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**The Path to Ruin : Ambition, Obsession, and the
Death Drive in J.R.R Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*
(1977) and *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-
earth* (1980)**

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Abstract

This study explores the psychological progression from *ambition* to *obsession* and ultimately to the death drive in the characters of Fëanor and Sauron in *The Silmarillion* (1977) and *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* (1980) by J.R.R. Tolkien through a Freudian psychoanalytic framework. The study argues that despite their different moral positions, both characters are governed by similar unconscious drives in which *ambition* gradually transforms into *obsession* and self- destruction. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's concepts of Eros, fixation, repetition compulsion, and Thanatos, the research adopts a qualitative comparative textual analysis of selected passages from both works alongside secondary scholarly sources. The findings reveal that Fëanor represents an impulsive and emotionally driven manifestation of the Death Drive, while Sauron embodies a calculated and systematic form of destructive compulsion, ultimately demonstrating Tolkien's profound psychological exploration of desire, power, and annihilation.

Key Words: ambition, obsession, Death Drive, J.R.R. Tolkien, Fëanor, Sauron

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Dedication

To my precious family and beloved friends, for always supporting me and encouraging me even at my lowest. I dedicate this humble work with all my gratitude and affection.

And to myself, for enduring the pressure, the doubts, and the long nights that made this work possible

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General Introduction

Literature has long served as a medium through which human beings explore the complexities of existence, identity, morality, and the hidden dimensions of the psyche. From classical tragedy to modern fiction, literary texts have consistently reflected the psychological tensions that shape human behaviour and motivation. Among modern literary genres, fantasy literature occupies a particularity significant position, as it transcends ordinary reality in order to address profound philosophical, psychological, and existential concerns through myth, symbolism, and imaginative worldbuilding. Although fantasy was historically dismissed as escapist or juvenile fiction, the genre gradually gained academic legitimacy, particularly after the publication of the works of J.R.R Tolkien, whose legendarium fundamentally transformed modern fantasy literature. Critics and scholars frequently regard Tolkien as the architect of contemporary high fantasy because of the unprecedented depth of his mythology, linguistic invention, genealogical systems, and historical structures (Gordon).

Tolkien's literary legacy expands far beyond his widely celebrated works *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955). While these works have played a pivotal role in securing the author's place as a pioneering figure in modern fantasy literature, they represent only a small portion of his great and vast legendarium. Through works such as *The Silmarillion* (1977) and *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* (1980), Tolkien constructed an extensive mythological universe that explores creation, corruption, morality, *ambition*, power, and decline. Published posthumously and edited by his son Christopher Tolkien, these texts reveal the philosophical and psychological depth underlying Tolkien's legendarium and provide insight into the internal motivations of characters such as Fëanor and Sauron. While Tolkienian scholarship has produced extensive studies concerning mythology, philology, medievalism, religion, heroism, and linguistics, comparatively less scholarly attention has been devoted to sustained psychoanalytic readings of his characters, particularly through a Freudian

¹ Throughout this study, the terms *ambition* and *obsession* are italicized for emphasis and are employed in accordance with a Freudian psychoanalytic framework. Rather than referring to their conventional meanings, these terms designate manifestations of unconscious psychic processes, particularly fixation, compulsive attachment, and the excessive investment of libidinal energy in a specific object or aim.

framework leaving the latent psychological dimensions of *ambition*, *obsession*, and self-destruction relatively underexplored (Butler).

This research therefore seeks to address this critical gap by examining the psychological progression from *ambition* to *obsession* and ultimately to the death drive in the characters of Fëanor and Sauron through Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory in J.R.R. Tolkien's renowned novels *The Silmarillion* (1977) and *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* (1980). Drawing primarily upon Freud's concepts of Eros, fixation, repetition compulsion, and Thanatos as developed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and related psychoanalytic writings, this study investigates how initially productive or creative drives gradually intensify into compulsive and destructive psychic forces. Although Fëanor and Sauron occupy radically different moral positions within Tolkien's narrative structure, one presented as a tragic heroic figure and the other as a tyrannical antagonist, this research argues that both characters are ultimately governed by similar underlying psychic mechanisms. Their trajectories reveal how *ambition*, once detached from moderation and ethical regulation, evolve into *obsession* and culminates in self-destruction.

The choice of this research topic stems from both a personal and an academic interest. J.R.R. Tolkien's works have occupied a significant place in my reading experience since childhood and played a formative role in introducing me to fantasy literature. Beyond their narrative appeal, Tolkien's texts captivated me through the richness of their mythology, the depth of their world-building, and the complexity of their characters.

This long-standing interest gradually evolved into a scholarly curiosity regarding the psychological dimensions of Tolkien's Legendarium, particularly the motivations and inner conflicts of its most influential figures. Among these characters, Fëanor and Sauron stand out for their exceptional ambition, creative genius, and relentless pursuit of their goals. Their psychological complexity makes them particularly suitable subjects for literary analysis.

The decision to adopt a Freudian psychoanalytic framework emerged from a desire to explore the unconscious drives, obsessions, and desires that shape these characters' actions and contribute to their eventual downfall. Freud's concepts provide valuable analytical tools for examining the tensions between creativity, ambition, repression, and self-destruction that characterize both figures. Consequently, this study combines a personal engagement with Tolkien's works and a scholarly interest in psychoanalytic literary criticism to investigate the psychological foundations of two of the most compelling characters in Tolkien's Legendarium.

The central problem addressed in this study lies in the insufficient exploration of Tolkien's characters through a psychoanalytic lens capable of uncovering the unconscious drives motivating their actions. Despite the richness of Tolkien scholarship, limited attention has been given to the progression of psychic drives in characters such as Fëanor and Sauron and to the manner in which Tolkien's mythology dramatizes Freudian concepts of fixation, compulsive repetition and the death drive. Consequently, this dissertation investigates how *ambition* evolves into *obsession*, and how obsessive attachment ultimately produces destructive consequences that align with Freud's notion of Thanatos. It further examines the similarities and divergences between both trajectories, questioning whether Tolkien's representation of heroism and villainy conceals deeper shared psychological structures beneath moral distinction.

Accordingly, this research raises several interconnected questions concerning the psychological dimensions of *ambition* and *obsession* in Tolkien's characters. First, how does Tolkien represent *ambition* in the characters of Fëanor and Sauron, and in what ways does this *ambition* evolve into *obsession*? Second, to what extent can Freud's theories of fixation and repetition compulsion explain the psychological development and behavioural patterns of these characters? Finally, how does the death drive manifest differently in Fëanor and Sauron, despite ultimately leading both figures toward self-destruction and ruin?

Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative and comparative textual approach grounded in Freudian psychoanalysis. Selected passages from *The Silmarillion and Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* are closely analysed in relation to Freud's psychoanalytic concepts, particularly the life drive, fixation, repetition compulsion, and the death drive. The study also relies on secondary academic sources from Tolkien studies and psychoanalytic literary criticism in order to contextualise and support the analysis. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the research aims to demonstrate that Tolkien's mythology not only constructs epic narratives of conflict and power, but also presents profound psychological explorations of desire, excess, and self-destruction.

J.R.R Tolkien's works have always been of great importance in the academic world, While much prior research have been conducted on Tolkien's books, mainly *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) and *The Hobbit* (1937) , emphasising on the philological, theological, and historical dimensions of Middle-earth, the psychoanalytic aspect is often neglected. Among the studies that do adopt a psychoanalysis lens, scholars have predominantly employed Jungian and Lacanian frameworks, whereas Freudian psychoanalysis has relatively received little attention.

Studies on Fëanor has predominantly centred on his mythological and creative significance. In his "Mythlore article The Tale of Noldor" (1977), Paul Kocher presents Fëanor as the quintessential Noldor whose unimaginable hand and mind produced the Silmarils, Palantir, and Tengwar, particularly emphasising on his achievements and portraying him as one of the most brilliant and imaginative figures who contributed immensely in shaping the history of Middle-earth. While this emphasises Fëanor's creative genius and leadership, Kocher does not interrogate the psychological drives and inner compulsions that underpin his actions.

Richard J. Whitt, on the other hand, in his article "Germanic Fate and Doom in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*" (2010), situates Fëanor within a Germanic framework of fate and

doom, arguing that the creation of the Silmarils sets into motion a sequence of events that inevitably brings tragedy and devastation upon his people. Whitt emphasises that Fëanor's act of creation, inspired from the light of two sacred trees, Telperion and Laurieth, functions not merely as an artistic achievement but as the narrative catalyst for loss, destruction, and the unfolding of collective tragedy in Valinor and beyond. While this reading effectively illuminates the narrative structure and theological dimensions of the text, Whitt does not examine Fëanor's internal psychological motivations, leaving his compulsive tendencies untheorized.

Together, these sources reveal that while Fëanor's creative and mythological significance is thoroughly documented, the internal psychological dynamics of his *ambition* remain unexplored, leaving a space for Freudian analysis.

Sauron's character has been extensively examined, but psychological analysis is largely absent. Gwennyth Hood, in "Sauron and Dracula" (1987), identifies Sauron's primary weapon as psychological domination, functioning through the imposition of false visions that incapacitates his victims and distort their perception of reality. Hood emphasises that Sauron's power lies in his capacity to replace the natural, individual, and personal vision of his victims with his own corrupted perspectives, thereby trapping them within a state of torment and mental subjugation. She further suggests that Sauron's drive toward domination becomes a consuming passion that at times overrides strategic rationality, ultimately leading him to actions that ultimately undermine his own cause. In a later article, "Sauron as Gorgon and Basilisk" (1987), Hood distinguishes between the Gorgon effect, which imposes a fatal false vision, and the Basilisk effect, which enables domination through perception and the controlling gaze. Although these readings aim toward an understanding of Sauron's psychological mechanism, they do not employ psychoanalytic theory to analyse his latent drives and compulsions, and unconscious motivations.

Other approaches grounded in monster theory conceptualise Sauron as a manifestation of spiritual rather than corporal evil, emphasising his role as an abstract and pervasive force, as seen in Joe Abbott's article "Tolkien's Monsters: Concept and Function in The Lord of the Rings (Part III): Sauron", Cameron Bourquein's article "Wizard, Demon, Cat; Reformer, Satanist, Bureaucrat: a Diachronic Analysis of Three Modes of Sauron in the Legendarium in Light of *The Book of Lost Tales*.", and Bo Kampmann Walther's chapter "Sauron's Sliding Door: The Diffraction of Mythological and Intimate 'Evil' in Tolkien.". However, while these studies provide valuable insights into the nature of Sauron's power, they largely neglect the underlying psychological processes that drive such domination, particularly the transformation of *ambition* into obsessive fixation and its eventual alignment with destructive impulses.

While existing scholarship had extensively explored Tolkien's characters through themes of power, free will, myth, and morality, little attention is given to the psychological progression that underlies their action. This research suggests an engagement with its psychological terrain, precisely through the application of Freudian psychoanalytic theory on two pivotal characters from Tolkien legendarium, Fëanor and Sauron, through a close reading of two of his most underrated works *The Silmarillion* (1977) and *Unfinished Tales of Númenor, and Middle-Earth* (1980). This gap highlights an opportunity to approach Tolkien's complex characters through a Freudian perspective, offering new insights into their drives, desires, and psychological constructions.

This research paper is divided into two main chapters in addition to the general introduction and conclusion. The first chapter is devoted to establishing the theoretical and contextual framework of the study. It introduces the major concepts of Freudian psychoanalysis, particularly *ambition*, *obsession*, repetition compulsion, and the death drive, while also presenting the literary and historical background of Tolkien's legendarium and the posthumous publication of *The Silmarillion* (1997) and *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*

(1980). The second chapter consists of a thorough psychoanalytic analysis of the characters Fëanor and Sauron through close textual readings from both works. It examines the progression of *ambition* into *obsession* and ultimately into self-destruction, demonstrating how both characters embody distinct manifestations of Freud's concept of the death drive despite their different moral positions. Finally, this study concludes by synthesising the findings of the study and highlights the significance of psychoanalytic criticism in the interpretation of Tolkien's mythology.

Chapter I

Between Myth and Mind: Tolkien's Legendarium
Through a Freudian Lens

The following chapter will be dedicated to establishing the theoretical and contextual framework necessary for the subsequent analysis of J.R.R Tolkien's novels *The Silmarillion* (1977) and *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* (1980). It begins by outlining the core principles of Freudian psychoanalysis, with particular emphasis on the life drive (Eros) and the death drive (Thanatos), in addition to the psychological mechanisms which emerge from their interplay: *ambition* and *obsession*. The chapter also includes an overview of Tolkien's long lasting influence on literature and the socio-historical situations of the United Kingdom during the publication of the two books. Finally, a biography of the author is provided, alongside summaries of the two selected books *The Silmarillion* (1977), *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* (1980)

1. Theoretical Framework: Freudian Psychoanalysis as a Literary Lens

Literary works are one the most intricate and intellectually profound forms of art. Their depth offer multiple layers of meaning and interpretation, resulting in scholars approaching them through a wide range of theoretical frameworks including Psychoanalysis, which enables an extensive exploration of characters' motives and underlying psychological structure.

Emerged in the early twentieth century, Psychoanalytic theory is one of the most prominent critical approaches in literary studies. It seeks to look beyond human behaviour and delve into the underlying drives and motives that shape humans' and literary characters' behaviour. Implementing this theory to literature enables critics to comprehend and interpret characters as complex psychological entities, whose impulses and motivations are driven by latent and underlying forces and unresolved tensions engulfed in the unconscious. By probing beneath surface narrative, this method "uncovers the emotional intensities, symbolic displacement, and identity crises that animate literary form" (Almaarroof 6).

Sigmund Freud is universally renowned as the founder of Psychoanalysis; his foundational works have immensely contributed in establishing the conceptual framework upon which psychoanalytic literary theory was built. His theories of the unconscious, repression, the structural model of the psyche (Ego, Id, Superego), and the interpretation of dreams, provided critics with tools for understanding literature as a symbolic expression of hidden desires and conflicts.

2.1 Foundational Concepts of Freudian Metapsychology

Sigmund Freud's concept of metapsychology refers to a theoretical framework that explains mental processes beyond observable behaviour by analysing them through dynamic, topographical, and economic dimensions of the psyche (Laplanche and Pontalis). This model emphasizes the role of psychic energy and the conflict between underlying drives in shaping human behaviour. In his later work, particularly *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud introduced a dualistic theory of motivation based on the interaction between Eros (the life drive) and Thanatos (the death drive), which together explain the tension between creation and destruction within the psyche (Freud). Within this framework, behaviours such as *ambition*, *obsession*, and Aggression (outward expression of the death drive), can be understood as expressions of these underlying forces.

2.2 Eros and the Life Drive: The Instinct toward Preservation and Creation

In Freudian psychoanalysis, Eros, also known as the libido, libidinal energy, or love, represents the life instinct innate in all human beings. Freud describes the life drive as the fundamental life-preserving force, which triggers human's needs for protection, survival, and reproduction (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 50). The conceptualisation of this idea is first introduced in his renowned work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), where he states that: "The instincts which watch over the destinies of the elementary organisms, which provide

them with a safe shelter while they are defenceless against the stimuli of the external world, which bring about their meeting with other germ-cells, and so on—these constitute the group of the sexual instincts. They are the true life instincts” (Freud 34). This drive represents the instinctual foundation of life itself, rooted in preservation, continuity, and creation. In this regard, what Freud identifies as Eros (the life instincts) or the sexual instincts extend beyond physical desire and instead includes a broader impulse toward productivity, growth, and the sustaining of existence. When this instinct goes through the process of sublimation, this instinctual energy is transformed into socially valued pursuits, and that includes artistic creation and intellectual achievements.

2.3 Ambition as Sublimation: The Constructive Expression of Eros

Within a Freudian framework, *ambition* may be understood as a manifestation of the Eros (the life drive), which represents a fundamental force oriented toward creation and preservation. Rather than remaining confined to biological or sexual expression, this instinctual drive may be redirected into socially valued achievements, a process Freud defines as sublimation. *ambition* in this sense can be viewed as not merely a desire for success but one of the most prominent expressions of the Eros. In *On Narcissism: An Introduction* (1914), Freud establishes a theoretical framework which enables us to interpret *ambition* as a sublimated expression of Eros. He further explains how primal life drives may be redirected toward socially valued achievements, stating that “Sublimation is a process that concerns object-libido and consists in the instinct's directing itself towards an aim other than, and remote from, that of sexual satisfaction; in this process the accent falls upon deflection from sexuality.” (94). this process highlights how *ambition* emerges as a constructive transformation of instinctual energy, while also suggesting the potential for this drive to intensify beyond its productive function, becoming excessive or even obsessive. Thus, while *ambition* initially reflects the creative power

of Eros, it also carries the potential to exceed its constructive function, hinting at an underlying instability within the psyche.

2.4 From Fixation to Compulsion: Obsession and the "Daemonic" Force

While *ambition* originates as a constructive expression of the life drive, it may, when intensified beyond its productive limits, evolve into a more rigid and compulsive form of attachment. According to Freud, this process can be understood through the concept of fixation, which refers to persistent psychological attachment to a particular object or desire. Such fixation often manifests in repetitive and compulsive behaviour, limiting the individual's ability to detach from the source of investment. Freud describes the compulsion to repeat as possessing a quality that transcends psychological explanation: "The manifestation of a compulsion to repeat...exhibit to a high degree an instinctual character and, when they act in opposition to the pleasure principle, give the appearance of some 'daemonic' force at work" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 29). The "daemonic" quality reflects the instinctual nature of repetition. The obsessive individual feels compelled and possessed because the repetition, thus *obsession*, is driven by force beyond conscious control. As a result, what initially appears as productive *ambition* gradually shifts into *obsession*, characterised by an overwhelming focus that dominates thoughts and actions, ultimately acquiring a destructive dimension that exceeds its original constructive purpose and paves the way for the operation of the Death Drive (Thanatos).

2.5 Thanatos and the Destructive Instinct: The Return to Inertia

Introduced in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the Death Drive (Thanatos), according to many scholars, represents one of Freud's most controversial and philosophically ambitious concepts (Laplanche and Pontalis 97). Whereas Freud had previously understood human motivation primarily through the pleasure principle and the conflict between sexual and self-preservation

instincts, the death drive introduces a more radical perspective, suggesting that all organic life is inherently driven toward its own dissolution. In this regard, Freud explains: “it seems, then, that an instinct is and urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things...the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life” (30). This concept, which Freud also termed “the destructive instinct”, provides a framework for understanding aggression, self-destructive behaviour, and most importantly, the compulsive repetitive patterns that characterise *obsession*. In this sense, the repetitive patterns observed in obsessive states can be interpreted not merely as psychological fixation but as manifestations of the death drive itself. The individual driven by forces beyond conscious control becomes trapped in cycles of behaviour that no longer serve constructive purposes but instead lead toward destruction. Thus, what originates as *ambition*, rooted in the Life Drive, ultimately culminates in a form of psychological and symbolic disintegration governed by the Death Drive.

3 Literary and Historical Context: Fantasy’s Marginalisation and Revival

In the mid-late 1970s, fantasy was not considered a prestigious genre; instead, it was dismissed as children literature and escapist pulp, frequently dismissed (Gordon). However, Tolkien’s works, particularly *The Lord of the Rings* (1954), paved the way to other authors, and even helped create and make the fantasy genre a recognised commercial category, recognised in an academic contexts (James). The post-war decades saw a gradual shift in the perception of fantasy, but it was not until the publication of Tolkien’s major works that the genre began to acquire cultural and commercial legitimacy.

Following the extraordinary success of J.R.R Tolkien’s renowned novels *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954), people developed an enduring fascination with the vast mythopoeic legendarium, which extended beyond the published narratives. The two works did not only secure Tolkien’s place within the twentieth century literature, but it has also resulted

in the increase of the fans' curiosity and a sustained demand for further access to the depth of the universe. Captivated by the depth and richness of Middle-earth's history, readers sought to know more and to read more about the legendarium even after J.R.R Tolkien's death in 1973.

In response to the readers' demands, Christopher Tolkien committed himself to continue his late father's legacy and undertook the formidable task of editing, assembling, and organising unpublished manuscripts, drafts and fragmented narratives left by J.R.R Tolkien. It is through his devotion that works such as *The Silmarillion* (1977) and *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* (1980) were published, allowing the readers to delve deeper into the legendarium and unravel the complex architecture of his father's imaginative world.

By the time *The Silmarillion* (1977) and *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* (1980) were published in the mid-to-late 1970s, the trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* has become a cultural phenomenon especially among university students (Dombrovskiy and Khazano 124-133). This popularity was closely tied to the socio-cultural situation of that period. The mid-1960s witnessed an explosion of Tolkien's popularity in the United States, driven by the availability of inexpensive paperback editions. By 1966, *The Lord of the Rings* was the top-selling paperback in the country, with three-quarters of a million copies in print. Students across American campuses adorned themselves with buttons reading FRODO LIVES and GO GO GANDALF. The "Frodo Lives!" campaign, as scholar Alexander John Sergeant argues, became a widespread social phenomenon of counter-cultural disobedience, reaching its zenith throughout the mid-to-late 1960s and functioning as a psychosocial symbol of youthful dissent and alternative values (103-118). In an era marked by political unrest, youth protest movements, and dissatisfaction with modern industrial society, Tolkien's works resonated with readers who were exploring alternative worldviews and new modes of imaginations rather than merely seeking escapism (Barker). Their appeal was further strengthened by the profound, ancient, and

morally complex mythology of the legendarium, which helped establish a new model for modern fantasy literature (Williamson).

The connection between Tolkien's mythology and the counterculture was not merely superficial. Scholars P.A. Dombrovskiy and O.V. Khazano have demonstrated that the writer's creativity became a fantastic allusion to modern and recent historical problems of society, such as the Vietnam War, the cult of consumption, environmental damage, and the fight for civil rights (124-133). Through the prism of the interaction, they reconstruct a layer of counterculture mythology in which the merging of "Tolkinism" (the writer's creativity and outlook) with protest ideas produces new ideological aspects reflected in slogans, signs, and street art of the period (Dombrovskiy and Khazano 124-133). At the same time, caution is necessary, while Tolkien works resonated powerfully with sixties youth, readings that interpreted them as direct allegory for Vietnam or other contemporary events are misguided, as Tolkien himself rejected allegorical interpretation (Watkins). The resonance lay instead in applicability, the ability of readers to find personal and political meaning within a mythic framework without reducing the narrative to a one-to-one correspondence.

The major success of *The Silmarillion* (1977) and *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* (1980) led Christopher Tolkien to publish 12 volumes of *The History of Middle-earth* (1983-1996), *The Children of Húrin* (2007), *Beren and Lúthien* (2017), and *The Fall of Gondolin* (2018) unravelling more of the depth and the complexity of the myth creation, language creation and genealogies previously established by his late father (Tolkien; Carpenter). This dense and consistent model is now the standard template taught to fantasy writers; therefore, authors continue, to this day, to adhere and draw upon the same structural framework, and that includes the renowned George R.R. Martin writer of the series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-2011) and J.K. Rowling writer of *Harry Potter* (1997-2007), as well as more contemporary writers such as Sarah J. Maas.

4 J.R.R. Tolkien: Life, Faith, and the Forging of a Legendarium

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, alias J.R.R Tolkien, was a distinguished university professor, poet, historian, writer and philologist. He was born in Bloemfontein, South Africa, on January 3, 1892 to English parents Arthur Reuel Tolkien and Mable Suffield. At the age of three, he, alongside his mother and brother, went back to their homeland, England, while his father remained in South Africa where he died one year later. He spent most of his childhood in the Warwickshire countryside, in the embrace of the landscapes and Nordic mythology of the Midlands, which have served as the fertile ground for his imagination. Tolkien could read fluently at the age of four and write soon after. Despite his young age, he possessed the talent of drawing and adored sketching landscapes and trees, but his interest was always drawn towards languages. Later, he would attend King Edward's School in Birmingham, where he expressed immense interest in studying languages including Latin, old English, Old Norse, Greek, Spanish and Gothic. Tolkien, while still a child, has made up many languages including early variations of Elvish which he later on used in most his writings. The fees of his school have eventually become a burden to his mother; hence, he was moved to St. Philips's school at the age of 10 but later was given a scholarship at his old school due to his outstanding intellect and his excellent mastery of languages.

In 1900, his mother converted to Roman Catholicism, which played a pivotal role in Tolkien's intellectual and spiritual journey. Having experienced isolation, poverty and many hardships due to his mother's conversion, Tolkien has learned from a very young age the spiritual nobility of endurance, that shaped his moral anchor and his unshakable faith. By the age of 12, Tolkien has already lost both his parents and was orphaned; he and his brother became wards of Father Francis Xavier Morgan. At the age of 16, Tolkien met one of the most significant persons in his life, Edith Bratt, with whom he fell in love. At 19, he earned a

scholarship to study English Language and Literature at Oxford where he graduated four years later with first class honours, and married Edith Bratt shortly after.

After few months of his happy marriage, Tolkien had to be separated from his wife because of World War I, which was happening at that moment in 1916. He joined the war and was sent to fight in the disastrous trenches of France. He barely spoke of his war experiences, but many were told through the events of his famous trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) (Jackson). Tolkien began the writing of the first drafts, which will later become *The Silmarillion*, in 1917, in a field hospital, while recovering from a trench fever (Carpenter 67). Unlike *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, the writing of *The Silmarillion* had no structural plan on how it will begin and how it will end; it contains crucial lore about how the universe, which he named Eä, came to be, and invaluable information about the Valar, the Maiar, and the Firstborn. After the success of *The Hobbit* in 1937, Tolkien attempted to publish *The Silmarillion*, but its mythological depth and its complexity ultimately led to the publisher to decline publishing the work, and instead requested a sequel about hobbits, a project that would later on evolve into *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955). Tolkien kept revising and expanding *The Silmarillion* throughout his entire life until his death on September 2nd 1973. Therefore, the manuscripts of the novel were a mass of conflicting drafts, incomplete narratives, and evolving ideas, not quite near from being ready to publish. Christopher John Reul Tolkien took the rigorous work of editing the countless drafts and make them into one coherent book with the assistance of the fantasy writer Guy Gavriel Kay. *The Silmarillion* was finally published four years after J.R.R Tolkien's death, alongside many other works, including the twelve volumes of *The History of Middle-earth Series* (1983–1996), *The Children of Húrin* (2007), as well as other publications beyond the legendarium such as *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary, together with Sellic Spell* (2014), *The Fall of Arthur* (2013) and many other scholarly and literary works.

J.R.R Tolkien's works had earned him many awards: International Fantasy Award (1957), during his life, in addition to posthumous awards including Locus Award (1978): Best Fantasy Novel for *The Silmarillion*, Gandalf Award (1974 & 1978), and Mythopoeic Fantasy Award (1981): For *Unfinished Tales*. And his legacy persists and his influence endures hitherto.

5 Synopsis of *The Silmarillion* (1977) and *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* (1980)

J.R.R Tolkien is known for his outstanding high fantasy writings, mainly for his famous novels *The Hobbit* (1937) and the trilogy of *The Lord of The Rings* (1954-1955). While many fans and enthusiasts showed immense interest towards the previously mentioned novels, less attention is given to other J.R.R Tolkien's works like *The Silmarillion* (1977) and *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* (1980).

The Silmarillion (1977) is considered the bible of J.R.R Tolkien; it contains crucial foundational information about his legendarium. It is not a single novel but a collection of five parts. The core part is the Quenta Silmarillion (The History of the Silmarils), the longest part which consists of more than twenty chapters; the creation myth Ainulindalë, the descriptions of the gods in the Valaquenta, the story of the downfall of the great island civilization in the Akallabêth (fall of Númenor), and a connecting essay "Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age". The book covers the first age of Middle-earth, narrating the story of Eru Ilúvatar (the God), who together with the Ainur (the archangels), brought the world of Eä into existence through the song of creation. Also, it introduces the appearance of the first evil entity, the Ainur Melkor, who later become the architect of most dreadful events of the coming ages. The book also tells the story of the awakening of the children of Ilúvatar, the Firstborn, mainly known as the elves, and the Secondborn (Men), alongside other species, which will come to exist in Arda such as the Orcs, the Dwarves, the Ents, and many other species. The work narrates the tragic

events surrounding the Silmarils, the three jewels which contain the light of the two sacred trees of Valinor, forged by Fëanor and stolen by Melkor. In addition, the story revolves around the elves and their struggles in defeating the evil wreaked by Melkor the Ainur and his most loyal servant Sauron, whom he managed to deprave and corrupt in the first-age of Middle-earth.

Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth (1980), unlike *The Silmarillion*, is a collection of fragmented narratives and manuscripts written by J.R.R. Tolkien and later edited by his son Christopher Tolkien, and published in 1980. It contains indispensable information about Middle-earth providing a deeper insight of the characters and the events that took place in the first, second, and third ages. The book also expands Tolkien mythology, which is highly influenced by Finnish literature, more specifically the Kalevala that inspired him in tackling themes of fate, tragedy, heroic downfall and destruction.

The book is divided into four parts, the initial part could be considered an extension of *the Silmarillion*, containing expanded stories from the latter and including more details about its characters and events. The second part, the most crucial part for my research, focuses on Númenor and telling the story of the rise and fall of the island, as well as the rise of Sauron, as the antagonist of the second ages and his wicked scheming and manipulation which led to devastating events in Middle-earth. The third part of the book refers to the third age, narrating stories related to *The Lord of the Rings* era like the creation of the one ring and the war of the last alliance of men and elves against the forces of Mordor. The fourth and last part of the book comprises a variety of explanatory texts, linguistic notes, historical clarifications, and essays revealing the construction of Tolkien's legendarium intellectually, not just narratively.

6 Conclusion

This chapter has laid the essential groundwork for the present study by introducing the author J.R.R. Tolkien through a biographical overview, followed by the synopses of the two

books *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*. Furthermore, this chapter has established the theoretical framework which will structure the subsequent analysis, by providing the conceptual tools necessary to examine the selected characters: Fëanor and Sauron, thoroughly and in depth. By integrating these elements, the study may now proceed beyond contextualisation and engage in a more critical and interpretive analysis of the latent psychological dimensions of the selected characters, Fëanor and Sauron.

Chapter II

The Psychology of Ruin: Fëanor, Sauron, and
the Death Drive

1. Introduction

After having established the theoretical framework of Freudian psychoanalysis and the literary-historical context of Tolkien's posthumously published works in the previous chapter, this chapter proceeds to a close reading and analysis of selected passages from *The Silmarillion* (1977) and *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* (1980). The analysis focuses on the psychological trajectories of characters whose actions illustrate the transition from productive *ambition*, rooted in the Life Drive (Eros), to destructive *obsession*, governed increasingly by the Death Drive (Thanatos). Central to this investigation are the characters of Fëanor and Sauron. Fëanor is presented as a tragic hero, flawed and prideful yet noble and gifted, the best elven smith, forger of the Silmarils, and whose unrelenting pursuit of these jewels resulted in so much tragedies and devastating wars during the First Age. Parallel to this portrayal is the figure of Sauron, the fallen Maiar, who is presented as calculative, corrupt and utterly malevolent. Yet beyond this moral dichotomy, this chapter argues that despite being framed as a tragic hero (Fëanor) and a villain (Sauron), both figures are governed by the same latent psychological impulses. This study, therefore, seeks to move beyond reductive notions of good and evil, unravelling how these shared drives are ultimately articulated through divergent moral frameworks.

2. Ambition as a Psychological Motivation

2.1 The Development of Fëanor's Ambition

The concept of *ambition*, in Freudian psychoanalysis, has not been theorised as a standalone concept, instead it may be understood as a sublimated expression of the life drive, Eros, wherein primal libidinal energy is redirected toward socially valued achievements such as creation, mastery and legacy (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*). However, when intensified beyond productive limit *ambition* begins to turn and detach from rational aims and align with compulsive psychic structures. This dynamic is particularly evident in Tolkien's

representation of Fëanor, whose *ambition* exceeds creative fulfilment and develops into obsessive compulsion that reflect deeper psychic drive toward perfection, control, and permanence. In *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien writes: “He became of all Noldor, then or after, the most subtle in mind and the most skilled in hand...; and he it was who, first of the Noldor, discovered how gems greater and brighter than those of the earth might be made with skill” (64). This passage reveals how Fëanor’s *ambition* is initially constructed as an exceptional intellectual and creative force. His ability to create gems “greater and brighter than those of the earth” shows his transgressive impulse to transcend natural limits and excel in his craft. This moment, also foreshadows how this *ambition* could exceed its original purpose and move toward a more excessive self-consuming form. Tolkien further shows that Fëanor’s *ambition* is not a circumstantial desire but an inherent condition of his being, by emphasising that “Fëanor was driven by the fire of his own heart only, working ever swiftly and alone...” (67). For this reason Fëanor was referred to as “Spirit of Fire” (71), suggesting that his *ambition* runs deeper and exceeds ordinary creative inclination.

Fëanor has a consuming need to create more and surpass his previous creations, always seeking perfection and the unattainable: “...; and he pondered how the light of the Trees, the glory of the Blessed Realm, might be preserved imperishable. Then he began a long and secret labour and he summoned all his lore, and his power, and his subtle skill; and at the end of all he made the Silmarils” (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 68). This process of creation is not merely technical but increasingly personal as Fëanor grew attached to his creation. The Silmarils, therefore, became inseparable from the self, marking a shift from creative *ambition* toward a more possessive and internally driven relation to his work. This is evident in the following passage: “The heart of Fëanor was fast bound to these things that he himself had made” (69). Such attachment suggest that his creative drive no longer operates within the limits of

productive *ambition* but begins to exceed them as the inability to detach from his creation indicates a growing internal compulsion.

2.2 The Evolution of Sauron's Ambition

The same Freudian framework applies to Sauron but with a crucial difference. While Fëanor's *ambition* lies in the internal creative force that gradually exceeds its limit and leads to fixation upon his creation (The Silmarils), Tolkien presents a fundamentally different configuration of *ambition* in the character Sauron whose *ambition* is grounded in a desire for order and total control over the structures of the world and all living beings. To reach his ambitious ends, Sauron resorted to all sorts of manipulation, artifice and cunning. This behaviour could be observed in many passages from *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* and also *The Silmarillion*.

Before examining Sauron's major actions in the second and third ages, attention must be first given to his evolution in the early ages. Sauron was first a Maiar of the Valar Aulë, The Smith of the Valar, fair in form and in name; he was once called Mairon (The Beloved). In Valinor, he loved order and coordination and hated confusion and waste. His *ambition* originates in a profound desire for order and structural harmony, rooted in his association with Aulë. However, this initial inclination gradually intensifies into an uncompromising need for control, where order is no longer an ideal to preserve but a system to impose. In this transformation, *ambition* ceases to be creative and becomes coercive, marking the early ages of its evolution into *obsession*.. After the defeat of Morgoth, Sauron "...rose like a shadow of Morgoth and a ghost of his malice, and walked behind him on the same ruinous path down into the Void" (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 24), resulting in many tragedies and ruin.

Tolkien illustrates Sauron's *ambition* through his deception of the elves of Eregion. It reveals a shift in his *ambition* from admiration of artisanship to a compulsive need to

appropriate and control it, making a transition toward obsessive domination. In *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*, Tolkien writes: “But Sauron had better fortune with the Noldor of Eregion and especially with Celebrimbor, who desired in his heart to rival the skill and fame of Fëanor.”(236). In Eregion, Sauron pretended to be an emissary of the Valar named Annatar (Lord of the Gifts), who came to aid them and share with them his wisdom and knowledge. Sauron soon earned the trust of the smiths of Eregion and retrieved to Mordor after learning all the knowledge he needed to create The One Ring to control all living beings. This marks the culmination of his *ambition* as his desire for order and mastery is transformed into an absolute will to dominate, no longer through persuasion but through total control.

2.3 Ambition and its Divergence: From Creative Drive to Obsessive Domination in Fëanor and Sauron

Freud’s conception of *ambition* as a fundamental psychic drive can be identified in both characters, Fëanor and Sauron. However, its manifestation differs. Fëanor’s *ambition* is initially expressed through creative excess, particularly in his creation of the Silmarils which preserve and surpass the light of the sacred trees. This embodies his pursuit of perfection which reflects a sublimated expression of libidinal energy directed toward creation and legacy. However, this creative drive exceeds its initial boundaries and evolves into a compulsive force intensifying into *obsession* as “the heart of Fëanor was fast bound to these things that he himself had made” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 69), marking the shift from generative creation to exclusive possession.

Sauron’s *ambition*, as depicted in *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*, is oriented towards domination and control. In *The Silmarillion*, his loyal servitude of Morgoth reflects his desire for order and control, while in *Unfinished tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* his actions in Eregion and in Númenor, though similarly grounded in a desire for order and technical mastery, is oriented towards manipulation, political control,

and systematisation. Reflected in the perception of “an evil controlling purpose...proceeding from a source further to the East” (Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 235). This reveals a systematic and pervasive will to control Middle-earth rather than possess.

This divergence highlights a crucial distinction: whereas Fëanor’s *ambition* originates in creative production and becomes corrupted into *obsession*, Sauron’s *ambition* is inherently structured around control and domination. Regardless of these differences, both trajectories ultimately converge in their excess, as *ambition* in each case exceeds its initial function and develops into a compulsive force, leading toward *obsession* and, ultimately, self-destructive consequences.

3 From Ambition to Compulsion: Obsession and the Logic of Excess

3.1 From Creative Drive to Fixation: Obsession in Fëanor

Obsession, just like *ambition*, has not been theorised as a standalone concept. It emerges as a manifestation of underlying psychic drives, particularly through mechanisms of fixation and compulsion, through which psychic energy becomes excessively invested in a specific object (Freud; Laplanche and Pontalis). Rather than being governed by conscious intention, obsessive behaviour reflects an underlying compulsion that resists rational control and persists beyond its initial purpose (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*), leading to psychological attachment to a certain object or desire. Freud claims that this behaviour transcends psychological explanation, it is a behaviour driven by force beyond conscious control.

In Fëanor’s case, *obsession* manifests as an intensification of his initial creative *ambition*, progressively turning into an exclusive and possessive fixation on his creation The Silmarils. What begins as a brilliant artistic act, soon becomes an object of psychic overinvestment as Fëanor’s identity becomes inseparable from his creation. This obsessive behaviour could be observed in many passages from *The Silmarillion*. Tolkien first introduced

this behaviour when he wrote: “The heart of Fëanor was fast bound to these things that he himself had made”(69). This shows the beginning of his *obsession* over these gems that capture the light of the sacred trees. However, he was not the only one in awe of them, for “all who dwelt in Aman were filled with wonder and delight at the work of Fëanor” (68). The fascination of the people of Aman has triggered a more possessive sense in Fëanor fuelling his desire to shield and protect the Silmarils from everyone. This could be observed in the passage in which Tolkien wrote: “For though at great feasts Fëanor would wear them, blazing on his brow, at other times they were guarded close, locked in the deep chambers of his hoard in Tirion. For Fëanor began to love the Silmarils with a greedy love, and grudged the sight of them to all save to his father and his seven sons” (70). In Freudian terms, this reflect a process of fixation whereby a generative drive to attain perfection once achieved leads to defensive, obsessive and possessive attachment to the Silmarils.(Freud, *Introductory Lectures*).

This *obsession* does not remain without consequences; rather, it initiates a sequence of tragic and destructive outcomes. Fëanor’s compulsive attachment to the Silmarils compels him towards actions which result in devastating tragedies and ultimately his own demise, therefore suggesting the emergence of a deeper, self-destructive dynamic within the drive itself.

3.2 Obsessive Domination and Repetition Compulsion in Sauron

Sauron’s *obsession*, unlike Fëanor’s, is deeply rooted in his consuming desire to control all living beings on Middle-earth, for “...Sauron’s lust and pride increased, until he knew no bounds,..”(Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 346). While Fëanor’s *obsession* is centred mainly on the Silmarils, Sauron’s operates as a pervasive and structuring drive oriented toward domination. This drive gradually intensifies into a compulsive need to impose his rule and authority upon everyone, strategically eliminating all threats and rivalry in the process. For instance, when “He perceived at once that Galadriel would be his chief adversary and obstacle, and he endeavoured therefore to placate her, bearing her scorn with outward patience and courtesy”(Tolkien,

Unfinished Tales 237). This manoeuvre ensures that nothing slips out of his control and no one could sabotage his goals.

According to Freud, this does not merely reflect fixation but a deep compulsive repetition, in which the subject is driven to continually reassert dominance in order to stabilise an underlying tension that can never be fully resolved. This dynamic is clearly evident in Sauron's disguise in Eregion, where his influence over the elves reveals a need not only to deceive but to direct and structure their creative activity. By positioning himself as a guide and instructor, he extended his control over the process of creation, reflecting an *obsession* that operates through systematization rather than possession. As Tolkien notes, "Sauron used his arts upon Celebrimbor and his fellow-smiths...they had great profit from his instructions" (*Unfinished Tales* 237). This tendency reaches its pinnacle in the forging of the One Ring, in which Sauron pours a significant amount of his own power, which, according to Freud, represents the material manifestation of his obsessive will (*Introductory Lectures*). This marks a critical intensification of this *obsession* as Sauron externalised his power into a single object, binding his own existence to it and therefore becoming dependent on it.

In *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*, after Sauron lost his One Ring, all his thoughts and purpose concentrate upon the ring; we observe a compulsive narrowing of the psyche, in which he becomes entirely governed by the drive. In Freudian terms, this reflects a state of compulsive repetition, in which the drive no longer seeks resolution but instead maintains itself through continuous reassertion, indicating a loss of psychic control (Laplanche and Pontalis 97). This progression suggests a shift in which the drive ceases to be life-sustaining and instead became a destructive orientation, anticipating the logic of the death drive.

3.3 Obsession and its Divergence in both Characters

The comparative analysis of Fëanor and Sauron reveals that, although both characters are governed by obsessive drive, which emerges from excessive *ambition*, the structure of this *obsession* differs. In Fëanor, *obsession* takes the form of fixation over one single object, The Silmarils, as his creative drive becomes fixated and centred on them leading to increasingly possessive exclusionary attachment. As Tolkien emphasises, Fëanor “began to love the Silmarils with a greedy love” (*Silmarillion* 70), illustrating how creative production transforms into psychic fixation. From a Freudian perspective, this reflects a process in which libidinal energy becomes arrested and bound to a specific object, resulting in rigid and defensive attachment (Laplanche and Pontalis 162-165).

In contrast, Sauron’s *obsession* operates through compulsive expansion, characterised by a persistent drive to impose control and domination beyond a single object. His increasing “lust and pride...knew no bound” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 346), and his manipulations for figures such as Celebrimbor and Galadriel in *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* demonstrate patterns of compulsive domination. This dynamic can be understood in Freudian terms as repetition compulsion, defined as the unconscious tendency to repeat patterns of behaviour or experiences, even when they are distressing or destructive (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*).

Regardless of this divergence, both trajectories reveal a common Freudian pattern in which the drive escapes conscious regulation, ultimately making the subject lose control and become governed by the drive. The convergence suggests a deeper destructive tendency within the drive itself, anticipating the emergence of the death drive.

4 The Road to Self-destruction: The Death Drive

4.1 Fëanor: The Death Drive as Impulsive Self-Destruction

Introduced in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the Death Drive (Thanatos) is defined as the fundamental tendency within the psyche toward tension reduction, repetition, and ultimately self-destruction (Freud). In Fëanor's case, the progression of excessive *ambition* into *obsession* creates conditions through which such destructive tendency could emerge. Initially driven by creative impulse, Fëanor's *obsession* of the Silmarils gradually exceeds all limits and boundaries, resulting in actions that undermine both collective stability and ultimately his own survival.

In *The Silmarillion*, when the light of the trees was stolen and all hope was lost and Valinor was plunged in pitch darkness, Fëanor was asked from the Valar to relinquish the Silmarils in hope to retrieve the light of the trees. However, despite the gravity of the situation, Fëanor refused to deliver the jewels declaring that such act he “will not do of free will.”, and “cried bitterly...If I must break them, I shall break my heart, and I shall be slain...”(Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 83). This moment reflects a drive that no longer seeks preservation but instead persists in spite of its destructive consequences, ultimately contributing to the sequence of tragedies and violence and his own death.

Upon losing the Silmarils, Fëanor's *obsession* did not diminish, instead it shifted into an obsessive and uncompromising pursuit of recovery, urging the Noldorians to follow him though his quest and rebelling against the Valar declaring: “...we will never turn back from pursuit. After Morgoth to the ends of the Earth! War shall have and hatred undying”(Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 88). This escalation reaches a critical point when Fëanor “...swore a terrible oath, his seven sons leapt straightaway to his side and took the selfsame vow together..., calling the everlasting Dark upon them if they kept it not;...vowing to pursue with vengeance and hatred to the ends of the world...any creature great or small, good or evil, that time should bring

forth unto the end of days, whoso should hold or take or keep the Silmarils from their possession” (89). This moment marks a complete submission to the drive, which now operates beyond regulation and moderation, leading to unrestrained compulsion which soon manifest in violence.

After swearing the terrible Oath, Fëanor led the Noldor to turn against their own kin (the Teleri), upon their refusal to join and aid them by providing them with ships, and commit the first ever kinslaying, “Thus the Teleri were overcome, and a great part of their mariners that dwelt in Alqualondë were wickedly slain... Then the Noldor drew away their white ships and manned their oars as best as they might, and rowed them north along the coast.” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 94), an act that reveals the extent to which the drive has overridden all ethical boundaries.

The subsequent departure to Middle-earth further reinforces these trajectories as Fëanor leads his people into exile and war, driven not by strategic necessity but by an irrepressible need to pursue the Silmarils at any cost. Upon arrival, Fëanor and his host were met by battle, for their presence did not go unnoticed by the enemy’s forces, and Fëanor fought vigorously, “long he fought on, and undismayed, though he was wrappd in fire and wounded with many wounds; last he was smitten to the ground by Gothmog...” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 120-121), and would have perished if his sons did not come for his aid. But Fëanor’s wounds were mortal and he died soon after and “...he had no burial nor tomb, for so fiery was his spirit that as it sped his body fell to ash, and was borne away like smoke,... Thus ended the mightiest of the Noldor, of whose deeds came both their greatest renown and the most grievous woe”(121).

Fëanor’s trajectory, thus, reflects a deeper psychic dynamic in which the persistence of desire no longer serves preservation but instead contributes to the subject’s own annihilation, aligning with what Sigmund Freud conceptualises as the death drive (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 30-35).

4.2 Sauron: The Death Drive as Systematic Domination and Self-Reduction

In contrast to Fëanor, whose downfall is driven by impulsive emotional-driven actions, Sauron's descent into the death drive manifests through calculated yet compulsive patterns of domination that ultimately traps him within the very structures he seeks to control. His obsessive pursuit for dominion through strategic deception and manipulation eventually leads him to his own end.

In *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*, Sauron was very aware of the strength of his enemies in Eregion; therefore, he resorted to using his cunningness and treachery instead, posing as a figure of order and rational governance (Annatar) sent by the Valar. Sauron thus reshaped Eregion from the inside by slowly gaining the trust of the elves and slowly poisoning their minds and "So great became his hold on the Mirdain that at length he persuaded them to revolt against Galadriel and Celeborn and to seize power in Eregion" (Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 237). This moment reveals not merely strategic intelligence but a deeper psychic compulsion: an inability to accept resistance or autonomy. This could be interpreted as an expression of the death drive operating through a controlled destruction where the subject establishes control from within and making other dependent on his authority alone by eliminating all threats (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 30-35). However, once his deception is exposed, and Celebrimbor revolted, this internal domination escalates into open violence. As the narrative states "When Sauron learned of the repentance and revolt of Celebrimbor his disguise fell and his wrath was revealed...and Sauron turned north and made at once for Eregion" (Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 237), and thus Eregion was destroyed. This trajectory is an expression of the Death Drive, where the subject's compulsion toward mastery becomes inseparable from a movement toward destruction marking the transition from internal domination to total annihilation (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 48).

This pattern could also be observed in *The Silmarillion* with the forging of the One Ring, when Sauron “made One Ring to rule all the others ... and much of the strength and will of Sauron passed into that One Ring” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 344). In this passage, his drive for domination produces a paradoxical outcome; instead of expanding his power, he reduces and externalises it into a single object. This act marks a critical turning point as power becomes inseparable from dependency. From a Freudian perspective, this reflects a movement toward self-diminution in which the subject’s investment in control results in a structural vulnerability that anticipates self-destruction (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 30-35).

This pattern reaches its culmination in the downfall of Númenor. Although Sauron was taken as prisoner to Númenor, after his intended surrender, he managed to turn the table and take control over the Númenoreans, as it is stated in the novel: “...though in truth Sauron ruled all from behind the throne” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 328). Even in captivity, Sauron reproduce the same pattern of control, manipulation, and corruption, demonstrating that his actions are no longer governed by rational *ambition* but by compulsive repetition. His compulsion to dominate eventually leads him to push the kingdom toward catastrophic rebellion. This repetition of control beyond rational limits results in total destruction of the kingdom of Númenor, alongside his own, as Sauron was seated on his throne in his temple when the Valar unleashed their wrath upon the island “and his seat and temple fell into the abyss” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 336). Thus, Sauron becomes implicated in the catastrophe he engineers, illustrating the paradox at the core of his trajectory: the pursuit of absolute control ultimately results in self-annihilation.

The consequences of this collapse are irreversible. After Númenor, Sauron “could never appear fair to the eyes of Men” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 336), marking a loss of adaptability and the emergence of a rigid and diminished state. From a Freudian perspective, this fixation reflects the dominance of a drive that no longer allows transformation but instead enforces repetition and decline. Ultimately, Sauron’s trajectory exemplifies the death drive as theorised

by Freud: a compulsive persistence that exceeds rational control and leads not to mastery but to fragmentation and self-destruction (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*).

4.3 Comparative Analysis: The Death Drive in Fëanor and Sauron

Although both characters Fëanor and Sauron embody what Sigmund Freud conceptualises as the Death Drive (Thanatos), their trajectories unravel distinct modalities through which these psychic forces operate: one impulsive and affect-driven, the other calculated and structural. In both cases however, the progression from *ambition* to *obsession* culminates in a state where the drive no longer serves preservation, but instead compels repetition, excess, and ultimately self-destruction (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 30-35).

In Fëanor's case, the death drive emerges through emotional excess and immediacy. His obsessive possession over the Silmarils and his refusal to surrender them, declaring that "if I must break them, I shall break my heart, and I shall be slain" (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 83), demonstrates a psychic condition in which preservation is subordinated to possession. This dynamic intensifies through the Oath and the Kinslaying, where desire transforms into violent compulsion ultimately leading to his death in a battle consumed by his own intensity and "he had neither burial nor tomb, for so fiery was his spirit that as it sped his body fell to ash, and he was borne away like smoke"(121). Fëanor's trajectory is therefore characterised by explosive escalation, in which the drive manifests outwardly through immediate action, rapidly collapsing into self-annihilation.

By contrast, Sauron's death drive operates through control, systematisation and repetition. In *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*, his domination of Eregion is achieved gradually, as "so great became his hold on the Mírdain that at length he persuaded them to revolt...and to seize power in Eregion" (237). Unlike Fëanor's impulsive violence,

Sauron's drive initially manifests as structured manipulation, yet it reveals the same inability to tolerate autonomy. This compulsion intensifies when control is threatened, shifting into destruction (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 47-49), as seen when "his disguise fell and his wrath was revealed" (Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* 237).

The contrast becomes even more pronounced in their relationship to objects of desire. Fëanor seeks to possess the Silmarils at all cost, but Sauron goes further by externalising himself into the One Ring, where "much of the strength and will of Sauron passed into that One Ring" (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 344). While Fëanor is consumed by his object, Sauron becomes structurally dependent on his, marking a deeper level of self-reduction. From a Freudian perspective, this reflects a more advanced stage of the death drive, in which the subject binds their existence to a fixed system that ultimately ensures their vulnerability (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 30-35).

Both trajectories culminate in self-destruction yet through different mechanisms. Fëanor's end is immediate and corporal as his relentless pursuit leads directly to his death in battle (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 120–121). Sauron's destruction, however, is progressive and structural. In Númenor, although he "ruled all from behind the throne" (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 328), his compulsion to dominate results in catastrophe, and he was caught in the ruin and the fall of Númenor he orchestrated (336). Unlike Fëanor, whose destruction is sudden, Sauron's is prolonged and recursive, as he survives only in diminished form, unable to "appear fair" again (336), indicating a state of irreversible fixation.

Ultimately, both figures illustrate Freud's notion that the death drive operates through repetition and excess beyond rational control. Fëanor embodies its immediate, destructive eruption, while Sauron represents its systematic and self-perpetuating form. Despite these differences, both trajectories converge in the same outcome: the transformation of creative or ambitious energy into a force that undermines the subject's own existence, demonstrating that

the pursuit of absolute fulfilment inevitably collapses into self-annihilation (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 30-35).

5 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that Tolkien's representation of Fëanor and Sauron in *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* may be interpreted through a Freudian psychoanalytic framework that reveals the gradual progression from *ambition* to *obsession* and ultimately toward the death drive. Through close textual analysis, the study has shown that both characters originate from highly productive forms of *ambition* rooted in creation, mastery, order, and transcendence. However, once these *ambitions* exceed rational and ethical limits, they progressively transform into compulsive and destructive forces that dominate the subject rather than serve them. Freud's theory of repetition compulsion and the death drive, introduced in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, provides the conceptual framework through which these trajectories may be understood, particularly as both figures become trapped within repetitive patterns that increasingly lead toward destruction.

Ultimately, this chapter has established that Tolkien's mythology possesses a profound psychological dimension that allows for a psychoanalytic interpretation of character motivation and destruction. By applying Freudian concepts such as sublimation, fixation, repetition compulsion, and the death drive, the study has demonstrated how Tolkien's characters embody complex psychic conflicts that reflect broader tensions between creativity, power, desire, domination, and annihilation. The analysis therefore contributes to a deeper understanding of Tolkien's legendarium not merely as fantasy literature, but as a sophisticated exploration of the destructive potential inherent within the psyche itself

General Conclusion

This study has examined the psychological progression from *ambition* to *obsession* and ultimately to the Death Drive in the characters of Fëanor and Sauron through a Freudian psychoanalytic framework and a thorough textual analysis of *The Silmarillion* (1979) and *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* (1980). It revealed how the characters' exaggerated *ambition* and the obsessive pursuit of perfection and control lead to their own dismay and ultimately their death. This study aimed to look beyond the notion of good and evil, and reveal profound psychological dynamics rooted in desire, fixation, repetition, and self-destruction. Although Fëanor and Sauron occupy different moral positions within Tolkien's narrative structure, the analysis has shown that both characters are ultimately governed by similar underlying psychic mechanisms that progressively escape rational control.

The first chapter established the necessary contextual and theoretical framework for the analysis, by introducing the main concepts of Freudian psychoanalysis, particularly *ambition*, *obsession* and the Death Drive, while also situating Tolkien's works within the broader context of fantasy literature and Tolkienian scholarship. The chapter also provided a biography of the author J.R.R. Tolkien, as well as a synopsis of the two novels *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*.

The second chapter explored the evolution of *ambition* in both characters. It demonstrated how the initial productive drive gradually transforms into compulsive and destructive forces. In Fëanor's case, *ambition* initially manifests through artistic genius and creative excess, particularly in the forging of the Silmarils. Yet this creative impulse gradually evolves into obsessive fixation and possessive attachment, culminating in violence, exile, and ultimately self-annihilation. His trajectory illustrates how libidinal energy, once detached from moderation, becomes governed by compulsive repetition and destructive excess, aligning with Freud's conception of the death drive as a movement beyond preservation toward self-

destruction (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*). In contrast, Sauron's trajectory, originates in a desire for order and domination, yet gradually evolves into an obsessive need for domination and systematic control over others. It reveals a more calculated and systematic expression of the same psychic dynamic as Fëanor. However, his *ambition* is fundamentally structured around domination, order, and control, which intensify into compulsive manipulation and totalitarian *obsession*. Through deception in Eregion, the forging of the One Ring, and the corruption of Númenor, Sauron repeatedly reproduces the same destructive patterns of domination, ultimately becoming trapped within the very structures of power he seeks to impose. Unlike Fëanor's emotionally impulsive excess, Sauron's destructive trajectory operates through manipulation, repetition, and increasingly rigid structures of domination. Nevertheless, both characters ultimately embody Freud's concept of the death drive, as their compulsive pursuit of fulfilment leads not to preservation or mastery, but to fragmentation, ruin, and self-destruction.

Despite the moral and narrative differences between both figures, the comparative analysis has demonstrated that they are governed by similar underlying psychic mechanisms. Fëanor embodies the impulsive and affective eruption of the death drive, whereas Sauron represents its calculated, repetitive, and structural form. In both cases, *ambition* ceases to function as a productive force and instead develops into obsessive compulsion that exceeds conscious regulation and culminates in fragmentation and self-destruction. Tolkien's legendarium therefore transcends a simplistic opposition between heroism and villainy, revealing how the same psychological drives may operate beneath radically different moral identities

The comparative analysis further revealed that Tolkien constructs two distinct manifestations of the same latent psychic process. Fëanor represents the impulsive and affective eruption of the death drive, characterised by emotional intensity and immediate self-destruction, whereas Sauron embodies a more calculated and systematic form of Thanatos rooted in

repetition, domination, and gradual self-reduction. Despite these divergences, both trajectories converge toward the same conclusion: the transformation of creative or *ambition* energy into a destructive force that ultimately consumed the subject itself. Tolkien, therefore, presents *ambition* not merely as a positive heroic impulse but as a potentially dangerous force when detached from moderation, ethical restraint, and self-awareness.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that Tolkien's legendarium possesses significant psychological depth that extends beyond its mythological and fantasy dimensions. Through the character of Fëanor and Sauron, Tolkien explores universal human tensions concerning desire, power, creation, possession, and destruction. A Freudian reading thus allows for a deeper understanding of Tolkien's characters by uncovering the unconscious drives underlying their actions and revealing the psychological complexities embedded within the mythology of Middle-earth. This dissertation therefore contributes to Tolkien studies by highlighting the value of psychoanalytic criticism in the interpretation of fantasy literature and by demonstrating that Tolkien's works remain profoundly relevant not only as literary and mythological texts but also as explorations of the human psyche itself.

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Résumé

Cette étude examine la progression psychologique qui conduit de l'ambition à l'obsession puis à la pulsion de mort chez les personnages de Fëanor et de Sauron dans *The Silmarillion* (1977) et *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* (1980) de J. R. R. Tolkien, à travers une approche psychanalytique freudienne. L'étude soutient que, malgré leurs positions morales différentes, les deux personnages sont gouvernés par des dynamiques inconscientes similaires au sein desquelles l'ambition se transforme progressivement en obsession puis en autodestruction. S'appuyant sur les concepts freudiens d'Éros, de fixation, de compulsion de répétition et de Thanatos, cette recherche adopte une démarche qualitative fondée sur une analyse textuelle comparative d'extraits sélectionnés des deux œuvres, mise en relation avec des sources critiques secondaires. Les résultats révèlent que Fëanor représente une manifestation impulsive et émotionnellement investie de la pulsion de mort, tandis que Sauron incarne une forme calculée et systématique de compulsion destructrice. L'étude met ainsi en lumière la profondeur avec laquelle Tolkien explore les mécanismes psychologiques du désir, du pouvoir et de l'autodestruction.

الملخص

تناول هذه الدراسة التطور النفسي الذي ينتقل من الطموح إلى الهوس، ثم إلى غريزة الموت لدى شخصيتي فيانور وساورون في كتابي السيلماريليون (1977) والحكايات غير المكتملة لنومينور والأرض الوسطى (1980) للكاتب ج. ر. ر. تولكين، من خلال مقارنة تحليلية نفسية مستندة إلى نظرية فرويد. وتجادل الدراسة بأن الشخصيتين، على الرغم من اختلاف موقعيهما الأخلاقيين، تخضعان لدوافع لاواعية متشابهة يتحول فيها الطموح تدريجياً إلى هوس ثم إلى نزعة تدميرية للذات. واستناداً إلى مفاهيم سيغموند فرويد المتعلقة بالإيروس، والتنشيط النفسي، وقهر التكرار، وثنائوس، تعتمد الدراسة منهجاً نوعياً قائماً على تحليل نصي مقارن لمقاطع مختارة من العملين، بالاستعانة بمصادر نقدية ثانوية. وتُظهر النتائج أن فيانور يمثل تجسيداً اندفاعياً ومشحوناً عاطفياً لغريزة الموت، في حين يجسد ساورون شكلاً محسوباً ومنهجياً من القهر التدميري. وتبرز الدراسة بذلك العمق الذي يستكشف به تولكين الأبعاد النفسية للرجاء والسلطة والتدمير الذاتي.