

TED ANKARA COLLEGE FOUNDATION HIGH SCHOOL

EXTENDED ESSAY-ENGLISH B HL

Research Question:

'How does Tolkien give the illustration of the human desire for power symbolized by the ring and demonstrates the alteration of the characters when they wear the ring in

Lord of the Rings: Return of the King?

Topic:

'Desire for Power and Change in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings: Return of the King.*'

Approach:

'To examine how particular characters change when they wear the ring.'

Word Count: 3679 Words

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Abstract

This extended essay is an analysis of theme power and the desire for power of the characters in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings: Return of the King* and consists of an examination of question: 'How does Tolkien give the illustration of the human desire for power symbolized by the ring and demonstrates the alteration of the characters when they wear the ring in *Lord of the Rings: Return of the King*?'; with references to the final novel of the trilogy and when necessary some secondary sources. Some quotations from the published literary is used to clarify the points given with the examples from the piece of literature.

This essay analyses the topic: 'Desire for Power and Change in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings-Return of the King*.' by giving the change of some particular characters: Frodo, Sauron, Gollum and Denethor. Each of the analysis of the change of the characters is focusing on a different aspect of the examination. With the first character, Denethor, the desire for power and letting it go is given and contrary to Denethor, Aragorn is given to show the contraction between good and evil. Second character, Sauron, is given to show the control of power and what power is capable of. Gollum, the third character, shows the changes of a character under the desire of power and Frodo shows the mental change and the change in aim.

Word Count: 233 Words

I. Introduction

Desire for power and the fear of power is effective enough to change a man into someone else and make him do things that he would not do if he was not under the desire of power. Under the effects of desire of power, human can be ripped out his innocence, make him break the oaths he take and take a man into his orbit and do not let him go if he does not give his life. Because power means being capable of ruling, managing and deciding and a human that rules and powers over some weak men does not give his desire of power easily In *Lord of the Rings: Return of the King* J.R.R. Tolkien suggests that, desire for power can affect that human and turn him into a man that he was before obtaining the power. *Return of the King* is the third and the last book of *Lord of the Rings*. It is a fantasy novel, published in 1955, that depicts the war between good and evil for the One Ring in the Middle Earth in 3th century. In the third book of the series, the One Ring is trying to be taken to the Mount Doom, where it can be destroyed by Frodo and Sam, two Hobbits that volunteered to take the Ring to the Mount Doom. Meanwhile, the armies of Mordor, ruled by Sauron, are trying to take control of the world and want the One Ring for their city. They face Gondor; the city ruled by men and in the throne sits Denethor, the steward of Gondor. Aragorn, the king of Gondor is trying to find an army that will beat the Sauron's army and he asks for help from the Oathbreakers, who betrayed the past king of Gondor and did not fight against the Ring, although they gave an oath. Because of their betrayal, the past King of Gondor, haunted them and make their souls trapped in the Middle-Earth until they are forgiven by another King. In this book J.R.R. Tolkien is focusing on the desire for power and the change that power can bring to a human. The change caused by power is symbolized by the effect of One Ring, which motivates the characters and is capable of starting a war between

nations. One Ring has the power to destroy an army with one touch when it is effectively used. The desire of power and the fear of power of humans are given with four of the main characters: Denethor, Sauron, Gollum and Frodo.

II.A Denethor

Once power is obtained, it is hard to let go of it. Humans are greedy; it is compelling to give power up. Mostly because of the benefits being powerful has. Power gives freedom to do rule the weak and be in control, but when man abuses power; he becomes addicted to power and cannot give power up. In *Lord of the Rings: Return of the King*, addiction to power of a human is given with Denethor. Denethor is the steward of Gondor and he is in charge of the city when throne is empty and has to hand over his powers to the king when the king returns. Denethor is depicted as a greedy man wanting more power with a selfish approach. At the beginning of the novel, Gandalf and Pippin are on their way to visit the steward and warn him about the upcoming war so that he will ready the armies of Gondor. Gandalf is talking to Pippin and he is specifying that, Denethor is a man who loves power but as a steward he owns the power temporarily and suggests that Denethor is a powerful man but he does not want to give his powers up: "Denethor is of another sort, proud and subtle, a man of far greater lineage and power, though he is not called the king"¹ Tolkien is foreshadowing to the conflict between Denethor and Aragorn. Aragorn is supposed to be king of Gondor, but he denies being king. Denethor knows when Aragorn returns, he has to give all of his power to Aragorn, but his addiction to power prevents him to concede the return of the king. On the other side, Aragorn is afraid of being king and making mistakes under the effect of desire for power like the previous king. Aragorn's grandfather, Isildur, was the king and he had the chance to destroy evil, once and for all, by destroying the One Ring, but he chose to keep the

¹Lord of the Rings: Return of the King pg.985

Ring and its power to himself. Aragorn is worried that he will go blind because of power and become make a mistake like his grandfather. Person that Aragorn fears to become under the effect of power is Denethor. Denethor becomes obsessed with power and when Aragorn returns to take the throne back, he commits suicide rather than having a powerless life: "Then Denethor leaped upon the table, and standing there wreathed in fire and smoke he took up the staff of his stewardship that lay at his feet and broke it on his knee. Casting the pieces into the blaze he bowed and laid himself on the table..."² With the conflict between Aragorn and Denethor, Tolkien suggests that, when a man gets addicted to power, he becomes unable to think about nothing but power and wants more power after he benefits from the advantages of power, and when the power of that human is taken away he will not give his power up and fight for it and even kill himself when power is not his anymore.

II.B Sauron

Sauron is the antagonist of the novel, who was almost destroyed in the war between good and bad in the 2nd century. In the war, his body was destroyed but his soul and his powers survived. After he gathered his old power he became a red eye that could see everything. Power of the One Ring in the novel is because it spreads fear; fear caused by the unknown. The One Ring is the main element in the novel and is given as a powerful item that is a mystery for many of the characters. Most of the characters do not know what the One Ring is capable of in terms of power. They do not know what ring can do or how powerful is it and do not know how to restrain the power of it. Like the One Ring, eye of Sauron is a mystical element in the novel and it spreads fear to the other races that are in fight with Mordor. No one even the brightest like wise wizards, do not know what the One Ring and the eye is capable of.

²Lord of the Rings: Return of the King pg.1119

After the battle of Pelennor Fields, the battle that Gondor's won and protected the city from Mordor's armies, the characters are having a council to discuss what to do next: "His doubt will be growing, even as we speak here. His Eye is now straining towards us, blind almost to all else that is moving. So we must keep it. Therein lies all our hope. This, then, is my counsel. We have not the Ring. In wisdom or great folly it has been sent away to be destroyed, lest it destroy us. Without it we cannot by force defeat his force."³ Fear of Sauron and the repression of Sauron are indicated. Aragorn indicates that the One Ring is powerful and destroying the Sauron without destroying the One Ring is impossible. They fear the outcome of an unknown possibility as they do not know what the Eye and the One Ring are capable of. Sauron is the one that forged the ring and used it as a weapon to become a dictator and rule the world and they are interdependent. Sauron wants One Ring to be able to gather all of his previous power back and desires power that One Ring will bring:

"The passion for power is epitomized in the One Ring around which the story revolves. The Ring had been forged in a former age along with others that by the time of the setting of this story had been destroyed, neutralized, or possessed by the Dark Lord, Sauron. Possession of this master instrument of power unleashes the worst aspects of this passion in those who seek to own and use it. The passion for power, along with the jealousy, hate, suspicion, deceit, anger, ruthlessness, and the contempt for compassion and mercy that it spawns, rises in intensity over time to poison all relationships."⁴

Former Chairman of the Australian Evangelical Alliance, Raymond J.Laird suggests that the ring is given as a symbol of desire of power and it was used as an instrument of Dark Lord to extend the boundaries of Mordor. Laird depicts desire of power with terms like jealousy, hate and suspicion to indicate the way of change of characters in

³Lord of the Rings: Return of the King pg.1151

⁴Laird, Raymond J *Theologian in Disguise? Small is powerful: A Guiding Principle of the Lord of the Rings*, Evangelical Review of Theology; Jan2014, Vol. 38 Issue 1, p81 7

novel. All of these ideas are things that make a powerful men feared and give him the chance to rule the world.

Besides Sauron, his servants indicate the change of a person under the effects of desire for power. There are nine Ringwraiths called Nazguls that were men before tricked by Sauron and turned into servants under the effect of the One Ring. Because of desire for power they become Sauron's servants. They are under the effect of power of the ring although they were some wise and powerful men before the ring.

“...Tolkien's nine 'Ringwraiths,' the iniquitous, ghastly servants of Sauron, the malevolent Lord of Mordor, and his evil Ring of Power. But what is the Ring? According to Tolkien it was the embodiment of evil. It could potentially control the other rings of power, it held a hypnotic power over all who came near it, and the nine Ringwraiths in particular were bound to it in zombie-like servitude.”⁵

Coordinator at the National Association of Writers Wes Brown suggests that the ring and its powers have a mental effect on the characters and it makes strong men servants for just desire of power. Just like Nazguls, because of their fear of power Oathbreakers changed and broke their vow. Oathbreakers are an ancient army, consisting of men and are haunted because of the vow they broke. As Aragorn is trying to find an army to destroy Sauron he wants to convince Oathbreakers. Aragorn is explaining Gimli, what Oathbreakers had to do but chose not to and broke their oath and did not fight against Sauron's army: “But the oath that they broke was to fight against Sauron, and they must fight therefore, if they are to fulfill it.”⁶ Later in his talk, Aragorn is giving information why the old army broke their oath referring the fear of power of the Oathbreakers: “But the when Sauron returned and grew in might again, Isildur summoned the Men of Mountains to fulfill their oath, and they would not.”⁷

⁵Brown, Wes, Alberta Report Newsmagazine, Vol.26 Issue 3, Edmonton, 1999.

⁶Lord of the Rings: Return of the King pg.1023

⁷Lord of the Rings: Return of the King pg.1023

Oathbreakers feared from Sauron and choose not to fight against him, although they had an oath to fulfill. It is because they were afraid of Sauron's power and did not want to fight beside the weaker side. This fear of power and betrayal to the King had haunted them across their lives and exiled them from the world, into the deepness of mountains. Tolkien suggests that, fear of power can make a man take actions that he would not have taken if he was not under the effect of power. When a man from powerful man, he cannot decide properly as he fears from the consequences that it would have.

II.C Gollum

Gollum is a character, deeply attached to the ring and its power. Gollum was an innocent hobbit, a race in the Middle-Earth known with their joy of life and pureness, before encountering the power of the ring. He achieved power in the hard way by killing his brother. After carrying the ring and benefiting from the power of the ring, he got addicted to it like Denethor. His addiction took over his joy of life and he started to call the ring my precious and acted that the ring is a god and a symbol of life for him. Gollum took Frodo and Sam to Mount Doom where Frodo will throw the Ring in the volcanic lavas to destroy it so that the evil character Sauron dies because he is interdependent with the ring. Gollum plans to take Frodo and Sam and kill them there and take the One Ring to himself again. Gollum gets the ring in his hands, just before Frodo throws it in the volcanic lavas and he falls in the lavas with the joy over having the ring back in his hands: "Precious, precious, precious!" Gollum cried. 'My Precious! O My Precious!' and with that, even as his eyes were lifted up to gloat on his prize, he stepped to far, toppled, wavered for a moment on the brink and then with a shriek he fell. Out of the depths came his last wail Precious and he was gone."⁸ Gollum is trying to have the ring although he knows that there is chance he will fall in to volcanic lavas,

⁸Lord of the Rings: Return of the King pg.1238

with this Tolkien suggests that power is something that could be obsessed and can make a man kill in vain.

Gollum shows the change of a character in mental aspect under the effect of power. Gollum, who is described as a miserable creature, afraid of everything, friendless, homeless and constantly seeking the one Ring, which he constantly calls as his precious, is the mortal being that possessed the Ring for the longest period of time and he seems almost completely corrupted by the desire for it. Every action he takes is designed to regain the lost power back. Also, because of the ring his soul was split in two: one half of his soul is Sméagol, the hobbit he was before the Ring had him corrupted, and the other half is Gollum, the creature whose only desire is to possess the Ring again. Gollum, the evil side of the old ring wielder, is seeking for the ring and planning to kill the new ring holder, Frodo, to obtain the ring and its power back. Sméagol is the innocent hobbit side of the Gollum creature and he is trying to be faithful to Frodo and wants the ring to be destroyed so that he could be relieved from the evil side. Gollum is trying to have the Ring for himself and kill the hobbits. In this quote he is having an inner conflict. Gollum side insists that Sméagol must take hobbits to the cave where they will be destroyed but Smeagol side wants to take the hobbits into the mountain safely. Throughout the novel the two sides of the Gollum is in an instability whether to be faithful or traitor: “‘Wicked masster!’ it hissed. ‘Wicked masster cheats us; cheats Sméagol, gollum. He musstn’t go that way. He musstn’t hurt Preciouss. Give it to Sméagol, yess, give it to us! Give it to uss!’”⁹ but at the end the fear of losing the power of the ring surpass the innocent and faithful side and Gollum wins over Smeagol and take control of the body. The inner conflict of Gollum shows the, physiological effect that power can cause to a man. Tolkien suggests that, there is a bad and good side in every man, with the actions and thoughts of the man, the evil or good side

⁹Lord of the Rings: Return of the King pg.1234

emerge and dominate the other side. Power is something that could affect or change a man's actions and determine whether a man is bad or good. Gollum is a clear example of the corruption of the soul and the loss of a meaningful life caused by the overwhelming desire for the Ring of Power: "The destructive effects of self-interest are most obvious in the fallen Gollum, whose earlier ownership of the Ring and his obsession to reclaim it has robbed him of his personhood, and with it the ability to choose. Gollum's grievous marks, are not the marks of strength but of weakness."¹⁰ Senior Leadership Development Consultant at Queensland University of Technology, Glenys M. Drew suggests that Gollum is obsessed with the ring and his obsession leads him weakness. He also suggests that Gollum's personhood and freedom to choose changed and he became unable to make own decisions and he became the servant of the Ring and its powers. The Ring made Gollum isolated from the real world and created a new world for him where everything focuses on power. After obtaining the Ring, Gollum hide into a cave in a mountain and started a life there without any friends or family. He spent his days looking to the ring, fondling the ring. With these physical changes of Gollum, Tolkien suggest that, desire for power can be so powerful that a man cannot do anything but thinking of power and how to get more power and change physically. Desire for power can be so strong enough that it could cause pain to the man and even death in severe doses.

¹⁰ Drew, Glenys M. *Enabling or "Real" Power and Influence in Leadership*, Journal of Leadership Studies Volume 4, Issue 1, pages 47–58, Spring 2010

II.D Frodo

Desire for power is strong enough to change a pure and innocent man, into a selfish and inconsiderate man. In the novel this change is depicted with the protagonist, Frodo. Frodo is the new ring holder after his uncle Bilbo. He is depicted as a brave and fearless hobbit, although he is short and weak compared to man race. The ring has given to him by the Fellowship of the Ring, the group formed to destroy the ring and Sauron. Frodo took the ring to destroy it by throwing in the lavas to kill Dark Lord Sauron, who created the ring and has a bonding with the ring that would destroy him when the ring is destroyed, but, as Frodo come close to throw the ring into the lavas and destroy it, he changes his mind and does not want to destroy the ring, despite the long and exhausting journey to Mount Doom. Although Frodo is given as a good and innocent hobbit at the beginning, in time his journey to Mount Doom with the ring so close to him, he got addicted to it and when the time came and when he had the chance to destroy the ring he choose not to and claim the ring: "Then Frodo stirred and spoke with a clear voice, indeed with a voice clearer and more powerful than Sam had ever heard him use, and it rose above the throb and turmoil of Mount Doom, ringing in the roof and walls. 'I have come' he said. 'But I do not choose what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!'"¹¹ The power of holding the Ring close to him make him feel the power of the Ring and when the time came to throw the Ring in the lavas, he denied to destroy the Ring and the powers that come with it and wear the ring.

¹¹ Lord of the Rings: Return of the King pg.1237

“As did the aged Bilbo before him, Frodo battles with that “strange desire” to use the power that could be his for self-aggrandizement, or to use it for beneficial, greater good. Charged with the responsibility to rid the world of the Ring’s tantalizing and destructive power, Frodo knows the course he should take but is deflected from his quest in the measure to which he uses the Ring for selfish gain. At those times when Frodo succumbs, he realizes that he stands, in more important ways, to lose.”¹²

Glenys M. Drew suggests that when a man succumbs in desire of power he will lose his passion of life. When someone uses power as a selfish gain he will become obsessed with the ring and this obsession will turn himself to another person. All of the sacrifices and all of the promises will be in vain with just a change caused by the desire for power. With the change in actions of Frodo Tolkien suggests that power is hard to let go because a man can easily become obsessed with power and no matter how pure and innocent a man is, he could be affected from the benefits of power.

III. Conclusion

In this study, the desire for power and the change caused by power in *The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King* is discussed in four main aspects. Obsession and change should be expounded together as obsession means change at higher levels. Power is beneficial and humans are obsessed with the power and its benefits. This obsession changes man and turn him into someone entirely else. Desire for power is another term for obsession and the aim of Tolkien writing this novel is to indicate the effects of power and the desire for it, and how effectively they can change a human. Characters in the novel are depicted to show this change caused by desire for power.

By depicting Denethor as a power centered and obsessed character, Tolkien shows how desire for power can be strong enough to affect the behavior of a strong and wise man. Also with Aragorn Tolkien make his points stronger by giving a

¹² Drew, Glenys M. *Enabling or “Real” Power and Influence in Leadership*, Journal of Leadership Studies Volume 4, Issue 1, pages 47–58, Spring 2010

contraction between Denethor and Aragorn. Gollum is depicted to show the mental and physical change that could occur under the effect of desire for power. The inner conflict of Gollum is illustrated the mental change and his death is a suggestion of how obsession could kill someone. Change of Frodo from an innocent man to a selfish person, is presented to show the effectiveness of desire for power. Antagonist, Sauron is a character that can control the ring and its powers and he is depicted as powerful man to illustrate the powerful side that rules over weak and spreads fear.

After the examination of the change of character due to desire for power, there are some questions unresolved: Does having power mean being powerful? Or In order to be powerful do men need to give up his powers and get away the change desire for power could bring?

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