Heroes: A Look at the Questor Figure in J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings

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Demons, gods, wizards, elves, dwarves, and monsters of all shapes, dispositions, and sizes regularly occur in the myths which have been at the center of most cultures since man appeared on earth. From childhood one is exposed to these marvelous creatures, invented countless years ago by primitive man to embody the fears and fantasies of his slowly awakening consciousness, through fairy stories. To the child, whose wide-eyed fascination and wonder at the vast world in which he grows allow him the same perspective of the world as primitive man, these incredible creatures are real, but to the adult, who has been schooled in that which ought to be real in the world, they are mere reflections of a past long faded, yet, oftentimes, cherished. This universality of myth and fantasy explains, in part, the wide appeal of J. R. R. Tolkien's tales of Middle Earth. The other part of the explanation is the pure pleasure and joy in reading these modern classics. This paper is a look into Tolkien's world, primarily through The Lord of the Rings, and an exploration of one of the most basic mythic motifs: the figure of the questor.

In order to gain a clear perspective of the questor as an archetype in The Lord of the Rings, an outline (map) of the mythic quest is essential, for, as in all journeys, one must know where he is going in order that he might see more clearly where he is and where he has been. In The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Joseph Campbell provides this indispensable guide for the sojourn along the paths of the mythic questor. Borrowing the term "monomyth" from James Joyce and using it to describe the general, circular path of the questor in mythology, Campbell assimilates and condenses the universal as-
pects of the mythic journey into succinct synthesis:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder; fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.¹

Campbell's presentation of the major patterns of the quest demonstrates little more than a simple pattern or path from the questor's initial separation with his civilization to his eventual return to his original place of departure. One is, of course, not left with this synopsis as final form, for Campbell, after detailed explanation of many of the properties of the "monomyth," expands his nuclear map into an intricate explanation of the journey of the questor.

In the following excerpt from The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Campbell summarizes the greater part of his discussion about the questor in mythology:

The mythological hero, setting forth from his common-day hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark (brother-battle, dragon-battle; offering, charm), or be slain by the opponent and descend in death (dismemberment, crucifixion). Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which give magical aid (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be represented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world (sacred marriage), or again—if the powers have remained unfriendly to him—his theft of the boon he came to gain (bride-theft, fire-theft); intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being (illumination, transfiguration, freedom). The final work is that of the return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection (emissary); if not, he flees and is pursued (transformation flight, obstacle flight). At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain
behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of
dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he
brings restores the world (elixir).\textsuperscript{2}

In this discussion, Campbell clearly establishes many of the directions
which the questor may take as he seeks completion of his mythological
journey.

The quest pattern is circular with the beginning and end of the quest
at the same point: the zenith of the circle. During the course of the
quest, the questor must cross the "threshold of adventure" into the lower
half of the mythological round. This is the descent into the underworld,
the mystical land beyond the home of the questor. The sequence of events
discussed by Campbell carries the questor up the other side of the circle
until he crosses the "threshold" on his return journey. Campbell demon-
strates that these mythological rounds may contain several elements of the
quest in a cyclical arrangement, or many smaller quests in a larger overall
quest pattern as, for example, Homer's \textit{Odyssey}. The structure of J. R. R.
Tolkien's \textit{The Lord of the Rings} is arranged in this latter type of pattern:
many smaller, separate quests along the journey to complete a huge task.
It is on this pattern and on the outline provided above of the journey of
the questor in myth that discussion of the questor figure in \textit{The Lord of the}
Rings will be based.

The major concern of \textit{The Lord of the Rings}, and the reason for the quest
which will be discussed in this paper is, as the title might indicate, rings,
particularly the One Ring, the Ring of Sauron, the Dark Lord. Throughout the
Trilogy, a haunting verse sustains the gloom which threatens the lands of
Middle Earth as Sauron's evil attempts to break forth from his dark tower
in Barad-Dûr:
Three Rings for the Elven-kings under the sky,
Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their halls of stone,
Nine for Mortal Men doomed to die,
One for the Dark Lord on his dark throne
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.
One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,
One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.³

Sauron bestowed the greater part of his power into the One Ring, and, in so doing, as the verse proclaims, sought to control the other rings and, thus, the peoples of Middle Earth.⁴

Sauron was defeated only after a long struggle, accompanied by the disintegration of the Houses of Numenor, the Men of the West, and the downfall of their kingdom. An alliance of Elves and Men, led by Elendil of Numenor and Gil-galad of the Elves, overthrew the power of Sauron.

Isildur, heir to the throne of the kingdom which the survivors of Numenor established in Middle Earth, cut the One Ring from the hand of Sauron and hid it.

The tale of the power of Sauron would have ended with his defeat at the end of the Second Age of Middle Earth had Isildur destroyed the Ring, but the strength of the One Ring had gained mastery over him, and Isildur began to adore the Ring until he could not bear to part with it. His doom was sealed, and the Ring betrayed him as it slipped from his finger while he crossed the Great River in attempt to flee the many Orcs, goblin-like servants of Sauron, which pursued him. With the magic of the One Ring gone from Isildur, the company of Orcs spotted him and slew him with arrows.

Isildur's line, afterwards, became scattered, and the White Tree of Gondor, symbol of the House of Elendil, withered and died. With the White Tree, the tree of life around which all other living things revolve (the "World Navel" which Campbell stresses as often at the nadir of the mythological quest circle)⁵ disappeared, not to be returned until the King, the heir to Elendil's
throne, and the White Tree returned.

Many years after the slaying of Isildur, the One Ring returned out of the depths of the Great River as Déagol, a Stoor, found the Ring while fishing and was killed for it by his companion, Smeagol, who would come to be known as Gollum. Gollum disappeared under the Misty Mountains with the Ring, but, as it was not his to keep, for only the Dark Lord could own the One Ring, the Ring passed into the hands of a Hobbit, Bilbo Baggins, who brought it back to the Shire.6 The Ring came to Frodo, Bilbo's heir and one of the two major questors in The Lord of the Rings, when Bilbo left the Shire for Rivendell, and the fate of the Ring became intertwined with the fate of Frodo whose quest to destroy the Ring was set long before he was born.

In addition to Frodo's quest, one reads in the trilogy of many great deeds and quests. Indeed, it can be argued that all of the major characters in The Lord of the Rings undergo some sort of quest, following the pattern presented in Campbell's outline. Besides Frodo, one other major questor figure is evident; he is Aragorn, known variously as Strider, the Dúnedain, and finally, Élessar, the Elf-stone. In Tolkien: A Look Behind "The Lord of the Rings," Lin Carter discusses the two major questors, Aragorn and Frodo, recognizing Aragorn as "the very pattern and prototype of the Quest Hero" and Frodo as "the ordinary man, forced by painful circumstances to find within himself the sources of courage"7 to complete his quest. The two questors are nearly opposite in character, yet are thrown together by the same fate, a destiny which is to decide the future lives of all in Middle Earth.

Aragorn, son of Arathorn, the heir to Isildur and Elendil, who is to return at the end of the trilogy to regain the throne in Gondor which had been in the keeping of a long line of Stewards for nearly one thousand years, is,
indeed, the archetype of the superior man, the Questor Hero. For this reason Aragorn faces little personal challenge on his road to regaining his kingship, save a few hundred thousand goblins, trolls and other dark and evil things which often seem to cower before him when he proclaims himself. In fact, even Sauron, the Enemy, is somewhat dismayed as Aragorn reveals himself and his legendary "Sword that was broken" shortly before the War of the Ring.

For all the power of Aragorn, for all his majesty, he cannot return to Gondor as King until Frodo’s quest is completed and the One Ring destroyed. The task of bearing the Ring to Orodruin and the Cracks of Doom in Mordor where the Ring was forged and there destroying the Ring by returning it to the fire from whence it came is placed upon the shoulders of the Hobbit, Frodo. Because Frodo is not a king and thus not in possession of the stature of an Aragorn, for Hobbits are simple folk and only half the size of men, Frodo must suffer the trials which all mythic questors who are not kings must confront if they seek the end of their road and the fulfillment of their quests. On Frodo, these ordeals will leave permanent scars, for he will make many mistakes and suffer greatly for them.

Frodo must cross many thresholds before his quest is complete; indeed, the pattern established in Campbell’s book can be traced in many instances throughout the trilogy. In order to discuss this intricate work of art in the most concise fashion and with regard and honor to Tolkien’s trilogy, the events in the tale will be discussed as they occur in these books with commentary made on the quest motif as it relates to the basic narrative.

The action begins in the Shire in the Northern lands of Middle Earth. The Shire, home of the greatest portion of the race known as Hobbits, appears somewhat like an American middle western farm community with gently rolling
hills and softly flowing streams. One might easily feel quite at home with the quiet, simple lives of the Hobbits, unless, of course, one finds it awkward living with a people who are no more than four feet tall. From this life and land, Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin, all hobbits, set out on their first quest to Rivendell. Their initial journey may be likened to the mythic "call to adventure" defined by Joseph Campbell:

This first stage of the mythological journey—which we have designated the "call to adventure"—signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown. This fateful region of both treasure and danger may be variously represented: as a distant land, a forest, a kingdom underground, beneath the waves, or above the sky, a secret island, lofty mountaintop, or profound dream state; but it is always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delight. To accept the "call" requires the quest hero to leave his comfortable existence, perhaps forever, and to enter into a world of unknown perils. The choice between the two options of refusal and acceptance is never easy, but, as in the case of Frodo of the Shire, persuasion to accept the call may come in the form of urgency, indeed, even necessity.

Frodo Baggins of Bag End in the Shire is an unwilling questor, as would all Hobbits be, for they value their homes and are, as a rule, a very conservative people, leaving adventures to the strange folk. One of these "strange" folk is Bilbo Baggins who had, a few years back, adopted Frodo as his heir. On his eleventy-first birthday (or one hundred and eleventh), Bilbo vanishes in a flash of light as he addresses those whom he had invited to the celebration. He leaves those hobbits assembled there quite baffled and aghast. Frodo knew what Bilbo had been planning, but did not suspect that he, too, would soon find it necessary to flee the Shire, for, as Bilbo's heir, he re-
ceived the magical One Ring among the other treasures at Bag End. Gandalf, the wizard, first recognizes what this Ring is and realizes that Frodo is in great peril if he remains in the Shire, for the Shadow, Sauron, is growing in Mordor and the Nazgûl, the Black Riders, evil servants of Sauron, are searching the lands of Middle Earth for news of the Ring. Yet, Frodo still resists the call:

"I am not made for perilous quests. I wish I had never seen the Ring! Why did it come to me? Why was I chosen?"

"Such questions cannot be answered," said Gandalf. "You may be sure that it was not for any merit that others do not possess: not for power or wisdom, at any rate. But you have been chosen, and you must therefore use such strength and heart and wits as you have." (I, 95)

At Gandalf's request, Frodo and Sam depart from their homes after delaying as long as they possibly could and soon discover that they are being pursued by at least one of the Black Riders. Frodo is joined by Merry and Pippin of Buckland, in the south of the Shire, and, despite their fears, pass through the gates of Buckland into the Old Forest to avoid the Black Riders. In so doing, they cross the "threshold of adventure" and enter a dark world of which they know very little. They have begun the dark journey and now face, in Campbell's words, the road of trials.

The dangers of the Old Forest appear mostly in the frightened minds of the hobbits, yet they realize that they are being drawn to the center of the world in which they now walk, the Withywindle valley. As Merry expresses his concern, one understands why the hobbits fear this course: "The Withywindle valley is said to be the queerest part of the whole wood--the centre from which all the queerness comes, as it were." (I, 160) That which he appears to be describing is, again, what Campbell defines as "the World Navel" or, perhaps more precisely, the center "Navel" in microcosm, for the Valley
affects little but the Old Forest.

Finally, they arrive at the center of the Old Forest and become enchanted with a great drowsiness. Three of the hobbits fall asleep: Frodo on a limb over the water of the river, and Merry and Pippin against a willow. Sam wanders off to find their ponies but returns quickly when he hears several loud noises and finds Frodo in the water and Pippin and Merry trapped in the tree, for the cracks against which they had been resting had closed about them as they were sleeping. One may find a parallel, here, with other myths such as those of Jonah, Jason, and others who were swallowed by sea creatures and returned whole and alive. In Campbell's words: "The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died." Three of the hobbits are initiated and thus allowed to enter into their quests: Frodo in a symbolic baptism, immersed in the water, and Merry and Pippin, swallowed by a willow tree, parallelling the whale motif in mythology.

Frodo, once rescued by Sam from the water, and Sam begin to cry out for help when they see the hopeless predicament of Merry and Pippin. They receive an answer in the form of a curious creature known as Tom Bombadil. He is the supernatural aid, an embodiment of all that is good over whom, as the company of hobbits soon discover, the One Ring has no power. Tom frees the two entrapped hobbits from Old Man Willow and invites them to his home where they sing, tell stories, and gain some well deserved rest. The hobbits leave Tom with directions to find their way out of the Old Forest and a song to call on Tom again if they are ever in peril, a song which they would use all too soon.

With the aid of Tom's directions, the hobbits soon find their way out of the Old Forest, but discover that they, again, are in a land which is ill-omened, for they are on the Barrow-downs. The hobbits are overcome by an
inexplicable fatigue and drift off to sleep by a large rock, just as they had dozed under the old willow by the Withywindle, though here the climate is cold and wet. Much to their dismay, the hobbits, who had begun their nap at noon, awake to see a pale sun disappearing before them:

The hobbits sprang to their feet in alarm, and ran to the western rim. They found that they were upon an island in the fog. Even as they looked out in dismay towards the setting sun, it sank before their eyes into a white sea, and a cold grey shadow sprang up in the East behind. The fog rolled up to the walls and rose above them, and as it mounted it bent over their heads until it became a roof: they were shut in a hall of mist whose central pillar was a standing stone. (I, 190-91)

They, once more, have entered a "Kingdom of the dark," the realm of the Barrow-wights, ghostly remnants of the North Kingdom of the Dunedain. They are beings who exist in fog and darkness. The hobbits become lost in the fog and are taken: Frodo alive, conscious, but the others seemingly dead:

He turned, and there in the cold glow he saw lying beside him, Sam, Pippin, and Merry. They were on their backs, and their faces looked deathly pale; and they were clad in white. About them lay many treasures, of gold maybe, though in that light they looked cold and unlovely. On their heads were circlets, gold chains were about their waists, and on their fingers were many rings. Swords lay by their sides, and shields were at their feet. But across their three necks lay one long naked sword. (I, 194)

Frodo shows his courage as he resists the temptation to use the Ring for his own escape and attacks the hand of the Barrow-wight. Suddenly, Frodo recalls the song of Tom Bombadil and begins to sing, quietly at first, then with ever increasing volume and resolve.

Tom appears in answer to the need of Frodo and rescues the hobbits from darkness. Sam, Merry, and Pippin are resurrected, reborn, and thus complete the mythic circle and their first quest. Frodo has yet to be initiated. Each is given a blade from the horde which was scattered about them when they
were being transported by the wight, and, though Merry did not know it and, perhaps will never fully realize, Merry's blade, a blade of Westernesse, crafted by the Numenoreans, would be the final blow to the Captain of the Nazgûl, for that blade was wrought to defeat the sorcery of Angmar who became Sauron's most powerful servant. Armed and under Tom's guidance, the hobbits are soon on their way once more.

The hobbits arrive at Bree where the two major questors, Frodo and Aragorn (known also as Strider) meet. Together, pursued by the Black Riders, they depart from Bree to face their greatest test so far at the hill of Weathertop. The Nazgûl assail the company at night and, at their call, Frodo slips on the One Ring and enters the world of the Nazgûl, the Ring-wraiths. As a result of this blunder, the Nazgûl see Frodo clearly and attack him. Frodo is wounded by one of the evil blades, but the Nazgûl are routed by the Company and flee, to wait until the poison tip which broke in Frodo's shoulder should do its work. Frodo has faced the Dragon-battle, Crucifixion at the Threshold, here, and must flee with the Ring before the Black Riders return.

The company struggles on as Frodo rides on one of the ponies. Again, they find help unlooked-for in the form of Glorfindel, the Elf, and his horse which Frodo mounts. At the first sign of the Nazgûl, Glorfindel bids his horse to fly and carry the Ring-Bearer to the Ford of Bruinen where, upon crossing the ford, Frodo will gain the protection of Elrond in Rivendell. Here Frodo faces a great struggle at the end of his first quest as he begins to fade into the world of the Nazgûl. By strength of will and magical aid, Frodo crosses the stream into the land of Rivendell and the Black Riders are dispersed and their horses drowned by a great flood of water sent by Elrond and Gandalf. Finally, in the house of Elrond, Frodo is brought back, resur-
rected from the world of the Ringwraiths and here the first of his quests is finished.

At Rivendell, the travellers find peace and healing for several weeks as council is held and scouts sent forth to seek information as to the existence and whereabouts of the Black Riders. When the scouts return and the decision to destroy the Ring at the Cracks of Doom in Mordor is made, Frodo once more accepts the task of bearing the burden which he has carried from his home in the Shire: the One Ring of the Dark Lord. A company of nine is chosen as the Fellowship of the Ring, and Elrond gives final counsel to Frodo and names the nine chosen to travel the paths of the Ringbearer:

"I can foresee very little of your road; and how your task is to be achieved I do not know ... You will meet many foes, some open, and some disguised; and you may find friends upon your way when you least look for it ..."

"And I will choose you companions to go with you far as they will or fortune allows ..."

"The Company of the Ring shall be Nine; and the Nine Walkers shall be set against the Nine Riders that are evil. With you and your faithful servant, Gandalf will go; for this shall be his great task, and maybe the end of his labours.

"For the rest, they shall represent the other Free Peoples of the World: Elves, Dwarves, and Men. Legolas shall be for the Elves; and Gimli son of Glöin for the Dwarves. They are willing to go at least to the passes of the Mountains, and maybe beyond. For men you shall have Aragorn son of Arathorn, for the Ring of Isildur concerns him closely." (I, 360)

Elrond names also Boromir of Minas Tirith, a man whose greatest desire is to take the Ring to Gondor and rise to the throne which has been vacant for many years. He is to learn, by traveling with the Company, why his desire cannot be fulfilled, for this will be his last journey as a live man but one which will leave him die in peace. Merry and Pippin, though not originally chosen, plead with Elrond to take the remaining two places of the Nine and are granted their request. The Fellowship is now complete.
Rivendell is neither home to the hobbits, nor is it in any way commonplace, as the Shire has been defined, for it is a land of magic and Elven-craft. Rivendell is an island of light in a sea of darkness, a sea into which the Fellowship must plunge as the second of the Quests begins. The members of the Fellowship set out from this magic land excited but with little hope that their task will ever be completed.

The motif of thornbushes, a traditional image in myth symbolizing the "threshold," begins to be noticed on this second Quest. Without guidance the questor cannot pass through the thornbushes without experiencing the tearing of the flesh, the dismemberment which faces the unaided traveller at the "Threshold of Adventure." With the help and leadership of the King, Aragorn, the Company passes unscathed and whole, and even use the brambles for protection as they journey on to the mountains before them. Indeed, for the presence of Aragorn and Gandalf, the supernatural aid, the Fellowship faces little trial until they are forced to take the dark road, the one most feared, through the mines of Moria.

The entrance to Moria is guarded by a Watcher, an evil creature who lurks in the murky waters before the doors. The Fellowship narrowly escapes the tentacles of the monster, Leviathan, and enters the dark passage to Moria. Slowly, for several days, the Company winds its way through the caverns until it faces challenge in the form of a Balrog, Bane of the Dwarf King of Moria, Durin, a creature of darkness bred by Morgoth, the Enemy of Old who was much greater, indeed, than even Sauron. Here, Gandalf is the only one of the Fellowship who can face the evil of this creature, and Gandalf the Grey, in casting down this creature, is pulled down to the depths of the Earth beneath the Bridge of Khazad-Dûm. The Fellowship flees before the Orcs and Trolls of Moria and escape, but mourn the loss of their leader, the Grey Pilgrim.
But Gandalf is not lost, for it is necessary for him to fall into a quest of his own which will result in his transformation. The pattern of Gandalf's descent into the underworld beneath Moria and his return follows, more closely than any other quest in The Lord of the Rings, the mythic round set forth by Campbell. Lin Carter discusses the significance of Gandalf's quest:

... Gandalf suffers in a Christlike way. For during the course of the story Gandalf is slain and passes through death to a greater region of life beyond, returning to the lands of men with powers greater than before, purged of human frailties and errors. 17

In "Hell and the City: Tolkien and the Traditions of Western Literature," Charles A. Huttar demonstrates more fully than Carter the mythic overtones of Gandalf's combat with the Balrog, his ascent from the depths of Moria, and resurrection and transformation after the defeat of his foe:

The story of Gandalf's struggle with him [the Balrog] has many parallels in the myths of the hero overcoming a monster of "the deep." The water motif and the hand to hand combat remind us of Beowulf, the association with death brings to mind Christ's Harrowing of Hell, and the ambiguous "man-shape" suggests Theseus' conquest of the Minotaur ... Tolkien's language in the "Chronology" is plain. Gandalf 'passes away. His body lies on the peak.' Then he "returns to life" (III, 373) but in a resurrection body (to use the obviously relevant theological term) which is "light as a swan's feather" (II, 106). His rescue by the eagle, the divine bird is one final image of ascent. 18

Gandalf defeats the dragon, the Balrog, sin, 19 but only after his own death and resurrection. The Balrog may represent the confrontation with the sins of men, or the personal sin which must be alleviated before one can enter the Kingdom, Heaven. Indeed, Balrogs might be considered evil in its primal form, for this particular Balrog and its race are the result of the casting out of Morgoth from the presence of Eru, the One, 20 as Satan was cast out of Heaven in Christian mythology. All that is evil in Middle Earth appeared as
a consequence of Morgoth's hatred of the world which Eru created. In de-
feating the Balrog, Gandalf defeats sin and thereby gains his potential as
an Istari, Wizard, and returns more powerful than ever to aid in the war
against Sauron.

Without Gandalf the Fellowship is, for a short time, lost, for it had
relied on Gandalf's wisdom to guide it through the perils of a darkening
world, but Aragorn quickly assumes leadership of the Company, for the danger
from which they fled in Moria still pursues them. Following the paths that
Gandalf had originally chosen for them, the Company enters the mystical land
of Lothlórien, of which not much can be said, for, as in Rivendell, Lothlórien
is a country of light, of joy where Elves make their home, and the map of the
mythic journey of the Questor is primarily concerned with the darkness of
surrounding lands.

Lothlórien is a golden wood, the home of the golden mallorn trees which
have existed since the Elder Days of Middle Earth. Here, also, is the house
of Galadriel, Lady of Lórien. She seems to fit Campbell's description of the
universal goddess, who can be seen in two different aspects, for she is both
fair and terrible. Frodo sees her transformed as she had not appeared be-
fore when he understands that she possesses one of the Three Elven-rings and
offers her the One Ring:

She lifted up her hand and from the ring that she
wore there issued a great light that illumined her alone
and left all else dark. She stood before Frodo seeming
now tall beyond measurement, and beautiful beyond en-
during, terrible and worshipful. (I, 473)

Galadriel refuses the gift of the One Ring, for she knows she cannot possess
it; yet, too, she realizes that the destruction of the Ring will decrease the
magic of the Elven-rings and Lothlórien will fade until it is only a memory
of the distant past.
The Company departs well rested and with gifts which will protect them as they follow their roads. Aragorn and Frodo are each presented with treasures which symbolize that which their fated journeys will bring. To Aragorn is given "a great stone of clear green, set in a silver brooch that was wrought in the likeness of an eagle with outspread wings" (I, 485-86) and the name Elessar, the Elfstone of the house of Elendil, and to Frodo a phial containing the light of Eärendil's star is granted, a light to be used "in dark places, when all other lights go out." (I, 488) It is understood, therefore, that Aragorn will return as King to Gondor as prophesied if the War against Sauron is won, and Frodo, the Ring-bearer, will choose his path to the darkness and desolation of Mordor.

The members of the Company give thanks and set out down the Great River to Tol Brandir where the decision must be made whether to go to Minas Tirith and await the storm, or to enter the darkness of Mordor. At Tol Brandir, fate, again, decides for the Company as Frodo flees Boromir, who, in his desperation and desire for the Ring, had followed Frodo to where he sat, alone, seeking guidance in his quest. In a rage of madness, Boromir assails Frodo after attempting to plead with him to go to Minas Tirith and keep the One Ring to use against the Enemy. Frodo escapes as he slips on the Ring and becomes aware that his Road lies in the direction of Mordor and the Cracks of Doom; he can ask no one to undertake this task with him.

Frodo vanishes and sets out for the boats to make good his escape, but Sam, ever faithful to his master and wise with a sense which will be of invaluable aid to Frodo, understands what his master will try to do and hurries back to the river as Frodo is leaving. The two hobbits now must journey alone with little hope, to the Gates of the Black Land. The Fellowship of the Ring is broken; the paths of Aragorn and Frodo are sundered; yet, their quests remain intertwined.
Boromir, meanwhile, has reached the end of his quest, for he now understands his great error and repents. He has found the answers to his deepest desire, the throne of Gondor, and accepts his fate. Faramir, brother to Boromir, would later explain Boromir’s motives to Frodo and Sam:

“And this I remember of Boromir as a boy, when we together learned the tale of our sires and the history of our city, that always it displeased him that his father was not king. ‘How many hundreds of years needs it to make a steward a king, if the king returns not?’ he asked. ‘Few years, maybe, in other places of less royalty,’ by father answered. ‘In Gondor ten thousand years would not suffice.’ (II, 352)

In defending the hobbits, Merry and Pippin, from a company of Orcs, Boromir dies in grace, and the boat in which Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas place Boromir appears as an apparition or vision to many, including Faramir, as it drifts out to its final resting place in the sea.

Merry and Pippin are taken alive by the Orcs who killed Boromir, and are thus abducted into the first part of a quest which culminates in the wood of Fangorn. Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli, in the meantime, understand that the hobbits are taken and set out after them, also undertaking a quest, of sorts. With great determination and stamina, the three chase the Orcs for many leagues until they meet a company of Riders from Rohan who inform the three that a band of Orcs, the same that had abducted Merry and Pippin, had been routed and destroyed though no hobbits or creatures other than Orcs were seen. At this news, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli despair, but set out in the direction of the battle on horses loaned to them by Eomer of Rohan. The three reach the edge of Fangorn Forest, but find no trace of the hobbits. They are puzzled, but decide to rest since it is night and there is no hope of discerning a trail in the dark.

The hobbits, clawed, bruised, and battered, had been dragged on a nightmarish journey with the Orcs, kept alive for reasons they did not know. The
company is assailed by the horsemen of Rohan, and quick thinking by Pippin saves the two hobbits from the doom which awaits their captors. Now free, Merry and Pippin, having passed their "tests," flee along the river Entwash into Fangorn Forest where they meet Fangorn, Treebeard, leader of the Ents, a race of tree-like creatures who have their own quarrel with the foul Orcs. They tell Fangorn all they have learned while in the company of the Orcs: the designs of Saruman, a wizard like Gandalf, but one who had turned to evil and desires the One Ring for his own use. Inspired with the urgency of these matters, Fangorn rouses the Ents and they set forth with many Huorns, creatures who were formerly Ents but have become more like trees over the long years, to destroy Isengard, the stronghold of Saruman. In bringing news to Fangorn, the hobbits complete another mythic circle and return out of the forest with "the boon," the end result of the elixir quest, which will aid in the first battles in the War of the Ring.

The culmination of the quest of Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas comes as they discover, to their surprise and utter delight, that Gandalf the Grey, now Gandalf the White, has returned to the world. Gandalf informs them of the whereabouts of the hobbits and brings messages to Aragorn and Legolas from the Lady of Lórien, Galadriel. The message of Legolas bids him to beware of the call of the sea, information of little use to anyone but himself. The advice given to Aragorn, on the other hand, is as important to the peoples of Middle Earth as his quest, for it calls him to start for the paths which will end his quest for ill or for good:

Where now are the Dúnedain, Elessar, Elessar?
Why do thy kinsfolk wander afar?
Near is the hour when the Lost should come forth,
And the Grey Company ride from the North.
But dark is the path appointed for thee:
The Dead watch the road that leads to the Sea. (II, 136)

Aragorn will not come to grasp the meaning of those words until he realizes
that the road into the Underworld, his "dark journey," the Paths of the Dead, is his fate and that his quest is nearly ended. That realization is reached after the overthrow of Saruman and the great battle of Helm's Deep, when Aragorn receives from Gandalf the Palantir, a stone fashioned in the Elder Days by the Noldor, the High Elves. Through this stone which Grima-Wormtongue, servant of Saruman, had cast down from Orthanc, Aragorn reveals himself and his sword to Sauron, thus openly proclaiming himself and his quest for the first time.

At this point, Frodo's quest, in the order of the Trilogy, is turned to once more as Frodo and Sam climb among the hills of Emyn Muil. Smeagol-Gollum has been following them, keeping just out of sight, since they left the Shire. Sam and Frodo have detected signs of Gollum's presence, and suspect that he is after them, for they realize that Gollum desires to gain back the Ring, his "precious" which Bilbo took from him after he had possessed it for so long. Gollum is a creature much like a hobbit since his race, the Stoors, are said to be distant cousins to the Hobbits, but he has been twisted to a selfish evil by the power of the One Ring. Many years had he spent in the depths of the Misty Mountains, living long beyond the ordinary lifetime of a Stoor, for the Ring's power affects one who retains it in this way, adding years of torment to the years in which an average life would have passed. Gollum is a fallen Hobbit, a brother, perhaps to the Hobbits of the Shire who has committed the sin of murder in the killing of Déagol for the One Ring.

As Gandalf did by defeating the Balrog, Frodo must defeat or conciliate, in Campbell's words, his "brother," sin, the fallen Hobbit, before he can enter into the "kingdom of the dark." Frodo, thus, in true hobbit fashion, conciliates the "power," Gollum, for he is moved by the pathetic creature and will not kill him; indeed, Frodo begs him to be his guide through the perils of this land, a move of which Sam thoroughly disapproves. Frodo's choice to
pity the poor, twisted creature proves to be a wise decision, for Gollum takes them along paths on which no Orc or enemy travels.

Gollum leads them through the Dead Marshes, an incredibly powerful rendition of Hades in Middle Earth with the faces of the Dead peering out of the waters at the travellers, and their candles casting an eerie light about, luring all who pass to their own death. Eventually Frodo and Sam are led to the Black Gates of Mordor and find them closed. Much to the dismay of Gollum who does not wish his "precious" to fall into Sauron's hands, Frodo still is determined to enter the Black Land though all paths are heavily guarded. On the advice of Gollum, Frodo resolves to take the stairs of Cirith Ungol into Mordor, a path, as others they have taken, which is dark and ill-omened.

During their journey around Ephel Duath, the Mountains of Shadow, Frodo and Sam are for a time separated from Gollum and meet with Men of Gondor, Minas Tirith, who guard one of the last outposts in North Ithilien near the land of Mordor. They witness a battle between these men and the Southrons, allies to Mordor, and then enter the secret passage to the outpost of Gondor where they rest for a time. Frodo again spares Gollum's life as he stays the hand of the bowman who thinks Gollum is a spy, and soon Gollum, Frodo, and Sam set out for Cirith Ungol.

Gollum, in suggesting the stairs of Cirith Ungol, is not without purpose or design of his own, for he knows that he is leading Frodo and Sam into the Lair of Shelob, a huge, ancient spider-like creature. Gollum apparently has an understanding with Shelob and allows Frodo and Sam to enter into the darkness alone so that Shelob might have the prey which Gollum promised her years ago when he passed out of Mordor through her tunnels. Shelob represents, again as the Balrog and Gollum did, evil, sin which must be confronted on the Threshold of Adventure, the threshold of the land of Mordor.
With the aid of the light of the Star of Eärendil which Galadriel infused into the phial which Frodo carries, Sam and Frodo gain the exit of the tunnels only to find it blocked by a mesh of web. After forcing Shelob back into her lair with the Magical aid of the light of the phial, Frodo slashes through the web of Shelob and, in the fey excitement of freedom, Frodo breaks out of the tunnels not caring that he is still in grave peril. As on Weathertop, in Frodo's first quest, Frodo commits an error for which he must pay. The dragon, Shelob, has not been defeated or conciliated in any way; thus, to follow and complete the mythic pattern, Frodo must die in order to enter into this land. Accordingly, Frodo is stung by Shelob as he runs blindly from the darkness behind him into the darkness ahead in Mordor. Sam, meanwhile, is assailed by Gollum from behind but is not to be detained long from rushing to his master's aid; with determination and courage ordinarily unknown in the Shire-folk, Sam chases Gollum off and confronts the grisly form of Shelob.

With a bit of luck, Sam defeats Shelob and runs to Frodo, believing him dead. Since Sam in seemingly the survivor at this point, the quest is cast upon his shoulders, and after debate, he takes the Ring and vows to complete the task. Slipping on the Ring, Sam sets out, but stops as he sees that a group of Orcs have discovered Frodo's body and are taking it back to the Tower of Cirith Ungol. Samwise Gamgee, at the close of the second book of the Trilogy, must decide between his love for Frodo and the urgency of the quest which he has now taken upon himself. At first he ponders, but then runs after the Orcs who have vanished into the tunnels to the Tower. As he gains on them, Sam discovers to his joy that Frodo is not dead, merely paralyzed, but Sam must, somehow, rescue his master from the hands of the Enemy.

As Frodo lies in the Tower of Cirith Ungol, the War of the Ring has begun, and Gondor is being attacked by the forces of Mordor, which are gaining
victory upon victory over the outnumbered, yet valiant Men of Minas Tirith. Aragorn, with Legolas, Gimli, and a company of Dúnedain, Aragorn’s kin, ride the Paths of the Dead, entering the Underworld to raise an army to aid in the War, and Gandalf is, with Pippin, in Gondor rendering what service he can to the despairing armies of men who are fighting under the darkened skies above their land.

Yet, even at the height of their despair, as the Gate into Gondor is broken and the Captain of the Nazgûl rides forth to claim his victory, hope comes to Minas Tirith as the wind from the sea brings the morning sun, and the Rohirrim, the Riders of Rohan with Merry in their company, charge to the gates of Gondor hewing and routing the Enemy until the Orcs and leagues of Sauron flee in terror and confusion. Aragorn returns from the Paths of the Dead, after gaining victory over the Corsairs on the sea and granting the Dead peaceful rest upon completion of their oath to aid in the War against Sauron, on ships bearing the sails of the House of Elendil. Victory seems possible now, yet no one knows how the Ring-bearer, upon whose shoulder’s the fate of Middle Earth rides, fares.

Sam, meanwhile, keeping in mind that his master still lives, brandishes his sword and begins to advance to the front gate of the Tower of Cirith Ungol, ready to face the entire army of Orcs which he supposes are inside. Sam, now that he possesses the Ring, a thing of too great a power for any but the Dark Lord to wield, faces the trials of the Ring even as he strives to save his master. Soon, however, his visions of grandeur are dissipated as Sam regains his senses. He has passed the test which others much stronger than he had failed:

In that hour of trial it was the love of his master that helped most to hold him firm; but also deep down in him lived still unconquered his plain hobbit-sense: he knew in the core of his heart that he was not large enough to bear such a burden, even
if such visions were not a mere cheat to betray him. (III, 216)

Having conquered the first test, Sam again bends his mind to the freeing of Frodo. He presses on until he reaches the front door to the Tower where he is stopped as if he had run into a wall, for he now faces the will of the Two Watchers. Because he could think of nothing else to do, Sam holds forth the phial of Galadriel and the will of the Watchers is broken. Sam, now with no hope of secrecy, finds that his task faces little challenge, for the Orcs have seemingly killed themselves off, he decides, fighting over the spoils of their prisoner, Frodo.

After discovering the whereabouts of his master, Sam springs up the ladder, provided by one of the Orcs who at the moment is whipping Frodo. Sam attacks the Orc and defeats him as the Orc trips over the ladder and crashes to the floor. Sam's quest, a small one, but huge in importance, is over, and he surrenders to Frodo the Ring. Afterwards, Sam and Frodo escape in the garb of Orcs, and the two pass through the force of the Watchers as they dash forth into the unknown.

Frodo and Sam are forced to take the high pass out of the Tower of Cirith Ungol, for the cliff walls on either side down to the land below are too sheer to attempt to conquer. As they perceive a company of Orcs rushing towards them, they are soon forced to choose between certain capture and leaping over the side of the road. They choose the latter as the best and, after a drop of only a dozen feet or so, land in "a tangle of thorny bushes" (III, 237). Once more the mythic pattern can be considered, and Sam and Frodo experience the tearing dismemberment of the briars as they break forth into the final road to Orodruin.

This road is to be Frodo's greatest trial, for, as they near Mount Doom, the Ring becomes ever a heavier burden, and Frodo feels it as a great weight
upon the chain around his neck and a never-fading wheel of fire before his eyes. Finally, after more tests, more trials almost beyond enduring, Frodo crawls toward the Cracks of Doom to complete his quest. The Ring, however much Frodo desires to destroy it, will not allow itself to be tossed into the Cracks of Doom. Frodo, overcome by the power of the Ring which has grown considerably now that it is near Sauron, slips the Ring on his finger and proclaims himself the owner of the Ring. He will not destroy it. Frodo has faltered on the brink of the end of his quest.

Yet, somewhere written in the designs of the Ring was the fate which would allow it ultimately to be destroyed. That time had come, for Gollum, who followed Sam and Frodo all the way to Orodruin, strikes Sam violently on the back and rushes forward to the edge of the Cracks of Doom to confront the Ring-bearer and win back his "precious." Gollum's purpose on Middle Earth and his quest, for he has been on a quest to regain the Ring since Bilbo Baggins took it from him, is now ended as he bites the Ring, finger and all, from the hand of Frodo and, in his joy, falls to his death in Mount Doom, still clutching the Ring and screaming "precious." Sam drags Frodo from the bowels of the erupting mountain and Frodo, at the end of his quest, sees the designs of fate in which he played an important role:

"... do you remember Gandalf's words: Even Gollum may have something yet to do? But for him, Sam, I could not have destroyed the Ring. The Quest would have been in vain, even at the bitter end. So let us forgive him! For the Quest is achieved, and now all is over. I am glad you are here with me. Here at the end of all things, Sam." (III, 277)

Frodo is free. His quest has ended with his final wound. All that remains is for Gwaihir, King of Eagles, and Gandalf to rescue the hobbits from the erupting Mount Doom. In this way, the archetypal mythic circle, delineated by Joseph Campbell, is completed for Sam and Frodo. The way is open for the King, Aragorn, to return to Gondor to regain the throne and enter into his "sacred
marriage," to use Campbell's words, to Arwen Evenstar, thus uniting the races of Elves and Men for the final time.

Aragorn's quest is not yet complete, for it is essential for him to restore the tree of life, the White Tree of Gondor, to its proper place. This act will symbolize the return of the "World Navel" to Minas Tirith. It must be accomplished before the mythic round and Aragorn's task can be fulfilled. Aragorn (Elessar) goes with Gandalf into the mountains and there beholds a sapling of the White Tree which, in appearance, is not more than seven years old. Aragorn returns to plant the tree in Gondor thus restoring the tree of life to the Realm of Gondor. Indeed, the lands of both questors, the Shire and Gondor, gain a tree which is an emblem for the respective centers of their lands, for a golden Mallorn tree, a gift from Galadriel, springs up in the Shire.

Before the Mallorn can be planted, however, the Shire must be cleansed of the undesirable ruffians who had invaded the Shire and began to destroy wantonly the land, under the direction of Saruman. Sam, Frodo, Merry, and Pippin return to their land and with their new found courage and wisdom (elixir), rouse the Hobbits, restore their world to order and cast out Saruman, who is killed in a final act by Gríma-Wormtongue. Now peace lies upon the land, and the tasks of the Questors are forever concluded.

EPILOGUE

Sadly, as Galadriel realized, with the destruction of the One Ring, the lands of the magic of the Elves fades into mere memory, for, in Middle Earth, good and evil are balanced. Ultimate good cannot exist without ultimate evil, and, thus, the Elves begin, along with their magic, and joy, to pass over the Sea to the Undying Lands. With them go the Ringbearers, Bilbo, Frodo, and eventually Sam, and Gandalf, whose task on Middle Earth, too, ended with Sauron.

One finishes The Lord of the Rings with a sense of melancholy, for one cannot help but desire the world in which he has lived for the fifteen hun-
dred pages of the trilogy to continue in its richness and enchantment. Yet, as in Middle Earth, the joy of the reader ends with the toil of the Questor, and the world of J. R. R. Tolkien must fade into memory until the reader picks up the trilogy once more and returns to the magic of Middle Earth again and again ... 

The Road goes ever on and on
Down from the door where it began,
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
And I must follow, if I can,
Pursuing it with eager feet,
Until it joins some larger way
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then? I cannot say. (I, 62)
Footnotes


2 Campbell, pp. 245-46.


4 Information concerning the history of the Rings is found in the appendices which are at the end of Part III of The Lord of the Rings.

5 Campbell, pp. 40-41.

6 A much more detailed account of the finding of the Ring may be found in the Prologue to the Trilogy and in Tolkien's The Hobbit.


8 Campbell, p. 173.

9 Campbell, p. 97.

10 Campbell, p. 58.

11 Campbell, p. 90.

12 Campbell, p. 69.

13 Campbell, p. 245.

14 See Campbell's diagram of the mythic journey.

15 Campbell, p. 78.

16 Discussion of the Elder Days of Middle Earth is contained in Tolkien's The Silmarillion (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).

17 Carter, p. 192.


19 Campbell, pp. 245-46.


21 Campbell, pp. 302-303.
22 Campbell, p. 185.

23 Campbell, p. 109.
Bibliography


