves Gollum, hoping for a chance to return to its master.

When it comes into Frodo’s keeping, it tries unsuccessfully to manipulate him into giving himself away in the presence of Sauron’s servants. “It took his hand, and as Frodo watched with his mind, not willing it but in suspense (as if he looked on some old story far away), it moved the hand inch by inch towards the chain upon his neck.” (Tolkien, *Towers* 393) Before its destruction, the Ring finally succeeds in dominating Frodo’s will and he finds himself unable to destroy it. This final conquest of the Ring proves futile, however, as the desire it has created in Gollum leads the creature to struggle with Frodo for it and it falls into the Cracks of Doom with him. Its own manipulation and corrupting influence becomes its undoing.
The Corruption of Goodness

The power of the dark side to turn good into evil has the greatest effect on minds already proud and hungry for power. Perhaps the most prominent example of this is the corruption of the wizard Saruman the White. Like Gandalf, Saruman was originally a Maia and was sent by the Valar to Middle-earth for the purpose of ridding the world of Sauron’s evil. He studies the Rings with the intention of using the knowledge to conquer Sauron and free Middle-earth, but as his knowledge grows, so does his fascination. Desire to possess the One Ring and use it to increase his own power engulfs him. “Too long he had studied the ways of Sauron in hope to defeat him, and now he envied him as a rival rather than hated his works.” (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 362) As Meyer Spacks remarks, “even without possession of the Ring, pride and the lust for power destroy him” (63).

Saruman resolves to watch Sauron in his quest for the Ring, hoping to be able to steal the Ring from him once Sauron finds it. To do so he uses one of the palantiri, the seven Seeing Stones, one of which is located in the tower Orthanc in Isengard, where Saruman takes residence. His own cunning becomes his undoing as Sauron ensnares his mind by means of one of the other Stones. Saruman is forced to ally himself with the Enemy and become his servant. Agnes Perkins and Helen Hill observe, “He [Saruman] is misled into thinking that he can avoid being corrupted if he joins the Enemy for his own good ends. Because he has the wisdom and strength which might have saved him, his failure to resist the temptation is most deplorable.” (60) Saruman’s allegiance and submission to Sauron are feigned, as Saruman’s only loyalty is to himself. He is constantly attempting to devise a plan to take possession of the Ring, overthrow Sauron and replace him as Dark Lord. He is corrupted by the desire for the Ring and for more power.

As mentioned earlier, good and evil characters can be distinguished by their treatment of nature. Saruman’s fall into darkness is displayed by his change of attitude towards nature. Before his corruption and treason were known he seemed to respect and care for it. The Ent Treebeard recalls, “‘There was a time when he was always walking about my woods. He was polite in those days, always asking my leave (at least when he met me); and always eager to listen.’” (Tolkien, *Towers* 84) As his betrayal is discovered
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this changes and he loses interest in the welfare of other living beings. “‘He has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things, except as far as they serve him for the moment.’” (Tolkien, *Towers* 84) Tom Shippey writes about Saruman’s change, “it starts as intellectual curiosity, develops as engineering skill, turns into greed and the desire to dominate, corrupts further into a hatred and contempt of the natural world which goes beyond any rational desire to use it” (*Author* 171). Eventually, the only interest Saruman has in nature is in trying to manipulate it into benefiting his purposes. Like Sauron, he has come to see nature only as something to be dominated and exploited.

The wizard’s moral decline is reflected in the mechanization of Isengard, Saruman’s home. When he first moved into the tower Orthanc, the plain was green and beautiful. As his corruption progresses, the scene changes.

Once it had been green and filled with avenues, and groves of fruitful trees, watered by streams that flowed form the mountains to a lake. But no green thing grew there in the latter days of Saruman. The roads were paved with stone-flags, dark and hard; and beside their borders instead of trees there marched long lines of pillars, some of marble, some of copper and of iron, joined by heavy chains.

… The plain, too, was bored and delved. Shafts were driven deep into the ground; their upper ends were covered by low mounds and domes of stone, so that in the moonlight the Ring of Isengard looked like a graveyard of unquiet dead. For the ground trembled. The shafts ran down by many slopes and spiral stairs to caverns far under; there Saruman had treasuries, store-houses, armouries, smithies, and great furnaces. Iron wheels revolved there endlessly, and hammers thudded. At night plumes of vapour steamed from the vents, lit from beneath with red light, or blue, or venomous green. (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 191-192)

Saruman continues Morgoth and Sauron’s work and his methods are as evil as theirs. Not content with simply bending nature to his will, Saruman also seeks to alter the creatures
Morgoth corrupted Elves to breed Orcs and Saruman breeds the genetically manipulated Uruk-hai, who are bigger, stronger and more efficient than ordinary Orcs. Treebeard speculates,

‘He has taken up with foul folk, with the Orcs. Brm, hoom! Worse than that: he has been doing something to them; something dangerous. For these Isengarders are more like wicked Men. It is a mark of evil things that came in the Great Darkness that they cannot abide the Sun; but Saruman’s Orcs can endure it, even if they hate it. I wonder what he has done? Are they Men he has ruined or has he blended the races of Orcs and Men? That would be a black evil!’

(Tolkien, Fellowship 84)³

According to Jane Chance in “The Lord of the Rings: Tolkien’s Epic”, “Saruman has abused Nature’s growing things by destroying the trees and twisted human nature by creating mutants and enslaving the will of men like Théoden to obtain his own will.” (217)

Saruman is eventually defeated by the nature he has exploited. The Ents, powerful natural beings, rise against him. It is a battle both of good against evil and of nature against industry, in which nature extracts revenge on its ravishers.

‘Round and round the rock of Orthanc the Ents went striding and storming like a howling gale, breaking pillars, hurling avalanches of boulders down the shafts, tossing up huge slabs of stone into the air like leaves. The tower was in the middle of a spinning whirlwind. I saw iron posts and blocks of masonry go rocketing up hundreds of feet, and smash against the windows of Orthanc.’

(Tolkien, Fellowship 209)

The Ents use water, the source of natural life and a symbol of purging, to quench the

³ As it turns out, this is more likely originally to be Sauron’s manipulation, not Saruman’s, as the first Uruks came out of Mordor, but by making use of it Saruman declares his complicity with the forces of absolute evil. He is tampering with the natural law that no one but Ilúvatar may create life forms.
industrial fires of Isengard and cleanse the plain of its unnatural filth. Eventually, nature defeats industry and Saruman is left virtually alone and powerless. Petty and spiteful he seeks revenge. He has lost the grand dreams of limitless power that has so long constituted his entire being, but he still refuses to give up all hope of domination over others. His vindictiveness makes the country of his subjugators his object of conquest.

Saruman accomplishes his revenge through the industrialisation of the Shire. The Hobbits return home to find the country they grew up in and know so well changed and infected with the evil that they have been fighting elsewhere.

Many of the houses that they had known were missing. Some seemed to have been burned down. The pleasant row of old hobbit-holes in the bank on the north side of the Pool were deserted, and their little gardens that used to run down bright to the water’s edge were rank with weeds. Worse, there was a whole line of the ugly new houses all along Pool Side, where the Hobbiton Road ran close to the bank. An avenue of trees had stood there. They were all gone. And looking with dismay up the road towards Bag End they saw a tall chimney of brick in the distance. It was pouring out black smoke into the evening air. (Tolkien, Return 341-342)

Fuller comments, “The blight of Mordor and the damage sustained as far away as The Shire are images of the blight which the first half-century of the industrial revolution laid upon fair lands, especially England.” (28) The natural world is being subjected to the domination and exploitation of Saruman’s forces. While the Hobbits have been away saving Middle-earth from evil, their own home has become a last resort of the horrors they have been vanquishing in the rest of the world. They find that corruption, greed and lust for power have found their way into the last place where they expected to find them. The contrast between what they left and what they return home to displays with excruciating clarity what would have become of the world if Sauron had prevailed. “‘This is worse than Mordor!’ said Sam. ‘Much worse in a way. It comes home to you, as they say; because it is home and you remember it before it was all ruined.’” (Tolkien, Return 360)
The Shire has always been a place of refuge to the Hobbits. They suffer a terrible shock when they learn that not even their homes are safe from evil and that not all Hobbits are as humble and unassuming as they appear. Saruman entices the Hobbit Lotho Baggins with promises of wealth and power. The meek, peace loving Hobbits are easily subdued and subjected to Saruman’s domination. The few that revolt against the new rule are made into deterring examples. When Frodo and his friends return, Saruman is once again overthrown and he is finally slain by his abused servant. Sam restores the natural beauty of the country and purges it of the last remnants of evil, aided by the Elven gift that Galadriel gave to him.

As stated earlier, Mortal Men are the easiest of the free races for Sauron to corrupt, partly due to their short lives and fear of dying, which was first inspired in them by Morgoth. It is this fear, combined with excessive pride and the corrupting influence of Sauron, which leads to the Downfall of Númenor. The Númenóreans are the Men who were most faithful to the Elves and the Valar, and helped them vanquish Morgoth. For this the Valar reward them not only with longer life than any other mortal men, but also with the island Númenor. The Elves visit them and bring them gifts from the Undying Lands in the west. One of the gifts is Nimloth, the White Tree, which becomes the symbol of the prosperity of the Númenórean race and their friendship and loyalty to the Elves and the Valar. Once again, nature represents goodness and while the Númenóreans remain faithful to the Elves and content with the fate assigned to them by Ilúvatar, Nimloth blossoms.

However, their rulers become greedy for more than is their share and turn against the Elves and the Valar. The Númenóreans begin to desire immortality and they become reluctant to relinquish what they have made and what they have accomplished during their unusually long lives. “Their long life aids their achievements in art and wisdom, but breeds a possessive attitude to these things, and desire awakes for more time for their enjoyment.” (Carpenter & Tolkien 154) Being close to the deathless Elves, they begin to envy them and wish that they too could live forever.

But the fear of death grew ever darker upon them, and they delayed it by all means that they could; and they began to build great houses for their dead,
while their wise men laboured unceasingly to discover if they might the secret of recalling life, or at the least of the prolonging of Men’s days. Yet they achieved only the art of preserving incorrupt the dead flesh of Men, and they filled all the land with silent tombs in which the thought of death was enshrined in the darkness. But those that lived turned the more eagerly to pleasure and revelry, desiring ever more goods and riches . . . (Tolkien, Silmarillion 318)

As Tolkien wrote in a letter, the Númenóreans “begin to seek wealth rather than bliss” (Carpenter &Tolkien 155) and they expand their power to include parts of Middle-earth. They are no longer interested in the natural world, but only in the acquisition of material wealth. The White Tree is neglected and begins to wither, symbolising the moral decline of the Númenórean race. During this time Sauron’s power grows in Middle-earth and eventually he proclaims himself “King of Men” (Tolkien, Silmarillion 323). This enrages the king of the Númenóreans, who desires that title himself. The Númenóreans conquer Sauron and bring him as a captive back to Númenor. There he beguiles them by exploiting their pride, greed and desires. The White Tree is cut down, representing the end of the Númenóreans’ friendship with the Elves, and those of the Númenóreans who remain faithful to the Elves and the Valar are persecuted. Finally, knowing that it will bring an end to Númenor, Sauron persuades the king to invade the West and take the immortality of the Elves and the Valar by force. The invasion fails, as Ilúvatar is prevailed upon by the Valar to intervene. The Faithful alone among the Númenóreans survive and their island is sunk into the sea. The noble race of the Númenóreans is brought to an end by their arrogance and their desire for power and abilities to which they have no claim.

As with the wizard Saruman, a palantír is the means through which another mortal man and descendant of the Númenóreans, Denethor II, the proud Steward of Gondor, is corrupted. As Sauron’s power grows and the threat to Gondor increases, Denethor gives in to the desire to use the palantír in the White Tower of Minas Tirith. He hopes thereby to gain the knowledge he needs to defend his country. Gandalf surmises,

‘In the days of his wisdom Denethor would not presume to use [the Stone] to
challenge Sauron, knowing the limits of his own strength. But his wisdom failed; and I fear that as the peril of his realm grew he looked in the Stone and was deceived: far too often, I guess, since Boromir departed. He was too great to be subdued to the will of the Dark Power, he saw nonetheless only those things which that Power permitted him to see. The knowledge which he obtained was, doubtless, often of service to him; yet the vision of the great might of Mordor that was shown to him fed the despair of his heart until it overthrew his mind.’ (Tolkien, *Return* 149-150)

The visions Sauron shows him through the Stone convinces Denethor that the doom of his country is fast approaching. When, in addition, he appears to be about to lose his second and only surviving son Faramir, who has been severely wounded by the lord of the Nazgûl, his despair turns into madness. His pride cannot bear the knowledge that he will have to surrender his rule either to Sauron or Aragorn, the rightful king of Gondor.

‘I am Steward of the House of Anárion. I will not step down to be the dotard chamberlain of an upstart. Even were his claim proved to me, still he comes but of the line of Isildur. I will not bow to such a one, last of a ragged house long bereft of lordship and dignity.’ (Tolkien, *Return* 146)

Rose Zimbardo argues in “Moral Vision in *The Lord of the Rings*” that “Denethor, having chosen to keep to his own use a power too great for him, a power beyond his stewardship, lusts for more. He mourns his son Boromir less than he does the loss of the power that Boromir would have brought him” (72). Rather than suffer what he feels is an ignominy, Denethor chooses death. Denethor is too noble to become the servant of the Enemy. His pride and the influence of evil from the palantír lead to a different end. He prefers burning alive to surrendering his rule. As Meyer Spacks writes, “Denethor, the Steward of the King, kills himself, as a direct result of pride and that other great Christian sin, despair.” (62)

Denethor’s son Boromir is also corrupted by the dark force, but his fate is not as
wretched as that of his father. His desperation at the plight of Gondor makes him a target for the Ring’s perilous appeal and his attempt to take it from Frodo by force reveals that a person need not be in possession of the Ring to experience its corrupting evil. Tom A. Shippey writes in *The Road to Middle-earth*,

> He never touches the Ring, but desire to have it still makes him turn to violence. Obviously his original motives are patriotism and love of Gondor, but when this leads him to exalt ‘strength to defend ourselves, strength in a just cause’, our modern experience of dictators immediately tells us that matters would not stay there. Kind as he is, one can imagine Boromir as a Ringwraith; his never quite stated opinion that ‘the end justifies the means’ adds a credible perspective to corruption. (*Road* 125)

Still, Boromir is never completely corrupted by his desire for the Ring, as is proven when he overcomes his temporary insanity and is filled with remorse. He dies fighting to protect Merry and Pippin and although he cannot save them from becoming the Orcs’ captives, he is still redeemed by his noble actions. His fate is proof that corruption is not irrevocable and exemplifies the fact that neither good nor evil is absolute in Tolkien’s works.

It is not rare in Tolkien’s books that good and evil transform into each other. Just as good can be corrupted into evil, what at first appears to be evil may in the end prove to be good. Boromir’s attack on Frodo is an example of this. His attempt to take the Ring forces Frodo to make the decision he has been fearing and go on to Mordor with Sam as his only companion. Had he delayed this decision further or made a different one, he may never have succeeded and Sauron would have prevailed. Thus Boromir’s attack, stemming from an evil desire, serves a good purpose. Another example is Saruman’s effort to kidnap the young Hobbits Merry and Pippin and bring them to Isengard. Had he not been presumptuous enough to defy Sauron and decide to bring the Ring-bearer and his friends to him alive, instead of having them killed at once or delivering them to his master, Merry and Pippin would not have met the Ents and Saruman may not have been defeated. Evil purposes are distorted into serving the good forces, just as good purposes, such as Denethor’s and Saruman’s original
intentions, are distorted into evil. However, in the end, no evil purposes endure in opposition of Ilúvatar’s will, which proves the creator’s words to the originator of evil to be true.

‘And thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined.’ (Tolkien, *Silmarillion 6*)
Conclusion

As in many other works of fiction, evil in Tolkien’s world originates in the desire for absolute power. It causes those experiencing it to set themselves up against the only being to possess this power: the creator Ilúvatar. The first to be afflicted by this craving is the Vala Melkor, the most powerful of the beings serving Ilúvatar. His attempts to usurp his maker’s power leads to his fall from grace, in a manner similar to that of the fall of Satan in Christian mythology. Humiliated and resentful, he battles against his peers, striving to gain dominance over the world and thereby disturbing the natural order. Lacking the supreme power to create, he struggles to reshape Ilúvatar’s creation to pretend it is his own. Unable to create life, he corrupts the creatures Ilúvatar has brought into being and mutilates them into seemingly new life forms, proving that evil cannot create, only destroy. Ultimately, he is defeated and imprisoned by his former peers. His attempts to seize power to which he has no claim and to deprive the world of its freedom cause him to lose what power he originally had, along with his own freedom.

When Melkor is vanquished, the evil he has brought into the world lives on in those he has corrupted. His greatest servant Sauron, unable to redeem himself due to his excessive pride and his hunger for power, becomes the new Dark Lord. Through deceit he creates the One Ring, which embodies the evil of its maker’s will. It is a tool of absolute power and it inexorably corrupts its wielders, creating a need in them and making them thralls of its dominating purpose. The Ring is created to allow its wielder to enslave others, but in the end it is the wielder himself who becomes its slave. The use of the Ring eventually distorts all actions to evil, regardless of how good the original intentions are. However, only those with enough power of their own can truly gain from using the Ring and its corrupting allure has a stronger effect on those who have need for it, thereby becoming all the more dangerous. In the end, the manipulating and corrupting qualities of the Ring become its undoing, as the need it has created in Gollum indirectly leads to the destruction of them both, as well as to the fall of Sauron. As happened to his master, his rebellion against the superior powers of the world and his endeavours to enhance his own power through unjustifiable means become his ruin.

One of the primary effects of evil in Tolkien’s books is the corruption of noble ideas.
The wish to do good is frequently spoiled by the pride and discontent Melkor first brought into creation. For example, Melkor was not created evil, but was made so by his inability to accept his inferiority to Ilúvatar. Neither was Sauron originally evil, but he was seduced by the desire to share Melkor’s power. There are other characters also, whose desire to rise above their current position causes them to fall or nearly fall into evil. One of the greatest of these is the wizard Saruman, whose noble intentions fail before his desire for the Ring and whose original purpose to vanquish Sauron becomes a struggle to supplant him as the Dark Lord of the world. In his pursuit of this goal he tries to manipulate both nature and beings into aiding his cause. His ruthless devastation of his surroundings becomes his fall as it causes the powerful Ents, shepherds of the forest and representatives of nature, to go to battle against him. He is defeated and bereft of all his powers.

The Numénóreans are a good people who fall into wicked habits. Their long lives give them a taste for immortality and they become enamoured of what they have created and the power they have obtained. They doubt their creator and question his intentions. In attempting to appropriate a power and a gift not intended for them, they bring about their own annihilation.

One of their descendants, Denethor II of Gondor, also brings about his own death, although in a more direct manner. Brought to despair by the danger of his kingdom and believing himself strong enough to match his will against Sauron though the use of a Palantír, he becomes convinced by what he sees that he faces one of two evils: the subjugation of his kingdom by Sauron or the loss of rule over Gondor to its rightful king. Unprepared in his pride to confront either of these scenarios, he chooses to take his own life rather than relinquish the borrowed power that he has held all his life.

The evil characters in these books do not merely wish to dominate the peoples of the world, but also the world itself. Unlike the forces of good, whose relationship with nature is one of closeness and understanding, evil regards nature as something to be conquered and exploited, until all its resources have been depleted and they move on to the next area. In the end, however, this tyrannising attitude fails to prevail, as nature will not be oppressed and dominated, nor will people surrender their freedom, and none but Ilúvatar can have absolute power.
Finally, it is important to remember that good and evil are not wholly separate entities in these tales. They both originate in Ilúvatar and as two extremes on the same scale they blend and transform into each other. Neither can all power be seen as either wholly good or wholly evil. For example, there are good characters in this book, such as Aragorn, Galadriel, Gandalf and Elrond, whose power does not bring them into evil, most likely because they have gained it through rightful means and use it for the good and the freedom of the people that they rule. Thus, it is possible to conclude that as Lord Acton noted, “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely” (Lord Acton in Shippey, Road 125), but not all great men are bad men.
Works cited


Appendix

Explanation of names and terms in Tolkien’s works

Ainur  The first beings created by Ilúvatar. Sang the music through which the world was created.

Aragorn  Descendant and heir of Isildur. Became the King of the reunited kingdoms of Arnor and Gondor after the War of the Ring.

Arda  The world of which Middle-earth is a part. Created by Ilúvatar and the Ainur

Barad-dûr  The ‘Dark Tower’. Sauron’s abode in Mordor.

Bilbo  Hobbit. Found the Ring after Gollum lost it. Had it for sixty years, and then passed it on to his cousin and heir Frodo.

Boromir  Oldest son of Denethor II. Brother of Faramir. Accompanied Frodo during the first part of his journey. Killed in battle by Orcs.

Cracks of Doom  The fiery rift where the Ring was made and destroyed.

Denethor II  Steward of Gondor. Rules in the absence of the king.

Eä  Elvish word, meaning ‘It is’ or ‘Let it be’. Denotes the universe or the “World that Is”, which came into existence when Ilúvatar spoke the word.

Elrond  Elven lord of Rivendell.
Elves Immortal people. The first Children of Ilúváatar in Arda.

The Enemy see Sauron

 Ents Tree-herders. Ancient beings created to protect trees and plants.

The Faithful The Númenóreans who remained faithful to the Elves and the Valar, and were saved from sharing the fate of their countrymen.

Faramir Youngest son of Denethor II. Brother of Boromir.

Frodo Hobbit. Bilbo’s nephew. Last to possess the Ring. Given the task of destroying it.

Gandalf One of the Istari.

Galadriel Elven queen. Lady of Lothlórien.

Gollum Found the Ring after Isildur lost it. Owned it for more than 500 years before he lost it. Obsessed with regaining it.

Gondor Kingdom of Men.

Hobbits A small people distantly related to Men.

Ilúvátar The God and creator of Arda.

Isengard The valley in which Saruman’s tower Orthanc is situated. It originally belonged to Gondor, but Saruman was allowed to live there and
eventually claimed it for his own.

Isildur  One of the Faithful of Númenor. King of Gondor. Cut the Ring off Sauron’s finger.

Istari  Wizards. Maiar sent by the Valar to fight Sauron.

Maiar  Less powerful Ainur than the Valar. Often serve the Valar. Cannot die as long as the world lasts.

Manwë  The chief of the Valar.

Melkor  Mightiest of the Ainur. The original evil. The first Dark Lord.

Men  The second race in Arda to be given life by Ilúvatar, who also gave them the gift of mortality.

Merry  Hobbit. Frodo’s friend and companion for the first part of his journey to Mordor.

Middle-earth  Part of Arda. Setting of most of the tales.

Minas Tirith.  Capital of Gondor.

Mordor  Sauron’s country.

Morgoth  The “Black Enemy”. See Melkor

Nimloth   The White Tree. Gift from the *Elves* to the *Númenóreans*.

Númenor   Island in the sea west of *Middle-earth*. Furthest west and closest to *Valinor* of all mortal realms.

Númenóreans   Inhabitants of *Númenor*. Mortal *Men* most beloved and favoured by the *Elves* and the *Valar*.

Orcs   Creatures bred to serve the Dark Lord. Originally thought to be *Elves* that were corrupted by *Morgoth*.

Orthanc   Stone tower in *Isengard*. Home of *Saruman*.

Palantíri   Seeing stones. Given to the *Númenóreans* by the *Elves*. Seven were brought to *Middle-earth* by the *Faithful*.

Pippin   *Hobbit. Frodo’s* friend and companion for the first part of his journey to *Mordor*.

The (One) Ring   *Sauron’s* ring. Created to rule the *Rings of Power*.

Rings of Power   Nineteen rings with different powers created by the Elven ring-smiths with the help of *Sauron*.

Sam   *Hobbit. Frodo’s* friend and the only companion to go with him all the way to *Mordor*.

Sammath Naur   The ‘Chambers of Fire’. The forge where *the Ring* was made. Open to the fiery *Cracks of Doom*,


Sauron  Maia. Morgoth's lieutenant and his mightiest servant. Succeeded Morgoth and became the second Dark Lord.

The Shire  The calm and peaceful country of the Hobbits.

Treebeard.  An Ent. Instigator of the Ents' attack on Saruman.

Undying Lands  The lands of the Valar in the west where Valinor is situated and where those Elves who have left to Middle-earth dwell.

Uruk-hai  Race of Orcs. Stronger and more efficient than ordinary Orcs.

Valar  The most powerful of the Ainur that entered into Arda. Guides and guardians of the world.

Valinor  The dwelling place of the Valar.

The White Council  The Council of the Wise. A council formed by the chief of the Elves and the Istari.

The White Tree  see Nimloth