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Madeline Haddad
University of California, Los Angeles

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“Even Darkness Must Pass”: An Ethical Commentary and Musical Analysis of *The Lord of the Rings* Score

Madeline Haddad

University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)

Abstract

Although Peter Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy film adaptations were considered evolutionary turning points within the film industry, the musical score has not faced similar analysis. In order to truly understand J.R.R. Tolkien’s manifestation within the film adaption, there must be an acknowledgment of how the motifs interplay with or against each other to uncover and exhibit the narrative in such a way that is reflective of the inner moral grounds of the listener. All actions are aimed towards some good, with happiness being the highest Good, according to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. This paper argues that Tolkien reflects this in his own philosophy through his creation of The Lord of the Rings, an epic in its own right. The score of the films follows the precedent set by Richard Wagner, utilizing musical leitmotifs to symbolize certain characters, locations, and themes through various harmonic, melodic, and instrumental differences. This thesis suggests that Howard Shore’s composition of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy soundtrack merges Tolkien’s written word with Peter Jackson’s motion film through an interpretation of ethical theory by leitmotifs, highlighted by differences in orchestration and variation of the musical score, which in turn allow for a process of meta-subcreation to further the narrative’s unfolding destiny.

Keywords: Tolkien, Lord of the Rings, Film, Music, Philosophy

Introduction: Ethics

For Aristotle, all actions are ultimately aimed towards some kind of good. Even if one desires to do evil, this presupposes a value judgement, namely that evil is more good than good. The good is human "happiness," and happiness for Aristotle is not at all the way this term is understood in Western modernity; rather, happiness is defined as *eudaimonia* (Aristotle 2002), which is not a state of pleasure, but a state of human "flourishing." In modern English, it can be basically understood as "a life well-lived." The concept of flourishing is important because flourishing implies a principle of maximum development, to have some sort of potential which is fully actualized. In fact, potentiality and actuality are ideas that Aristotle uses to convey this point. A human person is potentially happy, and then is actually happy. However, any actualization of a potential implies change. So, what is the motor that causes this change? What is the force which catalyzes this change, that makes a human go from potentially happy to actually happy? This force is virtue - the mediation of excesses and deficiencies - and so Aristotle's ethics are often referred to as Virtue Ethics. He defines virtue as "An induction of instances [which] shows that it is a mean between excess and defect; not indeed, an absolute mean, but a relative one; that is, one relative to the internal moral constitution, and to the external circumstances and conditions of the moral agent" (Aristotle 2002).

However one might ask, then, why is that happiness itself an inherent good? The point for Aristotle is not that happiness exists as a standalone, or that happiness is the goal of everything that exists. Rather, happiness is specifically the human end which is to be achieved, and it is this achievement of the end to which one's own nature is inclined which is the real

overarching theme of Aristotle's Ethics (Aristotle 2002). If all actions aim towards some kind of good, then all actions presuppose a value judgement, and thus evil occurs whenever some person wills some kind of good but does so inaccurately. Therefore, when a person commits an immoral action, what they are truly doing is making an incorrect judgement that results in the undermining of their own human dignity through irrational behavior. Just as one does not shoot an arrow with the intention of missing, so too is the presence of evil simply an illusion. All judgements contain within them a judgement of values, even if a person says they prefer evil to good, their preference is an expression of value and thus they are judging that evil is more good than good. The problem is inescapable: all objects with final natures aim towards their own respective good. Just as how irrationality and sin are the motors behind which the conscious intentions of individuals aiming towards the good can go astray, virtue is the motor by which one is aided to achieve true happiness.

Background: Subcreation

Only through defining our place in the moral landscape can we hope to appreciate the rich differences in modes of thought that impact all of our moral presuppositions. On face value, can one relate to the heroism of Gilgamesh or Odysseus as fully as the people of antiquity did? The heroes of antiquity were heroes in ways that might seem brutish, simple, unsophisticated, and vain to us today; in the same way that the people of antiquity would have scoffed at the snarky, self-aware, cynical and overly ironic stories and characters today. How would modern, secular, Western society relate to overly dramatic, overly sincere heroism of King Arthur of the Britons? How would the medieval poets and nobility react to the insincere, dishonorable womanizing of Han Solo? Certainly, fiction is universal. Themes, arcs, and

archetypes persist through all stories from Homer to Wilde, from Chaucer to Goethe, and from Dostoevsky to Rowling. Yet, the exact form of our heroes as conquerors or diplomats, as infallible or complex, as valiant, or witty, depend heavily on the particular ethical makeup of a given society. Thus, the reason we must understand Medieval ethics is to fully grasp the depth of Medieval-styled fiction, specifically, *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien.

It may seem quite strange that many who claim to be nonreligious are enchanted by *The Lord of the Rings*; after all, it is a Christian story. However, the story is not overtly about a Christian world, but is instead suggestive, "one in which the truth as Christians know it has been used as a light to see the world by" (O'Connor 1969, 173). Tolkien's entire philosophy and inspiration for his writings was clearly based on and centered around his Catholic faith, and he believed the story to be a fundamentally religious and Catholic work, unconsciously at first, but deliberately so in the revision (Tolkien 2006, no. 142). Therefore, it follows that the religiosity present in the story was intended by Tolkien to point to the higher truth. Within the worldview of Middle-earth, the setting of Tolkien's story, are an entire collection of religious themes that are manifested in the plot and the characters such as grace, glory, heroism, tradition, humility, resurrection, duty, authority, hierarchy, and eucatastrophe (Kreeft 2005). It is surprisingly familiar that Frodo's undertaking at the Council of Elrond, "I will take the ring…though I do not know the way," (Tolkien 2012, 269) in some way resembles the Virgin Mary's fiat at the Annunciation: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 2005, 1:38). Frodo's trust and faith in some invisible higher power and the Blessed Mother's in God both required an immense amount of grace and humility in order to bring about the events that would completely change both of their worlds.

In relation to this formal cause as well, Tolkien introduces the subject of "subcreation" where man creates in the image of God, using pre-material and arranging it to form something new, just as God has created man and the rest of the universe, material and immaterial (Tolkien 2014). By engaging in acts of creation, humans can participate in God's divine nature as created beings, reflected in the subcreations they make. Just as in the "Primary world" there is a nature and divine-willed structure, so too in created fantasy's "Secondary world" do we see a parallel form. In many ways, this secondary world (Faërie) might be even more "real" than reality of the Primary World, being ever so closer to the imagination and beauty of God and providing an "escape of the captive" from the fallen, brokenness of our world: "They open a door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself, maybe" (Tolkien 2014).

While these structures may be independent of what we make of them, in combination they may have even more significance such as in fantasy, where fairy-stories are written for the purpose of "the satisfaction of certain primordial human desires" (Tolkien 2006, no. 144). Which desires is Tolkien exactly referring to? We may connect this to Aristotelian thought, wherein voluntary human action is aimed at some good, and which all actions collected as a whole toward the Good, happiness. It should then follow that fantasy, in Tolkien's estimation, must be the highest literary art form, as it points towards the highest form of good. Interestingly enough, critics of the genre suppose that fairy stories should only be suitable for children since adults assume that they are naive enough to envision that they are in reality. However, Tolkien believed that there was no better medium for moral teaching than a fairy-story because they allow a deeper glimpse at meanings that are not bound by any time or

place, but that are universal to all (Tolkien, 2014). This belief is biblically based, pointing to the words of Jesus to his disciples: “unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven,” (Matthew 2005, 18:3) and so to fully grasp the structure of “Faërie,” one must become childlike in their seek for happiness.

Background: Film and Metasubcreation

Now that we have looked at the way in which literature is used as a guide to the Good, I will turn to consider how other media art forms, particularly film, serve to distill the concepts of Ethics and Virtue as they relate to Aristotelian philosophy and are informed by Tolkien’s religious grounding. How might film mediate these philosophies at the same scale or even greater scale than the actual literature does? The added visual and auditory elements seem to allow for a more concrete representation of good and evil and in a digestible format for a broader audience. It seems apt that *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy films could be seen as part of an ‘epic.’ Although there are many different interpretations of what defines an ‘epic,’ especially with regards to film, we might consider that “epics can be seen as the embodiments of collective myths and symbols that enable a society to establish its own identity and face its severest tests…the epic film can be seen as an embodiment of aspirations, hopes, fears and other collective emotions and feelings [of a society]” (Santas 2008, 2). Thus, what helps define an ‘epic’ film is not the methods or means by which it is produced, but rather the perception that the audience has of it.

Although every precaution can be taken to include the utmost detail and authenticity of the novels, a film often engulfs its literary version by ordaining a literalness and linearity to the story that may or may not actually be present. Alterations to the story for visual continuity

impose meanings and connotations that are not readily apprehended or evident to a reader. Every person has their own ideas and imagined versions of what the story may be, but after watching the film version, they now experience a limited, definite way of the novel, one that can no longer be subject to many other interpretations. This inherently inhibits the original intent of a story in the first place, to participate in God's divine nature through subcreation. A reader therefore enacts with author in this regard through a tertiary form of creation, which I will designate as "meta-subcreation." Tolkien creates a Secondary World through his narrative and poetry, one that any person can then materialize in their own consciousness, and by doing so they are also participating in the act of creation simply by their mental visualization of Middle-earth, for example. It is evident then, that meta-subcreation is in itself good, as it guides the path to happiness, the highest Good. Thus, a prohibition of this act through the transformation of the narrative to film would violate the quintessential "satisfaction of certain primordial human desires" (Tolkien 2006, no. 144), and therefore resists categorization as "good." So is there a solution to this dilemma? Is there a way in which film, or at least some aspect of it, could provide the ability for the audience to envision their own impressions of the story without obstructing the narrative's "unfolding destiny" (Jorgensen 2010, 44-57)? An answer does not lie in the film itself, nor its conventions, but rather, through its score: the original music for the film.

In order to understand how music provides the foundation for meta-subcreation, we must first consider the ways in which music is understood to have an influence on human character. Is there a connection between the aesthetics and harmonics of music and one's disposition towards right and wrong acts, their capacity for moral rectitude? Aristotle

contextualized the theory of ethos in music by the role it plays in man's existence and in its use in education within the state, or the power of music's effects. Specifically, music imitates, represents, and expresses "characters" in its scales and rhythms. These "characters" form impressions through expression of implicit emotion to the listener, and in turn, leave a lasting impact of the development of the overall character of man (Riethmüller 2008, 169-76). It should be noted that the Greek term "ethos" is commonly translated by another Greek word "charassein" or "character" which means to etch or engrave. Certainly, true ethical pursuit requires the formation of righteous character through moral conduct, something that is stable and enduring. This character is formed by the choices made in the midst of changing circumstances, so choice is at the center of the building of character. Free choice is the fundamental requirement for genuine human freedom, and so the idea that music could have a moralizing impact is essential to the proper moral development of an individual. However, it is not only the individual which is connected with moral rectitude. When we aggregate all individuals, the mereological sum is also concerned with mass, collective moral rectitude. This mass aggregate of proper moral development of character is principally the concern of statecraft. Statecraft requires adherence to the ethical character of music and must therefore mitigate the consequences of "unethical" types of music (the devilish connotation of the *tritone* in medieval times, for example), through discouragement or censorship. This kind of philosophical inquiry into aesthetics (the philosophy of dealing with beauty and art) shows itself to be necessary in consideration of the generative impact music has on the character of man.

There is a long history of discourse in which music is intrinsically intertwined with ethics and morality. However, how does its impact on character and the listener's moral rectitude

affect the capacity for meta-subcreation? For that, we must turn to the purpose and conventions of music, specifically, in regard to film. Since the viewer's sensory background is the least susceptible to rigorous judgement, film music is not incidental once we recognize how its effects our perception of the narratives. Instrumentation, melodic, and harmonic changes to a piece of music can all vastly have different impacts on the picture and the interpretations that the viewers may carry away from it. Cultural associations with particular styles imply the cinematic musical codes which are often used to also push a particular meaning or feeling. Most significantly though, is the temporal coincidence of music and the action occurring on screen that evokes emotions from the audience.

There are two terms in which we can define this interaction of music with its corresponding scene: diegetic and nondiegetic music. Diegetic music is referred to as music that issues from a source within the narrative, while non-diegetic music refers to narrative intrusion upon the diegesis (the "space-time universe and its inhabitants referred to by the principal filmic narration"), music that accompanies a scene but is external to the film universe (Gorbman 1987, 21). Whether the music on a film soundtrack is diegetic or nondiegetic, the mood will be felt in relation with diegetic events occurring on screen. However, the functions of diegetic and non-diegetic music can be divergent. In one way, diegetic music can function mainly as sound to expand out the cinematic space , interacting with camera movement. Diegetic music also might perform irony in a more explicit manner than nondiegetic music. Consider, for example, the scene in which Pippin is asked by Denethor to sing while he eats his dinner. As Pippin solemnly sings "The Edge of Night," a piece meant to be sung in happy times, we see contrasting concurrent scenes of Denethor obliviously eating as Faramir charges on

horseback to take back Osgilliath from the Mordor orcs (Jackson 2003, 1:32:19-1:33:22). Pippin's song here plays an ironic commentary on Denethor's callous disposition towards the war, and Faramir's desperate struggle to win his father's approval.

"Home is behind the world ahead

And there are many paths to tread

Through shadow to the edge of night

Until the stars are all alight.

Mist and shadow

Cloud and shade

All shall fade

All shall fade."

EX. 1. Pippin's Song, *The Edge of Night* [i]

By taking music meant as "extranarrative" (nondiegetic) and rendering it diegetic, it can motivate the narration through the naturalization of the music. However, the music in this scene is not completely diegetic. Towards the end of the song, we hear the strings come back in with tremolos to accompany Pippin's singing until they are cut off upon the last sung word, "fade." Since the orchestra is not heard by the characters in the film, and not sourced from the film, it can be considered nondiegetic. What then, is the purpose of nondiegetic music? In this case, nondiegetic music enhances the emotion and supports the cross-cutting – smoothing over the disunity of images – and bringing us back to the diegetic moment on the last word. A film's soundtrack can vastly alter an audience's perception and interpretation of a scene not only

immediately but also influencing the memory for the visual content of the film. Nondiegetic music also has the capacity to promote types of continuity such as thematic, dramatic, rhythmic, and structural continuities (Gorbman 1987, 26). In these cases, the music serves as a bridge among all levels of the narration and can lead us from one level to another. There is a clear process by which non-diegetic music accomplishes these tasks; the foundation for most film soundtracks is settled on themes and thematic continuity.

Current Study: Leitmotifs and Themes

In film music, a theme is defined as "any music — melody, melody-fragment, or distinctive harmonic progression — heard more than once during the course of a film" (Gorbman 1987, 26). More commonly recognized as "theme songs," perhaps, the motifs are repeated throughout the duration of the film to correspond and symbolize either certain characters, places, and ideas. This concept is known as a *leitmotif.*[ii] A musical motif is known as the smallest structural unit of music that possesses thematic identity (White 1984, 26-27), and so the *leitmotif* carries that thematic continuity through its repetition in a work. However, this motif need not be conducted in the exact same way every time it is reproduced. It may be modified in rhythm, orchestration, harmony, or accompaniment, and can even be combined with other motifs to signify development in the film. As long as the original motif is clearly identified, the subsequent appearances are able to easily recall the thematic context in which the *leitmotif* was first heard, and thereby extrapolate on it with new information.

Music imitates physical gestures connotatively and signifies particular emotions in order to transcend the individuality of the represented characters to universal significance. Now, through this does the audience have the capacity to participate in meta-subcreation. With the

presence of *leitmotifs* in the score, they are able to interpret the characters and places in their own way, although they are given guidance through the typical Hollywood film music conventions. Therefore, the *The Lord of the Rings* provides the ability for the audience to envision their own impressions of the story without obstructing the narrative's unfolding destiny through Howard Shore's soundtrack, which exemplifies ethics and morality by its *leitmotifs*, all of which are highlighted by differences in orchestration and variation of the musical score.

The task of transforming the breadth and complexity contained in Tolkien's works in a way that mimics his legacy is no small feat. In order to perform something of this magnitude, Shore would have to create a musical history that in every way reflected the variation and detail that was contained in Middle-earth. Thus, in preparation for composing, he surveyed centuries' worth of Western music for stylistic gems, examined elements of folk music from Celtic, Middle-Eastern, and African traditions, and researched performers and instruments from all over the world (Adams 2010, 2). He even went so far as to invent new instruments where existing ones did not suffice, experimenting with piano wires and variations on fiddles and bowed lutes. Additionally, Shore was able to bring Tolkien's mythology into the film through the extensive choral writing, where the text was taken either from Tolkien himself, adapted from his work, or originally written in a style that resembled his voice. Six of Tolkien's languages were employed to be sung by the performers: Sindarin and Quenya of the Elves, Khuzdul of the Dwarves, Adûnaic and Old English of Mankind, and Sauron's Black Speech of Mordor (Adams 2010, 3). As he was working on the compositions, Shore remarked, "Tolkien wrote so beautifully. I read his descriptions of the natural world and feel so inspired. The music needs to

provide clarity and show you the connections in Middle-earth. But it also needs to lift those words off the page in a purely musical way" (Adams 2010, 4). So these choral texts seemed to require an impressionistic approach where there could be unbroken full passages or specific syllables were isolated and highlighted to synthesize Tolkien's philological sounds and meanings.

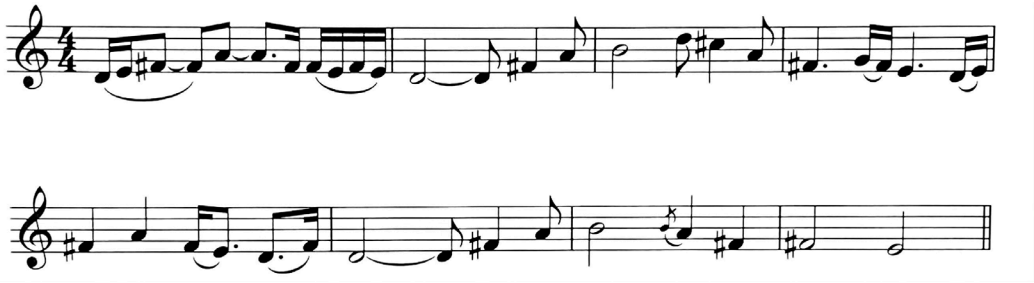
Shore also took on the role of orchestrating, one of the major ways of variating the score through emphasizing musical textures. Although orchestra seemed standard with a typical assortment of strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion, and choruses, the treatment that accompanied it was anything but. He explained, "Orchestration is, in essence, about range. People think it's color, but it actually is range" (Adams 2010, 7). Instead of treating each instrument family separately, Shore divided the entire ensemble by range, regardless of instrument type. Now with the orchestra split into layers of low, middle, and high sounds, each layer included any and all combinations of instruments at any given time, giving the entire ensemble a more cohesive sense of unity. For example, "a high-range chord would underscore a tender moment, but within that single shape of sound resided a multitude or aural details: flutes in octaves, oboes emphasizing inner harmonies, violins clustered six ways, shimmering harp tones, and females' voices" (Adams 2010, 7). This type of orchestration makes sense in this case, where the music parallels Middle-earth in the sense that the entire world possesses a cohesive sound that surrounds its inhabitants.

However, Shore's themes which developed into many leitmotifs were the most closely aligned with Tolkien's writing. What deserved a motif? This question was often asked by Wagner when deciding what was important to the story. Similarly, Shore believed that if

something was important enough to be a motivic principal in the plot, then it got its own motif. In *The Lord of the Rings*, we often see that it is racial groups that receive a motif rather than any specific character. The Hobbits of the Shire have their own theme filled with Celtic hues, the Men of Rohan and Gondor have their own themes set in minor-mode melodies speaking of tragedy and a dawning future, the Elves of Rivendell and Lothlórien have their own themes painted in chromaticism of Eastern-like tones, the Uruk-kai of Isengard have their own theme embellished in industrialism with sounds of metal in hammered percussion and low brass, and of course the One Ring itself has its own theme reflective of the Evil that it endorses. Shore built Middle-earth with over ninety motifs from all these stylistic domains, and each motif was subject to variation with no fixed setting, but with a core of permanent musical colors in each theme that could be recognized amongst the rhythmic changes and altered melodic figurations. These variations could be subtle or so volatile to a point where the essence of the material seemed to be transformed. It is in the subtle changes that the motifs bring the musical world to life, interconnecting the cultural relationships of Tolkien's world and highlighting the central dramatic themes of *The Lord of the Rings*: good and evil, and death and life.

The first major motif set that will be discussed is that of the Hobbits and the Shire. With sweet instrumental tones and simple melodies, the Hobbit motifs suggest a homeliness and safety that is far removed from the Evil rising in the East. The Shire and the Hobbits' way of life are a model of Tolkien's themes, friendship and loyalty, and so by their basic nature, the musical themes easily convey his intentions. Since the melodies are unadorned and flexibly constructed, the capacity for variation is expanded remarkably, allowing for the themes to accompany many differing scenes and moods.

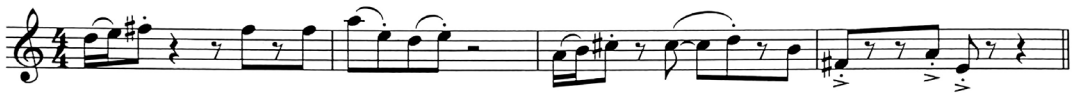
The first setting of the Hobbit theme is heard during the audience's beginning introduction to the Shire, where Frodo sits under a tree waiting for Gandalf (Figure 2). It is manifested classically with the orchestra with a clarinet playing the primary melody, although in other versions it is a solo whistle. Starting with three stepwise pitches up from the tonic in D major, the motif expands across the entire octave and follows a predictable but familiar harmonic progression: I-iii-IV-I-IV-V-I-V. Pentatonic scales in general are commonly found within folk and sacred music in many different cultures, and the Hobbit culture was based off Celtic culture, which also used the pentatonic scale in its folk music as well. The use of consonances, plagal, and imperfect cadences to return back to the tonic preserve the idea of the sanctity of the home, something that was of uttermost importance to Tolkien and consequently the Hobbits themselves. The melody follows a D major pentatonic scale, with the occasional major seventh added as a passing tone.



EX. 2 Reflective Setting of the Hobbit Motif

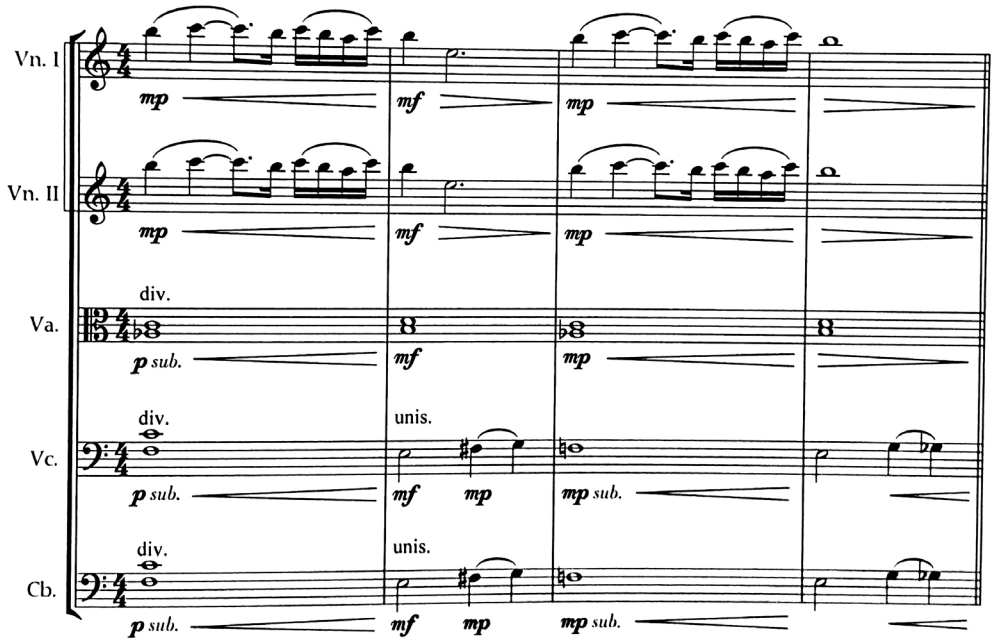
The country setting of the Hobbit motif turns it into a more playful and whimsical variation, one that resembles the Hobbits' disposition and way of life in the Shire since it is heard when we are actually shown the Hobbits going about their daily life in Hobbiton (Figure 3). Shore remarked that they "wanted to feel that the hobbits were playing the music, so it has that quality…Peter Jackson would say, 'Make it hobbity.' He was always conscious of the human

factor" (Adams 2010, 26). With a lighter orchestration and the addition of Celtic folk instruments—including bodhrán[iii], dulcimer, Celtic harp, musette[iv], mandolin, and guitar— the audience is whisked away to the simplicity and happiness of living in the Shire, as all these acoustic instruments were accessible and easy to bring while traveling. While this particular setting of the theme is not repeated again until the very end of the third film because of its strong associations with the life of the Hobbits, the Celtic instruments are carried along through the development of the story to continue the thematic material. The harmonic progression changes into a descending motion of the D major scale: I-V^6-vi-IV-V. With the inclusion of a first inversion V chord, this variation seems almost nostalgic, a revel in simplicity and joy.



EX. 3 The Country Setting of the Hobbit Motif

After the title is shown on screen in the Prologue, we hear the first theme of the One Ring, the History of the Ring (Figure 4). Shore commented that the rise and fall breath like pattern of the motif was so that it would feel "natural," and anthropomorphize the ring (Adams 2010, 15). The motif begins with a raised fourth above an F minor triad, however, the melody itself seems to play out an A minor triad with an added ninth. This added ninth plus the fact that the melody in the first phrase is actually nine notes seems to play significance to the evil of

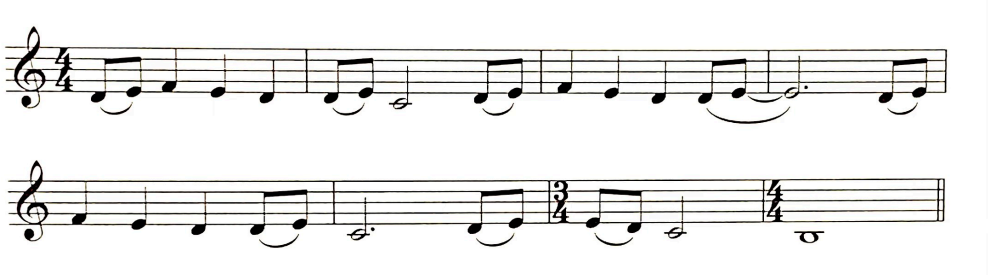


EX. 4 History of the Ring Theme

the nine *Nazgûl* or Ringwraiths. With the A minor triad positioned above the F minor triad, the opposing A♮and A♭mimic the duplicity of the ring itself, redemption or loneliness. The initial half step up before oscillating between the two notes seeks to ensnare the listener and lead them in circular motion (just as the ring itself is circular). However, the dissonances heard are temporarily resolved at the end of the first and second phrases, initially on the first scale degree and then subsequently on the fifth scale degree of an E minor triad. This is befitting to the ring, for the theme tells its history and its seduction for its lie. Violins play out this motif, and their familiarity and simplicity deceive the listener as they are the instrument most similar to the human voice. Thus, by utilizing violins, the Ring attempt to speak and lure anyone who comes near it. As the narrative progresses, the orchestration becomes more complex and the melody of the theme changes according to the plot, but in the beginning of *The Fellowship of*

the Ring the Ring is dormant. The purpose of the History theme, Shore remarked, is to show "how the Ring has traveled from hand to hand" (Adams 2010, 136). Now, the venture into the world of Middle-earth has begun, and the vie for power amongst the forces of evil and Men is ever present.

The Seduction of the Ring Motif represents the Ring's lure and corruption that it brings to its beholder (Figure 5). It is first heard as Frodo and Sam set out for the village of Bree and Gandalf warns him to never put to wear it. However, instead of being sung, it is hummed by a boys' choir. The Ring struggles to seduce the less-corruptible Hobbits, and so we do not hear the fullness of the theme. Through the use of a boy's chorus, there seems to be a suggestion of false purity that the Ring promises its victims. The first three stepwise pitches act opposing the first three stepwise pitches of the Shire theme as they are in a minor mode variation. Although the Shire theme begins on the tonic of D major, the Seduction theme begins on the fourth degree of A minor, which also is D. The B♮ at the end of the line concludes the melody on the second degree of the A minor scale, which also suspends the appoggiatura suggested by the first nine notes of the History of the Ring theme. The lie of the seduction will inevitably lead to the truth of the Ring's history.



EX. 5 The Seduction of the Ring Motif

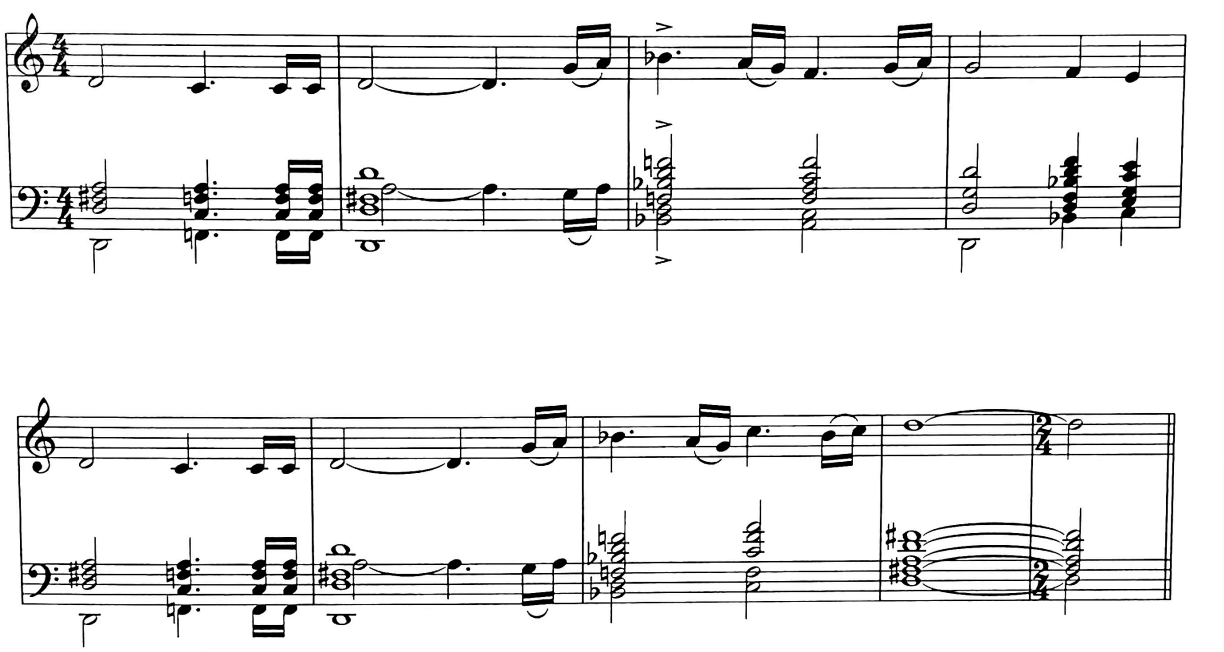
By knowing how important it was for Tolkien to have his characters achieve a moral victory, we can begin to understand what makes the ring so fundamentally Evil. In order to achieve a moral victory, it requires a choice, and choice requires freedom. This is exactly what the Ring takes away: “One Ring to bring them all, and in the darkness bind them” (Tolkien 2012, 50). The purpose of the Ring is to dominate other minds, to enslave them, and to place its own will upon them, thereby taking way the freedom of others to make their own choices, the very freedom that makes heroism and moral victories possible. With a half-step-up/half-step-down circular pattern, the Ring ensnares its bearer and leads them through the downward evil spike, a perfect fifth down. The Ring, of course, is an extension of Sauron, whose only cause is ultimate power and domination. It recognizes no other authority than its creator, which also explains why trying to use the Ring for military achievements is not possible, for this would still lead to a defeat as those under the Ring’s influence will eventually succumb to its corruption and end up a slave under Sauron’s dominion. Sauron’s power is singular, it does not desire friends or allies, it does not work towards the greater Good. It’s an end in itself, like a black hole consuming everything it touches. Instead of building connections, it breaks them. Instead of virtue, it wants obedience. On more than one occasion, this manipulation of the mind happens without the knowledge of those who are being manipulated. The Ring deceives through illusions of grandeur, often by giving its victims the false belief that it can be used for good. For this, it needs darkness, it needs to operate in secrecy, as is symbolized by the power of invisibility the Ring gives its bearer. “We are alone with the Eye. There is no room for two I’s, no room for an Other in the One Ring” (Kreeft 2005). The Seduction of the Ring theme achieves this, with a young boy’s choral it seems as if there is an innocence or purity in the Ring.

However, it is in this isolation that we also find its weakness; for power is limited to itself; it knows force, pride, and selfishness, but not gentleness, humility, and empathy. It knows how to take, but not how to sacrifice. And here is where we find a shimmer of hope; an unexpected advantage, but only we are brave enough to use it. Only if we have the courage to do what's right.

The central story revolves around the Fellowship: destroy the Ring and aid the realm of Men. And so, we hear the beginning of the Fellowship theme as Sam crosses the cornfield with Frodo, and it is played on an English horn and a French horn indicating that the Fellowship has now officially begun to form (Figure 6). As the Hobbits manage to escape Bree with Strider, the theme is reiterated once more, this time fuller than before. Shore notes, "It's the first time you've heard it filled out, but it's still pretty slow. It's not completely assembled, but it's getting closer because now Strider has joined them. The orchestration is fuller—you hear a little more of the brass. In earlier sections with Frodo and Sam you heard one French horn playing. Now there are three" (Adams 2010, 152). It is not until the Council of Elrond, where the Fellowship officially forms to help Frodo carry the Ring to Mount Doom do we hear the theme in its full statement with a crescendo of brass and cymbals.

The first three pitches of the theme follow a whole-step-down/whole-step-up pattern, but the theme for Evil opens with a half-step-down/half-step-up pattern. Each alliance has goals for the fate of the Ring, so it makes sense that they have similar musical form and content, but because they are opposing in these goals, their treatment of the forms is different. The half-step equates with mystery and evil in the History of the Ring theme, while the whole-step equates with its antidote. The first time we hear the down-and-back melodic shape occurs in

the Prologue with Isildur cuts off Sauron's hand. This act ensured the formation of the Fellowship and Isengard even though they did not yet exist. As this figure climbs a D minor scale, both the half-step and whole-step variations are used.



EX. 6 The Fellowship Theme

Sauron's fall was the turning point for all of Middle-earth. The Fellowship theme in its second half is comprised of nine notes, just like how the History of the Ring theme is also comprised of nine notes. Nine was a significant number to Tolkien and thus it appeared frequently throughout his works, so Shore decided to include it wherever he could in his score. Three pitches are articulated in the second phrase of the theme, and they are drawn from the first three pitches of a minor scale, which are quoted directly in the Seduction of the Ring theme, and in a major mode in the Shire theme. These pitches can be thought of as inverted expansion of the score's common down-and-back shape. Between these three themes, there is

a link between the allure of the Ring, the sanctity of the home, and the lengths to which the Fellowship must go to protect and restore Middle-earth.

Conclusion

In *The Silmarillion*, we learn that *The Lord of the Rings* takes place in a universe created by a single God, named Eru Ilúvatar, meaning 'the one,' and 'father of all.' Ilúvatar created the Ainur, his angelic spirits, and all the living beings in Middle-earth and kindled within them the Secret Fire, which can be seen as the gift of an independent existence, containing self-awareness and most importantly, free will. This was the greatest gift given by Ilúvatar because this freedom enables them to participate in Ilúvatar's Music and to themselves assist in subcreating new beauty, and because this gift was so great, no other being that Ilúvatar himself can give it (Dickerson 2003). Just as God himself created us and gave us free will in his image, so too are we able to participate in his divine creation through subcreation. Ilúvatar's sole ownership of the Secret Fire came to great envy of his most powerful Ainur, Melkor, who, like Satan, wanted to replace his creator and take away the gift of freedom. He became Morgoth, the first dark lord, and his chief lieutenant and representative character in *The Lord of the Rings* is Sauron. This reframes the central conflict in *The Lord of the Rings* into one with a greater cosmic significance. In other words, the war is for the soul of Middle-earth, a fight to remain under Ilúvatar's grace, to keep the Secret Fire burning in the hearts of every living creature and not fall under the dominion of a corrupted angel seeking absolute power.

The importance for the characters to achieve a moral victory over a physical one is also a reflection of the spiritual warfare between Ilúvatar and Morgoth. This is significant because it

adds moral objectivism to the world of Middle-earth, meaning that there is a pre-determined concept of what is considered good and evil based on higher forces than ourselves. Striving towards a moral victory therefore not only suggests choice, but also responsibility. As we've seen, responsibility is complicated by the fact that every character is endowed the Secret Fire, and is thus free. Ilúvatar's creations are not compelled to do good. As a consequence, having the courage to resist evil becomes a great virtue, but failing to do so also becomes possible. *The Lord of the Rings* presents a world wherein good and evil are absolutely distinct, but not one wherein good and evil people are absolutely distinct. Tolkien believed that "there's a little good in the worst of us and a little bad in the best of us; but *not* that there's a little good in evil and little evil in good. He believes in human moral complexity but not logical moral complexity" (Kreeft, 2005).

It is clear that the freedom that allows moral choices is most valued in Middle-earth. But what does this mean for Ilúvatar? How does he intervene in the story without compromising this freedom? How does he ensure his beloved creations do not fall into darkness? The first way he shows his guiding hand is by providing the Fellowship with a guardian angel in the form of Gandalf, who is one of the Maiar, the lesser angelic spirits of Ilúvatar sent to Middle-earth in a mortal form. Since Ilúvatar does not want to compromise the freedom of his creations to make their own moral choices, Gandalf's powers are limited; his main purpose is to guide the characters on a spiritual level, not fight their battles for them in the physical realm. This is why Gandalf is never really given his own motif, for he is not meant to be a force but a guide. And that is why we only see him use his magical powers against other higher beings who are corrupted by evil. For although we've been focusing on what is within the power of the

characters, their free will, choices, and virtues, Gandalf also points out what is not within their power. Tolkien separated the virtues from the glorification of war and death in battle; for those require a specific outcome in the physical world, be it a military victory or glorious death, and such outcomes are not for us to decide. That power belongs only to Ilúvatar who is the only one that can see all ends, only he can determine the ultimate fate of Middle-earth. As Gandalf tells Frodo, “All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us” (Jackson 2001, 2:09:02-2:09:06).

Ilúvatar’s hand is however not directly perceivable to the characters, or to us for that matter. It is in this way that he can intervene without compromising the freedom of his creations. The characters are responsible for their own choices, not for the outcome of those choices. Frodo rises and attacks Gollum and they fall over the edge, the ultimate evil ends up being vanquished by accident. Tolkien coined the term ‘eucatastrophe’ to define this sudden hand of fate, which to him was more than a simple happy ending, it was pure grace, the ultimate salvation for the courage, mercy, and selfless sacrifices of Ilúvatar’s children. It also reasserts the theme of moral victories being more important than physical victories, by showing us again what is within our power and what is not. It is within us to be brave, merciful, and virtuous, and that is what Tolkien wanted to emphasize. But it is not within us to see all ends, to decide our fate. Remembering that this was a battle for Ilúvatar’s sole right to such divine power, it becomes understandable that the final glory of the physical victory against Sauron belongs to him and him alone. This parallelism understates that the real battle is between Ilúvatar and Sauron. “The nearly miraculous outcome leaves the reader no room for pride or self-righteousness, as many ‘happy endings’ do” (Kreeft 2005). Tolkien deliberately ended the

story with a eucatastrophe, not to detract from the achievements of his heroes, but rather to emphasize what drives us through hardship and suffering, and that, ultimately, is the belief that no matter how bad things become, there is always hope.

The Lord of the Rings takes place in a pre-Christian world, which is why we do not see any characters praying for miracles or divine intervention. This was important for Tolkien as he didn't want the story to be allegorical, he wanted it to be mythological, he wanted it to reflect a deeper, universal truth. We find this applicability in the simple fact that although one can find and be inspired by Ilúvatar's existence, it's not necessary to believe in, or even know about his presence to reach the same deeper meanings of *The Lord of the Rings*. What matters is that his Secret Fire, his divine light, his hope, exists within the hearts of all his creations. And this we where we find the very essence of Tolkien's work.

We've observed how the Ring's evil is isolating, it creates a darkness of everlasting conflict, betrayal, and loneliness where vulnerability is punished, and all hearts turn to stone. But therein lies its greatest weakness, it cannot open its heart, it cannot be vulnerable, and thus, it cannot hope. For hope does not depends on the power of one, but on the bond between all. This is why Galadriel specifically tells the Fellowship that hope remains while the Company is true. They can face evil as long as there remains love and friendship between them, and such qualities are not about taking, but about giving. Even the quest to destroy the Ring is itself an act of giving, because whereas most stories concern conquering or acquiring something, *The Lord of the Rings* is about returning something, about giving back the evil that does not belong in this world. It is in these acts of sacrifice, be they great or small, that characters find hope. It captures how time and time again characters strengthen each other's

spirit through courage and kindness, loyalty, and friendship. And so, while there's no hope for divine miracles, there is hope for goodness, for courage, and for brotherhood. There is hope that our friends will not abandon us in the face of great evil, that they remain true when all hope seems to be lost. And it is this hope, ignites a fire across mountains, and brings the story to its fateful ending.

Aragorn becomes king, and Middle-earth ushers into a new age of peace, but the victory is not everlasting, no victory over evil is. Eventually, Aragorn will die, and his legacy will slowly fade away. Darkness will find its way into the world again and the entire struggle begins anew. And that brings us back to the importance of mythology. As Frodo closes the book on *The Lord of the Rings*, his adventure becomes a story, his story becomes a myth, and that myth becomes a source of inspiration for countless generations yet to come, ensuring us that no matter what darkness may rise, there is always hope. But above all, *The Lord of the Rings* shows why we need such stories, stories that form a mirror to our hearts, that tell tales of friendship, love, and trust, and affirm that hope is and will always be more resilient than any force of evil. For "in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow…even darkness must pass" (Jackson 2002, 3:22:37-3:22:44).

End Notes

[i] Tolkien had another alternative name for this piece, calling it “A Walking Song,” with the lyrics written by Bilbo to the melody of an old tune. In the books, it is sung by Frodo, Pippin, and Sam just before they see the Black Rider a second time while walking to Crickhollow (Book 1, Chapter III: “Three is Company”). In the film rendition, Pippin sings only the last verse in the halls at Minas Tirith.

[ii] The spelling is actually an anglicization of the German leitmotiv which literally translates to “leading motif.”

[iii] The bodhrán is a frame drum of Irish origin that creates a rich deep sound and requires certain skills and techniques to play.

[iv] A musette is a small bagpipe of French origin played with bellows and has a soft sound similar to an oboe.

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