



A Study of J.R.R. Tolkien's Works : Blindness Caused by Obsessiveness

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A Study of J. R. R. Tolkien's Works: Blindness Caused by Obsessiveness

(J. R. R. トールキンの作品研究——執着が引き起こす盲目性)

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**A Study of J. R. R. Tolkien's Works:
Blindness Caused by Obsessiveness**

By

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Abbreviations

Hobbit *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again*

LOTR1 *The Fellowship of the Ring*

LOTR2 *The Two Towers*

LOTR3 *The Return of the King*

SOWM *Smith of Wootton Major*

FGOH *Farmer Giles of Ham*

Letters *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*

Introduction

The objective of this paper

In reading J. R. R. Tolkien (John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, 1892-1973),¹ we notice that he deals with the issue of obsessive behavior many times. For example, Tolkien's most popular work *The Lord of the Rings* is known as an epic adventure story of the struggle between good and evil: hobbits, along with some good companions, join forces and defeat the forces of the Dark Lord, Sauron. Yet, when we view the various characters' reactions to the One Ring, which has a power to dominate the whole world, we notice that Tolkien depicts several characters who become obsessed with the One Ring and lose sight of their original purpose to destroy the ring for world peace in detail. In this novel, even good characters can be seduced by the power of the ring, cling to have it, and take mistaken action in a desire to possess it. In addition to that, in his other novels, we find characters who are also confronted with such obsessions as fixed ideas or selfish desires. Therefore, it can be said that obsessiveness is a kind of underlying theme in his work. It will be helpful to consider the descriptions of various obsessions in order to better understand Tolkien's novels.

Tolkien thinks that obsession blurs our view of things. For example, he explains that familiarity or triteness comes from a one-dimensional view formed by an obsession. That is, when we recognize something as a trite, familiar, or ordinary thing, we merely cling to a one-sided vision and stop to look at them. We are frequently obsessed with our habitual view stamped on us by repeated contacts with familiar things and forget to see different

aspects of them. Tolkien explains this in his essay “On Fairy-Stories” as follows:

This triteness is really the penalty of “appropriation”: the things that are trite, or (in a bad sense) familiar, are the things that we have appropriated, legally or mentally. We say we know them. They have become like the things which once attracted us by their glitter, or their colour, or their shape, and we laid hands on them, and then locked them in our hoard, acquired them, and acquiring ceased to look at them. (“On Fairy-Stories,” 67)

Thus, Tolkien insists that our vision is blurred when we are obsessed with a one-dimensional view of things.

Because obsession obscures everything else that is worth looking at, Tolkien takes this matter of obsession seriously and asserts, “We need, in any case, to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity—from possessiveness” (“On Fairy-Stories,” 67). Thus, he claims that it is necessary for us to escape from such one-sided vision. He stresses that if we want to know our world more deeply and desire to find the essential nature of things, we have to abandon our various obsessions and recover a flexible vision of life to reconnect our fascination with the world around us. Then, through his novels, he reveals the risks of various obsessions and the necessity to be freed from them.

In this paper, we will examine several of Tolkien’s writings, and see how he depicts the matter of obsession in them. In each of his novels, Tolkien shows us obsessiveness in various situations, and he indicates how preconceptions, customs and traditions, pride, selfish desires, and many

other elements cause adherence to a one-dimensional perspective. We are going to see how Tolkien depicts obsessive behavior, and analyze the processes whereby the characters, who are obsessed with something, have unusual experiences, thereby we will find something meaningful which they have lost sight of. Our analyses will clarify the risks of obsession and the importance of gaining a new vision.

Tolkien's life and works

Let us take a brief look at the life of Tolkien. He was born on January 3, 1892 in Bloemfontein, in South Africa. This was because his father worked as a branch manager of the Bloemfontein office of an English bank. Tolkien returned to England with his mother and his little brother at the age of three. His father died in 1896, and his mother in 1904, and he was then raised by Father Francis Morgan, a Roman Catholic priest, from the age of twelve.

He studied philology at Exeter College, Oxford and became a scholar of Old and Middle English language. He became Professor of English Language at Leeds University in 1924, Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford in 1925, and Merton Professor of English Language and Literature at Oxford in 1945. He retired his professorship in 1959 and died on September 2nd, 1973, at the age of eighty-one.

While Tolkien was teaching English as a professor, he wrote several literary works for fun. His writings came out of his interests. In his youth, he had enjoyed various stories of the old legends which had fairies and dragons: such as the legends of Arthur, the saga of Beowulf, and the tales of Sigurd who slew Fafnir the dragon,² all of which influenced his writing. Yet,

his literary works are not only affected by these old tales but also are based on them as well as his linguistic interest. He had a high level of interest in words, and his affection for language led him to create a wholly new and original language, he called “Elvish,” of the language of elf tongue. Then, he created his own imaginary world and its history, where Elvish was spoken. This is now known as the history of Middle-earth, and *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *Silmarillion* are written as part of this history. He also wrote other stories separate from the Middle-earth series: such as *Roverandom*, *Farmer Giles of Ham*, *Leaf by Niggle*, and *Smith of Wootton Major*. He was the first to create a new world based solely on his imagination.

All of his imaginative stories were written for his own pleasure, sometimes for his own children, so that he never expected to publish them. Yet, a member of publishing firms found the manuscript of *The Hobbit* by chance and asked him if he would allow its publication. He did, and it became popular and his novels are now known throughout the world.

Studies on Tolkien's works

Various studies have been made on Tolkien's novels, especially on *The Lord of the Rings*. For example, Paul H. Kocher examines Tolkien's ideas of heroism, the nature of evil, and morality.³ Nigel Walmsley discusses Tolkien's sub-cultural impact in the 1960s.⁴ C. Frederick and S. McBride read *The Lord of the Rings* as an attitude of contempt for women.⁵ Tom Shippey explicates Tolkien's works from the linguistic perspective and explained several of the texts in detail. Regarding the literary sources of

Tolkien's writing which inspired his imagination, there are many studies: such as David Day's *The World of Tolkien: Mythological Sources of The Lord of the Rings*, and Lee, Stuart D. and Elizabeth Solopova's *The Keys of Middle-earth: Discovering Medieval Literature through the Fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien*. For Tolkien's biographical aspects, we refer to Humphrey Carpenter's *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography*, the authoritative biography of Tolkien. Tolkien's novels were received coldly by critics at first,⁶ but they have gradually met with general recognition.

As for the matter of obsession, Alison Milbank discusses the fetishism of the One Ring. Alison claims that *The Lord of the Rings* "is not an escapist fantasy but a challenging work that 'reads' us as fetishists" ("My Precious: Tolkien's Fetishized Ring," 33) and says that this novel is "an ethical text that teaches us to give up dominatory and fixed perceptions" ("My Precious: Tolkien's Fetishized Ring," 44).⁷ Gregory Bassham explores the secrets of true happiness and fulfillment from *The Lord of the Rings*, and mentions that it is important for us to avoid desire of possession.⁸ Ralph C. Wood also reveals the danger of possessiveness seen in the Middle-earth series. For example, Ralph shows that Gollum is cut off from all community because of his strong obsession with the One Ring.

The scope of this paper

To discuss obsession, we will take up following works: *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* (1937), *Farmer Giles of Ham* (1949), *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55), and *Smith of Wootton Major* (1967). Previous studies have mainly focused on *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, and little attention

has been given to the shorter works, *Farmer Giles of Ham* and *Smith of Wootton Major*. These works are often treated merely as an afterthought and have not been studied thoroughly. However, as we find the similar theme of obsession in these shorter novels, we are going to give them more emphasis in order to more fully understand Tolkien's works.

The structure of this paper

This paper consists of 6 chapters. Chapter 1 will see some concrete examples where the intrinsic nature of things is lost due to obsessiveness, and we will clarify the use of fantasy for recovering our vision. Chapter 2 is a reading of *Smith of Wootton Major*, the last work published in his lifetime, and will discuss the importance of abandoning the fixed ideas and having willingness to see things carefully. Chapter 3 will read *The Hobbit*, which is his first published novel, and examine the images of dragon which shows greedy features of obsession with the treasure. Chapter 4 will read *Farmer Giles of Ham*, a dragon-slaying tale, and examine excessive acts of the knights caused by their inability to overcome the traditions and customs of knighthood. Chapter 5 and chapter 6 will focus on *The Lord of the Rings* which is a sequel of *The Hobbit*. Chapter 5 will look at people's obsession with pride or fame, and examine the essential qualities of a hero. Chapter 6 will examine the characters' obsession with one thing and the journey of abandoning the One Ring.

Through these explorations, we will clarify how Tolkien views and depicts blindness caused by obsession and his understanding of the importance of freeing oneself from this restraint.

Chapter 1

Blindness Caused by One-dimensional Vision and the Liberation of Fantasy

As outlined in the Introduction, one's vision is blurred by the triteness or familiarity of the things we view, and this triteness comes as a penalty of "appropriation" ("On Fairy-Stories," 67). Tolkien points out that we often comprehend things from a one-dimensional point of view and stop viewing them further with more careful attention. This leads to a distortion of vision towards the nature of things and poses a risk to us when we lose sight of their intrinsic value.

This chapter will examine how this appropriation happens, and how things of the world are distorted or forgotten and are replaced by other elements. We are going to see some concrete descriptions from Tolkien's writings and statements where the vision of the nature of things is lost through obsession, and we will posit that it is a self-centered mind that is involved with this distortion of things.

This chapter will also examine the usage of fantasy. In "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien stresses that fantasy can recover one's clear vision, and he deals with the matter of appropriation in his own works through the use of fantasy. We will then see how fantasy can help us free ourselves from triteness and appropriation.

I The essential quality missed by selfish interpretation

I-1 Gollum's concealment of the truth

When one sticks to one's own selfish ideas, the vision becomes dim. The distortion of truth happens easily when one adheres to one's selfish interpretation. Let us take a look at Gollum, one of the characters in *The Lord of the Rings*.

In this story, Gollum distorts the truth to hide his sin. When a friend of his found a beautiful golden ring,⁹ Gollum, desiring to obtain it, kills his friend and steals the ring. However, he is filled with guilt after committing the murder. To assuage his guilt, he provides himself with a plausible explanation and to justify his crime:

The murder of Déagol haunted Gollum, and he had made up a defence, repeating it to his 'precious' over and over again, as he gnawed bones in the dark, until he almost believed it. It *was* his birthday. Déagol ought to have given the ring to him. It had obviously turned up just so as to be a present. It *was* his birthday-present, and so on, and on. (*LOTR1*, 56-57)

Repeating the lie to justify his error, Gollum accepts his own justification and becomes firmly convinced that the ring is his rightful birthday present from his friend. He is deluded by his own interpretation and becomes confused about the truth and his lying. Thus, facts can sometimes be changed by a little lie. Gollum abuses the imagination and interprets the matter in a way pleasant to himself. That is, he ignores and stretches the truth with his selfish convenient explanation, and loses sight of the truth in the end. In Tolkien's words, it is merely "Morbid Delusion." ("On Fairy-Stories," 65)

I-2 Socially affected fairy tales

As has been seen in Gollum, truth is sometimes changed intentionally by one's own selfish making. Yet even if we do not intend to twist matters to our own ends, we often cling to a one-sided idea and ignore the intrinsic plural nature of them unconsciously. To impose social ideas and principles also spoils the charm of things and causes triteness. For example, the idea that fairy tales are only for children is embraced in the manners of the society of the period. Now many people think that children are the most appropriate readers of fairy stories, but as Tolkien claims, "Actually, the association of children and fairy-stories is an accident of our domestic history" and "Children [. . .] neither like fairy-stories more, nor understand them better than adults do" ("On Fairy-Stories," 50), this idea comes from a wrong perception on the part of adults.

The concept that fairy tales are only for children is a recent idea. Let us follow the brief history of the reception of fairy stories.¹⁰ As Phillip Aries has illustrated in *Centuries of Childhood* (1962), in the medieval ages, people did not have a notion of childhood, for children had a low survival rate due to illness and even if they survived they were soon forced to work alongside adults. Education for children was lacking, therefore, the reading books by children itself seldom existed. Yet, when William Caxton's printing press appeared in 1474 and many books came into print, the guardians of education claimed that improving children's literacy would develop them into the respectable grown-ups. Then, the idea of children's education drew attention and educational opportunities spread. The educators, however, considered that reading fairy stories were vain and useless activities which would interfere with children's education at school, so they condemned such

books as reading matter for little children at bedtime. That is, “a whole society was to excoriate such reading for children and to push aside any book that contained ‘the matter of fantasy’” (Egoff, *Worlds Within*, 24).

In the seventeenth century, this educational policy was changed again. When the English philosopher John Locke preached in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) that it would be effective to learn in an enjoyable way, adults began to use fairy stories for children’s education. They revised the fairy tales with a lot of morals and gave them to the children as the instructive books.

Thus, the guardians of education forced their ideas and the principles of the age onto the fairy stories; hence the reception of fairy tales has changed over time. Adults too were affected by such social conventions, and come to recognize that the fairy stories were appropriate only for children, not for adults. Once they perceived them as such, they stuck to this idea and could not see the enchantments as works of art. Tolkien states this as follows:

Fairy-stories have in the modern lettered world been relegated to the “nursery,” as shabby or old-fashioned furniture is relegated to the play-room, primarily because the adults do not want it, and do not mind if it is misused.” (“On Fairy-Stories,” 50)

Tolkien blames self-conceited ideas for twisting the value of fairy tales, and those tales have been relegated to being trivial things. That is, the perceptions of the fairy tales have been blurred, and people have lost sight of their intrinsic charm. Again, we see how people unconsciously stick to a one-sided vision of things and forget the intrinsic value.

1-3 Losing sight of the whole thing

Tolkien also indicates that even if we have a willingness to look at things carefully, we might miss the essence of things: for, when we only focus on the matters of interest, we lose sight of other elements.

For example, Tolkien takes George Webbe Dasent's metaphor of soup and says; "[w]e must be satisfied with the soup that is set before us, and not desire to see the bones of the ox out of which it has been boiled" ("On Fairy-Stories," 39).¹¹ He explains that it is useful to investigate the ingredients in order to taste the soup, but if one desires to see the sources or material and is entirely focused on them, one will forget to enjoy the soup itself, which makes no sense at all.

Then, Tolkien claims that we have to see things from various angles. Although the perception of things varies with time and this change is inevitable, it is important to see how things change over time. Tolkien says as follows:

[I]t is more interesting, and also in its way more difficult, to consider what they are, what they have become for us, and what values the long alchemic processes of time have produced in them. ("On Fairy-Stories," 39)

Tolkien stresses here that it is not enough to see things from one side. If we want to know things well, we should expand our vision to see the whole and find a new value in them which has been produced over time. We have to escape from the one-dimensional vision and see things from various perspectives in order to understand things clearly.

He also expresses this idea through another example of investigators

who look only at one side of things. In his essay, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" (1936), which was originally a lecture given to the British Academy in the same year, he shows that the investigators are apt to focus only on the matters which they are interested in, and fail to look at the other surrounding elements. Although they see things carefully and try to find the origin or the history of things, they tend to focus too much on the details or fragments and neglect to see things from a macroscopic perspective. Tolkien admits that investigating things in detail is useful in understanding this work, for he himself has studied *Beowulf* in detail and has a thorough knowledge of it. Yet, he thinks that it is insufficient to look at the parts of it. He laments that "Beowulf has been used as a quarry of fact and fancy far more assiduously than it has been studied as a work of art" ("*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics," 5) and claims that the text of *Beowulf* should be appreciated not just as a historical document but as a poem.

In the following story about a tower, Tolkien blames the critics who do not consider *Beowulf* as a poem:

A man inherited a field in which was an accumulation of old stone, part of an older hall. Of the old stone some had already been used in building the house in which he actually lived, not far from the old house of his fathers. Of the rest he took some and built a tower. But his friends coming perceived at once (without troubling to climb the steps) that these stones had formerly belonged to a more ancient building. So they pushed the tower over, with no little labour, in order to look for hidden carvings and inscriptions, or to discover whence the man's

distant forefathers had obtained their building material. Some suspecting a deposit of coal under the soil began to dig for it, and forgot even the stones. They all said: 'This tower is most interesting.' But they also said (after pushing it over): 'What a muddle it is in!' And even the man's own descendants, who might have been expected to consider what he had been about, were heard to murmur: 'He is such an odd fellow! Imagine his using these old stones just to build a nonsensical tower! Why did not he restore the old house? He had no sense of proportion.' But from the top of that tower the man had been able to look out upon the sea. (*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*,” 7-8)

“A tower” indicates the text of *Beowulf*, “a man” who built the tower is the poet of *Beowulf*, and “his friends” are the critics of the poem.¹² In this story, Tolkien criticizes the “friends” who break the tower. These friends, the critics, do not see *Beowulf* as a literature but consider it merely as an important historical document. Although the “man” uses things from the past and builds a tower to look out upon the sea, which means he uses the old items and gives a new value to them, the critics only focus on the fragments of the old things and never try to see the tower or from the tower, the poem itself and its meaning; Thus, when we focus on these things in which we are interested too much, we forget to see the whole thing, which Tolkien claims in his tale of the tower.

I-4 Tolkien's allergy to allegory

We can see Tolkien's criticism of the one-dimensional vision from his

allergy to allegory, too. In the foreword to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, he remarks:

[. . .] I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse ‘applicability’ with ‘allegory’; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author. (*LOTR*, xxiv)

Here, Tolkien clarifies that he dislikes allegory because it is a form of control, by “the purposed domination of the author.”¹³ Thus, he thinks that to be controlled by a one-sided idea is not sufficient to understand the nature of things very deeply.

As we have seen in several examples, we often decide the value of things based on our own self-centered point of view and forget to see them from other sides. Yet, since Tolkien claims to be freed from such restrictions, he is able to see how obsession with a one-dimensional idea blurs our sight. In addition, such obsessiveness occurs in various situations.

II The usage of fantasy

II-1 What is fantasy?

As it is not sufficient to see things from one side in order to perceive things well, we have to be freed from one-dimensional vision to regain a more clear perception. Tolkien, then, asserts that a fantasy world is useful to escape from the triteness and appropriation of the single vision, for fantasy

gives us wonder, tells us that things are not always as they seem, and makes us free from observed facts. He says, “creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun; on a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it” (“On Fairy-Stories,” 65).

According to a dictionary definition, fantasy is the faculty or activity of imaging what is unlikely to happen. In *The Old English Dictionary*, “fantasy” indicates “imagination; the process or the faculty of forming mental representations of things not actually present.” The origin of the word comes from the Greek *phantazein*, which means to “make visible.” Thus, creative fantasy has the power to clear our vision through the use of imagination.

Sheila A. Egoff states that the roots of fantasy “are deeper than those of any other literary genre, for they lie in the oldest literature of all —myth, legend, and folklore” (Sheila A. Egoff, *Worlds within*, 3), but it is actually quite recently that “fantasy” has begun to be used as a genre of literary composition. The first recognized example of fantasy as a genre is said to be found in the American magazine, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, published in 1949.¹⁴ When this word is used for literature, it indicates “a genre of imaginative fiction involving magic and adventure, especially in a setting other than the real world” (*The New Oxford American Dictionary*). Many scholars say that it is difficult to define fantasy, but nowadays, the stories dealing with the supernatural elements after the eighteenth century are regarded as fantasy novels in general.

As fantasy deals with supernatural elements and shows us wonder, some people criticize that fantasy is just escapist fiction. Yet, actually, fantasy

helps people who are blind to the intrinsic nature of things. For, we leave our world for a while by reading fantasy novels, and have various unusual experiences in the Otherworld. Through this experience, we gain an ability to take a larger view of things. As a result, when we return to our world, we can see our world with brand-new eyes and find enchantment once again. That is, fantasy enables us to be freed from the one-sided idea and to rediscover the intrinsic value of things which we have lost sight of.

II-2 Tolkien's art of writing

Through fantasy novels, writers show us different aspects of familiar things. Yet, if writers make fantasy too freely, their fantasy world will be incoherent. Therefore, when the sub-creators establish an imaginary world,¹⁵ they should use materials in the real world and rearrange them a little, which would provide us with many possibilities to see things from other sides.

Tolkien also defamiliarizes everyday affairs of this world to shed light on the true nature of familiar things and to recover their values which we have lost sight of. He introduces a new word "mooreeffoc" as an example. It is a very strange word which we have never seen before, but Tolkien does not make this word arbitrarily. In fact, "mooreeffoc" is the word "coffee-room" read from backwards. That is, when we see "coffee-room" from the inside through a glass door, we suddenly see it in a completely new way. He tells us that we can find something new in familiar things when we look at them from different angles. Thus, Tolkien finds ways to depict different aspects of things through his imaginative power, which help us to recover our vision.

In the same way, Tolkien sub-creates his fantasy writings by using the

materials of the real world. Let us take a look at Middle-earth for example, which is his fictional setting for *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. Middle-earth seems like a completely different world from ours, but in fact, it is located on this earth. Tolkien repeats many times that Middle-earth is our world, and in one of his letters he explains as follows:

‘Middle-earth’, by the way, is not a name of a never-never land without relation to the world we live in [. . .]. It is just a use of Middle English *middle-erde* (or *erthe*), altered from Old English *Middangeard*: the name for the inhabited lands of Men ‘between the seas’. (Tolkien, “To the Houghton Mifflin Co.,” June 1955[sic], Letter 165 of *Letters*, 220)

In addition, Tolkien further explains the location of Middle-earth. He says that the history of Middle-earth is described as an imaginary period,¹⁶ but that the location of it is put at the latitude of northwestern Europe. He shows the positional relationship between the Primary World and the Secondary World:

The action of the story takes place in the North-West of ‘Middle-earth’, equivalent in latitude to the coastlands of Europe and the north shores of the Mediterranean. But this is not a purely ‘Nordic’ area in any sense. If Hobbiton and Rivendell are taken (as intended) to be at about the latitude of Oxford, then Minas Tirith, 600 miles south, is at about the latitude of Florence.¹⁷ (“To Charlotte and Denis Plimmer,” 8 February 1967, Letter 294 of *Letters*, 376)

Besides, Tolkien also depicts the races of Middle-earth in relation to that of

our Primary World. For example, the hobbits are depicted as humans except for their size.¹⁸

Thus, Tolkien establishes his sub-created world based on our real world. It is difficult to create an imaginary world without falling into delusion, but in sub-creating a world by which people can recover their sight displays Tolkien's art of imagination. He rearranges the familiar and shows us them through eyes of wonder, and in doing this shows us that we have lost sight of the enchantment of things because of our one-dimensional vision. His sub-created world shows us things from other sides and we find a lot of possibilities to see new aspects in them.

In Summary

As we have seen several examples, when we lose sight of the nature of things, we concentrate on our self-centered point of view and stop seeing things in their entirety. That is, blindness is caused by obsessiveness of one's own ideas. Actually, there are very few things that we really know in this world, and we often only believe what we see with our eyes yet forget to pay attention to other aspects. In his writings, Tolkien shows us that obsession with a one-dimensional idea blurs our sight, and indicates that such obsessiveness occurs in various situations.

To arouse one's interest in the world again, we have to gain a flexible perspective and see the other aspects of things. Sub-creators then shed light on the true nature of familiar things by defamiliarizing everyday affairs of this world and show us them anew with wonder. Through this sub-created world, we, freed from one-dimensional vision, can recover unclouded eyes.

Chapter 2

A Need to Have Willingness to Look at Things:

Smith of Wootton Major (1967)

Smith of Wootton Major (1967) is the last work Tolkien wrote, and is also the last one published in his lifetime. This story is not connected with Middle-earth, but it deals with the fantasy world, the land of the fairy. Tolkien says in “On Fairy-Stories” that the stories about “the realm or state in which fairies have their being” (“On Fairy-Stories,” 32) free us from one’s slavery to a narrow, distorted vision about the world, to recover a clear perspective on familiar things, and bring us a consolation and joy.¹⁹ Yet Fairy²⁰ does not work out fully, unless people have a willingness to think positively about the Otherworld. In fact, some people are obsessed with their own thoughts and denounce anyone going to Fairy, saying that such behavior is not facing reality.

In this chapter, we will discuss the importance of abandoning fixed ideas on Fairy in order to recover one’s clear vision. We will focus on the two characters in *Smith of Wootton Major*: Nokes and Smith. While Nokes adheres to habitual things and never believes in the existence of Fairy, Smith, more selfless in disposition, finds a fay(Fairy)-star and goes to the fairyland. Their different reactions to Fairy clarify the idea that to be restrained by fixed ideas prevents us from seeing the real aspect of things. Through our examination, we will see that it is necessary to attempt to think about the big picture in order to rediscover the intrinsic value of the world.

I Background of *Smith of Wootton Major*

Before we discuss the story itself, let us look at the background of this work. Tolkien began to write *Smith of Wootton Major* in 1965, but this story was made purely by chance, for, it arose from a preface, which he was asked to write for a new edition of George MacDonald's *The Golden Key*.²¹ Tolkien had been amused as a child by MacDonald's "Curdie" books,²² but when he reread those books to write the preface, he found that much of MacDonald's writing did not match his taste.²³ He showed a negative reaction to MacDonald's work, saying that there was an allegorical and moralistic element about it and it was "illwritten (sic), incoherent, and bad, in spite of a few memorable passages" (Carpenter, *Biography*, 244).

He, then, began to explain the meaning of the term "Fairy" through a short story in the preface. He wrote as follows:

Fairy is very powerful. Even the bad author cannot escape it. He probably makes up his tale out of bits of older tales,²⁴ or things he half remembers, and they may be too strong for him to spoil or disenchant. Someone may meet them for the first time in his [MacDonald's] silly tale, and catch a glimpse of Fairy, and go on to better things. This could be put into a short story like this. There was once a cook, and he thought of making a cake for a children's party. His chief notion was that it must be very sweet [. . .]. (Carpenter, *Biography*, 244)

This was the birth of *Smith of Wootton Major*. In this story, Tolkien shows how several people react to a glimpse of Fairy. This tale was meant to be finished in only a few paragraphs, but beyond his expectation, it grew

into an independent story separate from the preface. It appeared as his new story, *Smith of Wootton Major*.²⁵

In this novel, Tolkien expressed his idea that glimpses of Fairy can be seen in our world although many people overlook them. He stresses that things brought from Fairy are often distorted or changed by one's personal thoughts and ideas, but, if we are willing and open to see them, we can find them.

II Nokes's persistence in his ideas and his blurred vision

A fragment of Fairy in the story of *Smith of Wootton Major* emerges as a form of a silver-looking fay-star which has been put in a special cake. The village named Wootton Major has one big festival called "The Feast of Good Children" to be held once every twenty-four years, and only twenty-four children in the village are invited. As is the custom of this festival, some pretty little things like trinkets and coins are put into this Great Cake to amuse children. And the star from Fairy is put into the cake, too. This star functions as a connection the land of the fairy, but if people do not have willingness to see it, the star only looks a trinket.

Tolkien introduces two characters, Nokes and Smith, who see the fay-star and show opposite reactions to it. Nokes, the Master cook in the village of Wootton Major clings to his fixed ideas and fails to catch a glimpse of Fairy. He is a self-confident and arrogant man, and does not believe in the least bit in the existence of the Otherworld. Throughout the whole story, he obstinately clings to his fixed ideas: he thinks that "fairylike" things are only for the children, and that their interest in Fairies

will fade away as they grow up.

Nokes also believes that things in Fairy are small and pretty things. His fixed idea of Fairy appears prominently in his cake decoration. Following the tradition of The Feast of Good Children, the Master Cook, regarded as the most important person in the village, is expected to make a Great Cake for this party. As this cake is expected to have something special, Nokes decides to make a pretty and fairylike cake with a “small white mountain” on the top and “up the sides of which grew little trees glittering as if with frost” (*SOWM*, 252). In addition, he puts “a little doll on a pinnacle in the middle of the Cake, dressed all in white, with a little wand in her hand ending in a tinsel star, and *Fairy Queen* written in pink icing round her feet” (*SOWM*, 250). As these descriptions indicate, Nokes is obsessed with the idea that the fairylike things are all “little” or “small.”

Yet, this notion that things from Fairy are all small is wrong. According to Tolkien, they are not originally diminutive in size. In his essay “On Fairy-Stories,” he says, “Of old there were indeed some inhabitants of Faërie [Fairy] that were small (though hardly diminutive), but smallness was not characteristic of that people as a whole” (“On Fairy-Stories,” 29, emphasis added). He points out that the concept of diminutive size is produced by the wrong interpretation of those people who only believe in what they can actually see, and do not try to know or perceive other things. When they encounter something that they have never seen or experienced before, they try to make a reasonable and convincing explanation for it. Instead of accepting the matter as it is; they distort the facts by their own interpretation, and try to minimize their substance.

People often interpret things in their own way, and stretch the facts to fit a convenient explanation. Tolkien uses Nokes as an example of someone who has distorted a fact. Actually, Nokes was not a good cook, but when the last Cook suddenly left the village, he was luckily appointed as the new Master Cook “who could cook well enough in a small way” (*SOWM*, 248). To put it another way, he became the Master Cook, even though he was not qualified for the position. The reason why he could make the special cake for the festival despite his lack of his culinary talents is that Alf, a prentice, helped him much. In fact, the Cake was made mostly by the prentice, but, Nokes in his arrogant could never admit the fact; he only believes that Alf “might be cleaver with icing but he had a lot to learn yet” (*SOWM*, 251). To make matters worse, many years later, he was “firmly convinced” that he had made the Cake on his own, saying that “It was the best cake I ever made, and that’s saying something” (*SOWM*, 275). Thus, Nokes is deluded by his own interpretation and has twisted the truth unknowingly.²⁶

Thus Nokes is a self-confident and arrogant man who clings to his own selfish ideas. His obstinacy regarding his own views poses a supreme challenge when it comes to a glimpse of Fairy. Even though he has the opportunity to see the fay-star, he never believes it is a real fragment from Fairy. When he is told the truth that the little silver fay-star has come from fairyland, he does not accept the fact and regards the star as a little fake “trinket.”

Furthermore, even when the Prentice Alf reveals that he is the King of Fairy, disguised as a young prentice of the Master Cook, Nokes averts his eyes from the fact again. He says, “King o’ Fairy! Why, he hadn’t no wand”

(*SOWM*, 279). It is obvious that Nokes still clings to his own idea that the fairies are small and pretty and have magical wands. Actually, Tolkien names the King “Alf” because it is an old Norse form of “elf.” He hints that Alf is a guy from Fairy.²⁷ Yet, as Nokes is obsessed with the idea of his own self-importance, he never manages to glimpse Fairy and spoils all his chances to see it. Thus, Fairy does not work out fully, because Nokes never tries to see it. His obsession with his own ideas prevents him to see things clearly.

III Smith’s journey to Fairy and the renunciation of fixed ideas

III-1 Smith’s selflessness and the recovery of his vision

While Nokes cannot abandon fixed ideas, Smith succeeds in catching a glimpse of Fairy. Smith is selfless and humble in disposition, does not cling to his own concepts, and has a willingness to try unfamiliar things, which is a significant difference from Nokes. We can see that with his selfless disposition and willingness to accept unfamiliar things he is endowed with a chance to recover his clear vision.

His selflessness was apparent at the Feast of Good Children in his boyhood. When Smith was eating the special cake at the festival, he happened to notice that the girl next to him was disappointed at finding nothing in her cake. He then gave her the silver coin which he had found in his slice of cake, expecting nothing in return. Thus, he shows his selfless disposition, which allows him to catch a glimpse of Fairy. After this incident, he finds the fay-star which was also put into the cake. Jane Chance, in her study of Tolkien, also mentions Smith’s selflessness leading to

transformation:

Because free of vice and filled with charity, Smith is “graced” with the gift of the star, his passport into the other world of Faery (what Tolkien usually calls Faërie), but one which simultaneously endows him with a recovery of insight and perception because of his visits to the other world. (Chance, *Tolkien’s Art*, 100)

When Smith receives the fay-star, he also receives some special abilities, such as singing and talking in a beautiful voice. In addition, he finds fascinating various things which he has not noticed before. He gains the skill to make all kinds of things of iron which bring out the virtues of the ingredient. His iron work has a unique charm, which is shown as follows:

[. . .] he could make all kinds of things of iron in his smithy. Most of them, of course, were plain and useful, meant for daily needs [. . .]. They were strong and lasting, but they also had a grace about them, being shapely in their kinds, good to handle and to look at.

But some things, when he had time, he made for delight; and they were beautiful, for he could work iron into wonderful forms that looked as light and delicate as a spray of leaves and blossom, but kept the stern strength of iron, or seemed even stronger. (*SOWM*, 255-256)

Thus, having gained new insight into the things of the human world, he is able to reintroduce the charm of things which had been lost from sight.

III-2 Taking a second look at Fairy

In addition, Smith notices that he has had the wrong impression of Fairy, too. When he explores the fairyland, he meets a young maiden. In fact, this fair maiden is the Queen of Fairy, but he does not notice it for a good while, because, like Nokes, he has been obsessed with the small and pretty image of the Faerie-Queen which he has seen at the Feast of Good Children. That is, despite Smith's longtime exposure to the land of the fairy, he is still restricted by his fixed idea that the fairies are small inhabitants. When Smith notices that the little doll on the Great Cake is a representation of the fair maiden, he finally understands that the fairies do not always look like what they are, and that the doll on the cake only represents a part of the real figure.

When Smith redefines his understanding of Fairy, he is ashamed that he has only seen a little part of Fairy and has been blind by observed facts for a long time. He also feels sad at the thought that most people in the human world only recognize what they can actually see and do not pay attention to the subtle world of Fairy. In regards to this, the Fairy Queen says as follows: "Better a little doll, maybe, than no memory of Faery at all. For some the only glimpse. For some the awaking" (*SOWM*, 264). She mentions that it is difficult to see every aspect of Fairy, but, if people have even a superficial knowledge of Fairy, there is always a chance to catch a glimpse and to improve their lot as long as they try to see it. That is, if we have willingness to pay attention carefully, fairyland can give us wonder and we can recover our vision anytime.

III-3 Returning the fay-star

When the King of Fairy first asks Smith to return the fay-star, Smith rejects the King's demand. He insists on his right to possess the star, for he considers that the star has been given to him as a gift and that he can have it forever. That is, Smith is oblivious to everything around him because of obsession with the fay-star. Here, we can see people's tendency to be contrained by one thing. Regarding this, the King explains as follows:

“Some things. Those that are free gifts and given for remembrance. But others are not so given. They cannot belong to a man for ever, nor be treasured as heirlooms. They are lent. You have not thought, perhaps, that someone else may need this thing. But it is so.” (*SOWM*, 267)

The King persuades Smith that there are many people who may need to recover their clear vision, so that the fay-star should be passed down to the next generation. Here, Smith is reminded of the other people around him which he has lost sight of. At the end of this story, Smith does return the fay-star to the Fairy King because he understands that to possess it forever is also a kind of obsession. In accepting the demand, Smith gives up the star, and returns it for nothing in return, showing he has accepted his humility.

It seems a very sad situation for Smith, having to abandon the fay-star, for he can never visit fairyland again after returning it. Yet, his flexible vision has grown, and he now finds new fascination with things previously unnoticed when he gets back to the human world. In addition, he finds some consolation in leaving the star behind, too. Although he has lost his star, the fragment of Fairy will remain somewhere in the human world as long as the

star continues to be handed down to others. Thus, he has gained a new perspective through his journey and can accept difficult things in a positive way.

As has been seen, through Smith's journey, Tolkien shows the importance of seeing things with flexible vision. We have a tendency to be obsessed with the superficial aspects of things. Once we see one thing, we often believe that we understand everything about it, and stop thinking about it again. Yet, we cannot possess or understand the whole in one glance. Tolkien says: "all you had (or knew) was dangerous and potent, not really effectively chained, free and wild; no more yours than they were you" ("On Fairy-Stories," 68). That is, even if we see one aspect of things, it does not mean that we quite understand everything. Tolkien indicates that we cannot decide the value or the meaning of things from single sight because everything has many aspects which we seem to ignore. Therefore, we need to attempt to think about the big picture.

IV Is *Smith of Wootton Major* an autobiographical fiction?

In previous studies of *Smith of Wootton Major*, Smith's relinquishing of the fay-star is often considered as "its author's farewell to his art" (Michael D. C. Drout, *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, 619), and it has been recognized that this last of Tolkien's completed fiction is an allegorical and an autobiographical work. Tom Shippey says that *Smith of Wootton Major* demands to be read as an "autobiographical allegory" (Shippey, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, 297).

Actually, Tolkien himself remarks that this tale relates closely to him.

While rejecting its allegorical possibilities, he says that it has been “written with deep emotion, partly drawn from the experience of the bereavement of ‘retirement’ and of advancing age” (Carpenter, *Biography*, 244). Moreover, in a letter to Roger Lancelyn Green, an old friend, who admired his story, Tolkien explained that this was an “old man’s book, already weighted with the presage of ‘bereavement’” (Tolkien, “To Roger Lancelyn Green,” 12 December 1967. Letter 299 of *Letters*, 389). Actually, Tolkien is prostrated with sorrow at that time. He also has lost his friend C. S. Lewis on 22 November 1963, a few years before starting to write this novel, so his grief and his anxiety about the future suffuse the process.²⁸ Besides, Carpenter notes that “like Smith, the village lad who swallows a magic star and so obtains a passport to Faery [Fairy], Tolkien had, in his imagination, wandered for a long while through mysterious lands; now he felt the approach of the end, and knew that he would soon have to surrender his own star, his imagination” (Carpenter, *Biography*, 244-245).

Thus, this story is considered as his sad farewell to his imagination. It is true that Tolkien’s autobiographical intention can be read into this fiction. However, he does not only depict his pessimistic emotions in this novel. Actually, he writes it to be free from his own grief. Because he has been obsessed with negative feelings and has lost sight of the joy of living, he tries to rediscover the charm of the world by writing the story about Fairy. In this, he must have found some consolation for the loss of his imagination, too. That is, although he cannot possess his imagination forever because his life is finite, his imaginary world will be handed down to future generations as long as his stories are read and keep fascinating people. It can be said that

Smith of Wootton Major is not merely an autobiographical fiction but a Fairy-Story which consoles his grief over the inevitable loss of his imagination.

In Summary

Fairyland is a wonder, and can help us recover a clear perspective on familiar things. However, if we cling to a one-dimensional point of view and do not try to accept alternate views, we will miss the chance to recover our vision. In this story, Tolkien introduces two characters, Nokes and Smith, who have a chance to see a glimpse of fairyland and show opposite reactions to it. Nokes is a self-confident, arrogant man who clings to his fixed ideas so that he never accepts the existence of Fairy, even though he has seen it with his own eyes. On the other hand, Smith is selfless and humble in disposition and can accept unfamiliar things, so that he is able to find fairyland and recognize his misperceptions about fairies with humility, which allows him to expand his vision further.

Through this story, Tolkien indicates that it is necessary for us to abandon fixed ideas and to see things with a positive state of mind in order to rediscover the value of things which we have lost sight of. That is, repudiating fixed ideas offers us a chance to alter our vision to see that which is deeply meaningful in the world.

Chapter 3

Excessive Desire for Treasure and an Image of Dragon:

The Hobbit, or There and Back Again (1937)

The Hobbit, or There and Back Again (1937), which is known to be a preceding chapter to *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55), is Tolkien's first publication except for his academic articles and his essays.

In this book, Tolkien depicts several characters who are depraved by clinging to the enormous treasure of the dragon, Smaug. Tolkien emphasizes that obsession with the treasure blurs their vision, corrupts their morals, and leads to a harmful influence over others. The image of the dragon expressed further his belief that excessive obsession destroys that which is good in us all.

This chapter focuses on the image of the dragon, and discusses how Tolkien uses this to depict the relation of excessive possessiveness and ties it to the bestiality of the monster. We are going to analyze descriptions of the dragon, Smaug; the strange creature, Gollum; and the dwarf, Thorin; and will elucidate the features these characters have in common.

I *The Hobbit*

Tolkien originally wrote *The Hobbit* for his personal amusement. He does not remember exactly when he began to write the story, but he recalls the stirrings to the beginnings of this story in the following letter:

All I remember about the start of *The Hobbit* is sitting correcting School Certificate papers in the everlasting weariness

of that annual task forced on impecunious academics with children. On a blank leaf I scrawled: 'In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.' (Tolkien, "To W.H. Auden," 7 June 1955, Letter 163 of *Letters*, 215)

He did not intend to publish this work, yet a former student and family friend, now a member of Allen and Unwin's staff suggested that her friend and co-worker read the manuscript. She was entered and asked for its publication. As soon as this book was released, it achieved widespread popularity, and was awarded the New York Herald Tribune prize which is given to the best children's book of the season.²⁹

This book mainly tells of the expedition recognition of Bilbo Baggins the Hobbit and the thirteen dwarves to take back the treasure, which the dragon Smaug robbed from the Dwarves. Long ago, relatives of the Dwarves found a great deal of gold and jewels in a mine in the Lonely Mountain and became very rich and famous. However, one day the dragon Smaug came to the Mountain, attacked the dwarves and took their treasure from them. Most of the dwarves were slain, but Thorin and some other dwarves fortunately survived the attack, and they decided to get the treasure back and avenge their comrades on Smaug. To achieve this, Thorin obtains the aid of the wizard Gandalf and Bilbo is hired as a burglar in order to steal into the dragon's den. During the quest, they encounter a number of dangerous situations, overcome these difficulties, and finally achieve their goal of revenge and take back the treasure.

However, this novel does not end with Smaug's defeat. After the dragon has been killed, many other characters, elves, dwarves, humans, and goblins

crave the Dragon-gold, and a catastrophic war breaks out between them over the treasure. As Tolkien says, the main theme of *The Hobbit* is “the Quest of the Dragon-gold” (Tolkien, “To Milton Waldman” Letter 131 of *Letters*, 159),³⁰ a lot of greedy characters desire to obtain the treasure and try to appropriate it. Their greediness leads each of them to disastrous ends. Through the whole story, Tolkien shows that it is perilous to be obsessed with one thing.

The following discussion focuses mainly on the descriptions of the three main greedy characters. Through the description of Smaug, we will confirm that excessive obsession with one thing is not desirable, and then, we will see how the transformation of Gollum acts as a metaphor to describe how such obsession disfigures any of us. And finally, the episode of Thorin will reveal the importance of freeing oneself from excessive obsession in order to regain an appreciation for the intrinsic value of the world.

II How greed affects the dragon Smaug

First of all, let us take a look at the dragon Smaug, who stole the dwarves’ treasure and hoarded it for many long years. Tolkien depicts Smaug as a self-conceited dragon who has a strong obsession with the treasure.

In Europe, a dragon is regarded as an evil creature which destroys the order of the world and brings misfortune to people. Let us take some examples: a sea monster called Leviathan in “The Book of Job” in the Old Testament is usually taken as a symbol of evil.³¹ In “The Revelation” in the New Testament, the great red dragon is considered as the “Devil” or “Satan.”³² In the West, the dragon is also perceived as an evil and terrifying

creature.

Without doubt, Tolkien also sees dragons as fearful evil creatures. In a comment about dragons in a BBC radio interview in 1965, he said, “They [Dragons] seemed to be able to comprise human malice and bestiality together so extraordinarily well, and also a sort of malicious wisdom and shrewdness—terrifying creatures!” (Anderson, *The Annotated Hobbit*, 309).

This malicious image of the dragon describes Smaug well, too. Tolkien depicts Smaug as “a most specially greedy, strong and wicked worm” (*The Hobbit*, 38). When he writes about Smaug, he borrows from the episode about a dragon from the Old English epic poem *Beowulf*, which also describes the dragon in a fearful image.³³ Therefore, we can see some similarities in the plots between *Beowulf* and *The Hobbit*. In the second half of *Beowulf*, there is an episode concerning a dragon, in which a thief steals a jeweled-goblet from the dragon’s hoard and escapes, and the dragon gets angry and attacks nearby settlements. In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo Baggins, as a burglar, steals a great two-handled cup from Smaug’s hoard and escapes. When Smaug finds that the cup has been stolen, the dragon’s wrath is directed to the lake-town Esgaroth, which is located near the dragon’s Lonely Mountain. Like this, these two stories have almost the same plot. Regarding this similarity, Tolkien says:

Beowulf is among my most valued sources; though it was not consciously present to the mind in the process of writing, in which the episode of the theft arose naturally (and almost inevitably) from the circumstances. It is difficult to think of any other way of conducting the story at that point. I fancy the author

of *Beowulf* would say much the same. (“To the editor of the ‘Observer’” 20 February 1938. Letter 25 of *Letters*. 31)

Thus, Tolkien continues the legend of a fearful and strong dragon by unconsciously imitating the old story.

However, Tolkien does not merely imitate this old poem. He depicts the dragon Smaug as a much more specific creature than *Beowulf*’s and expresses the image of greed much more clearly. To begin with, the dragon in *Beowulf* does not have a name and lacks concrete visualization. Whereas Tolkien gives a suitable name, “Smaug,” to his dragon, which is derived from the German verb “Smugan” meaning “squeeze through the hole.”³⁴ With this name, Tolkien attaches an image of this dragon, squeezing its own body inside his den in the Lonely Mountain.

Tolkien further expresses Smaug’s obsessive character by describing the light of the dragon’s eyes in detail. When Bilbo is about to step out onto the ledge of the dragon’s den, “a sudden thin and piercing ray of red” is directed to him “from under the drooping lid of Smaug’s left eye” (*The Hobbit*, 269). Besides, when Bilbo tells Smaug that he and the dwarves have come for revenge and get the treasure back, “the light of his [Smaug’s] eyes lit the hall from floor to ceiling like scarlet lightning” (*The Hobbit*, 273). According to Day David, the word “dragon” comes from Greek “drakon,” which means not only a “serpent” but also “to see fiercely” (*The World of Tolkien*, 88). Tolkien seems to hearken to the original meaning of “dragon” by depicting its eyes.

Moreover, Tolkien endows Smaug with the ability to talk, which gives us a window into the personality of the dragon. When the hobbit sneaks into

the den after stealing the cup, Smaug is able to address Bilbo, such was not possible in *Beowulf*.³⁵ In this conversation, Smaug cunningly tries to trick the hobbit and tells him not to trust the dwarves, because the dragon hopes to cause dissention among the company in order to better protect the treasure. As Stuart D. Lee and Elizabeth Solopova suggest, Tolkien endows Smaug “with emotions, a voice to express them, and nuances and idiosyncrasies.” (*The Keys of Middle-earth*, 110). Smaug’s way of talking clearly shows his wicked side.

This conversation with Bilbo also reveals that Smaug has a self-conceited disposition. Smaug is always concerned about protecting his treasure, but at the same time, he believes that nobody can make him surrender it because he is so confident of his power. Tyler J. E. A. points out as follows: “So fearsome was the known wrath of Smaug that none came to challenge his ownership of the hoard for many years, and he grew complacent and vain” (*Tolkien Companion*, 445). As Smaug boasts about his power, he says to Bilbo, “I am old and strong, strong, strong, Thief in the Shadows! [. . .] My armour is like tenfold shields, my teeth are swords, my claws spears, the shock of my tail a thunderbolt, my wings a hurricane, and my breath death!” (*The Hobbit*, 274). Smaug confidently shows his belly to Bilbo, which is covered with a protective shield of treasure. This dragon has spent many years on his piles of gold and gemstones, and his body is now almost completely covered with those jewels, and Smaug is very proud of his gorgeous armor. However, there is a large patch in the hollow of his left breast that is left uncovered and so his defense is not perfect, but Smaug in his vanity does not realize his weak point. In the end, he is slain by an arrow

which pierces the uncovered hollow of his chest.

Thus, Tolkien depicts Smaug as a greedy and self-conceited character. Smaug's evil disposition is consistent throughout the whole story and he never changes to do good. He is so confident in his own strength and is so preoccupied with the treasure that he loses sight of his own weakness. His vanity and sense of possessiveness blurs his vision, and leads him to self-destruction.

III Is Gollum an evil creature?

Smaug is the only dragon of this novel, but the elements of the dragon's character can be seen in other characters. Tolkien expresses idea that when one has excessive desire and sticks to it, this changes one's disposition into something akin to a dragon. The strange creature Gollum does not desire to get the dragon's treasure, but he has a strong obsession with the magic ring of power.³⁶ Gollum's obsession with it can be seen in the following statement:

Gollum used to wear it at first, till it tired him; and then he kept it in a pouch next his skin, till it galled him; and now usually he hid it in a hole in the rock on his island, and was always going back to look at it. And still sometimes he put it on, when he could not bear to be parted from it any longer, or when he was very, very, hungry, and tired of fish. (*The Hobbit*, 105)

Tolkien depicts this character as a fearful and greedy figure like Smaug. Gollum is "a small slimy creature" with "two big round pale eyes in his thin face" (*The Hobbit*, 94) and lurks around a lake in a dark cave. His outward

appearance is very ugly, and he has a tendency to throttle and eat Goblins.³⁷ He always hisses and talks to himself, and makes “a horrible swallowing noise in his throat” (*The Hobbit*, 95), which is the origin of his name “gollum.”

In addition to that, the greedy disposition of Gollum can be seen through the light of his eyes, which is similar to that in the dragon’s eyes. When Gollum has lost his ring, he strongly suspects that Bilbo has stolen it. As his suspicions get stronger and stronger, his big green eyes brighten like a flame: “[. . .] Bilbo now saw two small points of light peering at him. As suspicion grew in Gollum’s mind, the light of his eyes burnt with a pale flame” (*The Hobbit*, 107). Thus, we can see some similarities between Gollum and Smaug.

Gollum, however, is not such a greedy character in the first edition of *The Hobbit*. When Tolkien began to write the sequel, *The Lord of the Rings*, he made a vast change in chapter five of *The Hobbit* in order to give consistency with the sequel. At this time, the character of Gollum was revised into a greedy monster.³⁸

Let us take a brief look at the first edition of *The Hobbit*. In this version, Gollum is not a greedy but a sympathetic character. In addition, he was not as obsessed with the ring as he is in subsequent editions. In the first edition, Gollum promises to give the Ring to Bilbo if the hobbit wins when challenged at riddles. When Gollum loses at riddles, he means to give Bilbo his ring without hesitation; but, as the Ring is lost, and Gollum is terribly upset and screams with tears, not because he wants to possess the ring for himself, but because he cannot keep his promise to give it. The following

quotation is from the first edition of chapter five of *The Hobbit*:

I [the narrator] don't know how many times Gollum begged Bilbo's pardon. He kept on saying: "We are ssorry [sic]; we didn't mean to cheat, we meant to give it our only only [sic] present [sic], if it won the competition."³⁹ He even offered to catch Bilbo some nice juicy fish to eat as a consolation. (Anderson, Douglas A. *The Annotated Hobbit*, 129)

Thus, Gollum in the first version is a tender, honest character who does not covet his possessions.⁴⁰ Tolkien clarifies the connection between excessive obsessiveness and this tragic figure by rewriting Gollum's character.

Tolkien goes on to show that excessive desire for one thing distorts not only his disposition but also his outer appearance. In *The Lord of the Rings*, he presents Gollum's past, and from this we can see that this creature, Gollum, was not an evil creature in the beginning. In the beginning, Gollum was not originally a monster but merely a hobbit, and his name was not Gollum but Sméagol. Sometime in the past, when Sméagol saw his friend found a gold ring in the river where they were playing. Sméagol immediately desires the ring for himself, and in trying to get it, he kills his friend and takes ownership of it. Although he feels guilty about this murder, his desire for the ring never diminishes. He calls the ring "my precious," and repeats to himself that this ring is his "birthday present" to justify his sin (*LOTRI*, 105). Moreover, when he finds out that this ring has a power to make him invisible to others, he uses it to steal things and harm those he does not like. Sméagol is completely obsessed with the ring and loses any morals he used to have. He eventually goes underground to protect the

ring,⁴¹ and his greedy disposition changes him from a hobbit to the fearful creature, Gollum. It reminds us of the case in Fafnir of *The Volsunga Saga* who transformed from a dwarf to a dragon. *The Volsunga Saga*, an Icelandic legend written in a late 13th century, has a dragon named Fafnir. This dragon is born as a man, but his lust for treasure makes him change into a greedy dragon. Sméagol also transforms, as is the case in Fafnir, and his external form matches his inner evil desire. Here, Tolkien shows that even a calm being like a hobbit can be taken over by possessiveness and thereby lose their morality.

As we have seen, Tolkien depicts Gollum as a corrupted character who is addicted to one thing. Gollum's excessive desire makes him like the dragon and leads him into a miserable life. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Gollum tries to get the ring back from Frodo desperately, loses his footing on a cliff, and falls into the Cracks of Doom to his death.⁴² By depicting this transformation in a character like Sméagol, Tolkien emphasizes that a moral mistake can happen to anybody and is able to lead to dire consequences. Since an ordinary hobbit like Sméagol can have his disposition changed into that of an evil monster, every one of us has a risk of moral corruption. Tolkien reiterates that excessive desire depraves even good people.

IV The character of the dragon in Thorin

IV-1 Blindness caused by desire for dragon-gold

To hammer home the risk of obsessiveness, Tolkien has one more character appear: Thorin Oakenshield, the leader of the company of dwarves. His tenacity and passion to reclaim the Dragon-gold gradually builds in him

a violent temper. Although Thorin does not have the fierce look of a monster like Smaug or Gollum, his attitude towards others reminds us of the image of the dragon.

Let us take a look at the process of the internal transformation of Thorin. He is a courageous and stern dwarf who shows sufficient leadership during the quest, but he is also a self-conceited person and with strong pride, that already tarnishes his sense of morality. He clings to the glorious days of his family, which have been destroyed by Smaug, and he desires to rebuild the peaceful kingdom that has lost. Yet, he is so obsessed with his own coming glory that it does not occur to him that his attempt may cause the dragon to rage and lead to a tragic end.

Thorin's desire for the treasure grows even stronger when he sees them in the dragon's den. At first, he did not mean to take all the treasure for himself and only sought the Arkenstone, the great white gem, which was an heirloom of the dwarf Kings. However, being surrounded by all the Dragon-gold, he gradually coveted the wealth itself and forgot that his primary goal was to rebuild the lost peaceful Kingdom.

After the dragon Smaug is killed, and Thorin's revenge has been satisfied, Thorin begins to take all of the treasure for himself:

Long hours in the past days Thorin had spent in the treasury, and the lust of it was heavy on him. Though he had hunted chiefly for the Arkenstone, yet he had an eye for many another wonderful thing that was lying there, about which were wound old memories of the labours and the sorrows of his race. (*The Hobbit*, 318)

Therefore, when the people in the lake-town Esgaroth ask Thorin to

recompense them for all damages which the dragon Smaug had caused to the town, Thorin rejects their demand. In addition, when Bilbo, hoping for a peaceful solution to this case, secretly gives the Arkenstone to Bard, the leader of Esgaroth, in order to negotiate a favorable settlement, Thorin burns in anger, rejects the bargain, and curses and swears at the hobbit. Thus, because of Thorin's lust for the wealth, he loses his sensitivity to others and his moral authority, as well.

As Thorin is trapped by his excessive desire, he begins to resemble the dragon Smaug. Some similarities between the two become apparent. When the dragon Smaug gathered all the wealth for himself in the cave, he piled it up in a great heap. In the same way, when Thorin gets the treasure, he spends his time "piling and ordering the treasure" (*The Hobbit*, 321). While Smaug's body was covered with jewels, Thorin is "in a coat of gold-plated rings, with a silver-hafted axe in a belt crusted with scarlet stones" (*The Hobbit*, 289). Moreover, Tolkien expresses the greedy disposition of Thorin by depicting the red light in his eyes, which reminds us the depiction of Smaug's. In the following citation, Thorin, wearing the gorgeous armor, makes his eyes glow like fire:

Out leapt the King under the Mountain [Thorin], and his companions followed him. Hood and cloak were gone; they were in shining armour, and red light leapt from their eyes. In the gloom the great dwarf gleamed like gold in a dying fire. (*The Hobbit*, 340-341)

As Tolkien says, "So grim had Thorin become" (*The Hobbit*, 320), Thorin's pride and lust for the treasure have changed him like a dragon.

IV-2 Renunciation of the treasure

However, Thorin has different aspects from the dragon, too. Like Gollum and Smaug, Thorin loses his life at the end of the story, but Thorin's death is different from the other monsters who ruined themselves through excessive desire; for, unlike the other evil characters, Thorin comes to realize his own moral mistakes at the point of death, and he renounces his obsession with the treasure.

In this story, an opportunity to escape from obsessiveness is offered when the goblins attack. After Smaug has been slain, not only Thorin but also the others —the humans, and the elves— insist on the right to possess the Dragon-gold and this foments disorder at first. They desired the treasure to rebuild the peace, but as their desires grow they forget their original purpose, to keep the peace. They lose sight of and lack the quality to judge the situation calmly. To borrow Bilbo's phrase, "The whole place still stinks of dragon" (*The Hobbit*, 320).

When Thorin and the other races begin their battle for the treasure, the goblin armies attack them. The ugly and cruel goblins are common enemies of the dwarves, the humans, and the elves, so, Thorin and the three races stop their fighting and unite to fight their common foe. With this invasion by a new enemy, Thorin has a chance to take a step back from his current situation and to view it from a different perspective. That is, on seeing the goblins, he realizes how demeaning it is to be obsessed with the treasure. Through this battle against goblins, Thorin remembers that his intrinsic goal is not to control the treasure but to rebuild peace. Then, he comes to

recognize that he has been obsessed with the treasure and has lost sight of his morality.

At the end of this story, he abandons his possessiveness and admits his faults. He apologizes to Bilbo as follows:

“Farewell, good thief, [. . .] I go now to the halls of waiting to sit beside my fathers, until the world is renewed. Since I leave now all gold and silver, and go where it is of little worth, I wish to part in friendship from you, and I would take back my words and deeds at the Gate. [. . .] If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world.” (*The Hobbit*, 346-347)

As Thorin abandons his selfish desire, he recovers his spiritual richness and finds enchantment in the world itself.

Thorin, being freed from one-dimensional vision is able to remember his original purpose, to take the world back to peace, and accepts the facts that he must leave the treasure and his life positively. He has been fatally wounded during the battle and dies at the end of this novel, but when he departs from life, he shows no sorrow over his leaving of the treasure. That is because he finds greater joy in the happiness of others than feelings of personal success. Therefore, his death is unlike that of Smaug and Gollum who destroy themselves trapped by their desires. The death of Thorin symbolizes freedom from selfish desire. Tolkien through this novel shows the process of corruption by excessive desire, escape from obsessiveness, and the possibility of recovery of one’s clear vision.

In Summary

In *The Hobbit*, Tolkien portrays the features of the dragon Smaug in detail, and emphasizes Smaug's brutal and selfish nature and his clinging to treasure. Then, he analogizes the ugly possessiveness of Gollum and Thorin with the dragon. Tolkien paints each character who is obsessed with treasure, and the image of the dragon stresses their greedy disposition and their bestiality which is caused by the excessive desires. By depicting Smaug, Gollum, and Thorin in this way, Tolkien shows that excessive possessiveness narrows one's vision, makes one lose sight of morality, and causes a harmful influence over others.

Tolkien not only shows that everyone is at a risk of corruption by excessive obsession, but also indicates that there is a chance to escape. Through the episode of Thorin, who clings to the Dragon-gold but abandons it in the end, he shows that everyone can be freed from obsessions and can recover enriched humanity if he or she recognizes their own selfish desires and moral mistakes with clear vision. To abandon selfish desire leads to spiritual richness.

Chapter 4

Tolkien's Criticism against Excessive Acts of Heroes:

Farmer Giles of Ham (1949),

Farmer Giles of Ham, a dragon-slaying tale set in medieval England, was published in 1949, at a time between the publication of *The Hobbit* and that of its sequel, *The Lord of the Rings*. This story is not directly related to these two works, for, while *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are set in Middle-earth, the story of Farmer Giles is located in medieval England. However, *Farmer Giles of Ham* includes a similar theme to the other works in that obsessiveness eventually distorts and diminishes the intrinsic value of things. In *Farmer Giles of Ham*, Tolkien depicts knights who are tied by conventions and rules of chivalry yet fail to do their duty as knights. He shows us how their excessive pride to be heroic diminishes the essential qualities necessary to be a knight.

In this chapter, we will clarify that obsession with traditions and customs blinds individuals to their intrinsic duty. This paper first refers to Tolkien's scholarly work "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son" (1953)⁴³ for information about Tolkien's disaffection with heroes. Then, we will take up *Farmer Giles of Ham* and compare the acts of the knights in the court with those of Giles the farmer, which will explain those elements required of a knight.

I The Heroes' Overmastering Pride

I-1 Tolkien's dissatisfaction with the heroes

Tolkien enjoyed various heroic stories like *Beowulf* and *Le Morte d'Arthur* from youth, and was thoroughly acquainted with them. Yet, as the following letter shows, he was not deeply satisfied with those heroic tales. Writing to Milton Waldman, the editor at the publishing house of Collins at that time, Tolkien says:

[. . .] an equally basic passion of mine *ab initio* was for myth (not allegory!) and for fairy-story, and above all for heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history, of which there is far too little in the world (accessible to me) for my appetite. (Tolkien, "To Milton Waldman." Letter 131 of *Letters*. 144.)⁴⁴

Thus, Tolkien has a keen interest in existing tales, but feels that they are hardly his ideal of heroic stories. While he praises the knights or heroes for their valor in arms, he is discontented with many of them. Specifically, he does not appreciate the heroes' excessive acts of pride. He laments that heroes sometimes give their own pride preference over responsibility.

I-2 "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son"

"The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son" illuminates Tolkien's view of heroic tales. He wrote this work to comment on the hero's overmastering pride. It consists of three sections, two of which are prose essays, and one of which, the main section, is an alliterative verse drama written as a sequel to the Old English poem *The Battle of Maldon*.⁴⁵

The Battle of Maldon, which inspired Tolkien, tells of a battle between a Viking fleet and the defence-force of Essex near Maldon in Essex in the year 911. This poem has been preserved only 325 lines long, and the ending

and beginning have been lost, but it is generally known as this title. In the story of this battle, Beorhtnoth, Duke of Essex, a powerful, fearless, and proud man who leads the English against a Viking invasion, allows the Vikings to cross the River Pante⁴⁶ in order that a fair fight can be joined. Yet, as a consequence, the savage enemies slay Beorhtnoth and all the English, and the battle ends in the defeat of the English.

Tolkien says that this fragment has been regarded as a purely heroic poem telling of the brave deeds of Beorhtnoth and the knights,⁴⁷ but Tolkien himself disagrees with this. He comments that it is an “act of pride and misplaced chivalry” (“Homecoming,” 4). He thinks that Beorhtnoth puts too much priority on his own honor rather than on his responsibility to defend the realm, although his main purpose should have been to prevent the enemies from crossing the river.

In regard to this, Tolkien focuses on lines 89 and 90 of this poem: “ða se eorl ongan for his ofermode alyfan landes to fela laþere ðeode,” which mean “then the earl in his overmastering pride actually yielded ground to the enemy, as he should not have done” (“Homecoming,” 21, emphasis added). The word “ofermod,” the original form of “ofermode,” is generally translated into “overboldness,”⁴⁸ but Tolkien insists that “overmastering pride” is more accurate than the familiar one. He explains as follows:

[. . .] *ofermod* does not mean ‘overboldness’, not even if we give full value to the *ofer*, remembering how strongly the taste and wisdom of the English (whatever their actions) rejected ‘excess’.
[. . .] But *mod*, though it may contain or imply courage, does not mean “boldness” any more than Middle English *corage*. It means

“spirit”, or when unqualified “high-spirit”, of which the most usual manifestation is pride. But in *ofer-mod* it is qualified, with disapproval: *ofermod* is in fact always a word of condemnation. (“Homecoming,” 24)

Thus, Tolkien clarifies that the word “ofermod” should be translated as “overmastering pride,” and explains that Beorhtnoth’s behavior is merely misplaced chivalry.

In addition, Tolkien mentions that the poet of *The Battle of Maldon* also feels dissatisfied with the excessively chivalric act, although the poet does not elaborate on it in his poem. According to Tolkien, perhaps the poet is dissatisfied with the hero’s behavior, but is concerned to criticize what was accepted as a heroic deed and was greatly praised at that time. It can be said that this poet also goes along with the current of the time and also respects the aristocratic traditions. Therefore, the poet fails to express his true feelings against excessive acts of pride of heroes clearly.

Tolkien further expresses his opinion in his original verse drama. His play begins after the battle of Maldon. When two of the original characters, Tidwald and Torhthelm, go to the battlefield to bring back Beorhtnoth’s body, they notice that Beorhtnoth died from folly, holding his personal honor dearer than duty:

TÍDWALD. No more’s the pity.
Alas, my friend, our lord was at fault,
or so in Maldon this morning men were saying.
Too proud, too princely! But his pride's cheated,
and his princedom has passed, so we'll praise his valour.

He let them cross the causeway, so keen was he
to give minstrels matter for mighty songs.

Needlessly noble. It should never have been:

bidding bows be still, and the bridge opening,
matching more with few in mad handstrokes!

Well, doom he dared, and died for it.

(“Homecoming,” 16, emphasis added)

Here, Tolkien definitely shows his critical feelings toward chivalric deeds done beyond need. Although the knights should act not for themselves but for the people, Beorhtnoth thinks of nothing but his own dignity and pride and dies in vain. Tolkien provides a remarkable perspective on Beorhtnoth’s failure in the following statement:

Why did Beorhtnoth do this? Owing to a defect of character, no doubt; but a character, we may surmise, not only formed by nature, but moulded also by “aristocratic tradition”, enshrined in tales and verse of poets now lost save for echoes. Beorhtnoth was chivalrous rather than strictly heroic. (“Homecoming,” 23-24)

Tolkien points out that Beorhtnoth’s excessive pride arises from his attachment to chivalry. Beorhtnoth regards knighthood as a symbol of the martial spirit, and follows its aristocratic codes or manners. He is so affected by the traditions and customs of knights that he has forgotten his duty to protect the realm. That is to say, while the intrinsic purpose and duty as a knight grows blurred, overmastering pride begins to grow as a chief motive. Beorhtnoth has a mistaken idea from the tradition of knighthood and distorts the intrinsic value of it. His apparently brave behavior is merely

pointless, because he lost sight of his most important role as a leader. Thus, Tolkien shows his dissatisfaction with the heroes who put priority on fame and he criticizes such overmastering selfish pride.

II The loss of the nature of knighthood

II-1 A parody of dragon-slaying: *Farmer Giles of Ham*

In *Farmer Giles of Ham*, Tolkien shines a light on the heroic act, tongue in cheek. Although this tale deals with dragon-hunting, it is not your typical story of a brave knight who kills a dragon. This is an entirely “light-hearted” story (Tom Shippey, *Author of the Century*, 289), and Tolkien generously makes a number of philological jests and private jokes throughout the text. As Jane Chance indicates in the following statement, Tolkien parodies the legends of old in his story:

Farmer Giles of Ham represents Tolkien’s only medieval parody that both imitates a medieval form or genre and also burlesques medieval literary conventions, ideas, and characters drawn from fourteenth-century works, especially *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. (Jane Chance, *Tolkien’s Art*, 125)

Written as a parody, Tolkien portrays the failure of knights in a humorous way.

Furthermore, Tolkien “pretends to be the editor and translator of an ancient text” (*FGOH*, xv-xvi) and introduces the story with a mock scholarly foreword. This allows Tolkien to criticize the heroes’ failure more easily, because as the editor and translator, he stands apart from the chivalry or

even the heroism of the story. Unlike the poet of *The Battle of Maldon*, Tolkien makes fun of the misplaced chivalry in satire and jokes without the restraints of the aristocratic tradition.

II-2 The knight's preoccupation with tradition

Let us see how Tolkien expresses the knights' obsession with the traditions and the customs of the knighthood in *Farmer Giles of Ham*. The first point that we should discuss is their fixation on their outward appearance. The knights of the court wear "polished mail and shining helmets on their heads" (*FGOH*, 55). They are very interested in fashion, and turn their whole attention to it. They always care about appearance, and talk among themselves about fashionable new clothes. A knight traditionally puts on armor to fight enemies, but Tolkien's knights are clad in gorgeous armor only to improve their appearance. They are so concerned with appearance that they lose sight of their original duty as chivalrous knights.

Despite looking like knights, their behavior tells another tale. These knights use the conventions and rules of chivalry to avoid danger rather than confront it. When the dragon turns up and does a great deal of damage everywhere, the villagers of Ham plead with the King's knights to slay the dragon. The knights, however, do nothing because they say that they have not been ordered to by the King yet. To make matters worse, even when the King issues an order, they hide behind details of official events related to dragon-hunting:

It was still the custom for Dragon's Tail to be served up at the King's Christmas Feast; and each year a knight was chosen for

the duty of hunting. He was supposed to set out upon St. Nicholas' Day and come home with a dragon's tail not later than the eve of the feast. But for many years now the Royal Cook had made a marvellous confection, a Mock Dragon's Tail of cake and almond-paste, with cunning scales of hard icing-sugar. The chosen knight then carried this into the hall on Christmas Eve, while the fiddles played and the trumpets rang. The Mock Dragon's Tail was eaten after dinner on Christmas Day, and everybody said (to please the cook) that it tasted much better than Real Tail. (*FGOH*, 22-23)

Originally, this Feast should have been held to praise the dragon slayer, however, over time, the original function has become lost, and now eating cake has become more important than slaying the dragon. Therefore, when these knights are asked to start dragon-hunting, they postpone their departure because the Royal Cook has already made the Cake and Christmas Day is near. To eat the mock dragon tail, Paul H. Kocher says, "now the high table is reduced to eating an imitation tail made of cake baked by the royal cook" (*Master of Middle-earth*, 162). Thus, although these knights hold many traditional events, they have forgotten the original purpose of them. They do try to remember the old conventions and rules and try to hand down to following generations, but their ideas about these traditional events have become blurred and the original meaning, forgotten.

The aberrant behavior of the knights goes on. When the knights have finished the traditional seasonal events, they finally set off on the dragon-hunt. Yet, they are in no hurry, and ride "along at their leisure, in a

straggling line, knights, esquires, servants, and ponies trussed with baggage” (*FGOH*, 56). In addition, they are all talking, laughing, and singing in loud voices with a minstrel, less a hunt than a picnic. Even when they have found Dragon-marks on the road, they do not pay attention to the conditions around them. Here, Tolkien, as the purported editor of the tale, points out the knights’ foolishness:

[. . .] but it is unwise. Their coming was now known to all the creatures of that land, and the dragons were cocking their ears in all the caves of the West. There was no longer any chance of their catching old Chrysophylax napping.⁴⁹ (*FGOH*, 57)

The ending of the knights’ quest borders on the ridiculous. When the Dragon Chrysophylax comes upon the party in a rage, the knights fall off their horses, and run away at full speed without fighting. A few of them do manage to stay there to fight, but before they do issue a formal challenge to battle, they expect a proper exchange of titles and credentials as is custom. As a matter of course, they are killed before they can claim anything against the dragon. Thus, although they are well dressed and comport themselves in a stately manner, they completely miss the chance to accomplish their purpose. They adhere to traditional codes of chivalry and place pride and prowess, but they completely fail to achieve their intrinsic purpose to kill the dragon.

III Restoration of knighthood

III-1 Farmer Giles as a true knight

Tolkien steadfastly shows his dissatisfaction with the pompous

unheroic acts of the knights humorously. He then depicts farmer Giles and shows in him the intrinsic qualities which the knights have lost. Although Giles is just a farmer, he is more heroic than the knights of the kingdom, which adds further comical atmosphere to this story. While the knights fuss about their outward appearances, Farmer Giles never minds how he looks. He is a farmer, he is free from the customs or rules of knighthood and does not have desire for his pride as the knight do. He wears no gorgeous armor and does not behave formally during the quest.

When Giles first decides to join the dragon-hunting, he ignores the rules and customs of the knights preferring to act in a very efficient way. Since Giles has no armor, he and the villagers of Ham abandon all the planned festivals of the village and make improvised armor for Giles without rest. Yet, as ring-mail needs sophisticated craftsmanship and takes a fair amount of time, they stitch old rusting steel rings onto Giles's old leather jerkin. Although the finished product is marginal at best and Giles looks very funny in it, they do not care as long as it works. Actually, they had no intention to make gorgeous armor, because, as one of the villagers says, "[. . .] it need not be very fine. It would be for business and not for showing off at court" (*FGOH*, 36). Thus, these folks including Giles understand that the most important thing is not how beautiful the armor looks, but how practical it is for actual combat with the dragon. This statement is full of ironic overtones, for the knights of the kingdom proudly show off their armor but do not take a serious view of its practical function.

When Giles puts on his armor, he takes additional countermeasures for protection against the dragon. He ignores any idea of fashion and throws a

big grey cloak over his mail jerkin and breeches, and puts on an old felt hat over his helmet. He explains why the villagers who ask his reason:

“What is the purpose of that, Master?” they asked.

“Well,” said Giles, “if it is your notion to go dragon-hunting jingling and dinging like Canterbury Bells, it ain’t mine. It don’t seem sense to me to let a dragon know that you are coming along the road sooner than need be. And a helmet’s a helmet, and a challenge to battle. Let the worm see only my old hat over the hedge, and maybe I’ll get nearer before the trouble begins.”

(*FGOH*, 38)

Here, Giles takes a cynical view of the overdecorative costumes of the knights. He asserts that even though his figure is funnier than ever, it is more practical. The cloak will stop the jingling noise of the hanging steel rings of the jerkin, hence he can get closer to take advantage over the dragon. Thus, his behavior is very different from the knights, who take no mind of the noise they make. He sets the practical use of armor above its looking good.

Giles ignores the rules of chivalry, too. When he comes to fight the dragon, he attacks the dragon immediately without any declaration of intent. The dragon Chrysophylax complains that Giles ignores the rules of combat in which the knights should issue a formal challenge to battle. Yet, Giles says that since he is a farmer he is outside the form or custom of chivalry, and he can act freely and efficiently, as he wills.

Even when the dragon surrenders to Giles and promises to give him a great deal of treasure, Giles shows an attitude which is notably different

from the knights. He saves the life of Chrysophylax and in return the dragon carries the treasure to the village. He neither slays the dragon out of revenge or pride, nor strips all of the treasure from it. Tolkien says that his decision is “a laudable discretion”:

A knight would have stood out for the whole hoard and got a curse laid upon it. And as likely as not, if Giles has driven the worm to despair, he would have turned and fought in the end [. . .]. In which case Giles, if not slain himself, would have been obliged to slaughter his transport and leave the best part of his gains in the mountains. (*FGOH*, 64)

Typically, knights usually kill the dragon for fame and honor even if it is unnecessary in battle. On the other hand, Giles, who does not desire fame, chooses the best possible solution, a truce with the dragon instead of a fight to the death.

Thus, while the knights in their fine armor lose sight of their purpose and fail, Farmer Giles keeps sight of his purpose and fulfills his task. We see in this comparison that it is not important to wear gorgeous armor, or observe the customs of chivalry, or even to kill the dragon itself. The intrinsic goal for knights is to protect the people of the village and the realm from the attack by enemies.

III-2 Development of Giles and the restoration of the new knighthood

As we have seen, Tolkien shows that people often miss out on what is important because they hold dear their own selfish desires or are satisfied with superficial matters. He also claims that everyone is at risk of obsession

with a single idea. He shows that even Giles, who seems to be free from such obsessiveness, overall has a narrow view of things. Tolkien suggests the importance of freeing ourselves from selfish ideas to rediscover the intrinsic, essential value of things. In the quest of Giles, Tolkien shows that even simple people of narrow mind can recover the freshness of their vision when they step out of their daily life and see things from new angles.

In the beginning of this story, Giles is not interested in peace in the surrounding world; he is merely satisfied with maintaining his own comfortable life. Therefore, he has no idea about misplaced knighthood and takes it for granted that a knight should wear gorgeous armor and attach importance to one's honor. Although Giles himself does not desire to be honored like a knight, he has standard ideas about the greatness of knighthood. The following quotation shows that Giles thinks only of himself, and has no concern with chivalry:

[. . .] he was a slow sort of fellow, rather set in his ways, and taken up with his own affairs. He had his hands full (he said) keeping the wolf from the door: that is, keeping himself as fat and comfortable as his father before him. The dog was busy helping him. Neither of them gave much thought to the Wide World outside their fields, the village, and the nearest market (*FGOH*, 10).

He is satisfied with his current situation and no longer observes things carefully. He knows that a farmer has no connection with the court or the aristocratic code, so he pays no attention to them. His limited view of things never sees that the knights have lost their intrinsic values.

Yet, after Giles leaves his daily rounds to hunt the dragon, he recovers his clear vision and begins to act not only for his own, but also for the greater good. The idea to leave his home is quite unexpected. One night, a giant strayed into the village called Ham, and Giles repelled it by an unexpected accident. The village folk, not knowing the accidental nature of his achievement, treat him as “the Hero of the Countryside” (*FGOH*, 19), and they send Giles on a dragon-hunt when the dragon Chrysophylax is about to invade the village. Thus, Giles is unwillingly chosen to slay the dragon.

Giles goes through a variety of experiences during this quest, and he develops his own identity and gains a new multifaceted point of view. Now able to put things in perspective, he notices that his habitual views about knighthood were wrong; he finds that knighthood no longer serves its original function, and that the intrinsic value of a knight has been distorted due to misunderstandings of the tradition.

As Giles’ vision clears during the quest, he tries to correct the misunderstandings of others. At the end of this tale, Giles becomes a king and sets about to change the traditions of knighthood. He assembles the knights and sets an entirely new order of chivalry named “the Wormwardens” (*FGOH*, 76), which means guards of the dragon.⁵⁰ Tolkien does not explain clearly what this new knighthood is, but it is obvious that it is not attached to superficial things such as wearing gorgeous armor or conducting official events. Thus, Giles matures as a person through the whole experiences of the quest, understands what he should do, and changes from concentrating on only himself, to considering others. Tolkien shows that the most important thing for a knight to do is to act in a moral way to keep peace. His

alterations to the rules of the knights restore the knights' original purpose of protecting people.

Giles's modification of the conventions and rules may seem destructive to the old traditions, but in fact, this change restores the very essence of those traditions. Tolkien mentions that although the old traditions of the knighthood have been lost, it is not the end of the world, but only a turning point of the present time and the beginning of the new era. He stresses that essential quality and aptitude are more important to seize than superficial manners.

In Summary

Through depicting the knights or the heroes in "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son" and *Farmer Giles of Ham*, Tolkien criticizes those obsessed with superficial manners caused by selfish desires for fame or to be heroic. Such obsession blurs people's vision and leads them to take mistaken actions.

In *Farmer Giles of Ham*, the knights of the kingdom cling to superficial matters and forget that their intrinsic purpose is to guard their country from enemies. On the other hand, farmer Giles, who is quite foreign to the world of knights and thus free from their traditions or manners, succeeds in getting the dragon to surrender. Tolkien posits that the most important thing for knights is not to obey superficial rules but to act on behalf of people.

Chapter 5

The Essential Qualities of the Hero:

The Lord of the Rings (1954-55)

This chapter examines the heroic ethos in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955).⁵¹ As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, Tolkien has a keen interest in heroic tales and depicts several heroic characters in his own works. In *The Lord of the Rings*, he shows the essential qualities of the hero and depicts the ideal figure of them.

This paper focuses on several characters who look like heroes and examines their thoughts and actions, to clarify Tolkien's vision of the ideal hero. In this story, he depicts not only the ideal hero but also people who seem to act like heroes but actually are not. We will look at a brave warrior, Aragorn, first and confirm Tolkien's definition of a hero. Next, we are going to focus on a lady Éowyn, who strongly desires to be honored yet makes a false move, which will show that to be obsessed with excessive desire for fame leads to a misunderstanding of the essence of a hero. Finally, we will take up, Sam, who is depicted as a life-sized character and see his remarkable activity during the quest. In discussing these characters, we will show that the intrinsic nature of hero can be found not in superficial elements, but in their inner strength.

I The ideal figure of the hero

Let us begin with a definition of "hero." According to *The Old English dictionary*, "hero" is "a name given to men of superhuman strength, courage,

or ability, favoured by the gods.” In later times, this word, hero, is also used for a man who has “extraordinary valor and martial achievements,” such as “an illustrious warrior.”

Joseph Campbell, an iconic American cultural anthropologist, also provides a useful definition about the archetypal hero in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. He uses many examples of myths and folktales from around the world, and explains the fundamental structure seen in heroic tales:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 30)

He points out that most, if not all heroic tales, have a common structure which can be divided into three main sections: departure, initiation, and return.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Aragorn, a descendant of the first king of Númenor,⁵² is depicted as the main hero, and we can find the same aspects of hero noted above. Aragorn is strong, bold, and almost inhuman in his fearlessness. He has survived many adventures, and fights forcefully during war putting his life at risk. We can see here also the pattern of typical heroic tales, which Campbell has outlined.

Let us take one of the quests of Aragorn. During the war of the Ring, the armies of good need to enlist more soldiers to confront Sauron’s armies. Aragorn decides to take the Paths of the Dead, in the Hill of Erich, in order

to summon fallen ghosts in support of winning the war. The ghosts are called the Sleepless Dead because they have broken their oath with their leader Isildur to fight against Sauron, the primary antagonist of *The Lord of the Rings*. They have been cursed by Isildur to rest nevermore until their oath is fulfilled. It is said that no one alive can pass through this Paths of the Dead, and so everyone stays away. However, Aragorn dares to choose the paths risking his life, because he is the last heir of Isildur and has a small chance to call the ghosts to follow. In meeting the ghosts he continues them to prove their oath and he brings the military power of the dead to his party. Thus, Aragorn acts bravely, and in the same heroic pattern which Campbell has detailed, ventures “into a region of supernatural wonder,” and “comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons” on his fellow men.

Tolkien depicts Aragorn a true, typical hero, even in that Aragorn has a keen sense of humility and never acts arrogantly about his ability. What needs to be emphasized here is that Aragorn is a hero not because he is strong and is filled with honor, but because he is always willing to risk his life to save other people or to achieve a more important purpose. Tolkien considers that the brave hero’s actions should be based on morals. It can be said, that an ideal hero is brave and responsible, exposes his life for others, and acts on his own will to achieve a greater purpose.

II Misunderstanding heroic deeds, and the desire for fame

From what we have seen, it can be said that a man is treated as a hero who is brave, strong, and courageous, can act on the basis of his morals, and

risk his life to achieve a greater good. Yet, these features of the hero are sometimes misinterpreted. Some people only pay attention to the hero's superficial elements like their physical strength or their honor, and lose sight of the other essential elements.

Some people believe that heroes should have strong power because it is an essential quality for them. Yet, this is wrong. The heroic ethos cannot be measured only by superficial strength. For example, Frodo Baggins, the protagonist in *The Lord of the Rings*, is treated as a hero but he does not have any superficial strength. He is depicted as a life-sized character who does not show any physical strength during his quest. Tolkien indicates that superhuman strength is not intrinsic to the nature of a hero.

Other people only pay attention to the glory of hero and forget why heroes expose their life to danger. Although ideal heroes confront danger to keep peace, some people who desire to be heroes risk their lives just for fame. Yet, Tolkien claims that such behavior is merely foolish, an excessive act. In "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son,"⁵³ he complains about the man who forgets his responsibility and has prefers his own pride. Tolkien claims as follows:

Yet this element of pride, in the form of the desire for honour and glory, in life and after death, tends to grow, to become a chief motive, driving a man beyond the bleak heroic necessity to excess— to chivalry. "Excess" certainly, even if it be approved by contemporary opinion, when it not only goes beyond need and duty, but interferes with it. ("Homecoming," 22)

Thus, Tolkien shows his distaste for men who put priority on winning fame.

Tolkien's negative view towards excessive acts of pride can be seen in *The Lord of the Rings* as well. In this novel, he shows how the female character, Éowyn, acts against her better judgement. She is a noble and brave woman of Rohan,⁵⁴ and enjoys the fullest confidence of the King, but she wishes to be loved above all, and this undermines her sense of justice. She decides to participate in war in order to gain fame honor. Ralph C. Wood indicates that "She believes that her only lasting worth lies in being remembered for her brave deeds, especially in dying heroically while defending her people" (*The Gospel Accounting to Tolkien*, 81).

Moreover, when Éowyn meets Aragorn, her desire for her own fame overwhelms. Though she has feelings for him, she actually loves him only for his name. In regard to this, Faramir, who weds Éowyn in the end, points out as follows:

'You[Éowyn] desired to have the love of the Lord Aragorn. Because he was high and puissant, and you wished to have renown and glory and to be lifted far above the mean things that crawl on the earth. And as a great captain may to a young soldier he seemed to you admirable. For so he is, a lord among men, the greatest that now is.' (*LOTR3*, 964)

Thus, because of her excessive obsession with fame, Éowyn's vision is blurred and she is blind to that which is right.

She claims honor yet desires to go to war in order to gain glory, and in this, she completely forgets her true responsibility. When Théoden, the King of Rohan, orders her to stay in Rohan and protect the realm and people from their foes, Éowyn is dissatisfied with this order. She thinks that this duty has

no value for her because, if she stays home, she cannot acquire a great reputation. That is, she is not aware of the importance of the duty given to her. She complains that even though she is skilled at the arts of war and has a brave spirit, she has no chance to show her worth. She expresses her anger to Aragorn:

‘You are a stern lord and resolute,’ she said; ‘and thus do men win renown.’ She paused. ‘Lord,’ she said, ‘if you must go, then let me ride in your following. For I am weary of skulking in the hills, and wish to face peril and battle.’

‘Your duty is with your people,’ he [Aragorn] answered.

‘Too often have I heard of duty,’ she cried. ‘But am I not of the House of Eorl, a shieldmaiden and not a dry-nurse? I have waited on faltering feet long enough. Since they falter no longer, it seems, may I not now spend my life as I will?’ (*LOTR3*, 784, emphasis added)

Then, she goes on to say “Shall I always be left behind when the Riders depart, to mind the house while they win renown, and find food and beds when they return? (*LOTR3*, 784, emphasis added). Thus, we can see that Éowyn is obsessed with renown, and completely loses sight of the intrinsic purpose of risking one’s life to fight against enemies. Warriors participate in the battle to destroy their foes and protect the peace of the world, but she believes they fight to gain fame. Her desire to die bravely in the field is no more heroic than the knights in *Farmer Giles of Ham* who foolishly believe their fashion and manners make them heroic.⁵⁵

When Éowyn acts on her own will, it should not be to satisfy her own

desire but for the good of others; because if she ignores her duty to pursue fame, the people left behind may lose their leader and be exposed to life-threatening danger. However, she gives too much priority to her honor rather than her responsibility to carry out the mission she has been given by the King. It is obvious that she makes the wrong decision to go to war ignoring her duty.

Regarding her excessive desire for renown, Aragorn also admonishes Éowyn that it is wrong to stick to personal desire. He tells her that the most important thing is not to gain fame but to stand by one's morals and protect:

'Few may do that with honour,' he answered.

[. . .]

'A time may come soon, [. . .] when none will return. Then there will be need of valour without renown, for none shall remember the deeds that are done in the last defence of your homes. Yet the deeds will not be less valiant because they are unpraised.' (*LOTR3*, 784, emphasis added)

He insists that to be honored or not is insignificant to a real hero. As Ralph C. Wood says, the most important thing is "to act on the virtue that has no external reward but that possesses its own intrinsic merit" (*The Gospel Accounting to Tolkien*, 81).

As has been seen, Éowyn has an excessive desire for fame, and misunderstands the ideal heroic figure. Tolkien shows us several characters, like Éowyn, who are originally good but are corrupted by their excessive pride. For example, Saruman was originally a good wizard who tried to defeat the evil Sauron, however, he eventually desires to seize Sauron's

power for himself. Boromir, the brave warrior, is also tempted by the imperial power of the One Ring. He wished to use the Ring to defeat Sauron, but in consequence loses his head in his quest for power. These characters, though full of confidence, strength and ability, again, forget their essential purpose.

Thus, in sticking to their own authority, they lose any heroic quality they possesses in acting to pursue their own desires. If one risks life for one's own benefit, it should not be treated as a heroic act. Tolkien insists that the behavior of those who forget their responsibility and have a preference for their own pride are no more heroic but merely foolish. Having a sense of honor and superhuman strength are not enough alone to mark a true hero.

III The most important essence of the hero

As we has come to understand, people often focus too much on superficial elements and forget that the hero's true nature is based on morals. Tolkien tries to show this important element of the hero by depicting the life-sized character of the hobbits.

Frodo, for instance, is an ordinary hobbit and does not desire fame, but he can be seen as a true hero. When he takes on the task of destroying the One Ring, he leaves his comfortable life and risks his life to save peace of his world. As his mission is carried out secretly, Frodo's activity is not known to other people. Yet, he tries to achieve his duty with all possible effort and no thought of reward. David Day points out as follows:

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo's adventures appear at first to

be a foil to Aragorn's great deeds. The Hobbit is too frail and all too human to appear initially as a likely candidate for the role of questing hero. Aragorn is large, strong, bold, and almost inhuman in his fearlessness and virtue. In the end, however, it is the human qualities of compassion and humility in the Hobbit that are finally what are required to prevail in the quest. The deep wisdom of compassion found in the human (or Hobbit) heart succeeds where heroic strength cannot. (David Day, *The World of Tolkien*, 117, emphasis added)

Frodo's activity is not illustrious like Aragorn's quest, but it is worth noting that he acts with humility and compassion for others. He is moderate and knows well what has to be done to save the world. Tolkien depicts the hobbit as a life-sized hero to show his internal disposition clearly; that is, a keen sense of humility and wisdom to act in a moral way.

Such remarkable action without seeking renown or showing any love of superficial power can also be seen in Sam Wise Gamgee, the faithful servant to Frodo. As Tolkien himself says that "[. . .] the 'Sam Gamgee' of my story is a most heroic character" ("To Sam Gamgee," 18 March 1956, Letter 184 of *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 244),⁵⁶ Sam is depicted as a hobbit who retains the ideal essence of the hero. For, during the quest, he gives up his personal desires and gives his all to the task of protecting world peace.

As Sam is a very faithful servant, he desires to stay with and protect Frodo all cost. When Frodo is attacked by an evil giant spider named Shelob and seems to have been slain without accomplishing his purpose, Sam faces an extremely difficult decision. At first, he is upset by the loss of his master

Frodo, and asks himself what he should do:

‘What shall I do, what shall I do?’ he said. ‘Did I come all this way with him for nothing?’ And then he remembered his own voice speaking words that at the time he did not understand himself, at the beginning of their journey: *I have something to do before the end. I must see it through, sir, if you understand.*

‘But what can I do? Not leave Mr. Frodo dead, unburied on the top of the mountains, and go home? Or go on? Go on?’ he repeated, and for a moment doubt and fear shook him. ‘Go on? Is that what I’ve got to do? And leave him?’ (*LOTR2*, 731, emphasis added)

As shown in the underlined sentences, Sam actually knows what he should do, but he is still obsessed with his promise to stay with Frodo. Because Sam is so faithful, he wishes to stay and die with Frodo.

However, he thinks twice about why he has come along on Frodo’s quest, and he wrestles with the choice of whether to stay with his master, or leave and get revenge on the enemy, who sent him to his death, or take the ring from Frodo and continue the quest. Each choice is lonely and gives Sam nothing but pain, but, after deep consideration about the choices, he decides to leave Frodo and continue the quest:

‘What am I to do then?’ he cried again, and now he seemed plainly to know the hard answer: *see it through*. Another lonely journey, and the worst.

‘What? Me, alone, go to the Crack of Doom and all?’ He quailed still, but the resolve grew. ‘What? *Me* take the Ring from

him? The Council gave it to him.’

But the answer came at once: ‘And the Council gave him companions, so that the errand should not fail. And you are the last of all the Company. The errand must not fail.’ (*LOTR2*, 732, emphasis added)

Here, Sam abandons his personal desire and to attempt the more important purpose. Besides, although Sam’s efforts during the quest gain him no fame in the Shire, his homeland, he does not complain about it. This is behavior completely different from that of Éowyn. Thus, we find the ideal figure of hero in Sam; he risks his life to protect the world from evil and acts always on a moral basis.

In Summary

Tolkien shows that the most important element of a hero is not strength and power, nor honor and fame, but to behave bravely for the sake of others.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien depicts Aragorn as an ideal hero who has exquisite qualities both inside and outside. Yet, when people view this ideal figure of the hero, they often pay attention only to the superficial attributes such as his fame or strength, and lose sight of these inner qualities that really make one a hero. Hence, Tolkien depicts the life-sized characters, the hobbits, who do not have any superhuman strength, in order to emphasize the importance of the inner quality of the hero. Through the hobbits, Tolkien reminds us that heroes need a keen sense of humility and wisdom in order to behave in a moral way.

Chapter 6

A Journey in Which Selfish Desire Is Abandoned:

The Lord of the Rings (1954-55)

The Lord of the Rings concerns the quest to destroy the One Ring, which has been forged by the primary antagonist, the Dark Lord Sauron to gain power over all. As this Ring gives the power to dominate the world, several characters are seduced by it and desire to possess it. Yet, those characters, who are completely obsessed with the One Ring, destroy themselves in their excessive desire to obtain it.

In this chapter, we are going to clarify how foolish it is in the end to be obsessed with one thing, and show the importance of abandoning selfish desire. We will focus on Sauron and see how his selfish desire and excessive obsession blurs his vision. Then, we will examine Frodo's journey to destroy the One Ring. Frodo Baggins, a hobbit, takes on an immense task to carry the Ring to the Cracks of Doom,⁵⁷ where the ring was created, in order to foil Sauron's evil purpose to rule the whole world. Yet, he also suffers from the temptation of the ring's power during his quest. We can read the hobbit's quest as a description of the process to abandon one's selfish desire.

I Senselessness of obsession

To be obsessed with one thing is base and unproductive. Tolkien depicts Sauron the Ring maker as an evil creature who is completely obsessed with his selfish desire. From the depiction of Sauron, we see how meaningless it is to be obsessed with one thing.

Sauron desires to control the free peoples of Middle-earth and dominate the whole world forever, he creates nineteen rings and gives them to the elves, the dwarves, and the mortal men, and then he secretly makes the One Ring to rule all of those rings. He puts much of his power and will into the ring, so that he can come back to life again and again as long as the ring remains. Owing to this ring, Sauron has gained an unholy immortality; for even though his body is destroyed, his spirit survives and will return back to this world, as long as the Ring exists. However, it does not mean that he can mature or obtain more power by the Ring, because the One Ring can only bind his life to this world. Therefore, he merely continues to exist even if he becomes tired of living. It can be said that his tenacity with the world kills any delight in life. As Bilbo, who possessed the One Ring for many years, says, his life is “all thin, sort of stretched,” and it is “like a butter that has been scraped over too much bread” (*LOTRI*, 32). Extended life is meaningless and does not bring forth any delight. Thus, although Sauron gains the great power, his single, one minded desire makes a mockery of his life itself.

Sauron’s unique external figure also confirms that his excessive desire deprives of him of the joy of living. In *The Lord of the Rings*, his figure is described as one great lidless eye: it is “rimmed with fire, but was itself glazed, yellow as a cat’s, watchful and intent, and the black slit of its pupil opened on a pit, a window into nothing” (*LOTRI*, 364). The lidless eye intimates that Sauron stays awake all the time and continues to gaze steadily on the foes without rest, a single eye, of single vision. As long as Sauron adheres to the One Ring, he continues to live without knowing rest. It is

obvious that Sauron has no joy in living because he is swallowed up in his own possessiveness.

In addition, Sauron's desire to rule the whole world makes him blind and prevents him from judging the matter rightly. When Frodo and his company try to return the One Ring to the Cracks of Doom to destroy it, Sauron does not notice because he would never dream that someone would try to destroy the Ring:

For he is very wise, and weighs all things to a nicety in the scales of his malice. But the only measure that he knows is desire, desire for power; and so he judges all hearts. Into his heart the thought will not enter that any will refuse it, that having the Ring we [the forces of the good] may seek to destroy it. (*LOTR1*, 269, emphasis added).

Since Sauron has a one-dimensional sense of value and is obsessed with his own ideas, he does not imagine selfless ideas about the One Ring could exist. Therefore, he cannot anticipate the behavior of others and is completely defeated in the war of the Ring. This defect in Sauron's character is embodied in his depiction as a single eye; Sauron exists only as one all seeing eye, yet he has a limited grasp of reality and sees things merely on the surface.⁵⁸

Such blinkered vision is also expressed by the effect of invisibility of the One Ring. This Ring has a power to make the one wearing it invisible, but at the same time, it blurs one's sight as well. To take the example of Frodo, when Frodo puts on this Ring, he disappears from the others' view, but his own eye sight also becomes dim and dark: "At first he could see little.

He seemed to be in a world of mist in which there were only shadows” (*LOTRI*, 400). Thus, although the One Ring has a special power to make the man who put it on hide from other peoples’ vision, the user of the ring also loses his vision. Such blindness misleads one’s thoughts and can distort one’s vision of the true nature of things.

Thus, obsession with one thing is senseless and dangerous, and it leads one to destruction. It is obvious that Sauron is completely taken over by personal desire. Sauron made the One Ring to rule others, but in fact, it is he that is ruled by it. To covet the One Ring blurs one’s vision, promotes selfish ideas, and deprives one of peace.

II Blindness happens to everyone

II-1 Selfish desire blurs one’s purpose

One’s desire unconsciously grows, and as it swallows one whole, in the end it blurs one’s vision. This blindness can happen to anyone. This idea is expressed in two lines of a verse about the One Ring, “One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, / One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them” (*LOTRI*, 50), which is also found printed on a cover page of the book; this indicates that the One Ring, the selfish desire, gradually grows and takes over one’s mind, and in the end blurs one’s vision.

By way of illustration, Tolkien depicts several characters who are obsessed with their personal desires. He shows that not only evil characters, like Sauron, but also good men who try to challenge the evil forces can be tempted by desire and make mistakes. Éowyn, the lady of Rohan, for example, who wants to fight with the foes but she gives too much priority to her own

honor and forgets about her responsibility; her desire for fame overcomes her mission to which she had been ordered.⁵⁹ Boromir, a brave warrior, overestimates his own abilities and believes that he can control the power of the ring for good, so he plans to use the One Ring to counter the evil forces and tries to take it from Frodo; his behavior is merely selfish and obviously far removed from his original objective. Actually, he desires the authority of the One Ring for his own.

These characters try to act for good, but they are seduced by their own selfish desires and lose sight of their intrinsic purpose. Thus, people are often blinded to the most important things without noticing it and lack a sense of perspective because of personal obsession.

II-2 The hobbits cling to their daily life

Not only obsession with one's desire for power but also to be trapped in habitual views causes blindness. Tolkien portrays the hobbits, the folk of the Shire,⁶⁰ as merry folks who like eating and drinking, and laugh as well, as ultimately trapped being by the conditions of their ordinary life.

The hobbits are small in size but Tolkien depicts with human like traits. In the Prologue to *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien says: "It is plain indeed that in spite of later estrangement Hobbits are relatives of ours: far nearer to us than Elves, or even than Dwarves. Of old they spoke the languages of Men, after their own fashion, and liked and disliked much the same things as Men did" (*LOTR1*, 2). Tolkien depicts the hobbits as "rustic English people" (Carpenter, *Biography*, 180),⁶¹ and the Shire is also based on rural England.⁶² He enumerates the similarities between the hobbits and himself

in the following comment:

I am in fact a hobbit [. . .] in all but size. I like gardens, trees, and unmechanized farmlands; I smoke a pipe, and like good plain food (unrefrigerated), but detest French cooking; I like, and even dare to wear in these dull days, ornamental waistcoats. I am fond of mushrooms (out of a field); have a very simple sense of humour (which even my appreciative critics find tiresome); I go to bed late and get up late (when possible). I do not travel much. (Carpenter, *Biography*, 179)

Thus, the hobbits are as much the same as humans. They love their good tilled country fields and can find delight in order and ordinary things.

It seems as if the Shire is an ideal world, but actually it is not. Tolkien reflects the faults of humans in the hobbits as well as their good points. That is, although the hobbits love their ordinary life, they have an inclination to shut out non-conforming elements. For example, they do not try to use unfamiliar things even if they are useful for them: “They do not and did not understand or like machines more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom, though they were skilful with tools” (*LOTRI*, 1). They have a love of old, traditional things and rigidly refuse to accept change.

As Tolkien said in the former citation he “detest[s] French cooking,” the hobbits are also very closed and do not try to open their hearts to foreign things. They avoid different races, like dwarves, elves, and humans, and furthermore, they even try to avoid hobbits from other regions.⁶³ Jane Chance points out that the hobbits do not trust those who come from outside;

they do not try to understand different things, and place much value on sameness.⁶⁴ Hence, when the hobbits find something they know nothing about, they immediately regard that these things are “queer,” and do not desire to inspect them closely. In conversations among hobbits, the word “queer” is used repeatedly for unnatural things. The Shire is a closed community and the folks avoid unusual things and prioritize their own comfort; that is, they cling to that which is familiar.

This tendency to avoid unpleasant things and have preference for the self can be seen clearly in the behavior of Frodo. He does not desire wealth, fame, or power,⁶⁵ hence it seems that he is a superior character who is free from any kind of desires. Yet, in fact, he is obsessed with one selfish desire: the desire to stay peacefully at home. Like other hobbits, he is satisfied with the ordinary life in the Shire and scarcely pays attention to unfamiliar things. The map that Frodo has, demonstrates his lack of interest in the outside world: the “maps made in the Shire showed mostly white spaces beyond its borders” (*LOTR1*, 43). In addition, the local name for Frodo’s house, Bag End, which means “the end of a ‘bag’ or ‘pudding bag’ = cul-de-sac” (Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, *The Lord of the Rings: A Reader’s Companion*, 51), indicates that his vision is limited and he is blind to other communities.⁶⁶ Thus, Frodo has a narrow vision, and the things that he already knows are enough for him.

Furthermore, Frodo not only lacks interest toward foreign things, but also refuses queer and unfamiliar things. When the wizard Gandalf tells Frodo that Gollum, who was one of the former bearers of the One Ring, was originally a hobbit in spite of his ugly appearance,⁶⁷ Frodo does not accept

this fact because Gollum looks an unnatural and queer being to him. He shows antipathy towards Gollum and complains that Bilbo should have killed this creature, saying, “[. . .] What a pity that Bilbo did not stab that vile creature, when he had a chance!”⁶⁸ Then, he continues as follows:

‘[. . .] I am frightened; and I do not feel any pity for Gollum.’

‘You have not seen him,’ Gandalf broke in.

‘No, and I don’t want to,’ said Frodo. ‘I can’t understand you.

Do you mean to say that you, and the Elves, have let him live on after all those horrible deeds? Now at any rate he is as bad as an Orc, and just an enemy. He deserves death.’ (*LOTRI*, 59)

Here, Frodo rushes into judgement of Gollum based on his own standards and regards Gollum as a worthless being. He does not try to see beyond unfamiliar. Moreover, he complains that the One Ring has come to him:

‘All the same,’ said Frodo, ‘even if Bilbo could not kill Gollum, I wish he had not kept the Ring. I wish he had never found it, and that I had not got it! Why did you let me keep it? Why didn’t you make me throw it away, or, or destroy it?’ (*LOTRI*, 60)

All he is concerned about is his own safety, so he wants to thrust responsibility of the One Ring on somebody else. Thus, at the beginning of this tale, Frodo only thinks about himself and is obsessed with his selfish desire to live a comfortable life. He lacks a sense of humility and affection toward others; even though he has the potential to gain these attributes, they are not yet developed in him.

Furthermore, as Frodo and the folks of the Shire are obsessed with their

personal desires to preserve their comfortable life and do not pay attention to their surroundings, they take it for granted that they will live their life in peace. They never understand that their comfortable life has been brought by someone's efforts to keep peace and safety in the world. Tolkien explains this defect of the hobbits as follows:

[. . .] in that pleasant corner of the world they plied their well-ordered business of living, and they heeded less and less the world outside where dark things moved, until they came to think that peace and plenty were the rule in Middle-earth and the right of all sensible folk. They forgot or ignored what little they had ever known of the Guardians, and of the labours of those that made possible the long peace of the Shire. They were, in fact, sheltered, but they had ceased to remember it. (*LOTRI*, 5)

Tolkien points out that they are satisfied with their comfortable life and forget that their life style has been provided due to the efforts of unknown beings outside their society. That is, they are so obsessed with their own life, that they are blind to their relationship with the outer world.

As has been seen, blindness can happen to anyone who clings to a single vision. If we want to know the intrinsic nature of things, we have to abandon our selfish desire and regain a clear perspective.

III Frodo's journey to destroy the One Ring

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo escapes from his one-dimensional vision, is freed from selfish desire, and recovers clear vision through his journey to destroy the One Ring. That is, the quest to destroy the Ring

represents the quest to be freed from obsession.

At first, Frodo is unwilling to leave his home, even though he knows how terrible the One Ring is. He understands that he has to take the Ring away from the Shire, but he postpones his departure as late as possible, from which we see that he clings to his comfortable life and puts priority on himself. Yet, waiting until the last minute, he finally decides to leave home; for he wants to keep the Shire, his home, in peace. Here, Frodo's self interest is still focused on his own well being, but we see a sign of his affection for others from this decision. Frodo's leaving Bag End is the first step for him to recover his vision. Leaving his home, he has a chance to see below the surface of things, to their intrinsic nature.

During the journey out of the Shire, Frodo ventures into the unfamiliar world and meets many different races. He has unusual experiences and gets through many crises with the help of friends. These experiences not only broaden his limited vision but also remind him of his relationship with others.

Frodo's relationship with others is shown in several episodes. To take an example, in the battle of the Pelennor Fields, many races of the Middle-earth participate in the war against Sauron partly to distract him so that Frodo can achieve his task unnoticed. These folks do not wage this battle to win but to divert the eye of Sauron from Frodo. As Gandalf says, "[. . .] we must at all costs keep his [Sauron's] Eye from his true peril. We cannot achieve victory by arms, but by arms we can give the Ring-bearer his only chance, frail though it be" (*LOTR3*, 880), in spite of the danger of the situation, they try to do their best at the risk of their lives for a better future.

Owing to their efforts, Frodo finally reaches his destination. Thus, it is shown that Frodo's task to destroy the One Ring in the Cracks of Doom needed the support of all the other races. Frodo knew nothing of his relationship with the others and thought that he was confronted alone with the fearsome journey in the face of Sauron's wrath. However, through the experiences of his journey, he comes to realize that peace and his own safety depended on the efforts of others. He understands that they mutually support each other, and that all things are connected in some mysterious way.

Frodo's attitude towards others also changes with his awareness of world affairs; he begins to appreciate that others have different values. We see this change in his attitude towards Gollum. At first, Frodo hates Gollum and regards this creature as a worthless being. Yet, after the many experiences shared during his journey, Frodo shows sympathy for Gollum. He feels that Gollum is a "poor wretch" and says, "[. . .] still I am afraid. And yet, as you see, I will not touch the creature. For now that I see him, I do pity him" (*LOTR2*, 615). Here, we see Frodo's change of heart.

This pity Frodo felt for Gollum may seem to get in the way of success in his task to destroy the One Ring because Gollum is a dangerous creature who desires to steal back the Ring. However, contrary to this expectation, Frodo's affection towards Gollum in the end produces a successful result. When Frodo reaches his final destination, the edge of the Cracks of Doom, he is about to fail in his mission to throw the ring into the fire. Yet, at that very moment, Gollum suddenly attacks Frodo, bites off his finger with the One Ring, and falls with it into the fire from the rim of the volcano, and Frodo's task is unexpectedly completed. Thus, Frodo's inner development

leads unwittingly to the solution to his task of destroying the One Ring.

His development on the inside also can be seen when he returns to the Shire. Although Frodo had been trapped by his one-dimensional vision and avoided queer or uncomfortable things before leaving his home, he now accepts everything with humility and love after returning from his quest. For example, Frodo has been customarily hostile to the Sackville-Bagginses, his and Bilbo's cousins. Yet, when Frodo returns to his hometown after the quest, he shows generosity towards them. In addition, Frodo's change of heart for the Sackville-Bagginses changes their greedy personality, too. As a result, they reconcile each other and their longstanding feud ends. Frodo's inner development not only enriches his own vision but also brings about changes in others, which forges a new social community.

Unfortunately, his great achievement to destroy the One Ring and to save the world is not noticed by the folks of the Shire. Yet, he does not pay attention to how little honor he is given in his own country and never complains about it, because Frodo has held true to his former self.

Moreover, Frodo does not even show any dissatisfaction with the loss of his own peaceful ordinary life. At the end of this story, Frodo must leave his world, Middle-earth, because he has been injured deeply during the quest. It seems a very sorrowful ending, for he cannot enjoy peace even though peace has been restored to the world through his efforts. However, Frodo accepts these bitter circumstances, and interprets his wound, which cannot be healed, as one of the inevitable (or necessary) sacrifices to keep the world at peace. When Frodo leaves Middle-earth, he says to Sam as follows:

‘But,’ said Sam, and tears started in his eyes, ‘I thought you

were going to enjoy the Shire, too, for years and years, after all you have done.’

‘So I thought too, once. But I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them.’

(*LOTR3*, 1029, emphasis added)

As Frodo leaves behind his selfish desire for security and recovers clear vision through his journey, he can see things from a flexible perspective. He then comes around to the idea that it is far more gratifying to pass this world he loved down to future generations than to ensure his own desire or happiness. As he says to Sam, “But you are my heir: all that I had and might have had I leave to you” (*LOTR3*, 1029), Frodo gives up his peaceful life and leaves the world for those to come. The last sentence of Sam, “Well, I’m back” (*LOTR3*, 1031), indicates that the world of peace which is founded ultimately on the sacrifice of Frodo, has returned and will be preserved and continue for the generations, following, which consoles Frodo’s farewell to his life.

In Summary

Selfish desires and possessiveness narrow one’s vision and blurs the true nature of things. Like Sauron, if one sees things only from a one-dimensional point of view and clings to one’s own desires, one will lose sight of the joy of living because of this possessiveness. However, when one can escape from various obsessions and see things from a multidirectional

point of view, like Frodo has done, he will find a lot of delight in life. Frodo has been obsessed with his personal desire to preserve his comfortable life and has not paid attention to his surroundings. Yet, through the journey to destroy the Ring, he escapes from his one-dimensional vision, is freed from selfish desire, and recovers clear vision, so that he reminds himself of his relationship with others. By depicting the development of Frodo through the journey, Tolkien shows the significance of freeing oneself from a covetous nature. The quest to destroy the One Ring tells us of the importance of throwing away selfish desires in order to join with the world on a deeper level.

Conclusion

In each chapter, we have looked at the various issues of obsession in Tolkien's writings.

In Chapter 1, we have seen some concrete examples where the intrinsic nature of things is lost, and clarified the use of fantasy to recover one's vision. By seeing some examples, we clarified that when we cling to a self-conceited point of view and stop seeing things from different perspectives, we lose sight of the intrinsic nature of things. That is, blindness is caused by obsessiveness based on a one-sided view. This obsessiveness occurs in various situations, therefore it is necessary for us to gain flexible visions in order to arouse our interest in the world again. Fantasy novels enable us to be freed from the obsessiveness of our one-sided view, since the imaginary world shows us everyday affairs of our world anew with wonder by defamiliarizing them. Through this sub-created world, we begin to recover an unclouded vision and find aspects which we have lost sight of and see them from another side. Fantasy allows us to see things from other points of view.

In Chapter 2, we read *Smith of Wootton Major*, and have examined the importance of abandoning fixed ideas and having a willingness to see things in themselves in order to recover one's clear vision. In this novel, Nokes, a self-confident and arrogant man, fails to see fairyland because he adheres to his fixed ideas and never accepts unfamiliar things. On the other hand, Smith, more selfless in disposition, finds a glimpse of fairyland because he can accept unfamiliar things, which expands his horizons further. In this story,

we see that obsession with one's own ideas deprives one of a chance to gain new perspectives. Tolkien tells that although fantasy can free us from slavery to a narrow and distorted vision of the world, it does not necessarily do so if we cling to our one-dimensional vision and never try to see outside of it; therefore, it is important to look at things with a positive consciousness in order to gain a larger vision of the world.

In Chapter 3, we read *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* and have examined the characters' obsession for a treasure and the images of the dragon in detail. Elements of the dragon are given to each character obsessed with treasure, and we see from their greedy disposition and their aggression toward others that this is caused by their selfish desires. It is clear that their excessive desires for one thing blur their vision and corrupt their morality, which then causes harm to others. Tolkien indicates through the character of Thorin, who gives up the treasure that when one abandons selfish desire, one will recover an enriched humanity and find that spiritual riches are more important than physical treasure.

In Chapter 4, we read *Farmer Giles of Ham* and have examined the excessive acts of the knights caused by their inability to overcome the traditions and customs of knighthood. Tolkien depicts the knights, as being obsessed with superficial manners ignoring their innate role of guarding their country, to criticize these attitudes as merely meaningless acts of selfish preference. Tolkien then portrays the farmer Giles: he is quite foreign to the knights and is free from any traditions or manners of the knights, but succeeds in making the dragon surrender. Depicting Giles, Tolkien shows that the most significant task of a knight is not to keep

courtly manners, but to protect the people and the realm from attack. Through this tale, Tolkien expresses his dissatisfaction with the misplaced behavior of the knights and mentions that adhering to superficial manners blurs the intrinsic duty of knights and that it causes moral blindness.

In Chapters 5 and 6, we read *The Lord of the Rings*. Chapter 5 has focused on people's obsession with power or fame and has examined how Tolkien shows the heroic ethos of this story. The most important element of a hero is to behave bravely for the sake of others, however, people often focus too much on superficial elements of the hero like their superhuman strength, and forget that true heroes act on moral conviction. Tolkien then depicts not only an ideal figure of the hero, Aragorn, who has exquisite qualities both inside and outside, but also depicts the hobbits, as life-sized characters, who do not have any superficial strength but achieve great deeds to achieve peace in their world. Through the great efforts of the hobbits, Tolkien reminds us of the intrinsic nature of the hero; that is, the hero's keen sense of humility and wisdom to behave in a moral way.

Chapter 6 has focused on the characters' selfish desires and has examined the journey to destroy the One Ring. By depicting the development of Frodo over his selfish desire, by taking the One Ring, and trying to throw it away, Tolkien along the way shows the risks of obsession and the significance of freeing from one's self-covetousness. People often adhere to a selfish desire and lose sight of that which is important, but it is necessary to abandon these obsessions to better understand the world. Frodo's quest to throw away the One Ring expresses the importance of escaping from one's own selfish desires and recovering one's clear vision. When we flee from

various obsessions, we can see things from a multidirectional point of view, like Frodo has done, and find delight in the simple things of life. This quest tells us that when we leave behind our selfish desires, we will be able to see the world more deeply and rediscover the intrinsic values of the world.

As we have seen, Tolkien depicts various obsessions in his work. He considers that obsessiveness makes our vision blurred and obscures many things that are worth looking at, therefore, he asserts that it is necessary for us to free ourselves from such obsession and see things from different angles in order to rediscover the intrinsic enchantments of the world we have lost sight of. Tolkien depicts characters' obsessive behaviors in each of his novels and shows that obsession prevents us from recognizing things rightly. In addition, he also expresses the importance of abandoning our obsessiveness by describing the process through which the characters have unusual experiences and gain an ability to take a larger view of things.

In everyday life, we are often obsessed with feelings of desire, hate, despair, grief, and other dissatisfactions. Once we allow ourselves to be restricted by these negative thoughts, we will miss the charm or the intrinsic values of the world. Yet, by reading Tolkien's writings of fantasy, we have the chance to experience imaginary worlds and gain an ability to take a larger view of things, which enables us to see our world with brand-new eyes and to rediscover the enchantments of the world, liberating us from obsession with negative thoughts. It can be said that Tolkien's works not only show us the risks of one-dimensional vision and the necessity of abandoning obsessiveness, but also offers us a multidimensional vision, freed from blindness to obsessiveness, by showing us a wonder.

Notes

Introduction

¹ Tolkien explains his surname pronunciation as follows: “(Tôl kēn) *tólkeen* (sc. *tol* does not rhyme with *yolk*; the division is *tol-keen* in which *tol* rhymes with *doll* and *kien* (NOT KEIN) = *keen* as *ie* in *field* and many other words.” (Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond, *The J. R. R. Tolkien companion and guide: Reader’s Guide*, 625)

² According to Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien found the story of Fafnir in Andrew Lang’s Fairy books. He also enjoyed many other fantasy novels like *Alice in Wonderland*, George MacDonald’s books in his childhood. (Carpenter, *Biography*, 30)

³ Paul H. Kocher, *Master of Middle-earth: The Fiction of J. R. R. Tolkien*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972.

⁴ Nigel Walmsley, “Tolkien and the ’60s.” *J. R. R. Tolkien: This Far Land*. Ed. Robert Giddings. U.S.: Vision Press, 1984. 73-86.

⁵ C. Frederick and S. McBride. *Women among the Inklings: Gender in C.S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams*. Contributions in Women’s Studies 191. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001.

⁶ For example, Edmund Wilson goes so far as to label *The Lord of the Rings* “juvenile trash.” (“Oo, Those Awful Orcs!” 329)

⁷ Alison Milbank, “‘My Precious:’ Tolkien’s Fetishized Ring,” Gregory Bassham and Eric Bronson, Ed. “*The Lord of the Rings*” and *Philosophy: One Book to Rule Them All*. 33-45.

⁸ Gregory Bassham, “Tolkien’s Six Keys to Happiness.” Gregory Bassham and Eric Bronson, Ed. “*The Lord of the Rings*” and *Philosophy: One Book to Rule Them All*. 49-71.

Chapter 1

⁹ This golden ring is the One Ring, which has been forged by Sauron the primary antagonist of *The Lord of the Rings*.

¹⁰ As for the history of reception of fairy stories, see Sheila A. Egoff, *Worlds within*, 21-33.

¹¹ Tolkien takes Dasent's metaphor from *Popular Tales from the Norse*. ("On Fairy-Stories," 39)

¹² For further details of the story of a tower, see Tom Shippey, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, 161-163.

¹³ Tolkien also denies an idea that *The Lord of the Rings* has written as an allegory. He says, "As for any inner meaning or 'message', it has in the intention of the author none" (*LOTR*, xxiii). Ralph C. Wood notes an example as follows; Tolkien "wants us to discern likenesses and resemblances between the Ruling Ring and the nuclear bomb, [. . .] but not to *equate* them." (*The Gospel According to Tolkien*, 5)

¹⁴ "fantasy." Def. 4f. *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

¹⁵ Tolkien calls writers who create the imaginary worlds "Sub-creator." This is a coined word by Tolkien, which he has said in "On Fairy-Stories."

¹⁶ According to David Day, Tolkien estimates that the war of the Ring in *The Lord of the Rings* happened approximately something between 4,000 and 5,000 BC. Day also points out that Tolkien establishes "an imaginary time of the real world's age of myth that had a parallel existence and evolution just before the beginning of the human race's historic time." (*The World of Tolkien*, 14) Further information about time and place in Middle-earth, see David Day, *The World of Tolkien*, 14-19.

¹⁷ “Hobbiton,” “Rivendell,” and “Minas Tirith” are the place names located in Middle-earth.

¹⁸ As for the connection between the hobbits and humans, we will discuss further in Chapter 6 of this paper.

Chapter 2

* This chapter is based on my paper, “*Smith of Wootton Major: A Glimpse of Faërie to Be Hande Down.*” *Kobe Studies in English*. No.26, Kobe University, 2012. 33-45.

¹⁹ See, Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 66-76.

²⁰ When Tolkien uses “Fairy” in a capital letter, it means the land of the fairy, that is, “the realm or state in which fairies have their being.” (“On Fairy-Stories,” 32) He also uses the word, “Faërie” or “Faerie” as the same meaning. So, in this paper, I use “fairy” for the creatures like elves, and “Fairy” for the realm in which those creatures exist.

²¹ George MacDonald (1824-1905) is a Scottish writer well known for the children’s books, for example, *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), and *The Light Princess* (1867).

²² “Curdie” books indicate MacDonald’s *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872) and its sequel *The Princess and Curdie* (1883).

²³ Tolkien says in his letter that he is not a warm admirer of MacDonald even though he thinks “well” of *The Golden Key*. (“To Michael di Capua, Pantheon Books” 7 September 1964. Letter 262 of *Letters*, 351)

²⁴ Tolkien probably mentions fairy-stories here. According to him, “fairy-stories are not in normal English usage stories *about* fairies or elves, but stories about Fairy, that is *Faërie* [. . .].” (“On Fairy-Stories”, 32)

²⁵ Carpenter adds that the preface was never finished. About details

of the making *Smith of Wootton Major*, see Carpenter, 244.

²⁶ Tolkien calls such distortion “Morbid Delusion.” (“On Fairy-Stories,” 65)

²⁷ See, Perry C. Bramlett, *I Am in Fact a Hobbit: An introduction to the life and Work of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 44.

²⁸ Tolkien shows his sorrow feeling in a letter: “So far I have felt the normal feelings of a man of my age—like an old tree that is losing all its leaves one by one: this feels like an axe-blow near the roots.” (Carpenter, *Biography*, 243)

Chapter 3

*This chapter is based on the paper “The Dragons in *The Hobbit: Or There and Back Again*” read at the autumn annual meeting of Japan Society for Children’s Literature in English, West-Japan Branch on September 11, 2010 at The Consortium of Universities in Osaka.

²⁹ Further information; see Humphrey Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography*, 180-186.

³⁰ This letter is not dated, but the editor Humphrey Carpenter says that it is probably written late in 1951.

³¹ “The Book of Job,” 41:1-41:34.

³² “The Revelation,” 12:9.

³³ *Beowulf* is an Old English epic poem consisting of 3182 lines, probably written in the early eighth century.

³⁴ Further discussion about the name of Smaug, see David Day, *The World of Tolkien*, 86-87.

³⁵ According to Tom Shippey, Tolkien borrows the idea of the conversation with dragon from an Eddic poem called *Fáfnismál*, “The Lay of

Fafnir.” See, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, 36-38.

³⁶ This magic ring is One Ring, which has been forged by the Dark Lord Sauron, the primary antagonist of *The Lord of the Rings*. This ring has a great power to dominate the world and many characters are seduced by this power and desire to possess it.

³⁷ These features of Gollum remind us of another monster, Grendel in *Beowulf*. Grendel is an ugly monster whose den is at the lake of a cave, and this creature kills and eats many people. See David Day, *The World of Tolkien*, 142.

³⁸ The revised edition of *The Hobbit* was published in 1951, and the sequel, *The Lord of the Rings*, was published in 1954.

³⁹ As Gollum has lived alone for a long time, he speaks in an idiosyncratic manner: he always talks to himself and calls himself “we.” In addition, he stresses the sound of “s” like “We are ssory.”

⁴⁰ Benniejean Christenesen examines the transformation in Gollum’s character of this revision in detail. See “Gollum’s Character Transformation in *The Hobbit*,” *A Tolkien Compass*, 7-26.

⁴¹ The name “Sméagol” also has an image of dragon. David Day says that it comes from an Anglo-Saxon root meaning “worming in.” (*The World of Tolkien*, 144) So, it conjures images of dragon that Sméagol goes into the cave.

⁴² The Cracks of Doom is the name of the volcanic fissure in Mount Doom. It is the only place to destroy One Ring.

Chapter 4

* This chapter is based on my paper, “Heroism in *Farmer Giles of Ham*.” *Kobe Studies in English*. No.24, Kobe University, 2010. 1-12.

⁴³ “The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm’s Son” was first published in the scholarly journal *Essays and Studies* in 1953, but it was already written in 1945.

⁴⁴ This letter is not dated, but the editor Humphrey Carpenter says that it is probably written late in 1951.

⁴⁵ Although “The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm’s Son,” which was intended as a recitation for two persons, was not staged, it was broadcasted on the radio in 1954. See further, Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, *The J. R. R. Tolkien companion and guide: Chronology*, 446-447.

⁴⁶ The Pante is now called the River Blackwater.

⁴⁷ According to this statement, see, J. R. R. Tolkien, “The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm’s Son,” 21-22.

⁴⁸ Tolkien cites this translation from William P. Ker’s (1855-1923), who was Oxford University Professor.

⁴⁹ Chrysophylax Dives is the dragon’s name. This name means the rich dragon: “Greek *krysos* ‘gold’ + *phylax* ‘keeper,’ latin *dives* ‘rich.’” (*FGOH*, 123)

⁵⁰ In regard to the comments of “Wormwardens,” I referred to the Notes of *Farmer Giles of Ham*, 138.

Chapter 5

* This chapter is based on my paper, “Tolkien’s Sense of Heroism in *The Lord of The Rings*: Heroic Nature of Frodo and Sam.” *Tinker Bell*. No.57, Japan Society for Children’s Literature in English, 2012. 111-123.

⁵¹ *The Lord of the Rings* is often called a three-decker novel, but this expression is, to be exact, not right. That is because it is in fact a single

novel, consisting of six books. Humphrey Carpenter states, “Tolkien was never entirely happy about the division, and he insisted on retaining *The Lord of the Rings* as the overall title.” (*Bibliography*, 216)

⁵² Númenor is the name of the huge land located in the west of the Middle-earth.

⁵³ In regard to the details about “The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm’s Son,” see Chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁵⁴ Rohan is the name of the wide and spacious realm of the Middle-earth.

⁵⁵ In *Farmer Giles of Ham*, Tolkien shows his dissatisfaction towards excessive act of the heroes humorously. In regard to this discussion, see Chapter 4 of this theses.

⁵⁶ This Letter was written to Mr. Sam Gamgee of London. When Tolkien received the fan-letter from real Sam Gamgee, he was delighted and sent a signed copy of all three volumes to him. See also Carpenter, *Biography*, 227.

Chapter 6

⁵⁷ “Doom” is the name of the volcano. Mount Doom is located in the Mordor, the dwelling place of the dark lord Sauron.

⁵⁸ Ralph C. Wood also mentions the narrow vision of Sauron. He says “As a singular Eye, [. . .] Sauron lacks perspective and depth of vision.” (*The Gospel According to Tolkien*, 59)

⁵⁹ As for Eowyn, we have discussed in Chapter 5 in detail.

⁶⁰ The Shire is the name of a region settled by the hobbits in Middle-earth.

⁶¹ This phrase is once used when Tolkien has commented in an

interview.

⁶² Day David says the Shire is “JRR Tolkien’s romanticized analogy for the rural and pre-industrial English Shire of his late Victorian Childhood” (*The World of Tolkien*, 174).

⁶³ The Shire is mainly divided into four regions, and they are also parted into the smaller clan homelands. Each land has a reclusive tendency and they call the hobbits from the other regions “queer.”

⁶⁴ Jane Chance discusses the problem of the hobbits’ tendency to avoid the queer things in *The Lord of the Rings: Mythology of Power*, 26-37. Ralph C. Wood also points out this issue. See also *The Gospel According to Tolkien*, 90-93.

⁶⁵ We have discussed obsession with wealth in Chapter 3, and obsession with fame in Chapter 5 of this paper.

⁶⁶ Originally, the name Bag End is the local name of Tolkien’s Aunt Jane’s farm at Dormston in Worcestershire. “It was at the end of a lane that led no further, and the local people used sometimes to refer to it as ‘Bag End.’” (Carpenter, *Biography*, 113)

⁶⁷ As for Gollum, it is discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis in detail.

⁶⁸ Bilbo finds the One Ring in the cave of the Misty Mountains, and there he meets Gollum. Bilbo has a chance to kill Gollum for his own safety but he does not do so. See, *The Hobbit*, Chapter 5.

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