Abstract

Many of the most ancient texts can be placed into the genre we now know as fantasy, and over time that genre has both evolved and flourished. An important subgenre of fantasy, which encompasses important texts both ancient and modern, is fantasy epic. This analysis proposes six hierarchical elements that make up the genre and describes how they function and intermingle within various stories. Furthermore, it compares and contrasts paradigms in ancient and modern examples of fantasy epic, primarily using Homer’s *The Odyssey* and J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. 
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I would also like to thank my fellow students in my British Fantasy Literature class. Though not directly involved in the writing of this thesis, they were each a constant inspiration and furthermore a constant joy. Their friendship has truly been a treasure worthy of a Hero’s Quest, and I can only hope that it continues to grow as we enter our return journey from this adventure.
Author's Statement

Choosing a topic was perhaps the most difficult part of my thesis and an endeavor that took nearly a whole semester. I started as most students probably do, by trying to find something within my major of particular interest to me, but I just kept turning up ideas that would have merely been projects or papers: nothing of any significance to me personally, certainly nothing that seemed an appropriate way to conclude my undergraduate experience.

Not that there were no topics within Economics that fascinated me, but there were none I could think of that could be a unique work representative of me and what I would like to contribute to the world. As a student who had changed his major several times, even as I eventually finished a bachelor’s I felt somewhat like a “jack-of-all-trades, master of none.” This also made choosing a topic difficult since I did not feel fully committed to one field of study. Furthermore, I knew I wanted my project, at least in some way, to reflect the time I spent in the humanities, both through the Honors College and my time as an English major.

All that I learned in the English department as well as in many of my honors classes provided me with a much-needed creative outlet throughout my four years at Ball State. Furthermore, it most helped me to feel educated, well rounded, and cultured. The humanities, more than my actual major, made the largest contribution to my personal growth and definitely kept me going while I labored in a major that focused almost exclusively on my professional growth.

As I began to recognize this distinction, I finally started to gravitate away from thesis topics within my major and into something in the humanities. Before I came up with
that idea, however, I started by meeting with the professor I suspected would be my advisor. I had taken several classes with Dr. Lindberg, so she had read a reasonable amount of my writing. Furthermore, I thoroughly enjoyed each of her classes, and I knew that she would probably be the advisor I would want, since by this point I knew I wanted to do something in the realm of literature.

Our first meeting was helpful but it would take more than one to figure out my topic. We began by discussing a few potential creative writing projects, then moved on to talk about several novels, genres, past essays, and archetypes. At this point I was considering either a gender discussion of various novels or some sort of fictional character journal. Dr. Lindberg did several times bring up Fantasy, a genre and idea I have always been very interested in. I suspect this topic came up because both of us were excited about the British Fantasy colloquium that was coming up in a few months. I thought about something pertaining to this genre for my topic after the first meeting, but at this point I was not sure what I could do. During our second meeting I didn’t have many new ideas, but Dr. Lindberg continued to visit Fantasy, sure that I could find something within that genre that would suit me.

After our second meeting I started to think more about writing a thesis over the Fantasy genre. I began to reflect on the ways Fantasy had influenced me throughout my life, having grown up with Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* as well as countless fairy tales and stories about knights, heroes, and magic. These stories had helped me develop as a person, so early on I knew that such stories had a special significance, not just to me but also to the human condition. I had found that a favorite subject throughout my humanities classes in the Honors College was the hero: his characteristics, his significance,
and how he reflects the culture that creates him. Although the hero is where I started my real search for a topic, I soon found that I was more fascinated with the stories surrounding heroes than with the characters themselves. The hero’s tasks, the supernatural forces that push him towards or further from his goal, and the examples of honor and nobility all captivated me about heroes and certainly about Fantasy literature.

After I had these ideas in mind, I started thinking about texts that I would like to analyze or at least consider in my thesis. My first thought was *The Lord of the Rings*, which has always been one of my favorite stories and is certainly a text I would consider to be a classic epic; it is not only a grand, heroic adventure but also one that reflects the ideals and virtues of Tolkien and his culture. Furthermore, the present, vast popularity of Tolkien’s books and film adaptations seemed to validate its significance. These thoughts led me to make the conclusion that Tolkien’s work was a combination of both Epic and Fantasy. I also decided to select an ancient text of the same genre, and Homer’s *The Odyssey* was a clear choice for me. It was a text I was quite familiar with, and it was also a well-known story. I hypothesized that I would find many connections between the two texts, but I also wanted to explore the differences between the two works in the context of one being ancient and the other modern; I also knew that the colossal differences between the heroes Odysseus and Frodo would present interesting contrast.

At this point I wasn’t sure how I would go about comparing the texts; I had no basis for my analysis. I started this stage of my essay by simply thinking of ways I could organize the two texts in the context of the genre they shared, Epic Fantasy. I remembered studying Aristotle’s *The Poetics* and recalled his six elements of tragic theatre; at the time I learned about it, I instantly thought it would be a useful analytical method and decided to use it as a
tool in my thesis. At my next meeting with Dr. Lindberg, I said I wanted to do a genre analysis of Epic Fantasy using my two selected texts and formatted in a fashion inspired by Aristotle’s *The Poetics*. She gave me some good advice on ways to organize my essay and seemed to think it was a very good idea. Soon that is exactly what my thesis topic became.

I started my research simply by rereading my selected texts. I then took my usual approach and explored various databases available through the library. This was helpful for getting some ideas about my individual texts, but I was having trouble finding information that would help me analyze the genre as a whole. Luckily, Dr. Lindberg was able to help me by lending me several books on Fantasy that would become some of my most valuable sources. Through my personal knowledge of the genre, my readings of the texts, and the sources of critical analysis provided by Dr. Lindberg, I was able to accomplish my first step: coming up with six elements and a hierarchical order of those six elements that was defensible.

The content of the essay began to flow once I finally started; I already had a tremendous amount to say about the genre and once equipped with important articles on the subject (such as Timmerman’s “The Quest,” which was one of my first and most valuable sources), I found myself filling my analysis and its six chapters with what I felt was important and interesting information. In generating this content and in coming up with the overall idea, I must also thank Joseph Campbell. Throughout the entirety writing of my essay I found myself revisiting his work. Even when I wasn’t directly using his work in my writing, I would find myself perusing his work, such as *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, for nothing more than personal support. His work not only was invaluable to my analysis but it also kept me believing that it mattered.
As I finally wrote my thesis, I began to really understand and become knowledgeable about something for which I have a great deal of passion, and that was a great reward, a reward of a lifetime supply of chocolate. Truthfully, writing an essay of this length and depth was one of the most difficult things I have ever done, and accomplishing it was also extremely rewarding. More significantly, however, it was choosing this topic and following through with it that truly meant the most to me. Rejecting certain pressures and writing on a subject that was important to me and that I had chosen myself gave me a tremendous amount of newfound strength, and in addition to the fact that the nature of this thesis seemed to capture many of the learning experiences I loved during my time at Ball State, it was inspiring to finish my bachelor's degree with what I felt was an act of personal triumph and self respect.
Introduction

The fantasy genre has had its share of criticism labeling it as being frivolous or even dangerous. Yet keeping it alive in academic discussion, scholars of fantasy strive to analyze and interpret it in such a way as to present and justify its significance and unique meaning. For the most part these scholars agree that fantasy is the most ancient literature, dating back to ancient epics, poems, and tales of myth; thus, some would perhaps believe the genre's importance to the human condition to be inherent in its prevalence throughout our existence. After all, art and entertainment resembling fantasy are hugely popular in modern culture, despite many of the themes, plots, and ideas. As writer Susan Dexter points out, "Star Wars didn't wow the world because it was a new idea; it resonates with audiences because it's a very old story: a fairy tale, right down to the princess" (46). But scholars' efforts have not stopped with finding archetypes and motifs. Many attempts have been made to classify various types of fantasy, to propose universal elements of the genre, and to explain its distinctiveness, and many of the critics attempting to do so have found themselves in disagreement.

In his article on re-evaluating perceptions of fantasy, for example, Edmund Little rejects several themes in the analysis of fantasy, partially based on the vagueness of the genre, by stating that it would be “difficult to deduce a coherent, consistent definition of the fantasy genre from... writers who differ so markedly from one another in content, style, and register” (52). J. R. R. Tolkien himself had a bit more of a universal philosophy when it came to the fantasy genre and believed in certain rules that determined what stories could be
included in fantasy or "faerie stores," more specifically. One of Tolkien's more debatable points was his dislike of the notions of metaphor and allegory. He was doubtful that writings which embodied a fair amount of symbolism or allegory could be true examples of fantasy. He also excludes several subgenres from being faerie stories and has rather strict beliefs on the "secondary world" (or the world of the story). Little, however, rejects several of these ideas and goes so far as to point out that Tolkien's analytic work was written solely "with his own work in mind" and therefore could not "be applied to all works... in the fantasy genre" (53).

The colossal differences that potentially arise between various works of fantasy can be problematic in analyzing the genre, leading to many scholars attempting to divide it into several subgenres, including high fantasy, science fiction, horror, etc. It is no surprise then that the specific analysis of fantasy becomes difficult since it is made up of works so different. However, in accordance with the notion that fantasy is perhaps the most ancient of literary genres, this analysis will focus on a subgenre that seems to have been most prevalent in its beginnings and remains significant in modern culture: the fantasy epic.

Wendy Mass and Stuart Levine identify a collection of genre elements based on what commonly appeared among the analyses of critical writers. These elements, commonly accepted as making up the general fantasy genre (though there is some debate), include the following: a mythic story, roots in modern fantasy, magic, new worlds, the common hero, good versus evil, and a meaningful journey (12-24).

The description of these elements proves to be a useful tool for understanding the genre, and each is certainly defensible. However, there seems a shortage in the academic environment of elemental analyses of fantasy that identify parts, not only explaining what
fantasy does or is, but how each element works and interacts with the others. Within the subgenre of fantasy epic, this analysis seeks to delve into the interworking components of such tales and to study how they work together to produce their stories. In a hierarchy of six, with the first being most essential and each following element serving and interacting with the latter, the elements of fantasy epic are proposed to be the following: the quest, the hero, a conflict of good and evil, an enchanted world, adventure, and return.

Because it is the ancient origin of fantasy that inspired the choice of genre for this analysis, an ancient and a modern text have each been chosen for the study. The analysis, though primarily on the genre itself, will utilize the ancient text by Homer, *The Odyssey*, and the modern text by J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*. The two texts are excellent examples of fantasy epic, and, though exhibiting important differences based on their historic difference, also adhere to the same hierarchy of elements.

**Chapter One - A Quest**

In Aristotle’s famous work *The Poetics*, the element of plot is identified as the most crucial and influential component of tragic theatre, and if plot in fantasy epic can be contained in one component, then it is certainly in the idea of the quest. Quintessentially, the quest is what the protagonist (the hero as discussed in the following chapter) sets out to achieve. It is one specific task, yet it also encompasses numerous episodes and is a feat so large that it is insurmountable by traditional or expected means. This great undertaking is what becomes the vessel through which the experiences of the entire story travel; it is what makes the hero grow and develop and what keeps the reader interested, and, more
importantly, it is what conveys the meaning of the story to the reader, allowing for learning and critical thinking. It is thus the quest that drives all else and that is most distinctive of the genre of fantasy epic, for, while much fantasy may be whimsical in nature and generally episodic, a fantastic epic will always begin with a quest.

**Insurmountable Odds**

In John Timmerman’s important article “The Quest,” he begins by pointing out that in quest-centered fantasy the “hero must act... he must often seek long and desperately for a basis for action” and that action will be a “grave and perilous undertaking” (98). Furthermore, the hero must have the odds stacked against him; it is, in part, the severity of the task that makes it so significant. Readers will not likely care to read about a hero who knows all the universe’s secrets and how to exploit them, even if his mission is to defend the entire world from an incredible dragon; it would be too easy for him. What need would he possibly have to change or grow? It is the challenge that the hero faces in finding a way to do the impossible that makes him develop, effectively making readers admire or at least be interested in him.

For Odysseus, the Quest involves defying a god, traversing hostile seas, and overcoming supernatural forces from Cyclops to sirens. For Frodo, it means traversing a new and magical world, infiltrating a land protected by both armies and walls, and destroying the single most powerful bit of magic in Middle Earth—not exactly trips to the local grocer. But although these tasks are enormous by nature, they remain specific. The quest is intentional; Odysseus was driven from the beginning by the goal of returning to Ithaca, and Frodo had only one true objective: to destroy the one ring.
Timmerman mentions a useful quote by W.H. Auden, and that is, "To look for a lost button is not a true quest" (99). This statement certainly seems true, and it is not a quest because the loss of a button is rather trivial; the stakes are entirely too low. Timmerman, however, in agreement with Auden to some extent ignores the inconsequential nature of seeking a button and instead points out that trying to reclaim something that is lost is not a quest on the grounds that the goal must be something never experienced or fully conceived. While there is some merit to this argument, it rarely holds true. Quests are often to reclaim something that has been lost. If, for example, the lost button could not be replaced, was carried off to a specific location or taken by a certain villain, and the button bore some clear significance, finding it would make for a perfectly acceptable quest. After all, Odysseus’ quest is plainly a journey of reclamation; he is seeking something that he has had before and that is rightfully his during the time of his plight.

Humanitarian and renowned commenter on myths and heroes Joseph Campbell states, “The usual hero adventure begins with someone from whom something has been taken, or who feels there’s something lacking in the normal experiences available or permitted to the members of his society. This person then takes off on a series of adventures beyond the ordinary, either to recover what has been lost or to discover some life-giving elixir. It’s usually a cycle, a going and a returning” (Power of Myth 152). This is effectively opposed to Auden and Timmerman’s claim that a quest must be for something new and unfamiliar. Furthermore, Campbell’s idea begins to explain the motivation behind the quest. Another important reason that the quest must be so sizeable is that it must produce change, change in the world and certainly in the characters involved in its completion.
Components of the Quest

It is difficult to describe the Quest in great detail without also describing fantasy epic in its entirety. This difficulty speaks to the definitive importance of the element in terms of the genre as a whole. It is also understandable since it has already been established that the Quest is not only one component, but is quintessentially the plot of a given fantasy epic story. As David Leeming states in *Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero*, "The quest myth in one sense is the only myth—that is, all other myths are part of the quest myth. The hero's whole life from birth to apotheosis is a quest" (np). It makes sense that so many scholars have concluded that much, if not all, literature comes in some way from the idea of the quest, and in the context of fantasy the concept of the Quest is even more prominent. Since the quest drives all the action in a story, it is the quest that will determine the fate of Middle Earth, of Ithaca, and of the literary genre.

The Quest is thus far reaching, and has mechanics applicable to stories outside of just Homer and Tolkien; it is certainly present in all fantasy epic. The other elements of fantasy epic (that is to say the hero, the conflict of good and evil, etc.) actively make up the quest. It is as though the entire genre and story are a moving force, piloted by the quest and fueled by each following component sequentially. There are, however, some devices specific to the quest and essential in defining a quest. As was previously stated, a search for a button is no quest. A true quest follows a certain formula, and while some stories deviate from the formula to some degree, many can at least find their roots in it, and our subject pieces *Lord of the Rings* and *The Odyssey* certainly can.

- There is a certain status quo. The world, however it is defined in the text, exists and that existence is good or at least satisfactory. Within the scope of both the soon-to-
be hero and the reader there are no maladies so insidious as to demand to be addressed.

• There is a disturbance of that status quo. Often it is some evil that arises. If it is not evil, then there is typically still some force whose power is out of reach of any immediate character to overthrow that threatens the hero or the world with which the hero is familiar. This can be the loss or theft of something dearly precious, or it can be a powerful object (what Campbell calls the Elixer or Ultimate Boon) fallen into the hands of one who would use it to upset some balance in the world; it thus must be reclaimed by the hero.

• The hero is the only one who can complete the quest and restore the status quo. In the more ancient texts this was typically because of prophecy, dealing with the paradigm of fate. In modern texts it tends to be more plot driven, exposing something that is either special about the hero or specific in the context of the quest itself (as is the case in *Lord of the Rings*).

• Typically due to forces out of the hero’s control, the quest will be divided into episodes. Odysseus does not sail straight to Ithaca. Rather, the hero will always have his stern faced towards his goal, but will inevitably make many side journeys in furthering his progress in the scheme of the overall quest.

• There will be a defeat or overcoming of the evil force. The hero will nearly always be aided by supernatural helpers, but will ultimately be driven by the hero. In this stage, the “Elixir” is attained (even in stories when there is no sacred object. So for Odysseus it would be the escape from the supernatural forces that would hinder him and the ability to sail home to Ithaca).
• The status quo is finally restored. This is similar to the defeat of the supernatural force; however, the task will be simpler yet more defining. For in this final stage it is the Hero alone who must reclaim the way of the world for what is “right.”

Naturally, it is often in this last stage that the hero fully develops; this idea will be expanded upon in later chapters discussing the Hero and in discussing the Return. These six components hold firm in both *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Odyssey*. Although their quests are clearly quite different in nature, at their core we find the same skeleton holding them together and motivating their progress.

**Archetypes and Campbell’s Cycle**

Among heroic tales both ancient and modern there are a variety of similarities; how the story begins, why the character takes on a quest, events that happen during the quest, the hero’s return, etc. Thus, one of the major points of interest among scholars is the explanation of these often-uncanny similarities throughout various cultural legends. The idea that these stories come from a certain archetype is not a new one; as a matter of fact many search for or argue that an existing work is a veritable “missing link” of literature connecting stories from Gilgamesh to Superman.

Whether or not there is such a tangible and singular source from which our legends have been derived is unclear; however, the reoccurring motifs throughout them allow for a more extensive and interesting analysis of them. While these ideas are typically applied to the idea of the myth (a well defined term, yet still rather broad in nature), they can certainly be used to further the discussion of Fantasy epic, for these themes are quite active components in the mechanics of the subgenre.
Campbell addresses this idea of the archetype in his proposal of the Monomyth, an idea on which much of his work is based. Although Campbell doesn’t fully embrace the idea that all such stories (those informed by some archetype) are intimately related or that they are all just one story, the similarities cannot be ignored. Campbell thus develops a cyclical sequence, which he calls the “The Adventure of the Hero”. This cycle is similar to what we have described as the Quest and will therefore be a useful tool in further analyzing the most essential element of Fantasy epic.

Campbell’s sequence is divided into three parts: the departure, the initiation, and the return. Much as our elements of Fantasy epic work together in order to drive the genre, these smaller elements in the cycle work to drive the quest. Though they will be slightly adapted to fit the specific subgenre, Campbell’s cycle remains a defensible and widely accepted interpretation of the hero’s journey. Thus, we will apply it to Fantasy epic and shown as they appear in the *Odyssey* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

**The Journey that Matters**

The quest is the element of an fantasy epic that is most dynamic and conveys the most meaning. In Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell describes the portion of the quest (as we define it) in which the hero enters the extraordinary and dire as the initiation, and he states, “If anyone-in whatever society-undertakes for himself the perilous journey into the darkness by descending, either intentionally or unintentionally, into the crooked lanes of his own spiritual labyrinth, he soon finds himself in a landscape of symbolical figures” (84).

This “spiritual labyrinth” Campbell describes is a multi-faceted idea. It describes the peril, turmoil, and challenge of the quest as well as the pathos of the hero performing the
task. It is in this way that meaning is added to the quest beyond the scope of simply the completion of some great and perilous task; it is through the next guiding element, which very actively drives the quest, and thus the fantasy epic genre, and that is the hero.

Chapter Two – The Hero

It is obviously not enough for a story to have only a quest; reading about some noble mission that never is completed or even progresses is hardly interesting or spiritually revealing. The next element, the one that drives the quest, is the Hero. This idea of the hero is an ancient one and one that has consistently been thought to be at the heart of various genres; thus there is a relatively large supply of ideas regarding the definition of a true hero. The simplest answer possible within the context of fantasy epic is that the hero is the only one who can complete the quest. This is his only absolute requirement, though he will exhibit several other important characteristics. We have established that Campbell’s Hero’s Journey cycle can be used to embody the mechanical nature of a fantasy epic piece, and thus how the hero fits into this model while also serving the Quest element that has been established is the most revealing way to observe the Hero as both a character and a component.

Frodo and Odysseus

The Hero is one of the most widespread paradigms among cultures ancient and modern. According to Otto Rank in his book The Myth of the Birth of the Hero, “Nearly all prominent civilized nations... have left us literature in which, early on, they glorify... heroes-in many poetic tales and legends.” Rank also mentions that there are “baffling similarities” between culture’s heroes and epics, and that it is fairly consistent that heroes,
especially in ancient cultural texts, embody many of the characteristics a society deems important or virtuous. Odysseus, for example, is highly athletic, noble minded in terms of hospitality and social structure, clever, and respectful to the gods and fate. These traits are, in fact, so strong in Odysseus that he is a sort of superman; his prowess is not supernatural, but far exceeds that which would be expected of a common man.

Frodo, who is very much one of Tolkien’s “Everyman” heroes, is almost opposite to Odysseus in this sense. Despite this difference, Frodo still manages to exhibit character traits that many modern people find valuable including courage, loyalty, and perhaps most importantly, “renouncing power and possessiveness,” as Richard Matthews points out in his book on fantasy. Also Frodo remains the only character capable of destroying the ring, by combination of his resistance to its magic, the singular nature of the ring, and perhaps even fate, but Frodo remains the only hope for Middle Earth. Despite the differences between the two heroes, they find similar places in their stories. That is to say, they, as heroes, serve the quest, and thus the story in a similar way. Both of the heroes' fitting into this analysis is what matters for the purpose of examining the fantasy epic Genre.

To further compare and contrast our two heroes, Matthews develops a binary of two types of heroes in his chapter “Mythic Heroes.” These two types of heroes are those who move vertically (he uses Frodo as an example) and those who move horizontally (in this case it would be Odysseus). The vertical hero is described as one “whose actions move upward or downward as he is propelled toward or away from absolute good or evil” and the hero is characterized by not being defined by “rivaling gods... or [his] relation to history or society”. A more horizontal hero such as Odysseus is likely a warrior and of noble stature (as opposed to a Hobbit who stand about half the height of a man) and is
characterized by less clear character change. A character like Odysseus experiences a less obvious struggle between good and evil, and he is already powerful and less dependent on outside help (although help and supernatural aid are still very significant as we will observe later). Mathews describes the horizontal hero as one who tries to become his own god. So, while Frodo is a meek hero who completes his quest by reaching outwards towards an ideal, Odysseus is one who advances by relying on his own strength and wits; fighting not to save the world but to claim his own status as king.

The important way Odysseus and Frodo are similar is the way that they fit into the quest. They are the elements that undergo the quest, complete it, and drive it forward, and the quest responds by shaping the story around them. What any story is saying can be seen in the character of its hero, so the hero serves the quest, he also shapes the rest of the story. As D.C. Feeney states in his article “Epic Hero and Epic Fable”, the epic is “organized around an individual who will embody the meaning of the poem... the nucleus of the epic [is] the chronicle of deeds of the hero. The epic plot is to a certain extent bespoken by epic characterization. The plot is inherent in the concept of the protagonist”. Thus, our next step is to observe the first stages of Joseph Campbell’s cycle and the idea of the Hero’s journey.

A Spiritual Journey and The Hero’s Cycle

Throughout much of Joseph Campbell’s work he makes the claim that the hero’s experience throughout a story is necessarily a journey that is spiritual in nature. It is one that changes and develops the hero, causing him to learn about the world and more importantly about himself. He also maintains the notion that this spiritual revelation is significant not only to the hero but also to the reader. The hero, according to Campbell, is each of us, and each one of our lives is a quest through which we must progress in a way
similar to a literary hero. The hero's experiences come together to make the quest more meaningful. By means of the hero, the quest becomes not only an account of some incredible deed but also a relevant and meaningful message about self-discovery and the human condition.

Thus the hero in the beginning is likely not fully developed; he has much to learn and experience that will lead to growth in maturity as well as the character traits he hopes to embody. He will gradually become a more shining example of cultural values by more visibly and actively embodying them. What prompts the hero initially to embark on his quest tends to be a matter of necessity in fantasy epic. As identified in stage one of the Quest, there is a status quo. This status quo is important as it represents the world of the story, in which there is either no visible evil or none that is actively threatening the world. For Tolkien this is rather clearly the Shire while it remains undisturbed by news of war or the One Ring. For Homer (in the context of the *Odyssey* alone) it is Ithaca, or rather the idea of Ithaca; the notion that Odysseus will be able to return home without the interference of the gods or other supernatural forces (not an unreasonable expectation after all).

The necessity to begin the quest then comes from a threat to this status quo, or even an immediate disturbance in it. This will be an important idea in future chapters, but for the hero it eliminates the option of continuing on his present path. He must do something, if not to save the world that has been depicted to be good then simply to allow himself to remain in it. The force that physically plunges the hero into his quest, however, is usually a supernatural one. For Frodo this is Gandalf, who reveals the nature of the Ring and sends the poor hobbit to Rivendell, and for Odysseus it is simply being plunged off of his course by a storm summoned up by the god Zeus. In any case, this supernatural event forces the
hero not only to act but to evolve for it is the only way in which he may complete his quest. As Ursula LeGuin states, "When genuine myth rises into consciousness, that is always the message. You must change your life."

Campbell's first section of the hero's journey, the departure, begins with "The Call to Adventure." This is the hero's first interaction with the supernatural and with the quest and adventures that will encompass the entire journey. According to Campbell, this introduction "reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood" (42).

The next part of the journey is "The Refusal of the Call". While this is by no means the most defining action of the story, it is often an important illustration of the hero's development as a character. The refusal is often due to one of the shortcomings in the hero that he is destined to change over the course of his quest. With Frodo, this refusal is rather clear; he is meek and very much comfortable with his life in the Shire and does not want to take the Ring even to Rivendell, so he offers it to Gandalf. When he does initially arrive in Rivendell it is with the pretext of passing the burden of the Ring to another bearer so that he may return to his old life. Although Campbell does not include such moments in his analysis of the journey, the hero's times of weakness are also characteristic of this refusal up until the very end of the quest; for example, each moment in Mordor when Frodo loses hope represents an important spiritual obstacle that must be overcome. Odysseus on the other hand, is catapulted into his quest by somewhat different means. He cannot provide much resistance to simply being blown off course by an Olympian storm. His refusal does come at several moments, however, moments when it is either lucrative or pleasurable for him to postpone returning to Ithaca. His first adventure to Ismarus and the sack of the
Cicones, for example, was an impromptu sidetrack (though to his credit it was not Odysseus' idea to prolong their stay and endanger his men). More clearly, Odysseus later finds himself unwilling to leave the island of Circe, and later still though he does desire to leave Calypso he distrusts his ability to depart from her island. Though these refusals may seem small, they reflect Odysseus' hubris, which we will see is one of the flaws he must overcome within himself.

**The Hero's Helpers**

In order to have any hope of completing his Quest, the hero must clearly have extraordinary characteristics (even if it is just his courage) and perhaps even more extraordinary luck. Despite these advantages, he is not plunged into his journey alone, for indeed he could not complete the quest without aid. He is provided with helpers, both supernatural and natural in nature. His natural helpers usually start out merely as travel companions, and his supernatural aid comes in various forms and is a cornerstone of his journey. In her article on teaching *The Odyssey*, Jane Ellen Glasser divides the story into two elements, elements within the control of the hero and his allies and elements resulting from divine intervention (or that are simply beyond the control of the chief characters). These natural and supernatural forces surrounding the hero move him forward on his quest and enrich his metamorphosis.

Campbell recognizes supernatural aid as one of the early stages of the hero's journey and as the part of the story where the hero is often sent out on his quest or given some magic he will need along his way. While this aid is common, we must also remember that supernatural aid comes to the hero at multiple stages throughout his journey in a fantasy epic. It always finds ways to show up in the story, and while various supernatural
forces stand in the hero's way, he will also regularly find help among them. As we saw in
stage five of the quest, it is often only because of supernatural aid that the task the quest is
fully completed. Considering, however, only the forces favorable to the hero, they provide
the character (who is already familiar and relevant to the reader) with a relationship with
the superhuman forces of the story and fuel the plot by making us believe that the quest is
possible. Even though the world of the story may make it seem as though the hero is
doomed to fail, we know when he sets forth by some supernatural power that he is sure to
succeed. As Campbell states,

What such a figure represents is the benign, protecting power of destiny. The
fantasy is a reassurance – a promise that the peace of Paradise... protective power is
always and ever present within the sanctuary of the heart and even immanent
within, or just behind, the unfamiliar features of the world. One has only to know
and trust, and the ageless guarding will appear. Having responded to his own call,
and continuing to follow courageously as the consequences unfold, the hero finds all
the forces of the unconscious on his side. Mother Nature herself supports the mighty
task. (59)

It is through this supernatural help that the story finds a certain sense of balance in the
fantasy realm. For while it is inevitably something magical or mythical in nature that stands
in the hero's way or must be defeated, it is a similar yet opposite force that not only allows
him to progress, but also deepens his relationship to the magic of the world and makes the
reader believe that he is destined to succeed.

The helpers, particularly the magical ones, are vitally important because they not
only drive the hero forward but also hasten his transformation and growth. As stated by
Philip Martin, “As a story progresses, characters come to life. Seeds sown early... begin to develop deeper meanings. Sprouts appear from magic beans planted in the soil, revealing the first tendrils of what will become a towering beanstalk” (106-107).

Chapter Three – A Conflict Between Good and Evil

We have now established the existence of the Quest and the hero who must complete it, but the third element creates the necessity for the Quest to take place. This need then drives the quest by being a force that disrupts the status quo, and it drives the hero by growing in his heart and ever nudging him forward.

There must exist some conflict of good and evil. These paradigms may not always be explicit, however. They are in The Lord of The Rings, where we are presented with courageous and selfless individuals who risk their lives to save Middle Earth from a powerful, sinister being, commanding armies of unnatural creatures and generally representing one of the most archetypical images of “bad guy” that literature can muster. In The Odyssey, however, the conflict is more obscure. This is primarily because Odysseus is a different kind of hero than is Frodo; Frodo is the kind who is driven almost exclusively by this struggle, whereas Odysseus as a king and warrior naturally finds himself more grounded in society and thus more focused on combating physical blockades than spiritual ones. While Frodo “comes to define himself internally in a moral struggle with the power of the Ring... (Matthews 91) Odysseus is defined by his culture as well as his desire to return to Ithaca and Penelope.

The two stories and heroes thus work in different ways to depict this struggle, and it becomes divided into two types. On Odysseus’ side there is the conflict that arises from a
cultural aspect and thus focuses both on the shortcomings or evils of mankind and also on
the power of nature to defy man. Whether it is an archetypical evil like Sauron is not
important for *The Odyssey*’s story; what is important is that there exists a conflict between
two paradigms. So while it is explicit in some tales such as *The Lord of the Rings*, the “good
and evil” conflict that matters in the context of fantasy epic as a whole is described as
follows:

- The world’s status quo and those striving to support, reclaim, or simply live in it
  peacefully are the aspects considered good.
- The forces that would rise up to challenge the status quo and then to hinder the hero
  are the forces that are considered evil.

Both types of this description give way to a struggle that is revealing of the human
condition and forces the hero to grow, and that growth is what is important.

**Crossing the First Threshold and The Hero’s Wound**

Within the fantasy often exists a certain symbolic barrier that divides the story into
two sections, the section that is “home” where the status quo can exist and the region that
is mysterious, uncharted, and supernatural. Crossing this barrier also puts the hero in the
realm of evil, where everything becomes foreign, and conflict begins to arise - the journey
begins to become truly perilous.

Campbell recognizes this point in the story as a stage leading out of the “departure”
portion of the journey and into the “belly of the whale” where the hero will finally enter the
“initiation” stage. The segments of the journey this threshold divides are not completely
intangible; they are often also divided into physical portions of the world of the story. In
*The Odyssey*, the lands of Ithaca and even Troy lie before the threshold; their locations are
known and understood, and they are both playing fields of mortal men, rather than the stuff of myth. However, the fictional islands and creatures all lie beyond the threshold, in the world of peril and danger. In Tolkien, there is a significant division in the physical world of Middle Earth, the West being the homeland and the East is a place that is foreign and evil.

Therefore, the portion of the story in which the hero crosses this threshold is often the point that the hero crosses into the dangerous region of his physical world. Classically, this is a drastic adventure, involving a trip to the underworld. Frodo crosses into the East when he leaves Rivendell, the last outpost of the West where he finds no hostility, and journeys underground into the depths of Moria and past the Misty Mountains. Though Odysseus also travels to the underworld (an important stage on his journey) it is not his crossing of the first threshold; his, rather, is in his departure from the island of Cyclops, after which he is plunged into a ten year voyage among gods and legendary creatures, and though this moment may lack the symbolic beauty of a literal underworld, it is certainly the point in Odysseus’ quest where the evil conflict begins.

At a point before or possibly during the crossing of this “first threshold” there is some event that happens to the hero that is defining for his quest and transformation, sort of an inciting incident of darkness, not in the quest but in the hero himself. This point could be called the “hero’s wound,” a term that is usually metaphorical but has been taken from the case of Frodo who receives a literal wound at this point in his quest. This is the point where some negative force interferes with the hero, or even when the hero allows the force to manifest itself, and though this event will inevitably make the quest more strenuous to the hero, it is also at the heart of why he is the hero, why he is the only character who can
complete the quest. While Odysseus’ underworld journey is important to his quest, it is simply not his crossing into the realm of gods and myths.

In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the wound is the moment when Frodo is stabbed by a morgul blade of the Nazgul at Weathertop, receiving an injury he will bear forever and that will darken him until his death. Certainly this event is before the first threshold, in Frodo’s case, yet it is the moment when he is introduced to the supernatural and to the darkness (rather than being immersed in it as one is after the threshold). Because of this point in the story the idea of evil is not just an opposing force; it has made it personal. And just as the supernatural elements and helpers form defining relationships with the hero, the element of darkness in the tale must do the same, and this is no doubt a deep and important relationship indeed.

**Evil and Hero**

For Frodo this “wound” again identifies with his interpersonal binary between light and dark, facing an archetypical evil and enduring the inner struggle not to succumb to it. The moment of his wounding makes him a sure choice to be the ring bearer. Not only has he survived being marked as a wraith and thus (from a mechanical viewpoint) logically resistant to the allure of the One Ring, but he has experienced a deep connection with the very power that his quest will be up against; it is not just crucial to the plot but also to the spiritual development of the hero and of the story.

Odysseus also experiences this moment, though his is less obvious than Frodo’s. As he crosses the threshold and leaves the island of Polyphemus, he inflicts it upon himself. He shouts out to Polyphemus that he is Odysseus, and the enraged Cyclops calls up on him a curse in the name of his father, Poseidon, and it is because of this that Odysseus could not
sail to Ithaca and the reason the majority of his quest had to take place. While this may seem vastly different from the case of Frodo, the moment works in the story similarly. For Frodo, his enemy is an archetypical and spiritual evil, and his moment reflects his first experience of its peril. Odysseus on the other hand is up against a more socially rooted evil, primarily the hubris of man; it is his pride that plummets him into danger, and it is a combination of greed, lust, and gluttony that frequently impede his progress (be it his own fault or that of his men).

In both cases there is a very real, internal conflict, and there is an equal external conflict as well between the hero and supernatural forces iconic of the world beyond the first threshold. The relationship between the internal and the external create the challenges and setbacks that a hero must face and overcome on his quest, and it can be rather substantial. As LeGuin states, “A dragon, not a dragon cleverly copied or mass-produced, but a creature of evil who crawls up, threatening and inexplicable, out of the artist’s own unconscious, is alive: terribly alive” (80). These dragons have contributed just as much to making fantasy epic an iconic and recognizable genre as have the heroes themselves. They can terrify us, and often reflect the fears and struggles in our own lives and spiritual journeys.

**Chapter Four An Enchanted World**

Campbell and certainly critics of the general fantasy genre would be displeased if we gave the impression that the world beyond the first threshold is characterized only by its danger and the wickedness that lurks within it. It is more than that; it is a special world,
and while it actualizes human fears and struggles into tangible obstacles, it also is capable of bringing our dreams and fantasies into form.

Tolkien himself put a large emphasis on the world of a fantastic tale, designating much of his writing on the genre to describing the idea of the “secondary world” (he was hesitant to make the distinction between what many may consider to be the fantasy world and the real world), which is perhaps not surprising given the amount of literature Tolkien produced to surround *The Lord of The Rings* that may or may not be relevant to the novel’s plot. Sculpting Middle Earth is actually considered one of Tolkien’s greater accomplishments in terms of fiction writing. As Matthews states, “Tolkien’s fiction is a complete and self-contained reality. This is part of his great achievement as an author. And the self contained quality of the fiction mirrors the self containment of his characters” (92).

It is important for fantasy epic to take place in a world that is immersive and believable; supernatural and magical phenomenon can happen in this world, and while it has clear rules and parameters, they are certainly different from the world we are used to. It is the proper execution of this world that allows the quest and the mystical forces helping or hindering the hero to exist without keeping the story from being real and relatable. The enchanted world gives us something at which to wonder, but it also satisfies our sense of reason and logic enough to prevent us from needing to suspend our disbelief.

**Supernatural Forces**

As we have already seen, supernatural forces and characters are a driving aspect of fantasy epic. They frequently progress the story and tend to control pivotal moments in the quest. These elements also tie in to what the writer is saying about good and evil. Magic, then, is both a mechanic for driving the plot and statement of the theme. Its role is specific. It gives
the first push, helps the hero up when needed, shoves him back down when it can, helps
the quest come to fruition, then all but abandons the tale so the hero is left to his own
devices. Any time a supernatural force enters into the story in any way, we must pay
particularly close attention to it, for it is certainly important.

There also tends to be a binary between the natural and supernatural parts of the
story, as was discussed with the idea of a hero’s helpers. And while the hero himself usually
has access to some kind of magic, it is usually still somehow foreign to him or recently
discovered to him. In the case of our subject texts, neither Odysseus nor Frodo are magical
in the grand scheme of Middle Earth or the mythic powers of the Olympians, and neither of
them have much access to magic that is not explicitly granted to them by more mystical
characters (such as sting or Galadriel’s phial for Frodo or the harnessed wind for Odysseus
for example).

In this way, the two heroes serve as good examples to a binary that tends to be
created in the genre between the common and the fantastic. They rather explicitly serve as
representatives of the non-special world, which means their experiences, once they are in
the special world, will take full effect and generate significant and meaningful responses.
And the relationship they form with the magic they discover is all the more essential.
Odysseus, for example, seems to at first view the supernatural forces merely as hurdles in
his path; he is not intimidated by them to the point of becoming arrogant and prideful; as
his quest progresses, however, he becomes more respectful of these forces, particularly the
ones that are more Olympian (as close to divine as the Ancient Greeks would get). For
Frodo it was always a struggle between light and darkness, and while he found both
paradigms in the magic of the world, it was ultimately he and Sam alone (both very much
common rather than supernatural) who held up the force of light against a very potent and supernatural darkness.

That being said, final pivotal moments are usually dictated by outside and magical forces. For example Frodo and Sam do have the phial, without which they could not hope to progress passed the watchers of Cirith Ungol, and Aragorn and the army of Gondor advance to the Black Gate to provide a distraction for Sauron’s eye. And truly, it is only due to supernatural aid that the ring is destroyed at all. While Frodo and Sam were the only ones who could have gotten the ring to the Cracks of Doom, they nearly fail at the last moment, when suddenly, supernatural aid comes flying out of the shadows to do what we knew would happen all along, complete the quest. Gollum, a creature once epitomizing the world of the status quo, the common, now misshapen and twisted into something supernatural by the story’s chief source of magic (and the very object of the quest), ensures that the ring is vanquished. With Odysseus, it is the gods that decide that it is time for Odysseus to be allowed to return to Ithaca, and furthermore it is Athena who disguises him to provide him with the capability of returning home.

This does not mean that the hero is not ultimately responsible for completing the quest. It does represent how the quest is destined to be completed. One of the strongest supernatural forces is that of fate.

Chapter Five – Adventure

While the world of the story and the magic that exists in it are critical elements, the reader needs some way to experience it along with the hero, and this connection is accomplished by the series of adventures the hero engages in over the course of the quest.
One aspect of the quest itself is that it is divided into episodes, and these episodes can be defined as adventures. The traditional definition of “adventure” tends to be that it is a whimsical journey with no particular objective; a fantasy story is typically described as being either an adventure or a quest. But whatever it is called, the various episodes and exploits the hero experiences that make up the quest are a critical part of the tale.

Adventurous Journeys

Bernard Knox points out in his introduction to *The Odyssey* that “odyssey is a familiar English word, meaning… a series of adventurous journeys usually marked by many changes of fortune. The Greek word Odusseia, the form from which the English word is derived, means simply the story of Odysseus” (3). Odysseus’ escapades are familiar to our culture, each of them being an often told parable ranging from the adventure of the Cyclops to that of the journey to the underworld. While each episode is recognizable, together they form the tale we know so well, to the extent that the structure of this story has won a permanent place in modern culture as well as in the dictionary. While no individual journey defines the text, each adds something unique to the overarching quest. Cyclops showed us that even mighty warriors must occasionally be able to outwit an opponent; we wondered at Circe’s magic, and to say one is “between Scylla and Charybdis” gives a clear description of hardship and choice. In this way *The Odyssey* is particularly episodic, and thus adventure is inherent to the text.

Similarly, Frodo’s quest is episodic. Although Frodo is not, as Odysseus, often tossed about by the waves into various challenges and ordeals, the battles and events that culminate with the Quest of the Ring each represent significant story arcs and adventures that allow the characters to develop along the way and demonstrate to readers the
progress those characters make. Time and again we thus witness Gandalf’s wisdom, Legolas’ skill, and Aragorn’s evolution from Ranger to king. It is each moment of loyalty and courage up until his conquering of Shelob that causes us to no longer see Sam Gamgee but instead see Master Samwise the Brave. And as the characters undergo more and more adventures, we begin to see the weight of the burden of the Ring on Frodo and admire his persistence, for in the tales that really matter, the hero is given lots of opportunities of turning back, excepting they don’t. To accept adventure often means to accept the unknown, so we admire little Frodo who will take the Ring, though he does not know the way.

Adventure is also a major contributor to what makes the genre so relevant; this element of adventure encompasses the individual experiences in the fantasy, the emotions, and the nuances. The way the hero interacts with each adventure and the way he experiences the fantastic world with splendor or fear allow the reader to know the hero on a deeper level and understand his thought process. Odysseus’ reacting with Athena and other supernatural characters as though they are familiar and natural demonstrates his strength and social position as king as well as the story’s overall foundation in myth. The events of which we and even the Ancient Greeks would likely be in awe are simply part of the world to a hero like Odysseus who understands the universe around him, defined in this case by myth. Frodo, however, is in awe of the splendors of Middle Earth such as Argonath, and all the hobbits are marveled by both the elves and Gandalf’s magic; this is telling of the nature of heroic characters like Frodo or Sam as well as how The Lord of the Rings is more grounded in high fantasy, which puts a stronger emphasis on amazing both its readers and its characters with magic.
A Passage through the Enchanted

Be the story more mythic or magical, readers want a way to experience as much of the world as possible, and this is accomplished by the adventures we can share with the heroes within that world. As an article from Time mentions, Tolkien was sure that his "imaginary world [was] equipped down to the last whisker of the last monster" (np), so it only makes sense that we would get plenty opportunity to explore Middle Earth and have a few encounters with these monsters, lest all those whiskers go to waste. For Homer, experiences on the journey from Troy to Ithaca were equally important, not just for amazing his audience but for depicting events, characters, and monsters that his people were familiar with and regarded in some ways as factual.

But the adventures are more than just scenic rides through the magical countryside; they are part of the spiritual journey we take with the heroes. As Campbell says, myths depict how others have "made the passage" through their journeys, and they not only show us how we can make our own passage but also "what are the beauties along the way" (87). The journey leads us through the world, each adventure allowing us to know it more intimately and, on a deeper level, allowing us to know ourselves. We can escape into the adventures and the splendor that they encompass and take something back from each one.

Chapter Six - Return

Towards the end of the story the time comes what the Quest must finally be completed. The hero will triumph and his initial goals will be fulfilled. At this point only one adventure is left for him, in many ways a small quest itself, and that is the return journey, the ultimate return to order. The status quo must be restored, and while the world may have changed or developed, the hero returns it to a state of peace and familiarity. As
discussed previously, supernatural forces often heavily aid in the final moments of the quest. Odysseus is permitted to leave Calypso, Gollum plunges the Ring into the fires of Mt. Doom, and the quest is completed as the elixir is obtained and forces preventing the world from being as it should be are defeated.

This does not mean, however, that it is not still up to the hero to reestablish the status quo. For assuredly when Sauron is defeated, and even when Aragorn is crowned King of Gondor, the status quo has not yet been restored. The story cannot come full circle for the hobbits or for the reader until we have returned to the Shire. At this point in the story the quest is essentially completed: Sauron has been defeated and Odysseus has returned to Ithaca. It is now up to the Hero alone (and his chief non-supernatural helper perhaps) to restore order. The supernatural aid may creates a scenario in which it is possible for the hero to do this, but then the final and perhaps most important task for the hero is following through, for it is only through this task that the story can become a cycle and that the hero can complete the spiritual aspect of his journey with greater strength of character and resolution.

**The Ultimate Boon**

When Odysseus at last sets foot on his beloved Ithaca he receives his last bit of help from the Goddess Athena when she disguises him as an old beggar. However, she will not help him expel the suitors; he is left alone to accomplish that final task. Similarly, Gandalf abandons the Hobbits in their return to the shire, warned that they will meet with some final task but will have to overcome it without the help of their wizard. This final task, which the hero faces alone, is his final test, his chance to restore order to his home and demonstrate how far his spiritual journey has taken him. He is able to accomplish this
alone because he has grown in his journey, become stronger. This is especially true in the case of our little Hobbits, who return to the shire with a newfound air of confidence and command, symbolized by their shining armor and blades. It is in this moment that the reader can truly recognize their growth, for though each of these characters has demonstrated exceptional bravery, it was in the context of the greater Middle Earth, which is a bold and dangerous place; to see them carry this strength to the shire, which is where we met them young and meek, thus is most significant in demonstrating their change. And the Hobbits utilize that change to stand up to half-orcs, rally and command a militia of Hobbits, and defeat Sarumon completely free of supernatural aid.

The same principles apply to Odysseus' defeat of the suitors: he does so without supernatural aid and is assuredly stronger thanks to his journey. The difference does arise in that Odysseus is a different sort of hero than Frodo and the Hobbits, for whereas one could say the Shirefolk acquired the traits of warriors and kings, Odysseus was, from the first time we met him both of these things. He has always therefore been a more idealistic hero, who developed more courage before the start of the Quest than did a hero like Frodo. The clearest indication of this is that the action that reveals Odysseus, stringing his bow, was a feat he could accomplish before he set out on his journey. However, Odysseus' development as a character is clear and while stringing his bow does not necessarily symbolize newfound strength like the shining White Tree of Gondor on Merry's breast, it does depict reclamation of old strength. This moment, coupled with his slaying of the suitors, also represents his ultimately regaining his rightful place as king and restoring natural order to Ithaca.
In his model of the hero’s journey, Campbell describes “The Ultimate Boon” as what the hero receives from his adventure before inevitably making his return, according to him, usually the “elixir”. This boon can also be found, however, in the strength that the heroes receive that enables them to restore the status quo and become masters, not only of the forced disturbing their homes, but also of their own souls. Certainly this is true in the cases of Frodo and Odysseus based on their triumphs upon their returns. Furthermore, this boon allows them to become what Campbell calls “Masters of the Two Worlds.” This means that the hero has gained lessons from his experience with the supernatural world beyond the threshold but has also gained new understanding of his own world: of Ithaca and of the Shire. Campbell refers to it as a transcendent “freedom to pass back and forth between the world divisions... not contaminating the principles of one with those of other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other” (Hero With a Thousand Faces 196). For Odysseus, being a hero of both worlds meant a new respect for fate and the gods, and for Frodo it was even more potent as he was permitted into the Grey Havens. The hero being granted a place of bliss is also essential to his boon as well as to Campbell’s analysis, which states that the hero is given a particular “freedom to live.”

The Return Threshold and Consolation

In accordance with what we have discussed thus far, Campbell describes the necessity of the return portion of the hero’s journey and some of its characteristics thusly:

When the Hero-Quest has been accomplished, through penetration to the source, or through the grace of some male or female, human or animal personification, the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy. The full round, the norm of the monomyth, requires that the hero shall now begin the labor of bringing
the runes of wisdom, the Golden Fleece, or his sleeping princess back into the
kingdom of humanity (Hero with a Thousand Faces 167).

However, before the hero can bestow his elixir on the world of light, he must first allow
himself to cross the return threshold, and, though he has completed his quest, becoming
the “Master of Both Worlds” can be a difficult task.

The hero must eventually travel out of the land of magic, darkness, and adventure
and back into the world that is native to him. However, as Campbell states,

The two kingdoms are actually one. The realm of the gods is a forgotten dimension
of the world we know. And the exploration of that dimension... is the whole sense of
deed of the hero.... There must always remain, however... a certain inconsistency
between the wisdom brought forth from the deep, and the prudence usually found
to be effective in the light world (Hero with a Thousand Faces 188).

The return threshold is often not as specific a point in the story as is the crossing of the
first threshold however, it is an important feature of the journey that allows the hero to
become the master, it is when he finds this power and learns how he can use it to redeem
the world.

Thus it is only natural that the hero shall bring about a certain happy ending, not
just for himself but for the world around him as well. This gives the reader a chance to
experience consolation and to get a glimpse of her inner desires coming to life in the story.
It gives the reader hope that she will complete her own hero’s journey and become master
of her own worlds. Tolkien called this sensation the “Eucatastrophe,” an ending that
provides bliss by means of depicting that joy and hope.
Conclusion

Fantasy Epic, perhaps the oldest literature that mankind has produced, has remained relevant and prominent through all of human existence, not only in the sense that tales such as *Gilgamesh*, *Beowulf*, and the *Odyssey* are still told time and time again, but also in the prevalence of their modern descendents such as *The Lord of the Rings*. These stories provide their readers with an escape into a world of wonder and adventure and also depict a very human journey, with which we are all familiar. We see the hero grow and grow with him; we feel doubt when the hero falters, and we experience Eucatastrophe when the hero defies the odds, completing his quest and restoring order to the natural world. Furthermore, we gain hope. We take certain elements of magic and adventure from the Epic and find them manifesting themselves in our lives, as we become, in our own way a "Master of Both Worlds" and find enchanted qualities in the realm of reality we could not previously see.

And this grand genre has not just amazed scholars in how meaningful it remains in the lives of its readers. Despite cultural change and evolution, the elemental structure of fantasy epic remains essentially the same in both the most ancient and modern texts. The texts have utilized the same elements, starting with the Quest and ending with the Return, in the same hierarchical order and functionality throughout the ages.

In transition from the ancient to the modern, however, several distinct differences have arisen concerning the elements of fantasy epic; while their mechanical functionality remains, they have grown to have slightly different spiritual impacts, based on the cultures from which they arise. Over time the hero has evolved from being more of a myth to more of a man. For example, though many of us are quite familiar with Odysseus, with his
strengths, his weaknesses, his pleasures, and his adventures, I would suspect that most of
us could not imagine what it would be like to sit down to tea and have a conversation with
him. With Frodo, however, we practically feel as if that’s already happening simply through
the narration of his text.

It could also be argued that the conflict between good and evil binary has evolved
over time. Though any of the struggles discussed with Odysseus or similar ancient heroes
are with powerful supernatural forces and lead to certain revelations, these forces tend to
represent a somewhat neutral force (a good example would be the gods or even fate itself).
A more explicit “evil,” however, may allow all the more insight into the hero and the human
soul. For example, according to Matthews, “Tolkien suggests that human identity springs
from direct personal confrontation with the clashing cosmic forces of light and dark powers
and that identity is created in the choices that result from this confrontation” (91).

Fantasy epic is characteristic in its reflecting the culture that generates it.
Differences are only natural and all the more indicative of how deeply rooted in human
nature the genre must be. Furthermore, as humans, we are given the honor of encountering
countless stories and myths that all reflect the very real journey that each of us is
experiencing in our individual Hero’s cycles. No matter how different all of these epic
journeys may be, the ones we read about or the ones we travel ourselves, they all begin
with a quest.
Bibliography


