The Understanding of Evil in British Romanticism: J. R. R. Tolkien and the Ring "a Running Ambivalence"

Araştırma makalesi • *Research article*

Ömer Faruk KALINTÜRK [*]

Abstract: J. R. R. Tolkien, like many people, is a figure that is difficult to explain in terms of the mono-disciplinary attitude of modern academia. The significance of this article lies in the attempt to understand Tolkien's work by taking it beyond the boundaries of traditional literary scholarship. Through an interdisciplinary reading method, it is argued that there is a depth in Tolkien's works, lost between the praise of his supporters and the criticism of his opponents, which exceeds what either group claims to have found. Tolkien's attitude to Evil consists of two parts, in terms of the Ring. The first is the traditional Augustinian, later Boethian view. According to this view, evil is itself nothing. It is an absence of good. So, it is internal. The sin and weakness of men are the major cause of evil. In terms of the Ring, the desire of Men for Power leads to evil. The important things are these lust and ambition. The second ambiguous and even contradictory vision of evil is the Manichean. From this perspective, evil is the equal of good. It is an external force that is equally powerful to that of good. Evil also has its own will.

Keywords: The Ring, Evil, Fantastic, Boethius. Manichaeism, Allegory, Theodicy.

[*] Dinler Tarihi Doktora Öğrencisi, Exeter Üniversitesi, Teoloji ve Dini Araştırmalar Bölümü / Ph.D. Candidate, University of Exeter, Department of Theology and Religion [op242@exeter.ac.uk], ORCID: 0000-0002-9767-8971.

İngiliz Romantizminde Kötülük Algısı: J. R. R. Tolkien ve Yüzük "Süregiden Bir Kararsızlık"

Öz: J. R. R. Tolkien, pek çok kişi gibi, modern akademinin tek disiplinci tutumu çerçevesinde açıklanması zor bir şahıstır. Bu makalenin önemi, Tolkien'in eserini geleneksel edebiyat biliminin sınırlarının ötesine taşıyarak anlama çabasında yatmaktadır. Disiplinlerarası bir okuma yöntemiyle, Tolkien'in eserlerinde, taraftarlarının övgüleri ile muhaliflerinin yergilerinin arasında kaybolan ve her iki grubun da bulduklarını iddia ettiklerini aşan bir derinlik olduğu savunulmaktadır. Tolkien'in kötülüğe karşı tutumu yüzük açısından iki kısımdan oluşur. İlki geleneksel Augustinusçu, daha sonra Boethiusçu görüştür. Bu görüşe göre kötülük kendi başına bir hiçtir. İyinin yokluğudur. Yani içseldir. İnsanın günahı ve zayıflığı kötülüğün başlıca nedenidir. Yüzük açısından, İnsanların güç arzusu kötülüğe yol açar. Önemli olan bu arzu ve hırstır. İkinci, belirsiz ve hatta çelişkili kötülük görüşü, Maniheizm'e aittir. Bu bakış açısına göre, kötülük iyiliğe eşittir. İyiyle eşit güçte olan dışsal bir güçtür. Kötülüğün de kendi iradesi vardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tek yüzük, Kötülük, Fantastik, Boethius, Maniheizm, Alegori, Teodise.

Introduction

After Peter Jackson`s blockbusting trilogy, J. R. R. Tolkien hardly needs to be introduced. He is considered the Father of Modern Fantasy. He was a professor at Oxford as well as the author of high-fantasy works such as *The Hobbit, The Lord of the Rings, The Silmarilli*on, and many posthumously published manuscripts and stories.

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born in 1892 in Bloemfontein, South Africa where his father was working as a bank clerk. He lived there till he was four years old. However, Tolkien along with his mother and brother moved to England when his father died there in 1896. Four years later, his mother converted into Roman Catholicism. After converting to Catholicism, she was rejected by her parents. That is why they tried to survive in poverty until his mother passed away. Upon her death in 1904, her children were taken into the care of a Catholic priest. Four years later Tolkien fell in love with another orphan, Edith Bratt, an Anglican Protestant who later would convert to Roman Catholicism to have their planned marriage approved by Tolkien's ward.[1] During World War I., he was a

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[1] Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 7-71, 233-250.

soldier at the Battle of Somme. After the war, he began teaching English language and literature, initially at the Universities of Leeds (1920-25) and then Oxford (1925-59) where he began his legendarium. His life came to an end in 1973 and was buried next to Edith, his wife.[2]

When J. R. R. Tolkien wrote *The Hobbit* in 1937, it did not seem as significant in Britain. It was not a very serious matter that a distinguished Professor of the English Language attempted to write a `fairy tale` as a novel. After all, Tolkien had only published the stories that he told his children; it could be welcomed as an English gentleman`s hobby.[3]

But seventeen years later, he published three large volumes: *The Lord of the Rings*. This was no longer trivial. In this book, which is close to fifteen hundred pages, the esteemed professor has created scores of characters and almost complete tongues, portraying a cosmic world with an immense history. Obviously, he was becoming serious and was expecting to become more so.

The solemn critics of the day did not tolerate this monumental work. Because of the unclassifiable nature of his works in the 1950s, the fire immediately began: where was Middle Earth? Who are these Hobbits, Dwarves, and Elves? Did anyone ever see them? Moreover, it was a sort of "escape literature". Why did he tell the story of some stunted creatures struggling with an "absolute" evil instead of dealing with facts?

Tolkien did not worry about the label "Escapist." This is because, as he said, "I do not accept the tone of scorn or pity with which 'Escape' is now so often used. Why should a man be scorned if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about topics other than jailers and prison-walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it."[4] And he warns the critics about falling a mistake that "In using escape in this way, the critics have

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[2] John Garth, *Tolkien and the Great War: the Threshold of Middle-earth* (London: HarperCollins, 2003), 139-202; Robert S. Blackham, *Tolkien and the Peril of War* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2011).

[3] For a brief insight into Englishness, see George Orwell, "Lion and the Unicorn," in *Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents*, ed. Dennis Walder (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 180-189.

[4] J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. by Christopher Tolkien (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 148.

chosen the wrong word, and what is more, they are confusing, not always by sincere error, the Escape of the Prisoner with the Flight of the Deserter."[5]

Modern critics tend to behave like ancient theologians. Their way of interpreting the text was similar to those who were banished from the realm of the modern world. Tolkien's writings were for them such an analogy of the battle between good and evil.

When the trilogy was published, some considered it and found that Tolkien was cunning and that he had not written a story of Hobbits, Elves, Orcs, and Goblins but an allegory of World War II. So, they began to make their own interpretations, as follows. The evil were the Nazis and the good were the free people of Europe. Sauron was Hitler, and the Orcs were the Nazis. The Two Towers could be the alliance of the Reichstag and Vichy France. Surely, Middle-Earth people [i.e., Men, the Dwarves, Elves, and Hobbits] united against the Lord of the Darkness, Sauron, were the Allies. After several examples of this extraordinary interpretation, some said the five wizards must be the five senses and that the Orcs were Communists.[6]

Fortunately, the author was not yet dead. There would be five years left to kill the author and conquer the text out of its author's will.[7] In this sense, it is known that Tolkien was furiously angry at the allegorical straight jacket critics tried to apply to the *Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien`s response was, "To ask if the Orcs `are` Communists is to me as sensible as asking if Communists are Orcs."[8] His anger at the allegory explorers was right: Gandalf or Sauron, the Elves or Orcs are actually nothing other than themselves. The problem is finding out what or who they themselves are.

Each novel builds step-by-step the background in which a few characters pass through in their adventures. This background may or may not be very familiar with the world we know and live in.

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[5]   Tolkien, *Ibid*, 148.

[6]   See Patrick Curry, "Tolkien and his Critics: A Critique," in *Root and Branch: Approaches Towards Understanding Tolkien,* ed. by Thomas Honegger (Zurich/Berne: Walking Tree, 1999), 81-150.

[7]   Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, ed., and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 142-148. This short but quite significant text for postmodernism was originally published in French in 1958.

[8]   J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006), 262.

Finally, Madame Bovary and Prince Myshkin are at least as "imaginary" as Frodo and Aragorn. But Madame Bovary lives in a nine-teenth-century France we recognise; Frodo lives in Middle-Earth.

The moral questions and themes that *The Lord of the Rings* is based on are quite simple: We are fighting against evil, and we have a weapon: a Ring:

> One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,
> One Ring to bring them all, and in the darkness bind them.

Should we use this weapon? Is this world composed of good and evil, and also of impartial, neutral weapons that either side can use? Or does the weapon that is used determine the identity of the user? Is Power, domination (`The Ring of Power`) good in the hands of the good, bad in the hands of the bad? Or is the Ring itself a per-petrator that has its own will and side and who leads its wearer to inevitable ways?

Undoubtedly, Tolkien did not write these three big volumes to support the liberal dictum `power tends to corrupt`. On the con-trary, his characters are very versatile in their relations to power and morality. Neither can the power spoil morality completely, nor the morality the power. Throughout three volumes, we are watching a "mutual play" of power and morality, loyalty and betrayal, good-ness, and ambition. Maybe one, the Dark Lord Sauron, is really just "bad", but he is not a sole character of the romantic fairy story any-way. The other villains are always ambivalent, and ambiguous. Tol-kien writes in a letter to Milton Waldman that "Anyway all this stuff is mainly concerned with Fall, Mortality, and the Machine."[9] In this article, these three main themes will be pursued with these two con-cepts; Evil and Power.

It can be said that *The Lord of the Rings* is a journey story, just like Frodo`s journey. This journey, like every other, is a story: a story of growth, maturation, self-knowledge, and knowing. Like every story of growth and self-awareness, this is a story of reckoning with the tension between "what one can do and "what one wants to do" with one`s own power; a story of meeting one`s own dark side and fighting/agreeing/ learning to live together with it.

Tolkien is deservedly accepted as the father of the twentieth-century heroic romance fantasy genre. His deep and enthusiastic personal and academic interest in language led him to the building

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[9]   Tolkien, *Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 145.

of a great world: the Middle-earth. When Tolkien attempted to describe this world as an eminent, serious academic of the University of Oxford, he attracted widespread criticism Critiques suggested that his fairy stories were bereft of any intellectual tradition. Meanwhile, Tolkien complained that some reviewers called the whole of *The Lord of the Rings* simple-minded, just a plain fight between Good and Evil, with all the good just good and the bad just bad.[10] For example, one of these critics, Robert Giddins, wrote that "the evil in the world as portrayed by Tolkien has nothing whatever to do with social or economic causes. It is evil, pure and simple. Consequently, there is no need for a change of socio-economic conditions, the environmental conditions of life, relations between different classes, etc. – all these things which make up the very fabric of a society, of any society, are perceived by Tolkien as totally beyond any need or possibility of change."[11]

It is an enigmatic fact that humanity has rarely fully confronted the problem of evil, that evil has not been addressed directly, and that it has generally been looked at from behind from the shelter of great myths.[12] Tolkien is not an exception to this case. He created – or "discovered" as he preferred— the great myth and tried to deal with the question of evil in that context. Although he was a devout Catholic who even disagreed with the Second Vatican Council's decisions to change the liturgical language from Latin to national languages, he never mentioned any word concerning his religious side throughout his legendarium. Sometimes, we can catch some glimpses of his Catholicism in his works.[13] However, one should not make the mistake of reading Tolkien's works as if they were Bible

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[10] Patrick Curry, *Defending the Middle-Earth: Tolkien, Myth and Modernity* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), 100.

[11] Robert Giddings, *J. R. R. Tolkien: This Far Land* (London: Vision Press, 1983), 12-13.

[12] Hannah Arendt`s work may be noted as one of the rare exceptions. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963). But it must be noted that Arendt questioned the `evil` in terms of the remnants of Auschwitz.

[13] Pat Pinsent, "Religion: An Implicit Catholicism," in *A Companion to J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Stuart D. Lee (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 446-460.

commentaries. In the academy, this attitude has been enthusiastically displayed by some Christian scholars.[14] Nor should one make the mistake of evaluating Tolkien's works in terms of simple modern literary theories. It is equally wrong and misleading to say that Tolkien was a writer of fantastic literature and nothing else, as it is to say that Tolkien was a priestly commentator on the Bible. It is necessary to listen to the voice of the author, namely of Tolkien.

In this sense, the mythology that Tolkien created contained numerous Augustinian, so Boethian theological insights, but there is still a different, maybe hostile perspective on evil. In this article, his understanding of evil will be tried to present and will be offered Tolkien`s works as an attempt to reconcile the two contradictory views of evil: the Boethian and the Manichaean.

1. The Boethian View

> Evil it will not see, for evil lies
> not in God's picture but in crooked eyes,
> not in the source but in the tuneless voice.[15]

What is the relationship between the author of a twentieth-century heroic romance and a Late Antique Roman philosopher?

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, commonly called Boethius (c. 480–524 AD), was a Roman senator and philosopher of the early 6th century. He was born to a privileged patrician family and had a superior education. He served as a Roman senator but was eventually imprisoned in 523 and executed by the Ostrogothic King, Theodoric the Great, in 524 on charges of conspiracy to overthrow him. While jailed, Boethius wrote his *Consolation of Philosophy (De*

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[14] For a series of examples, see Alison Milbank, *Chesterton and Tolkien as Theologians: The Fantasy of the Real* (London: T&T Clark, 2009); Richard Sturch, *Four Christian Fantasists A Study of the Fantastic Writings of George MacDonald, Charles Williams, C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien* (Zurich and Berne: Walking Tree Publishers, 2001); Ralph C. Wood, *The Gospel According to Tolkien: Visions of the Kingdom in Middle-earth* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003); Fleming Rutledge, *The Battle for Middle-Earth: Tolkien's Divine Design in "The Lord of the Rings"* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004); Paul Kerry, *The Ring and the Cross : Christianity and the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien* (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011); and Austin M. Freeman, *Tolkien Dogmatics: Theology through Mythology in Middle-Earth* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022).

[15] J. R. R. Tolkien, "Mythopoeia," in *Tree and Leaf*, by J. R. R. Tolkien (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 90.

Consolatione Philosophiae) around the year 524. In the *Consolation*, Boethius answers religious questions without any reference to Christianity or Christ, relying solely on natural philosophy and the Classical Greek tradition, particularly on Neo-Platonism.[16]

However, as Henry Chadwick observes that "If the *Consolation* contains nothing distinctively Christian, it is also relevant that it contains nothing specifically pagan either... [it] is a work written by a Platonist who is also a Christian but is not a Christian work."[17] These words might remind us that Tolkien, too, wrote his works without any reference to Christianity. By having an understanding of Boethius' theory of the doctrine of evil, we can get a better understanding of evil in Tolkien's legendarium.

The Boethian view of evil is, in essence, that of orthodox Christianity. It was first expounded by Augustine but found its clearest and most famous expression in Boethius` *Consolation* during medieval times.

The core of the Boethian view of evil lies in the idea that evil itself is nothing; it is an absence of good, the privation of good. Boethius says that "That absolutely every fortune is good."[18] Similar views were also proposed by Augustine, "Evil has no existence except as a privation of good, down to that level which is altogether without being."[19] In the City of God, Augustine also states that "Evil has no positive nature. The loss of good has received the name 'evil.'"[20] So, evil was "not in itself created but sprang from a voluntary exercise of free will by Satan, Adam and Eve."[21] So, Boethian evil is internal.

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[16] Henry Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology and Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1-29.

[17] Chadwick, *Boethius*, 249.

[18] Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Joel C. Relihan (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2001), IV.7.2.

[19] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), III. VII (12), 43. It can be read as a kind of a reaction to Augustine. Reaction against his past. Augustine's emphasis on the nothingness of evil is a reaction to the opposite extreme of Manichaenism.

[20] Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), XI.9, 440. "*Mali enim nulla natura est: sed amissio boni, mali nomen accepit.*"

[21] Tom A. Shippey, *Road to Middle-Earth* (London: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 146.

Thus, Boethian theory argues that all creation is good because God, its creator, is good, and the creation must reflect the creator.[22] Lady Philosophy tells Boethius, "Everything that exists is unitary, and that oneness itself is good."[23] In this case, Augustine states that "For You, evil does not exist at all, and not only for you but for your created universe, because there is nothing outside it which could break in and destroy the order which you have imposed upon it."[24]

That is, the creation of God is in a natural state of good. This idea of the natural origin of creation is seen in Tolkien most explicitly when Elrond makes a firm statement about evil at the Council saying that "Nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so."[25] In other words, at creation, no evil exists, and so evil is not eternal. In this respect, as Frodo says to Sam in the Tower of Cirith Ungol, "The Shadow that bred them (Orcs) can only mock, it cannot make real new things of its own. I don't think it gave life to the Orcs, it only ruined them and twisted them."[26] That is, evil cannot create. In fact, in the *Silmarillion*, Orcs are described as a race of rational incarnate creatures, though horribly corrupted by Morgoth.[27] Moreover, in Tolkien's own words, they are described as "The Orcs were beasts of humanized shape (to mock Men and Elves) deliberately perverted/converted into a more close resemblance to Men. Their 'talking' was really reeling off 'records' set in them by Melkor. Even their rebellious critical words – he knew about them. Melkor taught them *speech*, and as they bred, they inherited this; and they had just as much independence as have, say, dogs or horses of their human masters. This talking was largely echoic (cf. parrots)."[28] The question of whether Orcs stem from Men or Elves is not obvious even in Tolkien's own mind, but what is definite is that they became degenerated and alienated from their own reality. They were not created by Morgoth or Sauron because Morgoth is a created being.

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[22] Boethius, *Consolation*, IV.1, 106.

[23] Boethius, *Ibid*, IV.3, 118.

[24] Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.19, 125.

[25] J. R. R. Tolkien, "The Fellowship of the Ring," *in The Lord of the Rings: The One Volume Edition* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 261.

[26] J. R. R. Tolkien, "The Return of the King," in *The Lord of the Rings: The One Volume Edition* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 893.

[27] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 50, 94.

[28] J. R. R. Tolkien, "Myths Transformed," in *Morgoth's Ring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 367-401.

Moreover, Treebeard or Fangorn, who was the oldest of the ents, has already corroborated these ideas to Frodo by informing him that "Trolls are only counterfeits, made by the Enemy in the Great Darkness, in mockery of Ents, as Orcs were of Elves."[29] This is a good example of the transformative, or more truly, corruptive power of evil.

If the world was good at its creation and all things within it were naturally in a state of goodness at their beginning –at least in the Augustinian and later Boethian meaning—, evil must be a later development and a change from the good.

According to Augustine, "The first evil act of will, since it preceded all evil deeds in man, was rather a falling away from the work of God to its own works. Consequent deeds were evil because they followed the will's own line and not God's. Moreover, though evil will is not natural but unnatural because it is a defect, it still belongs to the nature of which it is a defect, for it cannot exist except in a nature."[30]

According to later Christian theologising which is based on different biblical texts, evil comes when Adam and Eve attempt to change their nature due to the temptation of the Serpent. This case is significant. There is an unaccepted nature as human: Being created means having boundaries. The archetype of all limits of human is death. Adam and Eve were driven to overcome their limits. They are deceived by the promise of being wise and having a resemblance to God. And they were expelled from Paradise not only because of their temptation by the promise of being wise but also to prevent their reaching "to the Tree of Life, and eat, and live forever." This is because "the Lord God said, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and also take from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (Genesis, 3: 22, NRSV). So, it might be said that to escape from death, escape from the inevitable ending, is the highest goal of mankind.

The core point, in this case, appears to be that evil is an act of free will, according to Augustine and Boethius. It is when an individual presents a wrong account of himself or herself or goes against his/her nature. To Boethius, good is also an ontological state of being

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29 Tolkien, "The Two Towers," in *The Lord of the Rings: The One Volume Edition* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 474.

30 Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.11, 568.

what you are. Humans are creatures of reason. They have the ability to choose something. "Human action presupposes two things: will and ability. Without the will, no man can begin any action, and without ability, the will is frustrated."[31] In this case, we may say that evil is not inhuman. On the contrary, it is a radical expression of human freedom.

In *The Silmarillion*, Melkor, and Sauron might be good examples of this. Melkor was the greatest of the Ainur in many ways in the *Silmarillion*. Sauron was also the mightiest of the Maiar. But they chose their place within that greatness. For instance, Melkor chose to pursue his own will and knowledge since the Music of the Ainur. He wanted to do/compose his 'own' music instead of following the "Music" of Ainur, which was composed by Ilúvatar. Tolkien writes in one of his letters that "The evils of the world were not at first in the great Theme, but entered with the discords of Melkor."[32] Therefore, Melkor is the first to choose evil. Alternatively, it can be said that he did not choose goodness. But more importantly, Melkor does not regret the evil he does. Moreover, his most important lieutenant, Sauron's will was to create the Ring to rule them all: "One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them."[33] Fëanor might be another example. He was seduced by the beauty of his own creation, that is, the *Silmarils.* He started to covet the Silmarils with greedy love. After a while, he ignored the fact that the light of the Silmarils was not his own making but of the light of the Two Trees. When Melkor stole them, he rebelled against the Valar and led his people to murder and invasion because of his desire to regain them.[34] That is an attempt by the sub-creator to be the Creator of its Sub-Creation.

Tolkien deftly depicts the purpose of Sauron "In my story, I do not deal in Absolute Evil. I do not think there is such a thing, since that is Zero. …In the Lord of the Rings, the conflict is not basically about 'freedom,' though that is naturally involved. It is about God, and His sole right to divine honour. The Eldar and the Númenóreans believed in The One, the true God, and held worship

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[31] Boethius, *Consolation*, IV.2, 109.

[32] Tolkien, *Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,* 413.

[33] Tolkien, *"The Fellowship of the Ring",* 248.

[34] J. R. R. Tolkien, "Of the Silmarils and the Unrest of the Noldor," in *Silmarillion*, 59-64.

of any other person an abomination. Sauron desired to be a God-King, and was held to be this by his servants (Tolkien adds at the footnote: `he claimed to be Morgoth returned`); if he had been victorious (at the end of the War of the Ring), he would have demanded divine honour from all rational creatures and absolute temporal power over the whole world."[35] Therefore, it can be clearly seen that in the cases of Melkor and Saruman, evil represents the desire of one to wrest worship and dominion away from Eru Ilúvatar.[36]

Thus, the problem is about the confusing the roles for Augustine and Tolkien as created beings and the Creator. The prime reason that a will is evil is that it chooses its own line over God's decrees, which means that it chooses to act independently of God's intentions. In this case, Tolkien writes in a letter that "Beginning well, at least on the level that while desiring to order all things according to his own wisdom he still at first considered the (economic) well-being of other inhabitants of the Earth, but he went further than human tyrants in pride and the lust for domination, being in origin an immortal (angelic) spirit."[37]

The decline of Sméagol into Gollum is a good example of this view. Originally Sméagol was a noble and mediocre hobbit, but once he took the Ring or even desired the Ring, he became an evil character because, as Elrond remarks, "The very desire of it (the Ring) corrupts the heart."[38] That is, to desire the Ring corrupts so that when one so corrupted wills, their volition is corrupt. This is reminiscent of the famous phrase of Lord Acton, "Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely."[39]

As an example of Saruman the White, he perpetuates a delusion. Saruman sees himself as an ally of the Dark Lord Sauron instead of as his instrument. Gandalf tells Saruman that Sauron is not one for sharing, and it seems obvious to us, but Saruman's willingness to allow the temptation of power to change his essential nature

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[35]   Tolkien, *Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 243-244.

[36]   The explicit account of that can be found in the "Akallabêth" in *Silmarillion* where Sauron introduces the worship of Morgoth to the Númenóreans. See J. R. R. Tolkien, "Akallabêth," in *Silmarillion,* 265-292.

[37]   Tolkien, *Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 243.

[38]   Tolkien, "The Fellowship of the Ring," 261.

[39]   Lord Acton, "Letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, April 5, 1887," in *Historical Essays and Studies*, ed. J. N. Figgis and R. V. Laurence (London: Macmillan, 1907), 504.

(that is, his colour, white, transformed into many-coloured) is evil because it is self-deception.[40]

Boromir is the classic case of evil existing as a wrong account of the good in the Boethian view and a corroboration of Elrond's remark, "The very desire of it (the Ring) corrupts the heart". He never touches the Ring but desires to have it. Boromir, acting initially from noble impulses, thinks that the Ring can be used against Sauron.[41] His original motive is patriotism and love of Gondor. This implies that the Ring can be used as an instrument of the good. This is false, as Gandalf warns that "the Ring will possess and devour any creature who uses it", but it is a delusion that Boromir insists on perpetuating. When Boromir says that "We (the Men of Gondor) do not desire the power of wizard-lords, only strength to defend ourselves, strength in a just cause. And behold! In our need chance brings to light the Ring of Power. It is a gift, I say; a gift to the foes of Mordor. It is mad not to use it, to use the power of the Enemy against him,"[42] Boromir was a possible candidate for a Ringwraith. He was on the wrong track and died contritely. Subsequently, Gandalf would say to his father, Denethor, that even unhandled the Ring can be dangerous "I do not trust myself in this, and I refused this thing… if you had received this thing, it would have overthrown you. Were it buried beneath the roots of Mindolluin, still it would burn your mind away, as the darkness grows."[43] Indeed, Galdriel, the greatest of the Elves in the Middle-earth, also refuses the Ring.[44]

Gandalf, Elrond and Galadriel all refuse the Ring. This is because they know what the Ring could lead to. They have had some notorious examples, such as Sauron, the Nazgûl, Gollum or Isildur, who wore them to abstain from the Ring. When Sam says to Galadriel, "I wish you would take his Ring. You would put things to rights. You would stop them digging up the Gaffer and turning him adrift. You would make some folk pay for their dirty work", 'I would,' she said. 'That is how it would begin. But it would not stop with that, alas!'[45] Galadriel knows her nature and the power of the

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[40]   Tolkien, "The Fellowship of the Ring," 252.

[41]   Shippey, *Road to Middle Earth*, 125-6.

[42]   Tolkien, "The Fellowship of the Ring," 389.

[43]   Tolkien, "The Return of the King," 796.

[44]   Tolkien, "The Fellowship of the Ring," 356-7.

[45]   Tolkien, "The Fellowship of the Ring," 357.

Ring, so she refuses it. This is because evil is misunderstanding one's nature and thinking that it is logical to act with free will against it.

2. The Manichaean view

Although Tolkien's evil is certainly Boethian, there is a latent dualism in certain aspects of Tolkien's portrayal of evil. This second view of evil is mentioned in the title of this part: the Manichaean.

Theodicy consists of two words: theo-dicy, God-Justice. It can be said that theodicy is a defense of God to save God from evil in the universe. Humans have always sought an answer to the question of evil. There have been numerous attempts. In this part, we will look at Dualism. The solution of the dualists was to take from God the responsibility of having made the visible world. This is because evil, which we know, happens in this visible World, and if the responsibility of the creation of the world can be attributed to another cause rather than God, God may be exempted from the guilt of bringing evil into the world. This theory reached its highest eminence with Mani.

Mani began his preaching at Ctesiphon in C.E. 242 and continued until his martyrdom at Gundeshapur in C.E. 276. According to the Manichean doctrine, from all eternity, the two realms of Light and Darkness have existed side by side. "In the former dwelt the eternal God, the Lord of Greatness. In the latter dwelt the Lord of the Dark with disorderly anarchical restless brood. Evil began when the denizens of the Dark, impelled by curiosity or some vague unregulated desire, began to invade the realm of Light."[46]

Without exception, all forms of power persecuted the members of Manicheanism during the Late Antique or Medieval Ages. Due to endless persecution, the Manichean movement never became official in the West. So, although we have some documents on Manicheanism, they are derived exclusively from the texts of their opponents, such as Augustine. As we know, Augustine was a follower of Mani up to his conversion to Christianity. This is a great handicap and risk, like listening to the story of the Carthaginians told by the Romans.

To put it in short, the Manichaean view is that evil is real and not merely an absence. Manicheanism asserts that Good and Evil are equal and opposite principles. According to the Manichaeans, the

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[46] Steven Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 13.

universe is a battlefield. Therefore, the Manichaean view of evil is that it is an objective, external force in the universe in eternal conflict with goodness, whereas Boethius' view of evil is not external.

It can be claimed that Tolkien's legendarium is made up of the duality of opposites. Dark and light, good and evil, black and white, free and slave, hope and fear, free people of the Middle-earth and the soldiers of Sauron. In this case, numerous examples can be found in the Lord of the Rings: the Black Speech of Mordor, the Black Years of the Dark Lord Sauron, the Black Gate or the Black Riders; balanced by the White Rider, the White Tree, the star-light of Galadriel or the White Council. The Dark Lord, Sauron, uses the Black Speech in his Black Lands, Mordor, where the shadow lies. There is The Fellowship of the Ring which consists of nine comrades. The most loyal and dangerous servants of Sauron are the nine Ringwraiths. Sauron is nine-fingered because he has lost his finger to the Narsill (word-by-word 'Sun' and 'Moon'), just as Frodo lost his finger on Mount Doom.

Moreover, light and darkness, the long-established archetypal opposites, are frequently applied as paraphrases of good and evil. Tolkien was not an exception. The colour specification of contradictory forces also plays a significant role in Tolkien's legendarium. Different colours specify boundaries between the good and evil sides of the conflict. For example, white colours characterise good but dark colours, especially black, are associated with wickedness. For instance, concerning colours, in dialog with Gandalf, Saruman calls himself "Saruman of Many Colours" and continues by disregarding the colour he is wearing: "White! (…) It serves as a beginning. White cloth may be dyed. The white page can be overwritten; and the white light can be broken."[47] The contrast between light and dark is stressed throughout the legendarium.

In a similar case, Gandalf shouts at Balrog on the Bridge of Khazad-Dum that he is a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor, and maintains that "The dark fire will not avail you, flame of Udun. Go back to the Shadow!".[48] There are two sides. The first is the Secret Fire or, as we know it, the Flame Imperishable, which is Morgoth`s most desired object, while the second is the Dark

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[47]   Tolkien, "The Fellowship of the Ring," 252.
[48]   Tolkien, *Ibid*, 332.

Fire and the Shadow. As stated in the Silmarillion, the Flame Imperishable is the origin of creation, the kind of the thing that gives life to everything. Ilúvatar or Eru or Eru Ilúvatar created all creatures from this fire which sounds like the doctrine of Logos with an important difference because the idea of the Logos as fiery is Stoic. This divine fire or celestial heat is *aether* in Stoicism.[49] But it also might be noted that the emphasise on fire as symbolising Ilúvatar with the Flame Imperishable is rather Zoroastrian. This is because the *ātar* is the Zoroastrian concept of holy fire.[50] Udun is Sindarin for Utumno means hell, which was Morgoth's original stronghold. The Flame of Udun is probably the Balrog because Balrogs are Maiar of fire which were seduced by Melkor at the beginning of Arda.[51] Gandalf serves and wields the secret fire, which may be understood to be God. By contrast, the Balrog is a flame of Hell. There is an obvious contrast between light and dark, as can be seen in terms of the campaigns of good and evil.

How could two such diametrically opposed views of evil, Boethian and Manichaean, be together in the same work? Is that a discrepancy? Shippey puts forward that "In Middle-earth, then, both good and evil function as external powers and as inner impulses from the psyche."[52] To put it in other words, the Ring is an external power of evil, as in the Manicheaen perspective, that draws out the latent internal evil in character, which is Boethian. As we know, Manichaeanism presents good and evil similarly. Therefore, in Tolkien's Middle-earth, the Ring can put external pressure on an individual, but ultimately the decision to do evil lies with the individual. That means that the evil in Tolkien's legendarium is both internal and external.

The Nazgûl shows the external and internal pressure of the Ring in this case. Nine power rings were given to the nine mighty kings of men. They were mortal. Because of mortality, they fall into the trap of Sauron to obtain immortality and limitless power. But they could not endure before the power of the One Ring, and then one by one, each became a servant of Sauron, the Lord of the Rings.

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49 See, Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), I. 13-15; II.22.

50 See, Mary Boyce, "On the Zoroastrian Temple Cult of Fire," *Journal of the American Oriental* Society 95, no. 3 (Jul. - Sep. 1975): 454-465.

51 Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 31, 51.

52 Shippey, *Road to the Middle-Earth*, 153.

Their stories are pathetic. They fell from the very top to the very bottom. While they were falling, these kings lost their corporeal bodies even though they still looked human. They have become mere wraiths, shadows. They lost not only their bodies but also their names. They became the Nazgûl, Ringwraiths. We can apply Boethius on choosing evil or good, "Whatever falls from goodness ceases to exist, and that evil men cease to be what they were, having by their wickedness lost their human nature, although they still survive in the form of the human body."[53] Furthermore, according to Boethius, those who have put goodness aside have no right to be called men anymore because there is nothing divine about these people. They have descended to the level of beasts.[54]

In the legendarium of Tolkien, those who choose evil have lost their original names which were given by Ilúvatar. Melkor was in the campaign of the Valar and was described as the greatest of the Ainur. But when he chose to be evil, he lost his name and took another, Morgoth. Sauron was a Maia before being corrupted by Melkor and becoming his most powerful lieutenant, or in Tolkien's words, "his satellite."[55] As in the case of the Nazgûl or Gollum, they also lost their original body shapes and names.

In the Lord of the Rings and Silmarillion, it should be recognised that the Ring is a sentient being.[56] Evil has its own will. As it seems, it has ontological independence in the climactic Sammath Naur scene toward the end of *The Return of the King.* In Sammath Naur, we can see that the two views of evil are that firstly, evil as internal temptation and so 'Boethian', and secondly, evil as an external force, and so 'Manichaean'. The Ring is evil not only because of what it does but also because of what it is. This is because "he (Sauron) made that Ring himself, it is his, and he let a great part of his own former power pass into it so that he could rule all the others."[57]

We may reach the conclusion that the Ring-as-entity (the conscious being, as opposed to the Ring-as-object, the physical gold band) might then be able to 'decide' to leave its bearer, as it does

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[53] Boethius, *Consolation*, IV.3, 118.
[54] Boethius, *Ibid*, IV.3, 118.
[55] Tolkien, *Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 202.
[56] Shippey, *Author of the Century*, 135.
[57] Tolkien, "The Fellowship of the Ring," 50.

in The Hobbit when it falls out of Gollum's pouch or slips from Isildur's finger as he swam into the Great River, Anduin.[58] Therefore, it can be said that the Ring corrupts people who use or desire it both passively through the desire people feel for it and actively by its "betraying" of its bearers. Boromir, Denethor, Frodo, Bilbo, Symeagol, or the nine-men kings are all examples of the passive corruption of the Ring.

An expert of Tolkien, Shippey, has claimed that the fiction of Tolkien, on the one hand, embodies a syncretistic, even contradictory union of the historically opposed views of Neoplatonic monism. On the other, a Manichean dualism according to which evil is a subsistent reality in its own right, equal and equipotent with the good.[59] There is a contradiction between Boethian and Manichaean opinions. As a devout Catholic, Tolkien maintains the reflections of his worldview that evil is an absence, which is the Shadow, and evil is a force, in other words, the Dark Lord.

Thus, the Ring is described both as a sentient being and a non-being in the works of Tolkien.[60] As said above, the Ring has its own will. But it was created by Sauron. So, it is a kind of creature or a sub-creation. For example, when Gandalf said to Frodo that "Give me the Ring for a moment", Frodo unfastened the Ring and "handed it slowly to the wizard. It felt suddenly very heavy as if either it or Frodo himself was in some way reluctant for Gandalf to touch it."[61]

If Boethius is right, then evil is internal. It is caused by human sin and weakness; in this instance, the Ring feels heavy because Frodo does not want to let it go. If the Manichaean view is accepted as a valid option, then "evil is a force from outside which has in some way been able to make the non-sentient Ring itself evil"[62]; therefore, it is indeed the Ring, obeying the will of its master, which does not want to be identified because Gandalf is a powerful wizard and he can recognise the link. We know that the animate Ring betrayed Isildur and abandoned Gollum. Moreover, Bilbo and Frodo are another examples to demonstrate the double-sided view of the

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[58] Tolkien, *Ibid*, 51.

[59] Tom A. Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000), 112-160.

[60] Shippey, *Ibid,* 134-135.

[61] Tolkien, "The Fellowship of the Ring," 48.

[62] Shippey, *Author of the Century,* 135.

Ring. Even when Sam hangs the Ring by its chain about his neck, "He felt himself enlarged… 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."[63] This is because the Ring utilises his unknown desires (unknown even by himself) in his unconscious and then amplifies them. It can also be seen that the desire to use the Ring for the sake of destroying the Enemy, which is a 'good purpose' in the Middle-Earth, is also produced by the Ring.

Conclusion

To sum up, there are two different views from the beginning of the legendarium. Firstly, the Ring is a kind of psychic amplifier. It augments its owner's unconscious fears and selfishness as the exemplars of Gollum, Frodo, Sam, Bilbo, and Isildur show. On the other hand, the Ring, as repeatedly implied by Gandalf, is a sentient creature with impulses of its own, which probably come from its master, Sauron. Therefore, these views are the Boethian internal evil and the Manichaean external evil. We may look at the Lord's Prayer at this point. Indeed, Tolkien had already bridged the gap between Sammath Naur and Lord`s Prayer in his personal papers. It contains seven requests or petitions. The sixth and seventh clauses are important for us.

> Lead us not into temptation,
> But deliver us from evil. (Matthew 6:13, KJV).

If it is accepted that these variants are basically saying the same thing, there is no more need to comment. However, different but complementary intentions are visible. For example, in the first line, asking God to keep us safe from ourselves suggests the Boethian view of sin, while the second, asking for protection from the outside, looks like the source of evil in a Manichaean universe. What Frodo experienced in the chambers of Sammath Naur was exactly the correspondence of these two petitions. On the one hand, he was tempted by his inner weakness and desire. When he came to the very Crack of Doom, he claimed that he will not destroy the Ring because the Ring belongs to him and set it on his finger. On the other hand, he was tempted by the Ring because he was at the heart of the

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63   Tolkien, "The Return of the King," 880.

realm of the Shadow where the phial of Galadriel loses its virtue on Mount Doom. His will and virtue were subdued by the power of the Ring and its Master. But he was saved by his earlier acts: forgiveness of the life of Gollum. Gollum saved Frodo, but he was also punished by losing his finger.

Tolkien relied not only on the Boethian understanding of evil in the First and Second Wars conditions. The Manichaean view might be the best option for the enemy people in a war. Tolkien lost his best friends at the Battle of the Somme in 1916. He was alive at the time of the gas-chambers of the Nazis. He was also alive when the calamity of the atomic bomb in Japan happened. At those times, Boethius was not the most obvious to believe in.

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