

# The Influence of the Ring on Various Races in J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings

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Studij: Sveučilišni diplomski studij engleski jezik i književnost, nastavnički  
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**Utjecaj prstena na različite rase u *Gospodaru prstenova* J. R. R.  
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## Abstract

J. R. R. Tolkien is considered to be the father of modern fantasy literature. He paved the way for many writers by establishing a unique form of fantasy literature. His most famous works are *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, and many others that were written with the help of his son, Christopher, such as *The Silmarillion*, and *Unfinished Tales*. His works describe adventures, which often revolve around a certain quest or a magical item, such as the One Ring. Since there are many races in Middle-earth, and they all come in contact with the One Ring at some point, this paper aims to analyze how the Ring influences members of each race. The Ring is undoubtedly a corruptive item; however, the paper will show that the extent of corruption depends on the bearer himself/herself, that is, on their character and sense of morality. Tolkien's races vary based on their personality traits and morality, which are reflected in the varying degree of the influence of the Ring and the consequences of its influence on each person. The Ring thus functions as a mirror, which reflects one's true self back to the bearer, or even an amplifier that magnifies the bearer's features.

Keywords: One Ring, J. R. R. Tolkien, morality.

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## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine the way the One Ring, a magical artefact central to the plot of J. R. R. Tolkien's novel *The Lord of the Rings*, influences each bearer, and determines the reasons for the differences or similarities in the consequences of the Ring's influence. The One Ring is a magical artefact created by Sauron, also known as the Dark Lord. It amplifies the bearer's personal traits, latching on to the bearer's flaws. When in hands of a person lacking moral strength, or a person being overly greedy and ambitious, the Ring displays its evil influence by enhancing these traits and prompting the person to act in a cruel or evil manner. The only possible way to resist the influence of the Ring is by having pure intentions, and displaying humility and strength of character. This is consistent with Tolkien's poetics, as he is known to be a devout Catholic who promotes Christian values in his works. The Ring's evil origins and inexplicable attraction symbolize the power and attraction of evil which can only be resisted if one has a pure soul and honest intentions.

The first part of the paper introduces the Rings of Power and the One Ring, explaining their creation and potency. Following that, the paper focuses on the comparison of Plato's Ring of Gyges and Tolkien's One Ring. The main part of the paper examines each race, explaining its creation, appearance, and personality traits, followed by the examination of the Ring's influence on particular characters belonging to each race. The final part deals with other corruptive items in Tolkien's works, namely the Silmarils, the Arkenstone, and the palantírs in order to show that their role is similar as the consequences of the use of these objects depends on and is modified by the user's character. The thesis ends with the Conclusion which summarizes the research findings.

## 1. The Rings of Power

The term Rings of Power is usually used to refer to the great Rings forged by the Noldorin smiths in Eregion during the Second Age, between the years 1500 and 1590 (Foster 421). Around the year 1200 during the Second Age, Sauron, using the name Annatar, meaning the Lord of Gifts (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 343), tries to seduce a certain group of Elves (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1421). At that time, Sauron is not known as evil, he deceives the Elves by assuming a fair appearance (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 172). He speaks to the Elves who openly disobeyed the Valar, the rulers of the world, during the First Age and were therefore banned from entering Valinor, the realm of the Valar, ever again (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 94). Sauron takes advantage of this and convinces them to help him by promising them the knowledge necessary to make Middle-earth look “as beautiful as Valinor” (Carpenter and Tolkien, *Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 172). In Eregion the Elves accept his guidance, since they want to become more powerful, and they want to use the knowledge offered to them by Sauron to achieve their goals (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 344). They begin by forging lesser rings, which are not so powerful and around the year 1500 in the Second Age they begin forging the Great Rings, also known as the Rings of Power (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1422). Sauron aids them in the forging of both the Great Rings and some lesser Rings (Tyler 544). Celebrimbor, son of Curufin, one of the Noldorin Elves, also helps Sauron during the forging of the Rings; namely, Sauron deceives him by claiming to be an ally. However, when he sees through Sauron’s plans and deceits, he uses the knowledge acquired from Sauron to forge additional three rings, and he makes sure that Sauron never touches those Rings of Power, to avoid his influence (Tyler 544). Tyler further explains the names of the Three Rings:

The names of the Three Rings were: Vilya, the Ring of Airs, mightiest of all, which bore a great blue stone and was originally possessed by Gil-galad, who gave it to Elrond at the end of the Second Age; Nenya, the Ring of Waters, with a single hard white stone of great beauty, which was always in the keeping of the Lady Galadriel; and Narya, the Ring of Fire, borne by Círdan the Shipwright until the end of the first millennium of the Third Age, when he surrendered the Ring with its great red stone to the Wizard Gandalf the Grey. (632)

The Elves wear the Rings until Sauron makes the One Ring and uses it. They immediately feel his presence and they decide never to use the Rings again, to avoid being corrupted by Sauron (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 173-174). They are supposed to destroy the Rings, “but they failed to find the strength” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 306). When Sauron learns of Celebrimbor’s betrayal, he attacks and destroys Eregion, and takes Celebrimbor captive. Sauron already managed to find the Nine Rings during the ransacking of the House of the Mirdain, but he is interested in the others. He tortures Celebrimbor to find out about the location of the remaining Rings of Power, but he only finds out about the Seven, since Celebrimbor did not consider them as important and powerful as the Three. After Sauron realizes that Celebrimbor was of no use to him, he has him killed (J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 307). Celebrimbor is shot with arrows and his body is hung upon a pole, which is then used by Sauron as a banner during his battle against the forces of Elrond (J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 309).

After the destruction of Eregion, Sauron seizes some of the Rings and decides to distribute them to Men and Dwarves, believing that those races are most susceptible to the power of the Rings. They all gladly accept the Rings, “out of ambition or greed” (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 173), proving that Sauron was right to believe that they are corruptible. To Men he gives nine Rings, and to Dwarves seven, which then become known as the Nine Rings of Men and Seven Dwarf-rings. Since Sauron participated in the making of the Rings, he could use them for his own evil purposes, and since the Rings were accursed, they would eventually betray their owners (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 345). Despite Sauron’s strong influence, the Dwarves are not so easy to ensnare, because they prove resistant to the power of the Rings. They only use them to acquire wealth and hoard gold, which attracts Dragons and leads to the fact that four of the Rings were destroyed by Dragons, and three are recovered by Sauron (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 345-346; J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 67). Men, however, prove far more susceptible to Sauron’s power. Those who have the Nine Rings of Power become mighty, but slowly, one by one, they decay under the influence of the Ruling Ring and soon they enter the realm of shadows and become the Ringwraiths, or the Nazgûl, who serve Sauron and are only visible to him (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 346).

The Rings of Power, especially the ones forged by Sauron, are created with the sole purpose of preventing or slowing down the decay, that is to provide the bearer with a longer lifespan. They also enhance the possessor’s natural powers, and they render the wearer’s

material body invisible and make the otherwise invisible things visible (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 172). When Gandalf explains the importance of Bilbo's Ring to Frodo, he mentions the effect the Rings of Power have on mortal races:

“A mortal, Frodo, who keeps one of the Great Rings, does not die, but he does not grow or obtain more life, he merely continues, until at last every minute is a weariness. And if he often uses the Ring to make himself invisible, he *fades*: he becomes in the end invisible permanently, and walks in the twilight under the eye of the Dark Power that rules the Rings. Yes, sooner or later – later, if he is strong or well-meaning to begin with, but neither strength nor good purpose will last – sooner or later the Dark Power will devour him.” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 61).

Since most races in Middle-earth are mortal in a certain way, Sauron uses the concept of immortality, or counterfeit mortality, as a bait for greedy individuals – “it leads the small to a Gollum, and the great to a Ringwraith” (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 301).

## 2. History of the One Ring

The most notorious Ring in the works of J. R. R. Tolkien is undoubtedly the One Ring, or the Ruling Ring. It is a Ring secretly forged by Sauron during the Second Age, around the year 1600 (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1422), in the fires of Orodruin, also known as Mount Doom (Foster 384). He makes the One Ring to gain dominion over all the other Rings of Power, and to bind their powers with it, so as to subject them entirely to its will. The Rings of Power are “to last only so long as it [the One Ring] too should last” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 344). While forging the One Ring, Sauron passes much of his strength and will into it, because his main goal is to control the Elven-rings, which are quite powerful, so in order to control them, he needs a Ring with a surpassing potency (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 344). The One Ring is also called the One, the Great Ring, the Ring of Rings, the Ring of Doom, the Ring of Power, the Master-ring or simply the Ring. Some of the names are connected to the bearers, such as Isildur's Bane, the Burden, in connection to Frodo, or Precious, as it was called by Gollum (Foster 386), alluding to the bearers' relationship with the Ring.

The One Ring is a perfectly round band made of, as it appears, pure and solid gold. (Foster 385; J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 65). Unlike the other Rings of Power, the One Ring bears no gem (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 328). Part of the One Ring's power is the ability to expand and contract to fit the bearer perfectly, but also to be able to slip from the bearer's hand unnoticeably (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 329). There is an inscription on the Ring, but after it was taken from Sauron, the inscription started to fade, as described by Isildur:

Already the writing upon it, which at first was as clear as red flame, faded and is now only barely to be read. It is fashioned in an elven-script of Eregion, for they have no letters in Mordor for such subtle work; but the language is unknown to me. I deem it to be a tongue of the Black Land, since it is foul and uncouth. (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 329)

Isildur speculates that the inscription on the Ring could be revealed by exposing it to great heat, such as the heat emitted from the hand of Sauron. Later on, Gandalf does just that by throwing the Ring into the fire at Bag End to confirm his suspicion that the Ring kept by Bilbo and given to Frodo is indeed the One Ring, and the inscription on the Ring shines bright. The inscription is written in the Fëanorian alphabet, or Tengwar, which is a writing system, or script, invented by Fëanor (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 40). In the language of Mordor, called Black Speech, the inscription reads: "Ash nazg durbatulûk, ash nazg gimbatul, ash nazg thrakatulûk agh burzum-ishi krimpatul" (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 331). The meaning of the inscription, in Common Tongue, would be: "One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, One Ring to bring them all and in the Darkness bind them" (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 331). These lines are a part of a well-known verse in Elven-lore, composed after the treachery of Sauron was revealed:

Three Rings for the Elven-kings under the sky,  
Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their halls of stone,  
Nine for Mortal Men doomed to die,  
One for the Dark Lord on his dark throne  
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.  
One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,

One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them

In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie. (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 66).

As soon as the Ring is no longer exposed to immense heat, the inscription slowly fades, until it disappears entirely.

In addition to being different from the rest of the Rings in appearance, the One Ring differs from the rest when it comes to the power it possesses. Since the main purpose of the One Ring is to control all others, the One Ring is the greatest of all the Rings of Power (Foster 384). Whoever wears the One Ring, gains the ability to see the thought of all those who wear the Rings of Power, and the bearer of the One Ring could manipulate the bearers of the lesser Rings, which would eventually lead to their enslavement (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 172). The Ring also possesses some form of “sentience” and self-determination, which Gandalf explains as the Ring’s desire to be found and reunited with Sauron (Foster 385). The bearer can never abandon the Ring, the Ring always treacherously escapes and chooses a new owner (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 73).

Another instance of the Ring’s power is visible in the longevity it provided for its bearers. However, that longevity comes with a price and the bearers eventually become enslaved to the Ring, and their physical appearance changes, since the Ring consumes both their bodies and their souls (Foster 385). The longevity itself can be seen as a sin against the order of things present by God and tradition, since it interferes with the natural cycle of life (Juričková 16). The Ring affects the emotions of the bearer, inciting greed, jealous hate and even fear in the mind of the bearer (Foster 385). In addition to all the mentioned powers, the Ring also affects the bearer’s senses. While wearing the Ring, the bearer becomes invisible, and is granted sensory acuteness, especially regarding sight and hearing, which would even remain, to an extent, even after the Ring is taken off (Foster 385). The invisibility provided by the Ring can be interpreted through the Augustinian concept of evil being the absence, or corruption, of good. When the bearer of the Ring becomes invisible, the good in him becomes corrupted and invisible and makes him able to do evil things, which he would not normally do: “The annulling or elimination of visibility to a state of *invisibility* suggests the erasure or absence of good and the consequent descent into an evil state” (Beal, “Why is Bilbo Baggins Invisible?” 5).

Due to the Ring's immense effect on both the mind and the body, the Ring appears heavy to anyone who bears it. The Ring is unbreakable by any weapon designed in Middle-earth and can only be destroyed in the exact place where it was forged, in Mount Doom, which is unapproachable. If the Ring were to be casted into the fire in Mount Doom, it would be annihilated, and its power would be dissolved, together with Sauron's power: "Sauron's own being would be diminished to vanishing point, and he would be reduced to a shadow, a mere memory of malicious will" (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 173). Also, all the Rings of Power lose their power after the destruction of the Ruling Ring. But Sauron never thought that it would be possible to destroy the Ring, since the effect of the Ring on the bearer would be so strong that the bearer could not damage the Ring or destroy it willingly (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 173). Ultimately, whoever comes in contact with the Ring is presented with a choice: "either to wield the Ring and face the inevitable corruption of their souls by unlimited power or reject the temptation and be satisfied with the fact that they withstood the greatest desire" (Howard-Hill 23). The choices the characters make depend on their personality, and the existence of a soul within them, since all their decisions occur within their soul (McPartland 19).

The One Ring represents Sauron's power in a small tangible object. Tolkien himself explains that the Ring represents the idea that potency has to be externalized in order to be used and to produce results, and by externalizing it the object passes out of the creator's direct control. However, due to the mentioned externalization, Sauron exposes the One Ring, his object of power, to capture and destruction, and therefore exposes himself to destruction (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 296). In addition to this, the Ring uses the wearers as a means to do evil, because it needs to use a certain being to work through. Therefore, the bearers of the Ring lose their free will and become slaves of the Ring and the evil it possesses (Juričková 14). It is possible also to interpret the Ring as an allegory, as explained by J. R. R. Tolkien, of the inevitable fate that awaits all those who attempt to defeat a certain evil power with power, since they will both be destroyed in the end (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 140).

### 3. Plato's Ring of Gyges

One possible inspiration for Tolkien's One Ring could be in the work of a well-known Greek philosopher, Plato. In his most prominent work, *The Republic*, Plato describes various

discussions between Socrates and other Athenians, mostly about the importance and meaning of justice, focusing on the differences in the lives of just and unjust men. In Book II, during one of the discussions on justice, an interesting story is revealed, the story of Gyges. The discussion in question is related to the concept of giving each man the freedom to do whatever he wants, and keep an eye on all of them. By keeping track of their actions, it would be possible to see where each man's desire takes him, and see whether he is a just man or not (Plato 359c). The mentioned freedom could be given to men if they possessed the power as the one rumored to be possessed by the ancestor of Gyges.

The ancestor in question was a shepherd, and one day, while he was tending sheep, a great rainstorm and an earthquake took place. Due to the earthquake and the rain, the ground opened up, and even though the shepherd was frightened, he decided to go down the hole. Inside he saw many wonders, but the most notable one was the bronze horse, which had windows on it (Plato 359d). When he looked through the windows, he saw a corpse, larger than human, "wearing nothing but a golden ring on its hand" (Plato 259e). The shepherd removed the ring and went out. At one of the meetings he attended, he wore the ring, and during the meeting he twisted the setting of the ring towards him, towards his palm. He realized that by doing that, he became invisible. After he turned the setting of the ring back outside, he was visible again. He was amazed by this discovery, and decided to experiment with the ring (Plato 360a). He arranged for himself to make the report to the king, and when he got there, he quickly seduced the king's wife, and developed an elaborate plan. He plotted with her against the king, killed him and seized his power (Plato 360b).

The men participating in the philosophical discussion conclude that if there were two such rings, and they gave one to the just man, and one to the unjust, they would both follow the same path of injustice. The argument is that people who are given such freedom to do whatever they liked could not control their behavior; they would likely start taking other people's possessions, breaking into houses and such things, since they know they cannot be caught. This can be further explained by the idea that the only reason why people do morally good things is to avoid punishment. But if the punishment did not exist, or could not be executed, the need to do morally good things is erased as well (Howard-Hill 16). They would be like gods among men, and therefore the conclusion is that both the just and the unjust man would follow the same course, since no man has such strong will to resist the temptation of power (Plato 360c). The discussion continues, and Socrates mentions the ring of Gyges again, saying that the souls of men know that being just is the only good thing, and that the soul should



do the just thing, whether it has the ring or not (Plato 612a). By saying this, Socrates added a mythical dimension to the discussion, stating that if sheer invisibility releases such unjust desires, then the ring itself might be an artefact from hell (O'Connor 68).

The similarities between the One Ring and the Ring of Gyges could be an indication that Tolkien used the Ring of Gyges as an inspiration for the creation of the One Ring. The most obvious similarity is the ability to make the bearer of the ring invisible, which is the ability that both Rings have. Both rings also influence their owners, each in its own way. On the one hand, the Ring of Gyges, unlike the One Ring, does not seem to possess the power to directly corrupt the owner, but rather reveals his true nature by enabling him to do anything he wants or chooses to do, without consequences. On the other hand, the One Ring magnifies the personality traits and the power already existing in a person, therefore corrupting even the morally good character into making morally bad choices. The Ring is an illusion of absolute power, and the extent of the influence and the corruption of the Ring depends on their personality traits (Howard-Hill 23). Although the One Ring exhibits a more direct influence on its bearer than the Ring of Gyges, which only highlights the bearer's character, and although Tolkien never explicitly mentioned it as an influence, the Ring of Gyges could possibly be seen as an inspiration for certain properties of the One Ring. Namely, the One Ring does take advantage of the bearer's character and influences those with fewer moral inhibitions faster and more easily than it does the moral characters.

#### 4. The Influence of the One Ring on Various Races

The aim of this thesis is to explain the influence of the One Ring on various races. There are numerous races, and each of them has its own peculiarities and personality traits. As mentioned before, the extent of influence of the Ring varies according to each person's personality traits. The Ring can be seen as a magnifying force of the pre-existing power of each character, and therefore the Ring's influence differs in the case of each character. Each race has its own characteristics, that make it either resilient or susceptible to the Ring's influence, but the role of the strength and morality of each character should be emphasized.

##### 4.1. Maiar

Maiar is a name used to refer to the spirits who aided the Valar in shaping the world. They usually dwelt in Valinor, but some came to Middle-earth and were therefore involved in certain events in Middle-earth. Each of the Maiar is associated with a specific Vala, answering only to him. However, some of the Maiar were corrupted by the evil influence of Morgoth into disobeying their Valar. Some of the names of the Maiar are recorded in history, but the ones important for the events in Middle-earth are few, namely Mairon, Curumo, Olórin, Aiwendil, Allatar and Pallando (Tyler 399). Some of the Maiar serve no Vala, since they were immediately corrupted by Morgoth, they are Valarukar, also known as the Balrogs.

The Maia Mairon originally served Aulë, but he fell under the influence of Morgoth, or Melkor, and became evil. Later he became known by a far more sinister name, Sauron. During the First Age, Sauron is not evil, but becomes a servant of Morgoth very soon. Eventually Sauron becomes the embodiment of evil itself, which lasts until the destruction of the One Ring during the Third Age (Tyler 565). He wanders all around the existing world, gains followers, and corrupts leaders, all through his acts of deceit and treachery (Foster 438). As mentioned before, he forges the One Ring with the sole purpose of enslaving the bearers of the Rings of Power, which he partially succeeds to do.

In the Second Age, Sauron becomes even more powerful than Morgoth was before, because Morgoth focused on “staining” all living things in the world with his malice. Morgoth’s main goal was to break the wills of his victims, and eventually to destroy their bodies, which can only be described as sheer nihilism. Sauron, on the contrary, never drifts into this nihilistic madness, since his goal is not to destroy all around him, even his own creatures, but he thrives to have the ability to do anything with the world around him, without destroying it (C. Tolkien, *Morgoth’s Ring* 396). In accordance with this, throughout the Second Age, Sauron’s mission is to enslave as many people as possible, and at times he is quite successful in his plans. It can be concluded that Sauron is not evil by origin, he is actually a spirit corrupted by Morgoth.

After Morgoth’s downfall, Sauron gets the opportunity to repent and relinquish his evil, but he chooses not to, because he is too ashamed to face the humiliation and asking for pardon, “and so his temporary turn to good and ‘benevolence’ ended in a greater relapse, until he became the main representative of Evil of later ages” (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 207). Around the year 1100 of the Third Age, he gets the attention of certain wise people in Middle-earth by establishing a stronghold in the fortress of Dol Guldur, and it

becomes evident to the Wise that there is evil power rising in Dol Guldur. However, at the time they do not know it is the shadow of Sauron rising to power again (C. Tolkien, *The Peoples of Middle-earth* 229). The reason for his return is that he wants to use all his power and malice to find out the whereabouts of the One Ring, and to make sure it is returned to him. This aim, however, is not fulfilled, mainly due to the strength of Frodo and Sam. After the destruction of the Ring, Sauron is utterly weakened making him unable to ever take physical shape again (Foster 437). Throughout the Ages, Sauron frequently changed forms, in order to deceive his victims; for example, sometimes he appeared as a Man, and during the War of the Ring, he appeared as an ever-searching Eye.

Some of the Maiar of Valinor joined the Order of the Istari, also known as Heren Istarion. They became known also as the Wise, or, as Men used to call them, Wizards, since it is a translation of the word in Quenya “*istar*.” It is recorded that they first arrived in Middle-earth in the year 1000 in the Third Age. In order to remain hidden, they are disguised as old Men, who travel across Middle-earth, gathering information. They carry staffs, which signify their membership of the Order (Tyler 705). They are very powerful, but they never reveal their powers and purpose to anyone. Despite their power, upon arrival in Middle-earth, they become subject to the fears and pains and weariness of earth, able to hunger and thirst and be slain” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 503). Even though they resemble Men, they are still immortal, and age slowly. They are sent to Middle-earth to aid the Elves of the West in their resistance, and also to control Sauron, since his attempt to rise to power is evident by the time of their arrival. They are sent to contest Sauron’s power, and to help all those willing to resist him in their uniting. However, they have some restrictions, since they are not allowed to match Sauron’s power with their own, meaning they have to weaken themselves, in a way. They are also forbidden from trying to dominate any Men or Elves, either by force or fear (J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 506). Even though they may seem entirely pure beings, the Istari can be corrupted, since they are in the bodies of Men in Middle-earth: “the Istari, being clad in bodies of Middle-earth, might even as Men and Elves fall away from their purposes. and do evil, forgetting the good in the search for power to effect it” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 504). The five of them were chosen to depart to Middle-earth: Curumo, Olórin, Aiwendil, Allatar and Pallando.

Curumo is the most powerful of the Istari, and he is known by many names in Middle-earth. He is known to the Elves as Curunír, and among the Men of the North, he is recognized as Saruman. Upon his arrival in Middle-earth, he is described as having raven hair and a fair

voice, and he is clad all in white (J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 503). As soon as he comes to Middle-earth, he has an immense desire for power. This is evident in his decision to live in Orthanc, where he spends most of his time searching the Tower of Orthanc, hoping to find one of the Seeing-stones of the Dúnedain, also known as the palantír (Tyler 563). He even becomes Head of the White Council, which is formed as an answer to the aforementioned events in Dol Guldur, that is, the rise of the Necromancer or Sauron. Unfortunately, through his desire for power, he becomes ensnared by Sauron. However, strange as it may seem, Sauron does not completely enslave Saruman because Saruman keeps his free will and actually wants to find the One Ring in order to defeat Sauron, and become the Lord of the Rings himself:

Thus the Wise were troubled, but none as yet perceived that Curunír had turned to dark thoughts and was already a traitor in heart: for he desired that he and no other should find the Great Ring, so that he might wield it himself and order all the world to his will. 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. (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 362)

Saruman is a double traitor; he betrays both the Council and Sauron. However, he still does not want to declare war on Sauron because he is aware of his lack of strength; hence his lack of determination when it comes to reacting to the threat in Dol Guldur, where he delays the reaction for as long as he could (C. Tolkien, *The Peoples of Middle-earth* 237). At the same time, he begins fortifying Isengard, preparing for the battle against all enemies, even Sauron if necessary. At the time of the War of the Ring, Sauron is aware of the treason of Saruman, but chooses not to react, since he does not consider him to be a direct threat, even though Saruman began creating his own army. Gandalf sees through his plans and offers him help with repentance, but Saruman refuses and is therefore cast from the Council by Gandalf (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 761). All his attempts to retrieve the Ring and overthrow Sauron are unsuccessful, and Saruman is eventually killed by one of his loyal servants, Gríma Wormtongue: “Whereas Curunír was cast down, and utterly humbled, and perished at last by the hand of an oppressed slave; and his spirit went whithersoever it was doomed to go, and to Middle-earth, whether naked or embodied, came never back” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 506).

Another Maiar who came to Middle-earth is named Olórin, known among the Elves as Mithrandir, and among the Northern Men by the name of Gandalf. He is sometimes called

Gandalf the Grey, or the Grey Pilgrim. He is described as merry and warm, clad in ashen grey clothes and always leaning on his staff. He is friendly with anyone he meets, and, unlike Saruman, does not desire power or praise (J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 505). He is also a bearer of one of the Elven Rings of Power, Narya, given to him by Círdan the Shipwright (Tyler 461). He is also a member of the White Council, and even gets the chance to become the Head of the Council, which he politely refuses. He aids the Dwarves on their Quest for Erebor, and is always particularly fond of the Hobbits. At the time of the War of the Ring, Gandalf plays a key role in the quest. He persuades Bilbo to give up his Ring to Frodo, and later helps Frodo fulfill his quest. When Frodo asks Gandalf to take the Ring, since he is far more powerful than an ordinary Hobbit, Gandalf refuses, saying that he is aware that the Ring would corrupt him:

“With that power I should have power too great and terrible. And over me the Ring would gain a power still greater and more deadly.” His eyes flashed and his face was lit as by a fire within. “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.” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 80)

It is evident that Gandalf is aware of the Ring’s power, and is also afraid that, even though he would try to do good with it, the Ring has a will of its own and it would use Gandalf as an emissary to do evil. At the time of the Council of Elrond, Gandalf becomes aware of Saruman’s treason, since Saruman imprisoned him in Orthanc prior to the Council. After it is suggested to give the Ring to the Wise, both Elrond and Gandalf conclude that it would not yield good, using Saruman’s treachery as an example of the matter, since no one but Sauron can rule the Ring:

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. For nothing is evil in the

beginning. Even Sauron was not so. (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 348-349)

Gandalf refuses to take the Ring, but agrees to help Frodo, as much as he can, in his attempt to destroy the Ring in Mordor. Unfortunately, during their journey, the Fellowship of the Ring meets one of the Balrogs in the Mines of Moria. Gandalf fights the Balrog, and is slain, but is granted the opportunity to return to Middle-earth for a short time in a different shape, the shape of Gandalf the White (J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 506). This is the moment of Gandalf's death, in a way, even though he is an immortal being. But, his death is not finite, since he is a form of angelic power, like all the Istari, he just suffers a change.

Namely, during the fight with the Balrog, Gandalf chooses to sacrifice himself for the greater good, and is therefore granted the mentioned change. By sacrificing himself he passes the moral test, by adhering to the rules set upon his arrival in Middle-earth. His sacrifice is accepted by the Valar, and he is able to return, enhanced in power. Upon his return, he is wiser and more powerful than before, and can thus fight other powerful beings, such as Saruman, but within the previous limitations. Even though he comes back by the grace of the Valar, he is still under his initial obligation of concealing power and not seeking to try and dominate the will of others (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 216-217). In the shape of Gandalf the White he rejoins Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli in their pursuit of the Orcs who took Merry and Pippin, and manages to overthrow Saruman and retake Orthanc and Isengard. When he first meets the Three Hunters, as they were called, he explains to them that he has returned to aid them in their quest, but he has forgotten much of his old life (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 645). Tolkien explains this by suggesting that Gandalf acquired some of the awe, a terrible power that the Ring-wraiths possessed, but only on the good side, meaning he did not pass into the Realm of the Shadows (C. Tolkien, *The Treason of Isengard* 422). During the battles of the War of the Ring, Gandalf aids the rebellion of the people of Middle-earth, indirectly overthrowing Sauron and restoring peace in Middle-earth. At the end of the Third Age, Gandalf sails over the Sea into the Undying Lands, along with Frodo, Bilbo and many others (Tyler 267).

Gandalf and Saruman, along with Sauron, can be viewed as perfect counterparts, one being the representative of moral righteousness, the other two being the illustrations of corruption of morality. Gandalf's goal is to preserve Middle-earth, and to prevent further corruption by Sauron. Sauron and Saruman choose to deceive and destroy, undermining

Gandalf's efforts (Burns 73). Saruman is deceived by the idea of ruling all of Middle-earth, unfortunately forgetting that Sauron does not wish to share his acquired power with anyone, meaning that he is using Saruman only as a means to his goal. Considering the fact that the Ring magnifies the pre-existing power of the bearer, it is possible that Gandalf would stray from his righteous path, when exposed to the Ring. He is one of the Maiar, just like Sauron, and he would most likely start using the Ring for good, but eventually he would slip into madness, in a way, aiming to control all of Middle-earth, since he is powerful enough to do so. By doing this he would become exactly like Sauron, which is one of the reasons why Gandalf refuses to come in direct contact with the Ring, fearing his reaction to its influence (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 350).

## 4.2. Elves

Elves are a race of people in Middle-earth. They are the firstborn Children of Ilúvatar, and they are considered the eldest and noblest of all the races (Foster 147). Soon after their creation, they are divided into two groups: the ones called the Eldar, who obey the Valar and accept their summons, and the Avari, who refuse the summons of the Valar, and therefore they become lesser Silvan Elves (Tyler 198). There are many subsequent divisions of the Elves, since there are many conflicts between them and other races. Their relationship with Men in Middle-earth was strained and they mistrust them, since many of the Men became servants of Sauron. Men do not trust the Elves, because they cannot distinguish between the High-elves that helped Men and all the other groups of Elves (C. Tolkien, *The War of the Ring* 158). The Elves mistrusted the Dwarves the most, and there are many possible reasons for that, such as the conflicts between kings of each race, the greed of the Dwarves and so on. Nevertheless, there are records of several instances of successful cooperation between the Elves and the Dwarves during the First Age (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 342). They are known by many names throughout their history, such as the Elder Race, the Firstborn, the Fair Folk, the Merry People, and Quendi, which was a word in Quenya, meaning the Speakers (Foster 148).

When it comes to their physical appearance, they are described as the fairest of all the creatures: "They were about six feet tall and somewhat slender, graceful but strong and resistant to the extremes of nature" (Foster 147). Their senses are especially keen, particularly the senses of hearing and sight. Peculiarly, they do not sleep at all, they just rest their minds in a form of waking dreams, or by looking at certain beautiful sights from their surroundings. The Eldar

Elves can communicate with each other telepathically. The Elves are extremely fond of nature, and their desire and knowledge is insatiable (Foster 147). They are an immortal race, since they cannot die of natural causes until the world itself dies, however they can be slain or even die from grief. When they grow weary from their long life, they can sail over the Sea into the Undying Lands (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 36).

One of the bearers of the Elven Rings of Power is Gil-galad, who is the bearer of the Ring named Vilya, the Ring of Airs, which is the mightiest of all the Elven Rings. The Ring bears a great blue gem, and is given to Elrond by Gil-galad at the end of the Second Age. Gil-galad is the last of the High-elven kings in Middle-earth, and is therefore the leader of the Elves in the War of the Last Alliance, when Men and Elves fought side by side against Sauron. Gil-galad is slain in battle by Sauron, and his body is burned by the heat of Sauron (Tyler 269-271).

The bearer of the second Elven Ring of Power is Círdan the Shipwright, who is one of the mightiest Grey-elves. He is the bearer of the Ring Narya, the Ring of Fire, which bears a great red gem. At the end of the first millennium in the Third Age, he surrenders the Ring to Gandalf, who is the bearer for the remainder of the Third Age (Tyler 632). Círdan fights in many battles throughout his life, but in the end he is appointed as the Keeper of the Havens, also known as the Shipwright of the Elves. He remains there until the end, and sails to the Undying Lands on the last ship to leave Middle-earth (Tyler 124).

The bearer of the third Elven Ring is Galadriel. The Ring in her possession is named Nenyá, the Ring of Waters, and it is adorned with a single white stone, which is of great beauty (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 475). Galadriel is one of the most regal princesses of the Noldor, one of the Edain. She is described as beautiful, with particular emphasis on the beauty of her hair: “Even among the Eldar she was accounted beautiful, and her hair was held a marvel unmatched. It was golden like the hair of her father and of her foremother Indis, but richer and more radiant, for its gold was touched by some memory of the starlike silver of her mother” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 296). Her power is even greater than her beauty. Sam explained the power she has over people when talking to Faramir: “But perhaps you could call her perilous, because she’s so strong in herself. You, you could dash yourself to pieces on her, like a ship on a rock; or drown yourself, like a hobbit in a river. But neither rock nor river would be to blame” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 889). Gimli, who disliked the Elves very much before meeting Galadriel, asks her for the three strands of her hair, which she gladly



gives him, symbolically reviving the friendship between the Elves and the Dwarves. When the Fellowship of the Ring reaches Lothlórien, they first meet Lady Galadriel and her husband, Celeborn. They are all witnesses to the immense power of Galadriel, when, upon their arrival, it seems as though she manages to get into their minds. She offers them each a choice: “between a shadow full of fear that lay ahead, and something that he greatly desired: clear before his mind it lay, and to get it he had only to turn aside from the road and leave the Quest and the war against Sauron to others” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 465). However, none of them reveal what was offered to them as their greatest desire. Galadriel also owns a mirror, which allegedly shows the past, present or future related to a specific person or event. She asks Frodo and Sam to look at the mirror, and unfortunately Frodo sees the Eye of Sauron, which is also perceived by Galadriel, since her power enables her to see such things. Frodo offers her the Ring, thinking it would be safer with her, and a sudden change in her behavior ensues, revealing that she has long desired the One Ring:

“And now at last it comes. 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!” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 476)

Frodo is shocked and terrified, yet he still admires her beauty. After the mentioned incident, Galadriel diminishes and is again her old self. She concludes that she has passed the test, and that she is permitted to pass into the Undying Lands, which she was previously banned from doing because she was wrongfully considered one of the leaders of the rebellion against the Valar. At the end of the War of the Ring, for all her contributions in the War, and for passing the mentioned test, she is granted permission to sail into the Undying Lands, which she does.

Legolas is one of the members of the Fellowship of the Ring, and hence he comes in contact with the One Ring. Legolas is one of the Elves of Mirkwood. He is the son of the King of Mirkwood, King Thranduil, making him an Elven-prince of Sindarin blood (Tyler 368). He is described as a fair elf, who is very capable when it comes to weapons:

He was tall as a young tree, lithe, immensely strong, able swiftly to draw a great war-bow and shoot down a Nazgûl, endowed with the tremendous vitality of Elvish bodies, so hard and resistant to hurt that he went only in light shoes over

rock or through snow, the most tireless of all the Fellowship. (C. Tolkien, *The Book of Lost Tales II* 327).

Even though he travels with a Dwarf, Gimli, instead of quarrelling, they develop a great friendship fighting side by side. Their friendship is so strong that Legolas and Gimli even sail to the Undying Lands together. Legolas comes in contact with the One Ring, but shows no interest in it or its power.

The Elves are very powerful beings, and they prove quite resilient to the power of the Rings and the One Ring. Namely, none of the Elves ever wanted to use the One Ring for any purpose because they had no real need for them. They are immortal, in touch with nature, very spiritual and knowledgeable, and, as such, they are not susceptible to its power. Thus, they were all convinced that the best thing to do with the Ring is to destroy it in the fires of Mount Doom. Even though it may seem that Galadriel fell under the influence of the Ring, that is not entirely true, since her contact with the Ring was meant to happen, in order for her to pass, or fail, the test of morality, and decide her fate regarding the ban previously set upon her. All the bearers of the Elven Rings of Power give them up easily, and although this is possibly because their Rings of Power were never exposed to Sauron's malice, and they were not worn for a long time, unlike the Rings of Men, it seems more plausible to suggest that their own abilities, virtues, and longevity make the Ring's powers less desirable. It cannot be concluded what the effect of the One Ring would be on them if they had it in their possession, but it is highly unlikely that it would corrupt them entirely, since they are the strongest, and the most resilient, beings in Middle-earth with few desires. However, considering the fact that the Ring magnifies the power within each bearer, it is possible that the Ring would try to use the Elves and their power to do evil.

### 4.3. Men

Men are the younger Children of Ilúvatar, since they were created after the Elves (Tyler 410). They awoke in Hildórien at the first rising of the Sun, and since the first Sun rose in the West, the eyes of Men turned towards it and their feet are now bound to forever stray that way during their journeys (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 115). The Eldar name them Atani, which means the Second People, in Quenya, which is a language spoken by the Elves. In another language of the Elves, Sindarin, they are named Edain, which becomes a term for Men

in general, even though the term is originally used by Elves to signify the Men that fought with them against Morgoth in Beleriand during the First Age (Tyler 178). Throughout the First Age, Men are also called Hildor, the Followers. They are called many names after that, such as Apanónar, meaning the Afterborn, Engwar, meaning the Sickly, and Fírimar, meaning the Mortals: “and they named them the Usurpers, the Strangers, and the Inscrutable, the Self-cursed, the Heavy-handed, the Nightfearers, the Children of the Sun” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 115). No Vala comes to Hildórien to aid and guide Men, not to mention to summon them to reside in Valinor. Due to this ignorance towards Men, they do not love the Valar, they actually fear them and the power they possess, since they never understood the purpose of the mentioned Powers (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 116). During the First Age, the Men befriend the Dark Elves that they come across during their journeys, and become their companions and disciples, “wanderers of the Elvenrace who never set out upon the paths to Valinor, and knew of the Valar only as a rumour and a distant name” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 116).

Men are in many ways inferior to the Elves: “They were subject to aging and disease, less resistant to the extremes of nature, less perceptive of the minds of others and the messages of the Valar, blind to the future, and less skilled in lore and crafts” (Foster 324). The major difference between Elves and Men is the mortality of Men and the immortality of Elves. When Eru, also known as Ilúvatar, made Men, he made them mortal, naming the given mortality the Gift of Men (Tyler 149). Eru also gave Men the freedom to shape their own future: “they should have a virtue to fashion their life, amid the powers and chances of the world, beyond the Music of the Ainur, which is as fate to all things else” (C. Tolkien, *The Lost Road and Other Writings* 163). Be that as it may, Eru knew that Men are not as strong as Elves and he predicted that they would often stray from the righteous path (C. Tolkien, *The Lost Road and Other Writings* 163).

As soon as the Men are created, they start dividing themselves into various groups, each group having a different culture. The most important group during the First Age are the aforementioned Edain, who divide themselves into three Houses: the House of Bëor, the Haladin, and the House of Marach, also known as the House of Hador. When the Men befriend the Dark Elves, they are also approached by Morgoth, or Melkor, who convinces some of the Men to worship him and to fight on his side against the Elves and the Edain (Foster 324). These Men are called the Easterlings and the Haradrim, and their descendants would go on to fight for Sauron in the Third Age. Later, certain groups of Men rise above the Shadow of Morgoth,

for example the Dúnedain, the Rohirrim (the Riders of Rohan), the Men of Dale and so on (Foster 324).

The Dúnedain is the name for the Edain who sailed to Númenor at the beginning of the Second Age and their descendants (Foster 120). After the Downfall of Númenor, the surviving Dúnedain divide into two groups: Black Númenoreans and the Faithful (Tyler 156). The Black Númenoreans die out during the Third Age, and the Faithful found the Realms in Exile, named Arnor and Gondor (Tyler 157). The lifespan of the Dúnedain, especially the Faithful, is three times longer than that of other Men, around 210 years, but they are still mortal because of the Gift of Men (Tyler 157). Their longer lifespan is the result of their blood being enriched with Elven-blood during the Elder Days, through the unions of Elves and Men. There are three of those unions throughout the ages: Lúthien and Beren, Idril and Tuor, and Arwen and Aragorn (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1352). Because of these unions with the Elves, the term half-Elven is sometimes used to describe the people of Númenor (J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 266). The remnants of these unions are visible in the appearance of the Númenoreans, namely their dark hair, grey eyes and the noble bearing, along with the “gifts of wisdom and foresight” (Tyler 157). As the time wore on, the Númenoreans, especially the Dúnedain of Gondor, begin thinking that their mortality was not actually a gift and that it is the only thing differentiating them from the Eldar, so they curse the Gift and rename it the Doom of Men, not perceiving the mercy behind Eru’s decision regarding their mortality (Tyler 149). However, the Dúnedain of Gondor, who are bitter about their shorter lifespan, fail to realize that by lessening the purity of their blood by “intermarriage with other, lesser Men,” they are shortening their lifespan (Foster 121). The waning of their lifespan continues throughout the Third Age as their blood continues to be mingled with the blood of the lesser Men (C. Tolkien, *The Peoples of Middle-earth* 227). Their desire for immortality will turn out to be one of the weaknesses that will make some Men susceptible to the power of the Ring.

Easterlings are Men of Rhûn, who are seduced by Morgoth, who uses their own greed, to participate in the battles against the Eldar and the Edain (Tyler 175). They periodically attack Gondor, following the orders of Morgoth, and motivated by their greed and the hatred for Gondor (Foster 133). The Men belonging to this particular group, or tribe, are “short and broad; they were dark of skin, eye, and hair” (Foster 133), and their culture is in general very primitive (Foster 133).

The other group of Men dominated by Sauron are the Haradrim, the People of the South (Tyler 308). Along with the Easterlings, they occasionally attack Gondor and thus pose a constant threat to Gondor's southern borders (Foster 238). The Men of Harad are primitive and savage, and some tribes even paint their bodies. They are similar to the Easterlings, tall and dark-skinned, their eyes and hair are black, but they love bright clothing and various ornaments. When in battle, they use a variety of weapons, but they are noted for the usage of Oliphaunts, or mûmakils (Foster 238), large animals similar to elephants.

When talking about the influence of the Ring on Men, it is essential to discuss the bearers of the Nine Rings of Power. After Men are given the Rings of Power, they are subdued to the will of Sauron, and with time, they become his slaves. They pass into the realm of shadows and become known as the Nazgûl, a word in the language of Mordor, Black Speech, meaning the Ringwraiths (nazg 'ring' + gûl 'wraith') (Foster 358). They are seduced by Sauron, who promises them immortality (Tyler 546), and they subsequently become his servants. They are corrupted by their own lust under the influence of the One Ring, and they become the Úlairi, or the undead creatures, who are bound to serve Sauron forever, unable to find rest (Tyler 545). They are known by many names: the Black Riders, the Fell Riders, the Nine, the Shadows, the Nine Servants of the Lord of the Rings and so on (Foster 360). They are very powerful and terrifying, and since they are shadow creatures and have no material body, they wear black robes "to give shape to their nothingness when they have dealings with the living" (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 289). They use special weapons, called the Morgul-blades or knives, which remain in the wound and turn the victim into a wraith under the command of the Nine or Sauron (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 289). They can only be killed or wounded by the weapons that have special spells on them, since any other blade that touches them melts (Foster 359). They are seemingly blind, but they have an extremely keen sense of smell, and can emit piercing cries, also known as shrieks (Foster 359). The most powerful of them is the Lord of the Nazgûl, also known as the Witch-king of Angmar. He is described as taller than the rest of the Nazgûl, wears a crown, and is so powerful that any blade that touches him perishes, unless it has a special spell on it. During the War of the Ring, he kills King Théoden, but is in return slain by Éowyn and Merry, fulfilling the old prophecy that "he was not to fall by the hand of Man" (Foster 302; J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1101). After the One Ring is destroyed, the Ringwraiths perish along with it.

One of the most famous Dúnedain is definitely Isildur, son of Elendil the Tall. He was born in Númenor, and helped found the Realms in Exile. During the Second Age, he fights

against Sauron, as a member of the Last Alliance of the Dúnedain and the Elves (Tyler 344). After his father is slain in the battle that took place in 3441 during the Second Age, Isildur fights Sauron and cuts off the One Ring from his hands with the shards of his father's sword Narsil (Foster 273). Even though Isildur perceives this act as victorious, he fails to realize that that very act nullified the victory they achieved, since the Ring survived and therefore Sauron can grow and regain physical form once again (Tyler 363). At the end of the mentioned battle, Isildur takes the Ring himself, unaware of the power it possesses. After some time, Isildur goes on a march with his men, and is ambushed by Orcs beside the Gladden Fields. His son asks him to use the Ring to control the Orcs, but Isildur is aware that he is not powerful enough to use the Ring: "I cannot use it. I dread the pain of touching it. And I have not yet found the strength to bend it to my will. It needs one greater than I now know myself to be" (J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 354). When he realizes that the Orcs will kill him, he decides to use the smaller portion of the Ring's power to make himself invisible and tries to run away. He leaves his armor and weapons at the bank of the river Anduin and jumps into the water. While swimming across, the Ring slips from his finger and sinks to the bottom of the river. When Isildur becomes aware that the Ring is gone, his first reaction is a sense of loss, but after a while he feels relieved, as if a heavy burden is taken of his chest. He starts swimming again, but he is spotted by Orcs, who shoot him dead: "They loosed their poisoned arrows at it, and fled. Needlessly, for Isildur unarmed was pierced through heart and throat, and without a cry he fell back into the water. No trace of his body was ever found by Elves or Men. So passed the first victim of the malice of the masterless Ring" (J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 356-357).

Another famous Dúnedain is undoubtedly the Ranger Aragorn II, son of Arathorn II and Gilraen the Fair, born in the 2931 of the Third Age (Tyler 31). He is the direct descendant, or heir, of Isildur, and is therefore targeted by Sauron during the Third Age (Tyler 32). After his father's death, he is raised in Rivendell by Lord Elrond himself and is given the name Estel, in order to avoid recognition by the servants of Sauron (Tyler 32). When he turns twenty, Lord Elrond reveals to him his real name and lineage, and gives him "the heirlooms of his Line: the Ring of Barahir and the shards of Elendil's sword Narsil" (Tyler 32). Afterwards, he goes into the Wild, and in many ways fights against Sauron, which is how he becomes friends with Gandalf the Grey and why he helps Gandalf capture Gollum (Foster 21). He has many names, such as Strider, Elessar, meaning the Elfstone (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 564), and Envinyatar, meaning the Renewer (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1129). He is also known as the "chieftain of the Dúnedain of Arnor, Captain of the Host of the West, bearer of

the Star of the North, wielder of the Sword Reforged” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1267).

Aragorn joins the Fellowship of the Ring at the Council of Elrond, and fights in many battles deciding the outcome of the War of the Ring. At the mentioned Council he first lays eyes on the One Ring, and throughout the first part of the journey with the Fellowship (before Boromir’s death), he is indirectly exposed to the influence of the Ring. However, he shows no interest in using the Ring for his own benefit, unlike his ancestor, Isildur. Frodo even states that the Ring rightfully belongs to Aragorn, but he refuses to take it (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 321). Even if Aragorn had taken the Ring, he would not be able to use it the way Sauron does, and he could not use to defeat Sauron: “In his actual presence none but very few of equal stature could have hoped to withhold it from him. Of ‘mortals’ no one, not even Aragorn” (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 349). Nevertheless, Aragorn’s half-Elven descent, seems to have made him more resilient to the Ring’s influence. It is impossible to know what he would use the power for if he were any weaker or less moral, but his refusal to take the Ring and his lack of interest in it, shows that his Elven descent and his strength of character have prevailed, as Legolas suggested:

In that hour I looked on Aragorn and thought how great and terrible a Lord he might have become in the strength of his will, had he taken the Ring to himself. Not for naught does Mordor fear him. But nobler is his spirit than the understanding of Sauron; for is he not of the children of Lúthien? (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1147)

Nevertheless, due to the fact that Aragorn has never taken the Ring, the question of how he would wield the Ring and for what purposes remains open to debate. After the War of the Ring, Aragorn becomes the King of Gondor, marries Arwen Undómiel, the daughter of Elrond, and dies at the age of 210 (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1367).

As opposed to Aragorn, who has proven himself to be resilient to the Ring’s influence, another member of the race of Men is significantly and undeniably influenced by the Ring, and that is Boromir of Gondor, the elder son of Denethor II, the Steward of Gondor (Tyler 94). He is one of the Dúnadan of Gondor, a strong and handsome man (Foster 65). In July of the year 3018 in the Third Age, Boromir sets out from Minas Tirith to seek the counsel of Elrond regarding a dream he and his brother had (Foster 65). He was always interested in weapons, battles and war, and sees himself as the protector of Gondor. His view of his role as the guardian

is justified, considering the fact that he is the eldest son, making him an heir of Gondor. His father loves him greatly, for he embodies all that his father could never achieve, courage, morality, valor and similar noble traits.

After joining the Fellowship of the Ring, Boromir begins to think about how the Ring can be used against Sauron, and his interest in the ring becomes clear to Sam, who, in the aftermath of the adventure, tells Boromir's brother, Faramir, that Boromir wanted the Ring from the start:

“Now I watched Boromir and listened to him, from Rivendell all down the road - looking after my master, as you'll understand, and not meaning any harm to Boromir - and it's my opinion that in Lorien he first saw clearly what I guessed sooner: what he wanted. From the moment he first saw it he wanted the Enemy's Ring!” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 889)

When the Fellowship arrives at Amon Hen, Boromir follows Frodo into the woods and tries to convince him to lend him the Ring, so Boromir can protect Gondor and defeat Sauron. His main desire is to gain advantage in a battle and to assure the victory of Minas Tirith, as his brother Faramir later speculates in a conversation with Frodo (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 877). When Frodo refuses, he asks for just a glimpse of the Ring, with a strange gleam in his eyes (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 518-519). He tries to explain to Frodo why he needs the Ring, and how he wants to relieve him from the burden of the Ring. Frodo is naturally suspicious and refuses to give him the Ring, at which point Boromir's friendly behavior drastically changes and he demands the Ring:

“How it angers me! Fool! Obstinate fool! Running wilfully to death and ruining our cause. If any mortals have claim to the Ring, it is the men of Nu'menor, and not Halflings. It is not yours save by unhappy chance. It might have been mine. It should be mine. Give it to me!” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 520).

This first incident is the result of the Ring's influence on Boromir, corrupting his mind. After Frodo refuses again, Boromir subtly threatens him to take the Ring from him, and tries to attack him, during which Frodo notices that Boromir's face has changed hideously and there is a raging fire present in his eyes (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 521), which is the evidence of the influence of the Ring on Boromir's behavior and appearance. After this, Frodo puts on the Ring in order to disappear, and Boromir starts shouting that Frodo will betray them



and take the Ring to Sauron. This suspicion and fear is the final act of the Ring's treachery and influence on Boromir, after which he realizes his mistake and tries to repent, but it is too late, since Frodo is already gone (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 521). Boromir feels guilty and he desperately wants to make things right, which he finally does, in his final act of redemption, by dying in an attempt to defend Merry and Pippin: "'I tried to take the Ring from Frodo' he said. 'I am sorry. I have paid'" (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 538). Even though Boromir succumbed to the Ring's influence because of his ambition and desire for glory and success, his ability to repent for his actions proves not only the real strength of his character but also his actual positive motivation; he did not want the Ring merely for his personal gain, but because he wanted to save the world from evil.

Boromir's younger brother, Faramir, is like his brother in many ways. He is a brave warrior, even though he is more interested in music and lore, and not battles, like his brother (Tyler 226). He is a gentle man, but this gentle nature is the reason why his father is displeased with him (Foster 173). During the War of the Ring, Faramir and his men catch Frodo and Sam, and then Faramir comes in contact with the Ring. Frodo fears that Faramir will also try to take his Ring away from him, but Faramir states that he would never use the weapon of the enemy to ensure his own victory: "I would not take this thing, if it lay by the highway. Not were Minas Tirith falling in ruin and I alone could save her, so, using the weapon of the Dark Lord for her good and my glory. No. I do not wish for such triumphs" (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 877). After he realizes that Frodo still does not trust him, he reassures him by saying that he does not want the Ring, since he is not sure he could use it for a good purpose: "Fear not! I do not wish to see it, or touch it, or know more of it than I know (which is enough), lest peril perchance waylay me and I fall lower in the test than Frodo son of Drogo" (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 891). This is evidence to the major difference between the two brothers, since Boromir is highly influenced by the Ring, and Faramir shows no interest whatsoever from the start. It is clear that Faramir saw through the illusion the Ring represents, the illusion of absolute power, and he is aware that no one except Sauron can use the Ring, making him one of the most morally secure characters (Howard-Hill 28).

Men are destined to be weaker than Elves, and the Ringwraiths, along with Isildur and Boromir are proof that the Ring can easily ensnare Men who have desires that are greater than their abilities. In the case of Boromir, it is important to mention that he should not be perceived as a morally bad person, since his only true desire was to save his home, Gondor. Therefore, he wants to use the Ring to protect his people, since he sees that as his duty (Howard-Hill 27). Aragorn, being the representation of a morally good and just person, remains unaffected by the

Ring. This goes to prove that a person's morality and other personality traits determine the extent of the Ring's influence. Men, like all other mortals in Middle-earth, act on emotion, which ultimately leads to their downfall and corruption, despite having good intentions (Shippey 125). Some Men, like Aragorn, proved their resilience to the Ring's influence because their intentions were pure and not overly ambitious. Aragorn was aware of his limitations and of the fact that there are forces and beings greater than Man; in order to defeat evil, Men had to cooperate with others rather than act as single heroes. This points to the conclusion that the strength of character plays a significant role in the degree of the Ring's influence on (individual) Men.

#### 4.4. Hobbits

Hobbits are a race in Middle-earth, closely related to Men (Foster 253). Although they were created during the First Age, their existence was hardly noticed by anyone until the Third Age, since they were quite unobtrusive (Foster 253). They live their lives peacefully, some in the Shire, some in Bree (Foster 253). The origin of the Hobbits is, unfortunately, unknown, since nobody recorded any parts of their history, save some oral traditions (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 176). They are a specific branch of the human race, which is why they live together with Men in Bree, divided into Big Folk (regular Men), and Little Folk (Hobbits) (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 176). By the Third Age, they were divided into three groups: Harfoots, Stoors and Fallohides (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 4), based on their appearance (there are certain differences in complexion, built and height), and their natural habitat (some lived in hillsides, others in flatlands, and others still in woodlands).

The Hobbits are known by many names, but they were most often called the Halflings or Little Folk/People (Foster, 254) because of their short stature. Namely, they are quite small; their height is between two and four feet (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 2). They have no beards, and they are inclined to be fat in the stomach (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 4). They are a merry folk, who enjoy eating and drinking: "Their faces were as a rule good-natured rather than beautiful, broad, bright-eyed, red-cheeked, with mouths apt to laughter, and to eating and drinking. And laugh they did, and eat, and drink, often and heartily, being fond of simple jests at all times, and of six meals a day (when they could get them)" (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 2). They wear clothes of bright colors, mainly green and yellow,

but they wear no shoes “because their feet grow natural leathery soles and thick warm brown hair like the stuff on their heads (which is curly)” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 4). They are very hospitable and extremely fond of nature. Even though they are closely related to Men, they are, unlike Men, “free from ambition or greed of wealth” (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 176), which makes them more resilient to the evil influences around them. Nevertheless, there are exceptions, which are relevant for the story.

The first Hobbit to come into contact with the Ring is the memorable Sméagol, also known as Gollum, who is the best example of the Hobbits’ corruption due to the power of the One Ring. He is one of the Stoors who live by the river Anduin, near the Gladden Fields. He mostly made his living by fishing in the Anduin. On one of his fishing trips, his friend, or cousin, Déagol finds a peculiar gold ring in the river. At the moment neither of them know that it is a magical ring, the One Ring. As soon as Sméagol sees the ring, he wants to take it from Déagol, which demonstrates the immediate influence the Ring had on Sméagol (Tyler 590). The reader does not know much about Sméagol, but the Ring’s power over him suggests that there was something negative in his character from the start to make the effect of the Ring so brutal and quick. Namely, since Déagol refuses to hand over the Ring, Sméagol kills him and takes it from him, which is quite a radical act. He later realizes that his ring has magical powers, which make him invisible when he wore it, and he soon starts abusing the ring’s power: “He was very pleased with his discovery and he concealed it; and he used it to find out secrets, and he put his knowledge to crooked and malicious uses. He became sharp-eyed and keen-eared for all that was hurtful” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 70). The Ring’s negative influence further emphasized his character flaws. Additionally, he starts making unpleasant, animal-like glottal noises in his throat, which gained him the name of Gollum (Tyler 590). Soon the people of his community began to dislike him, expelling him eventually.

After his excommunication, he goes to seek refuge in the Misty Mountains, more accurately, below the Misty Mountains (C. Tolkien, *The Peoples of Middle-earth* 233), where he lives for the next 500 years with his Ring, which he calls Precious (Foster 212). Even though the Ring grants him a longer lifespan, it slowly poisons his mind, and his appearance changes likewise. He used to look like a typical Hobbit, but due to the Ring’s influence he becomes “extremely thin and wiry, with black skin, flat feet, long thin hands, and large pale eyes” (Foster 213). As Foster contends, the Ring also influenced his senses, and caused the change in his “naturally nasty” character:

Although his sight was poor, his hearing was acute, and he could move silently and climb like an insect. Because of his long domination by the Ring, Gollum pathologically feared all things Elven; Elven ropes burned his flesh and lembas tasted like dust. He hated all creatures and was, because of the influence of the Ring on his naturally somewhat nasty character, generally despicable. (213)

This change is indicative of the influence of the Ring on Sméagol, but even though the Ring influences him greatly, he never becomes a wraith, he just fades slowly. This is largely due to the fact that he rarely uses the Ring, since he is in hiding and therefore has no need to use it (Tyler 591). He only uses it to hide from Goblins and even to hunt them at times, when he gets tired of eating raw fish (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 95).

His connection with the Ring was so great that his desire to own the Ring and have it in his possession continues, even after he loses it. Whereas, for example, Isildur felt relief after he had lost the Ring in the river, Gollum practically goes mad from the desire to have it back. After he leads Frodo and Sam to the Black Gate, Gollum precludes them from going through the Gate, because Sauron will see them and take the Ring. He then suggests that Frodo should give the Ring back to him: “Don’t let Him have it. Or go away. go to nice places, and give it back to little Sméagol. Yes, yes, master: give it back, eh? Sméagol will keep it safe; he will do lots of good, especially to nice hobbits” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 833). The Ring affects Sméagol the way it does, because his soul is already mean, so it makes him more susceptible to the Ring’s influence (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 253). He even dies with the Ring, after taking it from Frodo, when he falls into the fires of Mount Doom. The Ring influences Sméagol the most, turning him into Gollum over the course of many years that he owns it, ruining him both mentally and physically. Sméagol is immoral from the start, and the Ring uses his immorality to deepen its influence. Unfortunately, Sméagol does not have the strength, or the free will, to even try and resist the pull of the Ring, therefore he becomes entirely enslaved by it (Howard-Hill 25).

Bilbo Baggins is another Hobbit that comes in contact with the Ring, and he actually becomes the bearer after the Ring leaves Gollum. The Ring influenced him as well, but, because of the difference in character, the Ring’s influence was far less malevolent in Bilbo’s case. He is one of the Fallohides, and is a renowned Hobbit author and scholar (Foster 58). He lives in the Shire, in a house named Bag End. After Frodo’s parents die, Bilbo decides to adopt him and make him his heir (Foster 58). He is very adventurous, which eventually leads him on a

journey with the Dwarvish Company of Thorin, to reclaim their lost kingdom of Erebor. It is on this journey that Bilbo finds the One Ring (Tyler 86).

Namely, after the Company finds itself among the Goblins, Bilbo gets separated from them and, crawling in the dark, stumbles upon a fine gold ring. He does not know that it is a special ring, but he immediately puts it in his pocket without knowing why and without further thinking (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 81). He soon realizes that the ring is magical, and that it makes him invisible. However, the Ring soon displays its first act of treachery before ensnaring a new owner; it slips from his finger and remains in his pocket as he is trying to escape the Goblins (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 104). He manages to slip it back on his finger just in time to escape. The Dwarvish Company escape from the Goblins, but they soon meet another enemy, the Spiders in Mirkwood. The Spiders capture them, spinning their webs around them, but Bilbo puts on the Ring, and starts setting the Dwarves free. While doing that, he realizes that he can understand what the Spiders are saying due to the power of the Ring, which enables the bearer to understand Black Speech (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 182-183).

After reclaiming Erebor and participating in the Battle of the Five Armies, Bilbo returns home with the Ring. Many years pass, and the Ring's effect on Bilbo is becoming greater, and more obvious to others. Namely, people in the Shire begin questioning his unchanging appearance and believe that it is a result of something unnatural (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 27). On his 111<sup>th</sup> birthday, he is visited by his very old friend Gandalf, who notices Bilbo's unnatural vigor and the change in his behavior. He suspects that Bilbo might have a magical ring, and his suspicions are confirmed when Bilbo uses the Ring to disappear from his birthday party and leave the Shire unnoticed "“I am old, Gandalf. I don't look it, but I am beginning to feel it in my heart of hearts. *Well-preserved* indeed!" he snorted. "Why, I feel all thin, sort of *stretched*, if you know what I mean: like butter that has been scraped over too much bread. That can't be right. I need a change, or something"” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 42). Gandalf immediately realizes that it was the Ring that has kept Bilbo so young all these years, while simultaneously wearing him out too. Gandalf decides that it would be best for Bilbo to leave the Ring to Frodo, and Bilbo first refuses, thinking that Gandalf wants to rob him, but he eventually agrees to leave it, since the Ring has a tremendous effect on him, preventing him from parting from it:

Bilbo drew his hand over his eyes. "I am sorry," he said. "But I felt so queer. And yet it would be a relief in a way not to be bothered with it any more. It has

been so growing on my mind lately. Sometimes I have felt it was like an eye looking at me. And I am always wanting to put it on and disappear, don't you know; or wondering if it is safe, and pulling it out to make sure. I tried locking it up, but I found I couldn't rest without it in my pocket. I don't know why. And I don't seem able to make up my mind." (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 45)

Even as he is walking out the door, Gandalf reminds him that the Ring is still in his pocket, after which Bilbo unwillingly tries to place it on the mantelpiece. Unfortunately, he drops it, and tries to grab it, but Gandalf grabs it first, noticing the look of anger on Bilbo's face, followed by a look of relief (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 46). Later Gandalf explains to Frodo that he noticed the influence of the Ring on Bilbo when he asked him to explain how he found the ring, and Bilbo claimed that he had won it, trying to defend his right to own it:

Then I heard Bilbo's strange story of how he had "won" it, and I could not believe it. When I at last got the truth out of him, I saw at once that he had been trying to put his claim to the ring beyond doubt. Much like Gollum with his "birthday-present." The lies were too much alike for my comfort. Clearly the ring had an unwholesome power that set to work on its keeper at once. That was the first real warning I had that all was not well. (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 63).

After all the trouble the Ring caused in the life of Bilbo Baggins, he finally manages to pass it on to Frodo, becoming the first ever person to surrender the Ring willingly, with a little help from Gandalf (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 73). He settles down in Rivendell, where he stays until the end of the War of the Ring, after which he sails into the Undying Lands with the Elves.

The influence the Ring has on Bilbo is evident throughout his adventures. The greed it partially incites in him is evident in the very moment Bilbo acquires the Ring, taking it from Gollum. Later on, Bilbo snatches the Arkenstone as well (Frankel 5). Bilbo uses the Ring chiefly because of the invisibility it provides. In the beginning he uses the invisibility to do good, namely to help the Dwarves and save their lives on numerous occasions, while simultaneously encouraging them and leading them out of danger (Beal, "Why is Bilbo Baggins Invisible?" 17). Even though he starts using the Ring for the good, Bilbo eventually

falls under the influence of the Ring, and on a number of occasions, he lies to Gandalf about the Ring. Moreover, he hides it from everyone, and starts to use it for his own benefit, either to hide from unwanted relatives or to appear heroic in the eyes of his companions (Beal, “Why is Bilbo Baggins Invisible?” 13-14). This serves as an illustration of the corruption of the Ring and the effect it has on Bilbo, who is essentially a morally good character, but who unfortunately falls under the influence of an evil power. Due to his firm and generally good character, the effects of the Ring, that is the moral devastation, is neither evident immediately nor particularly potent, even though it increases over a long period of time. Still, it is never powerful enough to enslave Bilbo, which is why he was able to give up the Ring in the end, demonstrating the power of free will over the evil power of the Ring (Beal, “Why is Bilbo Baggins Invisible?” 24).

His resilience to the Ring is also connected to the concept of mercy, since Bilbo finds mercy not to kill Gollum when he had the chance, even though he is wearing the Ring at the moment (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 101-102). This situation can be interpreted as the explanation as to why Bilbo never fully succumbs to the Ring’s influence. Namely, according to Sanja Pavić, this is Bilbo’s first act after acquiring the Ring, and it was a morally just one, in contrast to Sméagol’s, who committed murder and robbery (18). In the character of Bilbo, Tolkien supposedly tried to portray the ordinary man, with all his flaws, who eventually does the morally right thing (Frankel 5). Even though Bilbo starts out as greedy, in the end he realizes the benefits of life without greed, portraying the character’s spiritual growth throughout all the adventures (Friedman 32).

After Bilbo’s departure from the Shire, Frodo inherits Bag End and the One Ring along with it. Frodo Baggins is a well-known Hobbit, known mostly for his journey to Mordor during the War of the Ring. He was born in the year 2968 during the Third Age, and lost his parents in a boating accident when he was twelve, after which he was adopted by Bilbo Baggins (Tyler 257). In 3018, Gandalf visits Frodo in order to confirm his suspicions regarding the Ring’s influence. So, he asks Frodo to cast the Ring into the fire at Bag End, which makes Frodo hesitant: “Gandalf laughed grimly. ‘You see? Already you too, Frodo, cannot easily let it go, nor will to damage it. And I could not ‘make’ you – except by force, which would break your mind” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 80). Gandalf explains the importance of the Ring to Frodo, and instructs him to leave the Shire and head towards Rivendell, to escape the Nazgûl, who are coming to the Shire to find the Ring (Foster 193). His gardener, Samwise

Gamgee, sets off with him, and along the way they are joined by two other Hobbits, Merry and Pippin. Although not fully aware of it yet, they set off on a dangerous adventure.

Upon their arrival in the village of Bree, they meet Aragorn, who joins them on their journey. Unfortunately, the Nazgûl catch up with them, and Frodo is attacked at Weathertop by the Nazgûl, who pierce him with a Morgul-blade. When they finally reach Rivendell, and find out the purpose of their “adventure,” Frodo volunteers to be the Ring-bearer and take the Ring to Mount Doom, in order to destroy it. Thus, he becomes the leader of the Fellowship of the Ring (Foster 193). Frodo, being the Ring-bearer, is constantly under the direct influence of the Ring. Even though it gives him longevity, the Ring is a dreadful burden for the Hobbit. The Ring makes Frodo feel weary due to constant surveillance by the Eye of Sauron. During their journey, Sam and Frodo run into Gollum, who promises to lead them to Mordor, but Samwise realizes that the only thing on Gollum’s mind is the Ring, and that his goal is to get it back. However, Frodo does not see it that way, and even gets angry with Sam when he tries to convince Frodo not to trust Gollum. At one point, Frodo even tells Sam to go home, whereas he will continue the journey with Gollum by his side. Sam, still very suspicious regarding Gollum’s intentions, pretends to leave but keeps close by to see what will happen. Before reaching Mordor, Gollum leads Frodo into the lair of a giant Spider named Shelob, convincing him that it is a shortcut to Mordor. Shelob attacks Frodo and stabs him in the neck, administering poison that paralyzes him. Fortunately, Sam comes back just in time to save Frodo from Shelob, but Frodo’s seemingly lifeless body is dragged away by Orcs. Luckily, the Ring is saved by Samwise Gamgee, who puts it on in order to hide from Orcs and save Frodo. When he finally manages to save him, Frodo asks him about the Ring, and demands that Sam returns it immediately, even going so far as calling him a thief:

“Give it to me!” he cried, standing up, holding out a trembling hand. “Give it me at once! You can’t have it!” “All right, Mr. Frodo,” said Sam, rather startled. “Here it is!” Slowly he drew the Ring out and passed the chain over his head. “But you’re in the land of Mordor now, sir; and when you get out, you’ll see the Fiery Mountain and all. You’ll find the Ring very dangerous now, and very hard to bear. If it’s too hard a job, I could share it with you, maybe?” “No, no!” cried Frodo, snatching the Ring and chain from Sam’s hands. “No you won’t, you thief!” He panted, staring at Sam with eyes wide with fear and enmity. (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1192)



Even though it is clear that Sam only wants to save the Ring from the Orcs, Frodo sees it as an act of treason. Thankfully, as the influence of the Ring wears off, he realizes what Sam's intentions were and apologizes to him.

In another attempt to help Frodo, Sam suggests taking the Ring, only for a short while, to ease the burden for Frodo, but Frodo refuses again and explains that it is his burden to bear: “‘No, no, Sam,’ he said sadly. ‘But you must understand. It is my burden, and no one else can bear it. It is too late now, Sam dear. You can’t help me in that way again. I am almost in its power now. I could not give it up, and if you tried to take it I should go mad.’” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1225). As they reach Mount Doom, and what they believe is the end of their journey, the Ring displays its treachery once again, deeming Frodo incapable of destroying the Ring, just like Isildur many years ago: “‘I have come,’ he said. ‘But I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!’ And suddenly, as he set it on his finger, he vanished from Sam’s sight” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1237). The Hobbits were followed by Gollum, who attacks Frodo and, in an attempt to retrieve the Ring, bites off Frodo’s finger with the Ring on it, and falling with it into the fires of Mount Doom. The Ring is destroyed and the quest fulfilled. However, Frodo explains to Sam that Gollum’s interference is the only way the Ring could have been destroyed, since Frodo could not have found the strength to destroy it himself:

“But do you remember Gandalf’s words: *Even Gollum may have something yet to do?* But for him, Sam, I could not have destroyed the Ring. The Quest would have been in vain, even at the bitter end. So let us forgive him! For the Quest is achieved, and now all is over. I am glad you are here with me. Here at the end of all things, Sam.” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1239-1240)

Frodo realizes to which extent the Ring influenced him, and also that, if it were not for Sam, he would not have succeeded.

After the War of the Ring, Frodo returns to the Shire, but he never fully recovers from the injuries caused by the Morgul-blade and Shelob. Every year, on the dates when the injuries occurred, he falls ill and suffers, so he decides to depart into the Undying Lands with Bilbo, to relieve the pain forever (C. Tolkien, *Sauron Defeated* 112). It is clear that Frodo is greatly influenced by the Ring, but, as Tolkien explains in one of his letters, he should not be considered a failure because he could not muster the strength to destroy the Ring himself. Namely, the influence of the Ring was at its peak in the Cracks of Doom, therefore no one, no

matter how strong, could have resisted its influence. Frodo found a way to fulfill his quest, even if by destroying the Ring indirectly. He succeeded in his mission to save the world he loved and to do his best to carry the burden for as long as his will and body could endure. However, if Gollum had not appeared and destroyed the Ring, it is possible that Frodo would have sacrificed himself, by throwing himself into the volcano along with the Ring in order to destroy it, since he was not able to do so willingly (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 346-347). This seemingly divine intervention could be interpreted as the act of evil destroying itself, and also as Frodo's reward for showing mercy towards Gollum by allowing him to live even though he, by certain moral standards, deserved to die (Beal, "Who is Tom Bombadil?" 3). Even without Tolkien's explanation, the reader would realize that the purity of Frodo's heart contributed to the success of his mission. Namely, unlike Sméagol, who only wanted to do harm, Frodo never tried to use the Ring for his own gain, let alone to hurt someone.

Finally, Frodo's loyal companion, Samwise Gamgee, also comes in contact with the Ring, and is even the Ring-bearer for a short time, after Frodo is stabbed by Shelob. Sam is the gardener at Bag End, and joins Frodo on his journey to Mordor after he is caught eavesdropping on the conversation between Frodo and Gandalf. He follows Frodo wherever he goes, and proves to be the most loyal companion and friend. Even though Sam never showed any interest in the Ring, he reluctantly gives it back to Frodo after saving him. It may seem that he feels this because of the influence of the Ring, but in reality he is just so caring that he does not want to burden Frodo any longer because he sees that he is weak (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1192). Carrying the Ring, even for a short while, makes Sam understand the weight of Frodo's burden (Tyler 560), but his utter lack of ambition and malice make him practically unsusceptible to the Ring's harmful influence. After returning to the Shire, Sam lives a happy life, becoming Mayor of the Shire seven times. When his time comes, he decides to sail to the Undying Lands, a right granted to him by the fact that he had been a Ring-bearer (Foster 432).

To conclude, Hobbits are considered weak and easily ensnared by the Ring, but it is clear that it all depends on the character of the bearer. Sméagol's lack of scruples made him use the Ring for treacherous acts, and he was therefore easily enslaved by the Ring. His utter psychological transformation into an evil being was marked by his physical transformation. In the final stage of his life, he did not look like a Hobbit at all. Contrary to him, Bilbo, Frodo and Sam realize that, even though the Ring presents itself as a gift, it is actually a heavy burden. The degree of the Ring's influence on them depends solely on their morality, and their

personality traits. Since all of them, Sméagol excluded, are morally good and strong characters, the Ring never fully ensnares them, proving that the influence of the Ring relies on the strength of the character of the bearer. Fortunately, because they lacked ulterior motives (they never wanted to hurt or trick anyone for their own gain), they all managed to resist and not fully succumb to its influence, making them stronger than most.

#### 4.5. Dwarves

The Dwarves are a race created by Aulë during the First Age. Aulë was impatient to behold the Children of Ilúvatar, and to be able to teach them lore and crafts, so he secretly created the Dwarves, fearing the judgment of other Valar. Keeping in mind that Melkor, or Morgoth, the source of all evil on Earth, still lurked over the Earth, he made sure that the Dwarves were strong and resilient to Melkor's corruption (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 37). However, Ilúvatar realizes what Aulë has done, and does the opposite of what Aulë feared he would do; he accepts them and allows Aulë to teach them all he knew, but under one condition: they have to sleep in the darkness until the first Children of Ilúvatar awake, and, after that, they can be awoken as well (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 38). Aulë agrees to these terms and hides the Seven Fathers of the Dwarves, since he only managed to make seven Dwarves, in remote places to await the awakening of the Firstborn (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 38). When the Dwarves finally awake, they are divided into seven groups, or Folk, and each Folk have their own King and ancestral halls (Foster 127). The Dwarves call themselves Khazâd, in their native language, called Khuzdul. The Elves call them Naugrim, which meant the Stunted People, and Nogothrim, meaning Dwarf-folk, and also Gonnhirrim, meaning the Stonemasters (Tyler 162).

Considering the fact that the Dwarves were made while Melkor still roamed the Earth, Aulë tried to make them strong enough to endure: "Therefore they are stone-hard, stubborn, fast in friendship and in enmity, and they suffer toil and hanger and hurt of body more hardily than all other speaking peoples" (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 39). They are short, around four and a half to five feet tall), and they could be described as stocky and strong. They have long beards, male and female alike (C. Tolkien, *The War of the Jewels* 205). They are also resistant to fire and prove to be able warriors. The Dwarves are very proud and unswerving, so they cannot be dominated by evil, and they "never forgot a wrong or a debt" (Foster 127). Since they were created in darkness, they are always attracted to the substances from the depths of

the earth, which makes them excellent miners and craftsmen. However, like any other race, they have their flaws. They are skilled craftsmen, and even though their works are skillfully made, they lack beauty; they cannot make their works beautiful, unless they attempt to imitate the arts of the Eldar (C. Tolkien, *The Lost Road and Other Writings* 273). They have a tendency towards wrath and possessiveness, and their lust for gold is always present and strong (Foster 127). Their lifespan is longer than that of Men, since they live about 250 years (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 39). Even though they have a longer lifespan, their race is struggling for survival, since their women are few, and they rarely wed (C. Tolkien, *The War of the Jewels* 205).

As mentioned beforehand, the Dwarves use the Rings of Power only to accumulate wealth and hoard gold in various caves and mines, which ultimately leads to their demise, since Dragons attack their hoards and destroy some of the Rings, whereas others are retrieved by Sauron (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 345-346; J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 67). The Dwarves are harder to ensnare by the power of the One Ring, because power means nothing to them and they are not evil by nature, which they prove by refusing to serve the Enemy (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1488). Thus, there is practically only one instance where the influence of the Ring on Dwarves may be observed: the story of the last Dwarvish Ring.

Namely, King Thrór was given the Seventh Ring of the Dwarves by his ancestors, and after he is forced to leave Erebor due to the attack of Smaug the Golden, he passes the Ring on to his son, Thráin II. Since Sauron's evil is in all the Seven Rings, Thráin feels it too; it affects him by stirring his Dwarvish lust for gold, thus deciding to reclaim their stronghold – the mountain Erebor. He is captured along the way by Sauron, taken into Dol Guldur, where he is tortured until he dies, and the last Ring taken from him (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1414). Even though the Dwarves prove untamable, the Rings of Power still affect them in a certain way:

The only power over them that the Rings wielded was to inflame their hearts with a greed of gold and precious things, so that if they lacked them all other good things seemed profitless, and they were filled with wrath and desire for vengeance on all who deprived them. But they were made from their beginning of a kind to resist most steadfastly any domination. Though they could be slain or broken, they could not be reduced to shadows enslaved to another will; and

for the same reason their lives were not affected by any Ring, to live either longer or shorter because of it. All the more did Sauron hate the possessors and desire to dispossess them. (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1414)

During the Third Age, the Dwarves become more secretive and they hide in deep places, with the purpose of guarding their hoards, since they have at least two enemies who want to plunder them: Dragons and Orcs (C. Tolkien, *The Peoples of Middle-earth* 227).

The only Dwarf who is a member of the Fellowship of the Ring is Gimli, son of Glóin. He is a typical Dwarf, and his weapon is a broad-bladed axe (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 364). Throughout his journey with the Fellowship, he becomes good friends with all of them, but the most peculiar friendship is the one with the Elf Legolas, since Dwarves and Elves do not particularly like each other. He also conceives an immense love for Lady Galadriel, who even gives him three of her hairs as a gift (Tyler 273). He is known as Elf-friend and also called Lock-bearer because of the lock of hair given to him by Galadriel (Foster 207). Even though he comes in close contact with the One Ring, the Ring has no influence on him, and he never expresses his desire of owning the Ring or using it in any way. He participates in the battles during the War of the Ring, and, after the death of Aragorn, he sails over Sea with his good friend Legolas, becoming the first Dwarf to ever sail to the Undying Lands. He is given this honor probably because of his contribution in the War of the Ring, and also his love for Elves, particularly Legolas and Galadriel (Tyler 273; Foster 207).

Even though the Dwarves never came in contact with the One Ring, it can be concluded that it would not have such an immense effect on them as it had on certain other races. The Dwarves are greedy by nature, and the Ring would only incite the feelings of greed and lust for gold in them. They could not be enslaved or used by the Ring, since they have no interest in the power it possesses. Even when they had the Rings of Power, they did not use them for evil purposes, only to accumulate wealth, which is possibly also what they would use the One Ring for. Ultimately, the Dwarves' resilience to the Ring's influence can also be explained by their character. They are created by Aulë as strong and robust, physically and mentally, and their only fault is their desire for gold, which is the only feature that the Ring could influence, that is, enhance.

## 4.6. Ents

Ents are the most ancient race of all, their name derived from the Old English word to signify a giant (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 221). They are also called Onodrim or Enyd in Sindarin, and in the Common Tongue they are known as the Shepherds of the Trees or the Shadow of the Wood (Foster 157). It is not clear how the Ents appeared in Middle-earth, but it is possible that they are actually spirits that inhabit trees, sent by the Vala Oromë and one of the Valier, named Yavanna (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 352). They are the result of a plea made by Yavanna, who wished to protect the trees and other growing things that she created by sending a race of shepherds to protect them (Tyler 205). They look like a cross between a Man and a tree, being fourteen feet tall. They resemble the trees they cared for, and cannot die naturally because of their tough skin, but they can be burned (Foster 156). Although they are slow to act, they possess extreme strength when aroused: “they could crack rocks and move large quantities of earth easily and quickly” (Foster 156). The most notable Ent is surely Treebeard, who saves Merry and Pippin from the Orc who wanted to kill them. He is also the only Ent described in great detail:

They found that they were looking at a most extraordinary face. It belonged to a large Man-like, almost Troll-like, figure, at least fourteen foot high, very sturdy, with a tall head, and hardly any neck. Whether it was clad in stuff like green and grey bark, or whether that was its hide, was difficult to say. At any rate the arms, at a short distance from the trunk, were not wrinkled, but covered with a brown smooth skin. The large feet had seven toes each. The lower part of the long face was covered with a sweeping grey beard, bushy, almost twiggy at the roots, thin and mossy at the ends. But at the moment the hobbits noted little but the eyes. These deep eyes were now surveying them, slow and solemn, but very penetrating. They were brown, shot with a green light. (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 603)

He plays a key role in the War of the Ring, since he decides to urge the Ents to go to war against Saruman, after he finds out that Saruman is cutting down trees (C. Tolkien, *The Treason of Isengard* 418).

Ents were never interested in the dealings in Middle-earth, since they live in the woods and are satisfied with the life they lead, especially Treebeard, who believes that there is no point in worrying about the affairs of other races: “I have not troubled myself with the great

wars: Elves are not my business, nor Men; and it is with them that wizards are mostly concerned. They are always worrying about the future. I don't like worrying about the future" (C. Tolkien, *The Treason of Isengard* 418). Even though the Ents never actually come into contact with the One Ring, they often come in contact with powerful beings or powerful items. Nevertheless, there is no record of them ever trying to claim that power or use it for their own benefit. They are only present to make sure that the trees survive and that everything is alright with the forests.

#### 4.7. Eagles

Eagles are the greatest birds in Middle-earth created by the Vala Manwë (Foster 129). They were never evil, and they could never be dominated by any other race (Tyler 169). The Eagles are large birds, and strong enough to carry a Man. Their approximate lifespan is very long, and there is even a possibility that they are immortal (Foster 130). They never get involved with any other races, and they never meddle in other races' business. However, there are instances when certain people ask them for help and they reach out; for example, they save the Dwarves from fire during the Quest for Erebor. Also, one of the Eagles, named Gwaihir the Windlord, saves Gandalf from imprisonment at Orthanc, and, finally, they save Frodo and Sam from the slopes of the burning Mount Doom. Even though they help in certain critical situations, they do not want to be perceived as the saviors that could be summoned whenever somebody pleases. This is exactly why they were not involved in the War of the Ring, save for the aforementioned situations. If they had desired the Ring, they would have gotten involved during the journey of the Fellowship of the Ring, but they chose not to interfere, probably because they did not want to possess such power and they believed that the Ring should be destroyed.

#### 4.8. Orcs

Orcs are Middle-earth's evil race. It is not specifically explained how they came into being. One possibility is that they were bred from Elves caught by Morgoth, who corrupted them and turned them into Orcs, as was believed by the Eldar:

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. (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 47)

This is possible because Morgoth was not granted the possibility to create creatures with independent will, and he therefore created Orcs, who are actually corruptions of pre-existing creatures (C. Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring* 409). It is highly unlikely that Morgoth created them entirely, since his abilities were only to mock the things of the world, and not to actually give them life (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 208). They were created to mock the Children of Ilúvatar (C. Tolkien, *The Lost Road and Other Writings* 212). One thing is for certain, Orcs were first bred during the Elder Days by the Dark Power of the North (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1486). Few Orcs are mentioned by name throughout the history of Middle-earth. The most notorious one would be Azog, who slays the Dwarvish King Thrór, but is killed by Dáin Ironfoot. His son Bolg is also known for his leadership of Orcs during the Battle of the Five Armies. The term "Goblin" is also used when referring to Orcs, and there is no indication that the Orcs are different from the Goblins. It is possible that the Orcs are just a stronger breed of Goblins (C. Tolkien, *The Return of the Shadow* 437).

In their appearance, the Orcs are "beasts of humanized shape (to mock Men and Elves) deliberately perverted/converted into a more close resemblance to Men" (C. Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring* 410). There are various tribes of Orcs, but they are mostly described as being short, with dark faces, squinty eyes, and long, jagged fangs. They wear foul clothing and use various weapons, such as bows, spears, swords, and scimitars, all of which are poisoned. They are weakened by the Sun, and despise all things related to beauty; their main focus is on killing and destroying everything around them (Foster 388). During the Third Age, they are used as warriors both by Sauron and Saruman, and, since they serve two different masters, they often fight amongst themselves over which of the two masters should get the Ring.

The most resilient tribe of Orcs are undoubtedly the Uruk-hai. They are stronger than normal Orcs, and are not affected by the Sun, meaning they can go to war even in daytime. Also, they fight with swords that have straight blades, contrary to the rest of the Orcs, who use curved and jagged weapons. They are extremely strong and courageous, which makes them worthier foes (Tyler 497). When the Fellowship of the Ring first comes in contact with the Uruk-hai, Aragorn notices how different they are from other Orcs, and concludes that they are warriors of Saruman (C. Tolkien, *The Treason of Isengard* 382).



To conclude, the Orcs are Sauron's servants tasked to find the Ring and bring it back to him. They never get hold of the Ring and they only wish to get it in order to please their master. This is evident in the incident when one of the Orcs who kidnapped Merry and Pippin says he wants to find out where the Ring is, so he can take it to Saruman (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 593-594). Even if they got the Ring, it is likely that they would not use it for their own benefit; they would just rush to take it to their master, Sauron or Saruman, in order to ingratiate themselves with him. The Orcs are not creatures with particularly independent will, hence they are often used as servants, and they probably would not even be aware of the power that is contained within the One Ring. In other words, their lack of character, as they are completely servile to their master(s), makes it impossible for the Ring to affect them.

#### 4.9. Tom Bombadil

Tom Bombadil is a unique being in Middle-earth, known throughout the ages (Tyler 637). Even Tolkien himself states that Tom Bombadil is an enigma, since every mythical story must have enigmas (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 193). His origin is unknown, and his race likewise. It is possible that he is one of the Maiar because of the immense power he possesses, but this is never explicitly stated (Foster 492). When he rescues the four Hobbits at the beginning of their journey, Tom Bombadil himself explains that he is one of the elder beings, not specifying which one:

Eldest, that's what I am. Mark my words, my friends: Tom was here before the river and the trees; Tom remembers the first raindrop and the first acorn. He made paths before the Big People, and saw the little People arriving. He was here before the Kings and the graves and the Barrow-wights. When the Elves passed westward, Tom was here already, before the seas were bent. He knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless – before the Dark Lord came from Outside. (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 172)

As Tolkien explains, Tom Bombadil is necessary in the story because he represents the embodiment of “the spirit that desires knowledge of other things, their history and nature, because they are ‘other’ and wholly independent of the enquiring mind” (Carpenter and Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 209).

Unlike his origin, his physical appearance and his adventures are described in great detail. He is known for his peculiar looks. He wears a bright blue jacket and yellow boots, with

a green girdle and leather breeches. He also has a tall hat with a swan feather in it. He is described as a merry fellow who lives under Hill (J. R. R. Tolkien, *Tales from the Perilous Realm* 175). Treebeard is very fond of Tom Bombadil, and he states that Tom understands trees, but he never interferes in the matters of other people in Middle-earth (C. Tolkien, *The Treason of Isengard* 416). He is known by many other names, besides Tom Bombadil. The Dwarves know him as Forn, the Men in the North call him Orald, and the Elves, who knew him from the First Age, name him Iarwain Ben-adar (Tyler 638).

Tom Bombadil comes in contact with the Ring after meeting the four Hobbits, but he seems to already know about the existence and the proximity of the Ring. He asks Frodo to show him the Ring, which Frodo does willingly, being himself surprised at how easily he gives it to Tom. Tom looks at the Ring and puts it to his eye, at which moment the Hobbits have a vision of his eye gleaming through the Ring, obviously resembling the Eye of Sauron. However, after Tom puts the Ring on his finger, he does not disappear, to the Hobbits' great astonishment. Before returning the Ring to Frodo, Tom makes it disappear for a split second, in which Frodo is convinced that his Ring is gone. Upon receiving the Ring back from Tom, Frodo decides to put it on to make sure it was his ring. He disappears instantly, but after a few moments he realizes that Tom can see him, even though no one else can (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 174). Tom shows no further interest in the Ring whatsoever.

Significantly, already at the Council of Elrond, the idea of giving the Ring to Tom emerges as one of the possibilities to handle it. Elrond thinks that Tom can control the Ring, but Gandalf explains that the Ring merely does not affect Tom, and that he cannot alter it nor destroy it: "Say rather that the Ring has no power over him. He is his own master. But he cannot alter the Ring itself, nor break its power over others" (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 346). Even if he had the Ring, he would not be a safe guardian, since he would not understand the power of the Ring and the need to keep it safe:

"Would he not take the Ring and keep it there, for ever harmless?" "No," said Gandalf, "not willingly. He might do so, if all the free folk of the world begged him, but he would not understand the need. And if he were given the Ring, he would soon forget it, or most likely throw it away. Such things have no hold on his mind. He would be a most unsafe guardian; and that alone is answer enough." (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 346)

The final conclusion of the Council is that the idea to give Tom Bombadil the Ring has many faults, since he will not be interested in such a duty, and, also, he cannot stand against Sauron alone to protect the Ring, which would ultimately lead to the return of the Ring to the Lord of the Rings. Therefore, even though Tom Bombadil is a powerful being, unaffected by the Ring, he can never be a Ring-bearer due to his lack of both interest in and need to interfere in the matters of Middle-earth (Shergold 25). Tom Bombadil's appearance and intervention in the key moment of Frodo's quest is sometimes compared to an angelic intervention from the Bible. Even though this was never confirmed, Tom undoubtedly helped Frodo and the Hobbits by saving them and eventually pointing them, and their quest, in the right direction (Shergold 22).

## 5. Other Corruptive Items in the Works of J. R. R. Tolkien

Along with the One Ring, there are other corruptive items in the works of J. R. R. Tolkien. During the First Age, the most important ones are the Silmarils, which are jewels made by Fëanor. Later on, there is the Arkenstone of the Dwarves and the palantírs. All of the mentioned items influence their owners in a certain way, mostly leading to the corruption of their morality, inciting greed, and pre-existing personality traits in a person. Similarly to the One Ring, they influence their owners, but unlike it, these items corrupt their owners indirectly. The usage, or ownership, of these items often leads to battles, wars, and intolerance, and they embody Tolkien's tendency to use magical artefacts as instigators for the plot.

### 5.1. Silmarils

The Silmarils, also known as the Great Jewels, are three bright jewels created by Fëanor during the Elder Days. Fëanor creates them by combining the luminous phosphor-light, which he gathers in urns, and upon arriving home, bathes various gems in this phosphoric substance. He then combines the gems with the light of the Two Trees of Valinor, which gave light to Valinor, the land of the Valar. Combining the ingredients, he pours them into a perfect glass, creating a jewel of his own. He has made only three of these jewels and named them the Silmarili (C. Tolkien, *The Book of Lost Tales I* 128). The jewels shine on their own and are perceived as the most beautiful jewels of the time. They are also magical, as any impure hand that touched them would get burned and wither. Fëanor adores these jewels, since he gave his heart to them. However, Morgoth also notices the beauty of the Silmarils. Fëanor thus hides the jewels, fearing that Morgoth might take them from him, which pushes him further into

arrogance and greed. Even though Fëanor does his best to keep them safe, Morgoth manages to steal them from Fëanor. Because of this, Fëanor and his sons swear an oath “of enmity for ever against any that should hold the Silmarils” (C. Tolkien, *Book of Lost Tales I* 238), which binds them to hatred and revenge at all costs. It also curses anyone’s desire for the Silmarils to an evil end (Foster 379). The beauty of the Silmarils corrupts their creator and anyone related to them, which leads to many disastrous events, such as the exile of Fëanor and his sons, the burning of the ships at Losgar, and many deaths can be attributed to the Oath of Fëanor. Even the Dwarves’ lust is kindled upon seeing the Silmarils: “Then the Dwarves looked upon the work of their fathers, and they beheld with wonder the shining jewel of Fëanor; and they were filled with a great lust to possess them, and carry them off to their far homes in the mountains” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 279).

After Morgoth steals the Silmarils, he quarrels with Ungoliant, which is a giant spider, an ancestor of Shelob, over them, but manages to save them and place them in his Iron Crown. However, one of the jewels is removed by Beren, who is demanded to do so by King Thingol, in order to marry his daughter, Lúthien. Beren gives the jewel to Thingol, who afterwards, refusing to give it to the sons of Fëanor, asks the Dwarves to put it in a necklace. However, Thingol is killed by the Dwarves who covet the jewel for themselves. The necklace with the jewel in it is retrieved by Beren, and eventually the jewel is set upon Eärendil’s brow, and then in the sky to represent a star signaling hope. The other two Silmarils are removed by Fëanor’s sons, Maedhros and Maglor, who are burned due to their corruption and the Oath of Fëanor. Unable to stand the pain, Maedhros casts himself and the jewel into the fiery abyss. Maglor throws his jewel into the Sea, and thus the Silmarils are lost forever (Foster 452-453).

Even though the Silmarils are not as corruptive as the One Ring, they still manage to enslave their owners in a certain way. That is evident in the case of Fëanor, who is so blinded by greed and arrogance that he swears the Oath, and his sons, who participate in unimaginable evil deeds, just to get their hands on the jewels. Ironically, their unscrupulous behavior provoked by the desire to own Silmarils prevents them from enjoying the jewels, as they are burned due to their corruption. The Silmarils, due to the Oath of Fëanor, are often perceived as the reason for many unfortunate and disastrous events, which were mostly incited by the greed and desire of certain individuals.

## 5.2. Arkenstone

One of the most corruptive items, at least when it comes to Dwarves, is certainly the Arkenstone. Arkenstone is a beautiful white jewel, found by the Dwarves of Erebor deep beneath the Earth (Foster 27). It is considered the greatest treasure and the most prized possession of all the Dwarf-hoards (Tyler 38). The Arkenstone is lost, that is, left behind in Erebor when Smaug attacks Erebor in the year 2770, during the Third Age. The Arkenstone is also called the Heart of the Mountain, or the Arkenstone of Thráin, since it was he that found it. Bilbo sees it when he enters Erebor, as a companion of Thorin and describes it as a white shiny jewel:

It was the Arkenstone, the Heart of the Mountain. So Bilbo guessed from Thorin's description; but indeed there could not be two such gems, even in so marvellous a hoard, even in all the world. Ever as he climbed, the same white gleam had shone before him and drawn his feet towards it. Slowly it grew to a little globe of pallid light. Now as he came near, it was tinged with a flickering sparkle of many colours at the surface, reflected and splintered from the wavering light of his torch. At last he looked down upon it, and he caught his breath. The great jewel shone before his feet of its own inner light, and yet, cut and fashioned by the dwarves, who had dug it from the heart of the mountain long ago, it took all light that fell upon it and changed it into ten thousand sparks of white radiance shot with glints of the rainbow. (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 274-275)

Bilbo is so enchanted by the light of the Arkenstone, and overwhelmed by its beauty, that he immediately takes it for himself, thinking how it can be his part of the treasure that was promised to him. After their reclaiming of Erebor, just before the Battle of the Five Armies, Bilbo decides to sneak out with the Arkenstone and gives it to the leaders of the armies of Elves and Men, King Thranduil and Bard the Bowman. He uses it as an attempt of reconciliation between the Dwarves and the armies besieging Erebor. However, the attempt fails, and the Battle of the Five Armies takes place.

The Dwarf most corrupted by the Arkenstone is the leader of the Company, Thorin Oakenshield. He considers it to be an heirloom of his house, and starts the quest with his loyal companions in order to reclaim Erebor and retrieve the Arkenstone: “‘For the Arkenstone of my father,’ he said, ‘is worth more than a river of gold in itself, and to me it is beyond price.

That stone of all the treasure I name unto myself, and I will be avenged on anyone who finds it and withholds it” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 309). As established earlier, Dwarves are generally a greedy race, and their lust for gold is omnipresent, so it is not surprising that Thorin wants it for himself. After facing the armies of Men and Elves, everyone notices the change in Thorin, who is more arrogant and thinks that he is invincible. Nobody dares to defy him, even though they think he is wrong: “So grim had Thorin become, that even if they had wished, the others would not have dared to find fault with him” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 308). Thranduil and Bard, after they receive the Arkenstone from Bilbo, offer it to Thorin, who is shocked at how they got hold of the jewel. Bilbo decides to confess, hoping that Thorin will see the reasoning behind it, but Thorin is so blinded by rage and greed that he almost kills Bilbo. Ultimately, he decides to just make him leave Erebor, calling him a traitor and a rat. Evidently, the Arkenstone, combined with his Dwarvish nature, turns Thorin into something he is not. Bilbo is his friend, and he is willing to throw him off the rocks, just because he took the Arkenstone. Thorin goes mad with greed and rage, so that he fails to perceive Bilbo’s true intentions.

Unfortunately, during the Battle of the Five Armies, Thorin is mortally wounded. While lying on his death bed, Thorin calls for Bilbo, in order to say goodbye to him, since he realizes the consequences of his actions: “Since I leave now all gold and silver, and go where it is of little worth, I wish to part in friendship from you, and I would take back my words and deeds at the Gate” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 333). Bilbo forgives him, and they indeed part in friendship. After Thorin’s death, the Arkenstone is buried with him because he was the King under the Mountain, at least for a short while.

Much like the Silmarils, the Arkenstone does not corrupt the owners directly, it does so gradually and indirectly. As mentioned before, the best example is Thorin Oakenshield, who changes rapidly when getting close to the Arkenstone. He even wants to kill his friend, and instead banishes him from Erebor, similarly to the way Frodo tells Sam to leave when he is under the influence of the Ring. Even though its influence is indirect, it is still visible. It is possible that the Arkenstone is so corruptive of its owners mainly because its owners are Dwarves who are greedy by nature, and they lust gold and jewels above all else. Be that as it may, the influence of the Arkenstone cannot be denied, but to which extent it will influence the owner depends on the strength of his character.

### 5.3. Palantírs

Palantírs is a term usually used to refer to the eight crystal globes, which were wrought by the Noldor. They are described as perfectly round spheres, varying in diameter, and very heavy:

They were perfect spheres, appearing when at rest to be made of solid glass or crystal deep black in hue. At smallest they were about a foot in diameter, but some, certainly the Stones of Osgiliath and Amon Sûl, were much larger and could not be lifted by one man. Originally they were placed in sites suitable to their sizes and intended uses. Standing on low round tables of black marble in a central cup or depression, in which they could at need be revolved by hand. They were very heavy but perfectly smooth, and would suffer no damage if by accident or malice they were unseated and rolled off their tables. (J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 529)

They are unbreakable by any weapon or act of violence, but some believe that only the fires of Mount Doom can destroy the palantírs. They are used as Seeing-stones, so that the owners can see far and wide, but with certain limitations. Namely, some of the lesser palantírs cannot see into great distance, or are fixed upon a certain direction and cannot be moved. Also, many palantírs show scenes near to another palantír, and only those of strong will can see where and whenever they wish (Foster 397). Generally speaking, the palantírs are used for communication among the rulers who own them, in order to protect their borders (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 780). The visions in the palantírs are difficult to control, and therefore it is said that they can only be properly used by the heirs of Elendil (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 350). During the War of the Ring, the palantírs are under Sauron's control, and are therefore dangerous for anyone to use. The Master-stone remains in the Tower of Avallónë, but the rest are divided. They are being kept in Annúminas, Amon Sûl, and the Tower Hills in Arnor, all three of which are known as the Númenorean realms-in-exile, and the rest are in Osgiliath, Orthanc, Minas Ithil and Minas Anor (Tyler 510).

The Steward of Gondor, named Denethor II, owns one of the palantírs, the Anor-stone. He is the father of Boromir and Faramir, and is described as a stern man: “Denethor II was a proud man, tall, valiant, and more kingly than any man that had appeared in Gondor for many lives of men; and he was wise also, and far-sighted, and learned in lore” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1383). Denethor cannot wait to become the Steward of Gondor, just so that

he can use the palantír because he wants to surpass his father, or even Gandalf, in the amount of knowledge about the outside world, and he even believes that he could become strong-willed enough to control the palantír and make sure that Sauron never uses the Anor-stone for his plans (J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 526-527). However, he begins using the palantír too much, which affects him greatly, and the people of Gondor begin to notice the change in his behavior. They also believe that their Steward can actually see into the future, and that this is the cause for his deterioration in both appearance and behavior:

And the Lord Denethor is unlike other men: he sees far. Some say that as he sits alone in his high chamber in the Tower at night, and bends his thought this way and that, he can read somewhat of the future; and that he will at times search even the mind of the Enemy, wrestling with him. And so it is that he is old, worn before his time. (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1001)

Due to the frequent use of the palantír, Denethor becomes paranoid, and after the devastating death of his son Boromir, he loses control and almost kills his other son. In the end, tormented by grief, Denethor kills himself by setting himself on fire, still holding the palantír: “Casting the pieces into the blaze he bowed and laid himself on the table, clasping the *palantír* with both hands upon his breast. And it was said that ever after, if any man looked in that Stone, unless he had a great strength of will to turn it to other purpose, he saw only two aged hands withering in flame” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1119).

Even Pippin tries to use the palantír, but his motivation is pure curiosity. However, his use of the palantír, although dangerous for Pippin, provides the rest with the insight to the events of the world. By using the Orthanc-stone, and being hurt by it, Pippin reveals to the others that the connection between Isengard and Sauron’s fortress of Barad-dûr is actually the Orthanc-stone, and another palantír, presumably the one in Gondor (J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 524).

Being one of the heirs of Elendil, Aragorn is the only person who can control the palantír. He uses it to meddle with Sauron’s plans, and he is the only one who can control the Orthanc-stone, and point it directly at Sauron: “I am the lawful master of the Stone, and I had both the right and the strength to use it, or so I judged. The right cannot be doubted. The strength was enough - barely” (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1021). He uses his power to reveal himself to Sauron, and to scare him, by showing him the re-forged sword of Elendil, and presenting himself as the rightful heir of Isildur. He wants Sauron to feel fear and doubt (J. R.



R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1022). He also wants to make Sauron focus on Gondor, so that Frodo and Sam can easily hide from him during their journey (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1150).

The palantírs are dangerous and corruptive items. Unlike with the One Ring, the corruption of the owner is indirect, as with the Arkenstone and the Silmarils. However, the palantírs give their owners incredible power to see things far and wide. This power and the lust for more knowledge is what corrupts the owners of the palantírs. Denethor wants to outsmart the people he was jealous of, so he decides to use the palantír not realizing that the things he sees while using it are causing his deterioration. Aragorn is the only one who can use the palantír without getting corrupted by the power it possesses, but even he barely has the strength to do so. This only proves that the palantírs are dangerous tools and should not be used lightly.

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to examine the varying degrees of the One Ring's influence on various characters. The One Ring is a magical artefact that influences each bearer differently, magnifying the power pre-existing in the bearer. The extent of the Ring's influence varies for each person, illustrating the correlation between the Ring's influence and the person's moral strength, along with other personality traits.

Maiar are the most powerful beings in Middle-earth, but they are not immune to the Ring's corruption, as seen with Saruman. Gandalf, however, manages to resist the Ring, knowing that the power within him is far too great for him to be able to use the Ring for good purpose. Elves owned the Rings of Power, but show little interest in the affairs with the One Ring, which is possibly because they are morally the strongest and purest beings. Men proved to be most susceptible to the Ring's influence, as shown by the examples of the Ringwraiths, Isildur, and Boromir. Some Men succeeded in resisting the Ring, which is connected to their strength of character. Hobbits also come in contact with the Ring, Sméagol being the prime example of the Ring's influence, both physically and mentally. Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam, displayed admirable resilience to the Ring, proving that the purity and morality of character play a significant role in the process. Dwarves are naturally greedy, so if they were to come in contact with the Ring, they would most likely use it to acquire wealth. Tom Bombadil is a mysterious character, who seemingly has power over the Ring, that is, the Ring has no power over him. He is content with his life in the woods, and displays a lack of interest in the Ring or the matters of Middle-earth in general. Other beings in Middle-earth, namely Ents and Eagles, never come in direct contact with the Ring, but when given the opportunity, they promptly refuse, claiming not to have interest in it whatsoever. A race entirely subservient to Sauron is surely the race of Orcs, who are also indifferent regarding the Ring. They would possibly use it only to ingratiate themselves with their master, since they exhibit no free will.

Finally, there are other corruptive items in Tolkien's works, the most significant ones being the Silmarils, the Arkenstone and the palantírs. They corrupt their owners indirectly, inciting greed, or in the case of the Arkenstone, the Dwarvish lust for gold. They provide a certain illusion of power to the owners, which slowly corrupts them. They are not as powerful and dangerous as the One Ring, but they are nevertheless important artifacts in Tolkien's literary world.

All this goes to prove that in the works of J. R. R. Tolkien, the influence of various corruptive items, the One Ring in particular, depends on the character of the person who uses them. Each character has his own ambitions and desires, and the One Ring uses those feelings and features to enslave the bearers. To conclude, if a person is morally strong and pure, no corruptive item will be able to affect that person, especially not the One Ring, which only acts upon pre-existing emotions and powers.

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