

# IN THE LAND OF MORDOR WHERE THE SHADOWS LIE

*GOOD, EVIL, AND THE QUEST  
IN TOLKIEN'S MIDDLE EARTH*



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1981

*Three Rings for the Elven-kings under the sky,  
Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their hills 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.*

*(The Lord of the Rings I,77)*

## INTRODUCTION

**T**he land of Middle Earth which is the setting for Tolkien's major mythic works is one which has been created from the best of traditional sources. Tolkien was a famed expert on the literature and language of the early medieval and dark ages. His researches and writings in Anglo-Saxon and Northern lore gave him a unique insight into the meanings of myth throughout the ages. When he came to form the mythology of Middle Earth he built into it all the aspects that made such literature popular for all time. He also included many further subjects and points that had been missing from earlier tales, or merely hinted at. The result is a complete history, cultural, geographical, religious and mythic.

In all chronicles of this kind there is an attempt to describe or explain the current state of affairs. In Middle Earth this state is not a pleasant one, and its origins go back to the beginnings of sentient life in that realm. The world is divided between the Dark powers and those who strive for Light. While it can be said that any world would be composed of good and evil parts, in Middle Earth the situation in contemporary times is balancing on a knife-edge. The evil forces are immeasurably more dangerous than those in existing literature, and those powers must be countered somehow to restore Middle Earth to normality. If one can explain the imperfect state of Man through comparison with the description of an elemental clash between the forces of good and evil, then the mythic tale which does can be said to have succeeded. Good and evil in Middle Earth are established as facts by Tolkien and he uses the classic method of resolving the differences between them - the quest. This device not only shows up good to the best, but also provides a way of countering the evil.

Eucatastrophe is the word Tolkien uses to describe the turning that occurs when imminent evil is unexpectedly averted and good succeeds. This word will serve well as the key word for the following discussions, embodying as it does the concepts of Good, Evil and the Quest which is the means to success.

*Note - all references to page numbers in the quotations in the text are to the editions of the sources quoted in the bibliography.*

# EVIL - its form and characters

The struggle of opposites is found in literature from the earliest times to the present day, and folk tales from all cultures have dealt with the themes of Good and Evil, strong and weak, light and dark. The precise nature of the positive force of Good is usually defined by the mores and beliefs of the people to whom the tales are related, and particular stories or legends might differ in their view of this force. Good and Evil are relative terms in mythology, their conception is governed by the standards of the day. As time and customs change, these concepts also alter their forms. A being symbolised as a force for Good in Norse mythology would not necessarily be classed as Evil by medieval Christians, but may have been viewed as insufficiently pure and restrained to be thought of as Good by their standards.

Abstract concepts alone cannot provide an account of Good and Evil, they need to be linked to physical or material beings through whom the basic powers can be manifested. Thus we have here the basis for the hero and the villain, characters whom the reader or listener can recognise or identify with. Although the fundamentals of strife are being portrayed in such tales, they are hidden behind the characters, however direct the connection between the basic concepts and characters.

The traditional heroic form is well formulated in the myths of classical Greece, and its counterpart can be seen in the Norse and Celtic mythology of later ages. The hero is usually a mortal man, perhaps descended from a god, who is confronted with an evil force which he has to overcome. Others may have tried to vanquish the foe and failed, and it is only the true hero, with acts of great valour, strength, and perhaps divine aid, who can achieve the defeat of the enemy. The tales and legends of the middle ages evolved from the traditional forms, adapting the basic themes to correspond to Christian belief and modifying the heroes to conform to the Christian ideals of Good men. The heroic quest was developed as a means of giving structure and meaning to the tales. It embodies an initial reason for the struggle, a goal to attain, an arduous path to follow, and a climax in which the goal is achieved and ultimate defeat or triumph is established.

Tales of traditional romance and mythology contain many identifiable aspects which have developed over the ages. Each individual tale contains the basic Good-Evil concept, but various forms of hero are employed; the motives and actions differ widely; and the props which are introduced to aid or hinder the quest range from dragons to amulets and mists to magic. The hero can depend on nothing but his natural abilities, or be aided by enchanted weapons and fantastic allies. The enemies to be faced are usually given unworldly forms to emphasise the fact that they cannot be overcome by ordinary means.

Middle Earth is a fantasy world created by J.R.R. Tolkien, and it is the location for his novels and stories which chronicle its history and culture. It is not based upon present or past worlds and societies, but rather on a detached idealisation of the heroic societies and locations of human mythology. The geographical idealisation is analogous to the physical world as we know it, since past mythology is based on this structure, but all cultural, sociological and religious aspects are representations of the heroic and romantic in literature. Tolkien's novels

of Middle Earth - *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion* - deal with two distinct areas of its history. *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* describe events in the final struggle of the history of the Ring, an all-powerful token around which the plots revolve. *The Silmarillion* sets out the early history and mythology of Middle Earth, an account of the Creation and tales of elemental powers warring in past ages.

Tolkien has stated explicitly that the stories of Middle Earth are not allegorical, but the central themes seem to be studies in the evil that accompanies the desire for power, and it is difficult not to attach some allegorical properties to these works.

For a conflict to exist between Good and Evil there must be a power involved somewhere. The corruption and misuse of that power determine the quality of the Evil, while its control is connected to the Good force. In Middle Earth the prime source of power and energy arises from the magic arts of its inhabitants. The manifestation of the forces tapped by these peoples is seen in the Rings of Power. These rings were forged in the Second Age of Middle Earth by the elven smiths of Eregion, and were distributed to the various peoples who were to bear them - elves, dwarves and mortal men. Each ring provided the bearer with certain gifts, properties of the ring, such as invisibility, protection from physical harm, precognition.

Sauron the Great, the epitome of evil in the Third Age of Middle Earth, had his beginnings back in the mists of time. He was not, in the early days, connected with evil but, like Loki in Norse mythology and Satan in Christian lore, he rebelled against the forces of good and established himself in the forsaken land of Mordor and there began his reign of terror. He assisted the smiths in the creation of the Rings of Power, and forged the One Ring to rule all others. Through the power and mastery of this One Ring Sauron managed to reign supreme over the Free Peoples of Middle Earth and their Ring-bearers. The One Ring was taken from Sauron at the end of the Second Age and thus removed his absolute control over the lands of Middle Earth. However, his influence remained, and he gradually built up his strength without the Ring to prepare for his desired victory and dominion over the Free Peoples once more. The subsequent finding of the Ring and the struggle by a small band of beings to destroy it and its power before Sauron can regain it, form the epic adventure story started in *The Hobbit* and completed in *The Lord of the Rings*.

The One Ring, fashioned to control the lesser Rings of Power, corrupts all who bear or serve it. Sauron, at first unassuming and of fair bodily form, becomes hideous and grotesque in his corruption after his use of the Ring and its loss, and he brooded in his retreat, planning his terrible revenge. As Gandalf the wizard warns Frodo Baggins, telling him the history of the Ring:

Always after a defeat and a respite, the Shadow (Sauron) takes another shape and grows again. .... The Enemy is fast becoming very strong. His plans are far from ripe, I think, but they are ripening.

*(LOTR I,78)*

Although Sauron is not physically encountered in the stories, his presence is everywhere, and events concerning him are detailed by his vassals and servants. His power is such that his followers have been wholly transformed by the Ring's influence. His major assistants are the Ring-wraiths of Nazgul, who are nine undead creatures used by him to spread his reign of terror and carry out his dark deeds. Originally the bearers of the Nine Rings for Mortal Men, the Nazgul succumbed to the power of the One Ring as it sapped them of life itself, until they had no more will to oppose it and they became slaves of Sauron. They have become the vanguard of the expanding empire of Mordor, striking fear and paralysis into all they meet.

The One Ring's gift of absolute power seemingly allows the bearer to master his environment and enemies, but in fact the bearer becomes the Ring's servant as it bends him, more and more, to its inherent evil. The Nazgul, known as the Black Riders to the hobbits, are perhaps the most immediate presence of evil in *The Lord of the Rings*. Since they act for Sauron, their deeds can be seen as those of Sauron himself. Their appearance in the Shire, in the early stages of the tale, breaks into the picture of a journey of no great trouble. Up to that point all the talk of evil and dark forces has been more in the form of veiled threats, without substance, and it is only when the Black Riders start sniffing and snuffling around that a sense of present evil is felt. The hobbits, on their way out of the Shire, are transfixed by the cry of the Nazgul:

A long-drawn wail came down the wind, like the cry of some evil and lonely creature. It rose and fell, and ended on a high piercing note. Even as they sat and stood, as if suddenly frozen, it was answered by another cry, fainter and further off, but no less chilling to the blood. Then there was a silence, broken only by the sound of the wind in the leaves.

*(LOTR I, 128)*

The unfortunate creature who found the One Ring, after its being hidden for years, was a hobbit-like being called Smeagol. In the very act of retrieving the Ring from its hiding place he succumbed to it and murdered a companion. It exerted its influence over him and he withdrew into a solitary existence in the depths of a mountain to guard his precious, as he called the Ring. He loses his identity as Smeagol, and thereafter is known only by the weird sound he utters - Gollum. He does not have the ability, intelligence or strength for the Ring to work upon him in a positive way, and he remains a pitiful figure, bound to the Ring, but presenting no threat in himself. We are first introduced to him when Bilbo Baggins meets him in the caves after finding the Ring lying about on the ground, and manages to escape the clutches of Gollum when the loss of the Ring is discovered:

"My birthday present! Curse it! How did we lose it, my precious? Yes, that's it. When we came this way last, when we twisted that nasty young squeaker. That's it. Curse it! It slipped from us, after all these ages and ages! It's gone, gollum."

*(Hobbit, 88)*

At this point in the narrative, the One Ring is not disclosed as an awesome source of power, rather it acts as a talisman which aids Bilbo through his adventures. It is only in *The Lord of the Rings* that we learn of its true nature and discover the effect it has on those who bear it. Its addictive power is seen in the attitude of Gollum, but in the *Hobbit* there seems to be no lasting effect on Bilbo.

From the very beginning of his possession of the One Ring, Frodo Baggins can be seen to be gradually becoming more under its influence. It has been passed on to him by Bilbo, who had realised what it had been doing to him and decided to leave the Shire. When the two hobbits meet again in Rivendell the Ring exerts its power once more on Bilbo and he tries to regain the Ring from Frodo. Bilbo is plainly suffering from the same state of mind that Gollum felt when he lost the Ring. As time goes on the Ring saps Frodo more and his degeneration is almost total when he eventually achieves his goal, a figure sick in mind and body, close to complete dominion by the Ring.

The One Ring is coveted and feared by many of the characters in the stories. Besides those already mentioned, there are three who could effectively make use of the power of the Ring if it were theirs to bear. Saruman the White, one of the wizards whose task it was to try and contain the threat of Sauron, had declined with the years and grown feeble in his purpose. He

retained few of his skills, falling under Sauron's control while still appearing to remain pitted against him. His one talent left to him was provided by the Palantir of Minas Ithil, a crystal globe which enabled him to view things far off in time and space but which also gave Sauron the means to trap him. Saruman's desire for the Ring was communicated to Gandalf when they met, and he tempted Gandalf with the possibility of gaining control of the Ring and the power it represented for themselves:

"As the Power grows, its proved friends will also grow; and the Wise, such as you and I, may with patience come at last to direct its courses, to control it..... The Ruling Ring? If we could command that, then the Power would pass to us. That is in truth why I brought you here."

*(LOTR I,340)*

Gandalf the Grey is a force for Good, his power and magic used to combat the chaos caused by Sauron. He resists the temptation of Saruman, but earlier he had been sorely tried by a chance question of Frodo's when he first inherited the Ring:

"Will you not take the Ring?"  
"No!", cried Gandalf, springing to his feet, "With that power I should have power too great and terrible. And over me the Ring would gain a power still greater and more deadly. ... Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself. .... I dare not take it, not even to keep it safe, unused. The wish to wield it would be too great for my strength. I shall have such need of it. Great perils lie before me."

*(LOTR I,91)*

Galadriel, the mysterious lady of the elves in Lothlorien, already bears one of the Elven Rings of Power and is offered the One Ring by Frodo. Her beauty and wisdom are masked for a moment as she contemplates what ownership of the Ring would mean for her. but happily she also resists:

"And now at last it comes. You will give me the Ring freely! In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! .... All shall love me and despair!" .... Then she let her hand fall, and the light faded, and suddenly she laughed again, and lo! she was shrunken: a slender elf-woman, clad in simple white .... "I pass the test," she said, "I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel."

*(LOTR I,474-5)*

Thus the One Ring has shown its power to those who could wield it. Some of the mortal men see a more practical use for the Ring, to defeat the hosts of Sauron in battle and save their own lands. Boromir of Gondor attempts to wrest it from Frodo and only succeeds in driving Frodo and Sam Gamgee off on their own, and splitting up the Fellowship of the Ring which had been formed to aid the Ring-bearer in his task. To others, the Ring is a symbol of power, but most do not understand its dangers and the burden it imposes on its bearer. The only character who handles the Ring and is completely unmoved by it, is Tom Bombadil. He is an ancient master of the forests, much in the vein of the Celtic figure of Hern the Hunter, and he merely plays with the Ring as if it were only a base-metal trinket.

Frodo, towards the end of the saga, is heavily burdened by the Ring. He is weary from his journey and mentally effected by its power. It is only through a strong sense of purpose and the help of Sam that he manages to continue. The figure of Gollum, who has been shadowing them because they hold the Ring, is an ever-present threat and spur to their activities. Gollum

is self-centred and narcissistic, and he lusts for possession of the Ring alone. It is this respect that makes him a danger to Frodo and Sam, if Gollum obtained the Ring he would be satisfied and be a danger to no one in particular. Sauron and his minions also want the Ring, but the effects of it falling into their possession are too terrible to imagine, throwing the whole of Middle Earth into blackness forever.

The One Ring and its creator, Sauron, form the hub of the great wheel of evils in Middle Earth, but they are not the only objects which are a threat to sanity and freedom. There are many races and species of beings in Middle Earth corresponding to those found in traditional mythology and fairy-tales. Some have always been associated with evil, others have been drawn under the influence of Mordor, yet others are, on the whole, neutral but have some disagreeable and unholy individuals. The Ents cannot be said to be good or evil, they do not take any interest in the problems of the peoples of Middle Earth and occupy a position of unallied neutrality in most affairs. Treebeard says of his people:

"Most of the trees are just trees, of course; but many are half awake. .... When that happens to a tree, you find that some have bad hearts. .... there are some trees in the valleys under the mountains, sound as a bell, and bad right through. That sort of thing seems to spread. There used to be some very dangerous parts in this country. There are still some very black patches."

*(LOTR II,83)*

The Ents have their counterparts, as many races do, in the Trolls. These creatures are definitely hostile, a cannibalistic people, thick-skinned and brutal, who were readily used by the dark powers for their purposes. Sauron improved the breed of Trolls under his control and built them into a formidable fighting force for the armies of Mordor. Their origins are hazy, but Treebeard maintains that they had shadowy beginnings:

"Maybe you have heard of Trolls? They are mighty strong. But Trolls are only counterfeits, made by the Enemy in the Great Darkness, in mockery of Ents, as Orcs were of Elves."

*(LOTR II,107)*

Bilbo Baggins encounters three Trolls during his journey in *The Hobbit*. In this case there is no mention of their loyalty to the dark powers in Mordor, they are portrayed rather as thieves and plunderers who also like dwarf meat. They are creatures of the night, being turned to stone if they are struck by sunlight. The Trolls that are met in *The Lord of the Rings* are more resilient to daylight, being supported by the protection of Sauron. During the battle at the Black Gates of Mordor, when the armies of the Free Peoples encounter those of Sauron, the Trolls are seen fighting in broad daylight:

There came striding up, roaring like beasts, a great company of hill-trolls out of Gorgoroth. Taller and broader than Men they were, and they were clad only in close-fitting mesh of horny scales, or maybe that was their hideous hide; but they bore round bucklers huge and black and wielded heavy hammers in their knotted hands. Reckless they sprang into the pools and waded across, bellowing as they came.

*(LOTR III,202)*

Many Norse tales contain Trolls, as giant creatures who eat men and women. The theme of the Trolls being transformed into stone is also widely found, usually consisting of a plot to keep them talking or busy until the sun rises and they are petrified.

Orcs are descended from creatures bred in the early ages of Middle Earth by Morgoth, the Dark Enemy in the Wars of the Silmarils. They are the counterparts to Elves - squat, ugly, hairy, bow-legged and with vile fangs. Although they were an independent race, many of them were controlled by Sauron, and exhibited similar tendencies to Trolls, such as a dislike of sunlight and a macabre taste for human and other races' flesh - even their own. The Orcs who captured Merry and Pippin after the death of Boromir are only restrained from killing and eating them by the strength of their orders from Saruman.

Dragons are mythical creatures appearing in literature from all over the world. Beowulf encounters a fire-eater in the Anglo-Saxon poem of his deeds, and overcomes it to the cost of his own life. Siegfried, the brave warrior of Northern mythology, battled with a dragon called Fafnir to win the treasure it was hiding. Dragons in Middle Earth are one of the fringe races not directly connected to the empire of Mordor, but they are sometimes used by Sauron and are distinctly evil in their own right. The great dragon Smaug destroyed the realm of the dwarves and had amassed a great hoard of treasure, an occupation which seems an integral part of all dragon myth. Bilbo, leading a company of dwarves against Smaug, does not manage to kill him, this feat is left to a man, Bard of the Lake People, who had been terrorised by the dragon. When Smaug is first seen by Bilbo he appears identical to the descriptions of other legendary dragons, such as that killed by St. George:

There he lay, a vast red-gold dragon, fast asleep; a thrumming came from his jaws and nostrils, and wisps of smoke, but his fires were low in slumber. Beneath him, under all his limbs and his huge coiled tail .... lay countless piles of precious things .... Smaug lay, with wings folded like an immeasurable bat, turned partly on one side.

*(Hobbit, 205-6)*

Three independent forces confront the Ring-bearer and his companions. These creatures are sufficiently dangerous and powerful to pose a great threat to the quest, but they are not strictly servants of Sauron. The first is the Watcher of the Water, a huge tentacled thing which guarded the West Gate of Moria. When the company attempts to pass into Moria the Watcher attacks them, and they just escape being dragged under the waters:

Out from the water a long sinuous tentacle had crawled; it was pale green and luminous and wet. Its fingered and had hold of Frodo's foot, and was dragging him into the water. Sam one his knees was now slashing at it with a knife. .... Twenty other arms came rippling out. The dark water boiled, and there was a hideous stench.

*(LOTR I,401)*

The second is the Balrog, survivor of a race of demons, accidentally released from its entombment by dwarves. It stalked the caverns of Khazad-dum in Moria under the Misty Mountains where the dwarf realms lay. The company of the Ring came upon it when trying to escape from a band of Orcs. Even the Orcs, afraid of the Balrog, part to let it through their ranks:

Something was coming up behind them. What it was could not be seen: it was like a great shadow, in the middle of which was a dark form, of man-shape maybe, yet greater; and a power and terror seemed to be in it and to go before it. It came to the edge of the fire and the light faded as if a cloud had bent over it. .... Its streaming mane kindled, and blazed behind it. In its right hand was a blade like a stabbing tongue of fire; in its left it held a whip of many thongs.

*(LOTR I,428)*



Lastly there is the great she-spider, Shelob, the only survivor of her race. She was tolerated by Sauron as she guarded his land for him, eating any who passed that way. Frodo and Sam have to find their way past this hideous beast in order that they can reach the Crack of Doom. The sight that faces them is not a pleasant one:

Great horns she had, and behind her short stalk-like neck was her huge swollen body, a vast bloated bag, swaying and sagging between her legs; its great bulk was black, blotched with livid marks, but the belly underneath was pale and luminous and gave forth a stench. Her legs were bent, with great knobbed joints high above her back, and hairs that stuck out like steel spines, and at each leg's end there was a claw.

*(LOTR II,420)*

These are the major components of the evil forces in Middle Earth. Their influence and power rule supreme in the Land, and the hopes of the Free Peoples seem to be insignificant in comparison. There is a great shadow hanging over the lands and the great Eye of Sauron dominates legions of servants. The basis for all this evil is described in the *Silmarillion*. The fall of the original dark power, Morgoth, from grace heralds the start of an age of despair in Middle Earth. Three great jewels, the Silmarils, like the Rings of Power, symbolise an ultimate force which is the root of all the lust and greed in the world. Beings become corrupted by power and the thought of power, and the eternal conflict for supremacy is retold again and again. The One, Eru, father of all, is visualised as the creator and the force against which the unsatisfied beings rebel. Morgoth is said to have rebelled by creating, in his own cosmic music, strident, clamouring notes instead of the slow beautiful music of the One.

Feanor, one of Morgoth's offspring, creates the Silmarils from the light of the two Blessed Trees, but he succumbs to a covetous love of them and this leads to his downfall. Thus the seeds of discontent are sown and the forces of evil gained strength and came to challenge the established order of things. The sins that are exhibited by these early miscreants comprise, in the main, of pride, greed, envy and hate; however these are soon augmented by an overwhelming lust for power and a complete disregard for other beings.

The struggles for power climaxed in the Wars of Beleriand, between Morgoth and the loyal supporters of the hero and lord Maedhros. The most disastrous battle in these wars was that of Nirnaeth Arnoediad where Morgoth accomplished his greatest victory, both over Maedhros and over the forces that united the peoples against him:

Great was the triumph of Morgoth, and his design was accomplished in a manner after his own heart; for Men took the lives of Men, and betrayed the Eldar, and fear and hatred were aroused among those that should have been united against him. From that day the hearts of the Elves were estranged from Men, save only those of the Three Houses of the Edain.

*(Silmarillion, 195)*

## GOOD - the passive force

The quality of goodness in Middle Earth is firmly based on the Christian ethic of virtue and passive force. The defence of the natural laws of life and a vision common to all the Free Peoples, dwarves, men, elves and hobbits, is an ideal to be attained. There is no identifiable prime force for good, no god-figure, but there is an overwhelming sense of fate and a great plan which has been in existence for all time. The events leading up to the finding and destruction of the One Ring are seemingly pre-ordained, not chance events, and those with foresight and wisdom see this. The forces of good, as in all good stories, triumph in the end, though with a high cost for their victory. Individual lives are destroyed or affected very like the Christian tales of martyrs. Although the ways in which good is applied in Middle Earth are essentially comparable to Christian thinking, the overall view of nature and civilisation is more of a pagan one. The races and individuals who ride on the side of good can be differentiated quite clearly from those who represent the evil in Middle Earth.

The hobbits, who are partly human, play the principal roles in the tales of the Ring. They appear insignificant creatures, living a pastoral life away from great strife in other parts of the world. However, they attain a greatness which seems incompatible with their appearance. This achievement results from their loyalty to a cause and to others. Together with Mortal Men, they are faced with the prospect of sinking into damnation or rising above their problems and opposing the evils in their lands.

The theme of temptation is prevalent in the stories, with the characters continually considering giving in to the Dark Lord and co-operating with his wishes. Good triumphs, however, as a rule, and like many others before them they overcome temptation with the virtues of courage, will, endurance, loyalty and love.

Bilbo Baggins is a self-important person at the start of *The Hobbit*, but when Gandalf pressures him into adventuring with Thorin and his dwarves, his injured vanity raises his stature and he begins to display the qualities that we all suspected were there in the first place. His place in the ranks of Good People is assured by his actions and his eventual recognition of the forces afoot in the world. When Smaug has been defeated and the treasure captured, he makes a firm decision that shows his love of peace and justice. He had previously rescued the dwarves and faced Smaug, both acts of extreme courage, but the act of giving the greatest treasure, the Arkenstone, to the Elf-king so that the peoples would be united against a common enemy, is perhaps his finest achievement. He was hated by the dwarves for this act, since it was their most prized possession, but the betrayal was later accepted as a necessary thing.

The influence which binds such folk as hobbits, elves, men and dwarves together in comradeship, stems from the mysterious, enigmatic figure of Gandalf. He is regarded as a wizard in Middle Earth, and seems to be able to foretell the events that are to come and the actions necessary to achieve the desired results. His presence is essential to the plot, without his guidance and wisdom there would be no hope or future for the company of the Ring. Within his character can be recognised a parallel of Merlin, the wizard mentor of King Arthur

in the medieval legends. A character which takes but a small part in the action of events but who is ever-present in spirit to point the main combatants in the right direction.

Even Gandalf is not all-powerful, he is bound by the limitations of his strength and knowledge, and this makes him more of a living character. The hero who is never wrong and is infallible does not make a good story. Those that are fallible, like Gawain in Arthurian legend, are more believable, the possibility of their failure emphasises the triumph when it eventually comes. Gandalf's lack of omniscience leads to his downfall in Moria when he falls from the Bridge of Khazad-dum, clasped in a death-struggle with the Balrog. However, like Christ, he arises from the dead, cleansed by the experience and becomes Gandalf the White. His earlier troubles are forgotten, he seems to have lost the connection with his physical form, and he must restore this connection to be of service to the Free Peoples once more. His appearance to the company of the Ring, after his "death" is almost a transfiguration:

He laid his hand on Gimli's head, and the dwarf looked up and laughed suddenly. "Gandalf!" he said, "But you are all in white!" "Yes, I am white now," said Gandalf, "Indeed I am Saruman, one might almost say, Saruman as he should have been. But come now, tell me of yourselves! I have passed through fire and water since we parted. I have forgotten much that I thought I knew, and learned again much that I had forgotten. I can see many things far off, but many things that are close at hand I cannot see. Tell me of yourselves!"

*(LOTR II, 119-20)*

This obvious parallel to the Christian account of the resurrection of Christ emphasises the point that there is much in Middle Earth that is based on Christian morals and themes, even though its structural essence is pagan.

Those entities in Middle Earth that can be labelled good, exhibit many of the aspects of life that give this impression. Beauty, friendship, happiness, loyalty, steadfastness and truth are some of the basic qualities by which someone can be seen to be on the "right" side. The Elves are a race who have been described in many fairy-tales as fair and friendly, though often shy and reserved. In Middle Earth the state of affairs is such that the distinct races of beings are often in ignorance of one another, or at least think the others are merely legendary. The Elves were traditionally the enemies of the dwarves, but the presence of the Dark Lord and the common fear they both had forced them to forget their differences and work towards a single aim. The land where the Elves lived was Lorien, the fairest of all wooded lands, and the traditions of the Elves maintained its secrecy from other races. Like many other beings, they did not die of old age, though they could be killed, or die of grief.

They were perhaps the most recognisable example of faerie-kind culled from the literature, and exhibited nobility, grace and justice in their lives. Legolas was chosen by the Council of Elrond to represent the Elves in the Fellowship of the Ring and was instrumental in bringing together the races of Dwarves and Elves through his great friendship with Gimli the dwarf.

Lady Galadriel, Queen of the Elves, reigned with Celeborn in Lorien, where time seemed to stand still to the Ring companions. She kept a magic fountain from which water came in which visions could be seen of the past and the future. She endowed the company with gifts peculiar to the Elven folk. Whereas dwarves were skilled smiths and metalworkers, elves were concerned more with lighter pursuits such as weaving and jewellery. Legolas received a superbly fashioned bow, Pippin a beautifully wrought brooch, Frodo a phial of star-water which illuminated his passage in the night of Mordor and helped to drive back Shelob. The

whole company was given Elven-cloaks which would give them certain camouflage from enemies. Galadriel is a sad figure, one who wished for success for the Ring-bearer, and is left behind in Lorien to resume her isolated existence from the world at large.

The hobbits, Sam and Frodo the Ring-bearer, are almost always together in the saga of the Ring, and their basic honesty and faith remains true. We learn a lot about hobbits and their habits in the tales, and Merry and Pippin also demonstrate the qualities which caused them to be chosen for the great adventure. The whole narrative revolves around these four hobbits and most events are seen through their eyes and with their priorities. Even their fundamental love of the good life does not desert them in moments of peril or exultation; and thoughts soon return to a good pipe and a bellyful of food:

"I have some stuff of my own. Come on now! Longbottom leaf it is. Fill up while I run and see about some food. And then let's be easy for a bit. Dear me! We Took and Brandybucks, we can't live long on the heights."

*(LOTR III, 174)*

The hobbits show a noble simplicity and do not appear self-righteous or self-satisfied. They feel surprised at their acts of courage and their good deeds, a state brought about by innocence rather than modesty. Their trust in others gives them a moral strength that few other characters have, and their qualities, although latent in the beginning, are quick to surface as the adventures occur. The symbolic value of friendship links the hierarchy of good characters. This is based on the comradeship of the four hobbits, all from different families (Baggins, Took, Brandybuck and Gamgee).

This small ring of friends is expanded into the full Fellowship of the Ring with the addition of representatives from the different species of the Free Peoples (Gimli the dwarf, Aragorn and Boromir the men, and Legolas the elf). The hobbits, although full-grown, are seen as youngsters by the others and this offers them extra protection. The other members of the Fellowship are also young, however, and each the heir to some estate or throne.

Frodo starts off in his journey with little awareness of what is to face him, but he comes to understand that evil is external and physical after passing the Black Riders and encountering the Barrow-wights. He begins to sense that sin and evil ultimately stem from within the individual, and after the discussions in Lorien with the Elves he learns that he must exercise free will in choosing good or evil. The temptation to use the Ring to escape from danger and to avoid responsibility grows upon him, and he makes several mistakes of judgement before he learns to control his own desires and resist the will of others. When he put on the Ring to avoid Boromir, he found himself in touch with the power of Sauron and had to battle with his mind to overcome the compulsion it set up:

And suddenly he felt the Eye. There was an eye in the Dark Tower that did not sleep. He knew that it had become aware of his gaze. A fierce eager will was there. It leaped towards him .... The two powers strove within him. For a moment, perfectly balanced between their piercing points, he writhed, tormented. Suddenly he was aware of himself again. Frodo, neither the Voice nor the Eye: free to choose and with one remaining instant in which to do so. He took the Ring off his finger.

*(LOTR I, 521)*

Sam Gamgee becomes a crutch for Frodo to lean on as they approach their destination. Frodo is weak, and Sam exemplifies the ideal servant as he feeds him, offers him his remaining water, carries him bodily over rough ground, and lifts up his spirits, keeping hope alive in

Frodo's ravaged brain. As they cross Mordor, Sam becomes more aware of the deeper things underlying the desolation and the darkness, seeing beauty beyond the waste, hope beyond the despair, light beyond the blackness. This new insight is sparked off by a vision of a star that he sees.

The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a passing thing; there was light and high beauty for ever beyond its reach. .... Now, for a moment, his own fate, and even his master's, ceased to trouble him.

*(LOTR III, 238)*

When Frodo is stung by Shelob and paralysed by her poisonous venom, it is Sam who heroically, though reluctantly, assumes responsibility. Frodo, to all appearances, has died, (as prophesised by the Mirror of Galadriel) but Sam manages to revive him and lead him out of Shelob's lair. His part is important in the respect that his burden is to ensure that safety of the Ring-bearer until the Ring can be disposed of, and then to try and return them both to the world of the living, outside Mordor. He has nursed Frodo before, when he was wounded by the Nazgul at the beginning of the trek:

Frodo felt a great weariness come over him. Ever since the sun began to sink the mist before his eyes had darkened. .... Now pain assailed him, and he felt cold. He swayed, clutching at Sam's arm. "My master is sick and wounded," said Sam angrily, "He can't go on riding after nightfall. He needs rest."

*(LOTR I, 280)*

The love that Sam shows for Frodo is nowhere shown better than in the passage where he has put an Orc to flight in Mordor, and removed the Ring from Frodo to keep it safe. Frodo discovers it missing:

"Give it to me!" he cried.... "Give it to me at once! You can't have it."  
"All right, Mr Frodo," said Sam, rather startled, "Here it is! .... You'll find the Ring very dangerous now, and very hard to bear. If it's too hard a job, I could share it with you, maybe?" "No, no!" cried Frodo, snatching the Ring .... A mist seemed to clear from his eyes, and he passed a hand over his aching brow. The hideous vision had seemed so real to him. .... But now the vision had passed. There was Sam kneeling before him, his face wrung with pain, as if he had been stabbed in the heart.; tears welled from his eyes.

*(LOTR III, 224)*

Aragorn, heir to Isildur, was a good friend of Gandalf, and provided a great deal of help to the Fellowship of the Ring. He was of high birth and, for much of the time, went around incognito to others he met, only making himself known when it was necessary. His own personal force of good comes to the fore when he leads the armies of the Free Peoples at the Battle of Helm's Deep. His courage and trust in his own men led him through the Paths of the Dead, gathering the Souls of the Dead to his army, and using them to aid the full forces of the Free Peoples in the great Battle of Pelennor Fields at the gates of Minas Tirith. One view of him is perceived by Frodo at the entrance to Lorien:

At the hill's foot Frodo found Aragorn, standing still and silent as a tree; but in his hand was a small bloom of elanor, and a light was in his eyes. .... For the grim years were removed from the face of Aragorn, and he seemed clothed in white, a young lord, tall and fair; and he spoke words in the Elvish tongue to one whom Frodo could not see.

*(LOTR I, 456-457)*

Aragorn knows what the fair past was like, and envisages a land free of the oppression of Sauron. He alone, with the exception of Gandalf, among the Fellowship appreciates the ultimate consequences of the Ring, and he strives with all his heart to turn the tide against Mordor. Being a man, he is easily recognisable to the reader, there is even romance in his life, in the form of the elf-maiden Arwen, but his humanity and natural integrity give him a station far above his fellow men.

The forces for good cannot defeat the gross evils of Mordor through virtue alone. They need the help of some external magical or protective devices. The magic of Gandalf is used to some effect early on in the tales, but his battle with the Balrog saps him of much of his power. Although the use of special objects in one way or another is fairly common in Middle Earth, the number that are available to the Fellowship of the Ring is very small, and their potency is not all that great. This lack of wondrous objects is to some extent necessary, since it reinforces the value of the victory when it happens and stresses the fact that good can triumph virtually unaided.

There is a great emphasis placed upon special weapons that are wielded by the characters. These are usually swords and they often have a history of their own. There is the short sword, Sting, given to Bilbo by the dwarves after the defeat of Smaug. It is an elven sword of great sharpness and penetration forged by the smiths of Gondolin in the ancient past. Bilbo gives it to Frodo, together with a coat of dwarf-mail or mithril, when the Fellowship leaves the Council of Elrond.

Merry is given a barrow-blade by Tom Bombadil after he has been rescued from the barrow-wights. This blade aids Merry in his greatest hour when he confronts the Captain of the Nazgul at the Battle of Pelennor Fields and kills it. It also is a sword of quality, wrought in "proud Westernesse in olden times", although it cannot stand up to the flesh of a Ringwraith, melting away as soon as the blow had been struck.

Orcrist and Glamdring were a pair of matching swords made by the Elves in the First Age. Orcrist was borne by Thorin of the Dwarves at the Battle of the Five Armies, which Bilbo had made possible by uniting the Peoples. Glamdring was borne by Gandalf and had the peculiar property that it shone with a cold blue light in the presence of Orcs.

The most famous weapon in Middle Earth, directly comparable to King Arthur's Excalibur, is Anduril, carried by Aragorn. This sword had legend attached to it. It was apparently forged by a master-smith in the deeps of time. It was broken in the struggles against Sauron at the end of the Second Age, and its hilt was used by Isildur to cur the One Ring from Sauron's finger. When Aragorn was chosen for the Fellowship it was reforged and became whole again. A sheath was given for it by Galadriel, one which it was said would prevent any sword that rested in it from being stained or broken, even in defeat. The legend of Anduril is described by Boromir in a dream:

Seek for the Sword that was broken: In Imladris it dwells;  
There shall be counsels taken, stronger than Morgul-spells.  
There shall be shown a token that Doom is near at hand,  
For Isildur's Bane shall waken, and the Halfling forth shall stand.

*(LOTR I, 322)*

These weapons help their bearers in the physical confrontations with the denizens of the dark lands, but it is some of the small objects that the characters carry that make the difference between success or defeat in certain events. The gifts of Galadriel loom large in this respect. All of the Company are given lembas, an Elven food of great nourishment which allows them to travel light and to stave off starvation in the desolate lands. The Elven cloaks, which hide the wearer from the eyes of unfriendly beings, save Merry and Pippin from the Orcs and aid the party in avoiding the searching gaze of Sauron. The phial of star-water, as noted above, saves Frodo and Sam from Shelob, and the exceptional lightness and strength of the hithlain ropes they are given makes their journey across Mordor possible. Even the box of Lorien earth given to Sam proves useful when he returns to the Shire and finds it laid waste by the servants of Saruman.

# QUEST - the goal and the journey

The underlying theme in the story of the Ring in Middle Earth is that of the Quest. In its general form the quest applies significant motifs of perils, obstacles and good fortunes within the journey to be made. It follows a standard form found in most classical quest tales:

- the separation of the hero from his community
- the initiation of the hero into some state of knowledge or power through the perils he faces
- the eventual return of the hero after attaining his goal, usually sadder and wiser for the experience.

In *The Hobbit*, the quest is more subdued than in *The Lord of the Rings*. Bilbo is taking part in a great adventure rather than a serious quest, but all the patterns are there. Bilbo is called to adventure by Gandalf and reluctantly accepts. The journey begins and dangers are overcome by luck, skill and the intervention of magical or external aids. Gandalf plays a large part in appearing when he is most needed, and lending a hand, very much like the good spirit who comes to one's assistance when called. When Bilbo and the dwarves are confronted by the goblins, deep in the Misty Mountains, help appears unexpectedly:

Suddenly a sword flashed in its own light. Bilbo saw it go right through the Great Goblin as he stood dumbfounded in the middle of his rage. He fell dead, and the goblin soldiers fled before the sword, shrieking into the darkness. The sword went back into its sheath. "Follow me quick!" said a voice fierce and quiet. .... Then Gandalf lit up his wand. Of course it was Gandalf; but just then they were too busy to ask how he got there.

*(Hobbit, 71-72)*

Bilbo and the dwarves go through many other events which can be seen as indicative of the quest theme. Bilbo "gains" the "magic ring", seemingly as a wish of the One Ring itself. The party is rescued from the air by huge benign eagles who carry them off to safety. Once safe they ignore instructions from Gandalf and find themselves in trouble with more villains, namely the spiders.

Then there is the fearless assault on the lair of Smaug by Bilbo, and he steals a golden cup from under the dragon. Whilst in Smaug's lair, Bilbo learns his secret, and this enables the evil dragon to be destroyed by an arrow. This is shot by the man, Bard, into Smaug's one and only unprotected spot on his hide - a theme that occurs many times in legends. Several heroes have discovered that their opponents have an impenetrable skin save for a single weak spot, and thus have been able to defeat them. The climax, in which Bilbo uses the Arkenstone to right various wrongs and to aid the victory of the Five Armies over the Wargs and Goblins, can be seen as the true accomplishment of the quest. The desired result has been achieved, the hero, Bilbo, has been recognised as such and awarded the honour due to him, and peace has been brought to the peoples of those lands.

Bilbo then returns to the Shire, sad from the parting of friends, but rich from his share of the dwarves' treasure, and finds that in his absence, his relatives have moved into his hobbit-hole



and started to auction his property. It is his last act in the quest to re-establish himself as the hero and to save his domestic situation. This also is quite a common ending to quests, where the hero returns, victorious and travel weary, only to discover that he has been thought dead or has been taken advantage of in his absence. He then has to right the wrongs in his own locale before he can rest.

In *The Lord of the Rings* the principal hero is Frodo, the Ring-bearer, who has a specific task to perform. His quest forms the backbone of the story of the Ring. However, both Gandalf and Aragorn have quests of their own which, while not interfering with Frodo's quest, are aiming towards the same general ideal - that of peace, freedom and security in Middle Earth.

The function and character of Frodo as the quest hero are unlike those in most other quest tales. In these the hero undertakes the quest as a result of a pre-ordained and foretold destiny that he has accepted, or perhaps it was necessary for his survival, like Odysseus. Frodo has his quest sprung upon him by Gandalf, and it is only when he has gained the required insight and experience that he learns of its true nature and the implied destiny that took him on that path. The rewards that traditionally go to the hero on the successful completion of a quest are missing here. There is no bride, great fortune or glory for Frodo, but he does satisfy two aspects of the heroic quest in his mutilation by Gollum and his passage through the bowels of the earth in dark labyrinthine places.

Frodo, like Bilbo, is chosen by Gandalf to perform the arduous task of destroying the Ring. Gandalf tries to get Frodo to realise that he was meant to bear the Ring, but this, to Frodo, is too far-fetched to be acceptable. However, he sets out and gains the support of Sam, another figure whom the quest requires - that of the loyal servant. The trail takes them through enchanted woods and dangers, meeting the enigmatic figure of Tom Bombadil on the way. Tom Bombadil is portrayed as the character who is all-knowing and benign, yet untouchable, and his affinity with the earth and growing things lends him the air of a "natural" god. The first part of the quest, in the flight to Rivendell, closes with the attempt of the Ringwraiths to capture Frodo. This event serves the purposes of identifying the hero and his charge to the enemy and marking him by wounding him with the poisoned blade of the Nazgul.

At the Council of Elrond in Rivendell, Frodo learns much of the nature of his quest, and he is finally identified as the major figure whom all the others in the Fellowship should guide and protect. He is equipped with companions, provisions and advice of an indefinite nature:

"I can foresee very little of your road; and how your task is to be achieved I do not know. The Shadow has crept now to the foot of the Mountains .... and under the Shadow all is dark to me. You will meet many foes, some open, and some disguised; and you may find friends upon your way when you least expect it."

*(LOTR I, 359)*

Thus armed, Frodo sets out on the road and, passing through blizzards and mortal dangers in Moria, he reaches Lorien. Here he meets the star-goddess figure of Galadriel who can be compared with the nature-god Tom Bombadil. She tests each adventurer in turn for their merit by offering him what he most desires. This is the first major temptation in the quest for Frodo. When the company splits after the treachery of Boromir, Frodo begins to realise he may not survive beyond the end of his quest, but by this time had accepted that this was a possibility and his courage does not fail him. He is now confronted with a series of physical obstacles, with only his wits and a few meagre aids to help him. Frodo and Sam are partly helped by Gollum, who has found them and agrees to guide them through Mordor. However, Gollum is

constantly seeking for an opportunity to regain the Ring. This adds to the burden Frodo has to carry since he has to keep an eye on the sneaky Gollum. Frodo cannot hate this vile creature, he does feel some pity for him. He himself has borne the Ring for some time and he fully comprehends what it must be like for Gollum to be parted from it.

The final great obstacle to overcome is that of Shelob's lair and Shelob herself. It is here, when Frodo makes use of Galadriel's gift, that he seems the most heroic in the traditional sense, a true knight:

"Galadriel!" he called, and gathering his courage he lifted up the Phial once more. The eyes halted. For a moment their regard relaxed, as if some hint of doubt troubled them. Then Frodo's heart flamed within him, and without thinking what he did, whether it was folly or despair or courage, he took the Phial in his left hand, and with his right hand drew his sword. Sting flashed out, and the sharp elven-blade sparkled in the silver light, but at its edges a blue fire flickered. Then holding the star aloft and the bright sword advanced, Frodo, hobbit of the Shire, walked steadily down to meet the eyes.

*(LOTR II, 414-415)*

As Frodo nears the end of his journey the path becomes ever more arduous. The Ring is pressing him increasingly to be returned to its Master and to be saved from destruction, yet he is still impelled by the forces of good to finish the quest. At the very last he quails and succumbs to the greed and lust that the Ring has seeded within him. He puts the Ring on and at once he is visible to Sauron who dispatches the Nazgul in a frenzied dash to get the Ring. Frodo has been taken over by events and it seems that he has been drawn with a malevolent attraction to this point, only to fail. The object of the quest is achieved, however, when Gollum, unable to keep away from Frodo any longer, attacks him. Frodo's finger is severed with the Ring still upon it, and Gollum, unbalanced, tumbles backwards into the Crack of Doom to the destruction of himself and the One Ring.

All has been fulfilled, the expected cataclysm occurs, the power of evil has been defeated, mountains crash to the ground and the air is rent with the death-cries of the servants of Mordor. Like Gandalf in his battle with the Balrog, this final act has almost finished Frodo, and it is faithful Sam who makes it possible for their eventual rescue from the depths of Mordor.

The final stage of the quest is concerned with the return home to the Shire. When Frodo and Sam enter the Shire they find that the forces of Saruman have taken it over and laid waste to it, and they have to fight one last battle to save their beloved home from Saruman before they can retire to a well-earned rest.

The quest of Gandalf is concerned with his responsibility for the freedom of Middle Earth and his ultimate triumph as the overlord of Good. He undergoes a metamorphosis in the tales, from the jovial magician who provides firework displays in the Shire to the great sage and leader of the fight against Sauron. His road on the quest is not fully charted, we are shown isolated incidents in his journey, through which we can see the deeds he performs. He is not troubled much by the events which occur to the Fellowship of the Ring, his power and gifts enable him to help the others or perhaps see a brighter time just around the corner. His struggle is with the elemental force of Sauron himself and it is his ability to deal with that that he doubts:

"There are many powers in the world, for good or for evil. Some are greater than I am. Against some I have not yet been measured. But my time is

coming. The Morgul-lord and his Black Riders have come forth. War is preparing.

*(LOTR I, 289)*

Gandalf's greatest test comes in the depths of Moria, at Khazad-dum. His powers had not been fully displayed up to that point, merely being used to kindle fires or throw fear into the wraiths from Mordor. He applies all the force that is available to him but to no avail; he plunges with the Balrog into the bottomless pit. There follows an undetermined period in which he suffers the ordeals of fire and water and undergoes some kind of mystical or religious experience which is not fully explained. His transfiguration signifies an end to his personal quest for renewal and gives him the strength and power to muster the forces of good for the final battles against Mordor. He must also fight a final battle to complete the entire quest, and this is accomplished at the Battle of Pellenor Fields where the might of Mordor is routed after the destruction of the Ring.

Aragorn, the third quest hero, is perhaps the one who conforms most closely to the traditional idea. He is strong, fair, true and brave. He is destined to take his sword into battle against the evil of Sauron to defend his land of Gondor and to justify his claim for the hand of Arwen, his love. He is included in the Fellowship from the start as one who can guide the members through the unknown lands. When Gandalf falls in Moria Aragorn has the leadership thrust upon him. Although he eventually accepts this responsibility, he has to resolve his doubts and fears that the Ring-quest is now without hope. His princely status is recognised by Galadriel in Lorien and the subsequent journey down the River Anduin shows him as the true kingly figure he has become:

In the stern sat Aragorn, son of Arathorn, proud and erect, guiding the boat with skilful strokes. .... "Fear not!" he said. "Long have I desired to look upon the likenesses of Isildur and Anarion, my sires of old. Under their shadow Elessar, the Elfstone son of Arathorn of the House of Vandalil Isildur's son, heir of Elendil, has nought to dread!"

*(LOTR I, 511)*

The Fellowship is split up as Sam and Frodo depart on their own, and Aragorn leads the others to the aid of the Men of Rohan. He returns to his lands as a warrior hero and gains the support and respect of the armies of Men. Having won a great victory at Helm's Deep, he undertakes the most perilous task of his career, and on that he alone can perform. This is the journey through the Paths of the Dead. These lands can only be entered by the heir to Isildur, Aragorn. Before entering this chill area he reveals himself to Sauron via a palantir, one of the ancient viewing stones of Middle Earth, in the hope that Sauron's attention will be directed towards him and away from the Ring-bearer. He sets out into the Paths of the Dead, followed by his faithful but fearful Rangers, and through his will power and strength of purpose, not only leads them to safety but also captures the legions of the dead and undead to his side. He conquers his fear of the area and even manages to control the dark forces within it:

They passed Tarlang's Neck and came into Lamedon; and the Shadow Host pressed behind and fear went on before them. .... But the next day there came no dawn, and the Grey Company passed on into the darkness of the Storm of Mordor and were hid to mortal sight; but the Dead followed them.

*(LOTR III, 70)*

Aragorn continues onward and defeats the Corsairs at Pelargir. He comes to Mordor with a large force of men, live and dead, to turn the tide at the Battle of Pellenor Fields. Even at this late stage he is still trying to protect Frodo as he claims his status and challenges Sauron

outright at the Gates of Minas Tirith. This last act completes his quest for the One Ring is destroyed shortly after, and he can return to his own lands to marry Arwen and become the good and wise king that he was destined to become. Aragorn's quest is characterised by the sadness of the man who describes beauty, glory, peace and wisdom such as he can yearn for but cannot understand. It is only through his quest that he reaches the state of maturity and insight that gives him that understanding.

Aragorn achieves his ultimate reward in his marriage to Arwen and the throne of Gondor, but Frodo and Gandalf do not obtain any significant reward. However, in the tradition of all good stories, there is a land, somewhere to the West, where everything is peace and the just and faithful are rewarded for their pains. The Greek heroes departed to the Elysian Fields after their quests ended, the Arthurian knights were promised, apart from Divine approval in the Holy Grail, the land of Lyonesse which lay somewhere to the West of Albion. In Middle Earth the equivalent place is called The Havens, and it is to this land that Gandalf, Frodo and the Elves of Rivendell and Lorien travelled at the close of the story of the Ring.

# Conclusion

The quest in Middle Earth follows the basic cyclical form that it does elsewhere. The subtitle of *The Hobbit*, "There and Back Again", reinforces this view. The participants start from a point with an objective in mind, they achieve it via a circuitous route and eventually return to the start. The symbolism of circles in Middle Earth is widespread, being an important part of the mythology, the One Ring and the globular Silmarils forming the basis. Free will is a major aspect of the quest. The heroes must proceed of their own accord and not be forced into action by any other than their own will. Although their course of action may be predetermined by the nature of the quest, they can still choose whether or not to take that course. The quest itself is all important with many fringe characters drawn into it without understanding its purpose or their part in it. They are sometimes enhanced by their experiences, they may fall serving the cause, or they may be discarded as unworthy. The sense of fate cannot be completely ignored, it is this that drives certain of the characters. The mythology of Middle Earth is so strong that the prophecies and tales of the past are often seen as indications that the future is fated. What this means to a quest hero can depend on the individual, it may strengthen his resolve to fulfil his destiny or, like Frodo, merely accept that fate exists.

Throughout the quest the play between good and evil is paramount. Whether the ultimate aim is to obtain a sacred object, such as the Holy Grail, or defeat a dreaded scourge, the questors are essentially good, and the environment, in the global sense, evil. To make the quest worthwhile and not a mere task, the obstacles and evils to overcome must be of a greater strength and number than the heroes can be expected to cope with. In Middle Earth the balance is such that the ratio between good and evil forms an ideal setting for the quest. It is a world created in the heroic style, people by all the creatures, beings, objects and forces of traditional legend and myth. Whatever parallels we may see in our own world, Middle Earth will remain an unique mythic experience and a glorious tribute to the genius of J.R.R. Tolkien.

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