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Abstract
With a Jungian slant, groups Tolkien's heroes from *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* into several types—assertive (tragic or epic), submissive (from Christian models), and the group or fellowship as hero.

Additional Keywords
Heroes in J.R.R. Tolkien; Jungian analysis of Irish mythology; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Heroes; Edith Crowe

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The Many Faces of Heroism in Tolkien

Edith Crowe

Few would disagree that high fantasy is one of the last bastions of the Hero in contemporary literature. There are, however, many kinds of heroes, and their various characteristics may even contradict each other. Throughout its long history the figure of the Hero has been exalted or humble, possessed of superior gifts or Everyman, a rebel against his society or its representative, assertive of submissive. Moreover, the identical type of Hero can be viewed very differently depending on the prejudices of the viewer-one man's Prometheus is another's Lucifer. Tolkien's major works, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*[1], provide us with examples of many of the basic heroic types-sometimes within the same individual.

It is sometimes difficult to decide where a god ends and a hero begins. There seems to be a continuum with the inarguably divine being at one pole and the inarguably human Hero at the other, but in between a great variety of manlike gods, demiurgic beings and heroes with supernatural powers. Joseph Campbell traces a change from the great creation myths which deal with the actions of gods, through legends in which heroes still have remarkable powers, up to the place where legend and metaphysics come into "the common daylight of recorded time."[2] Taken together, Tolkien's works exemplify this continuum. *The Silmarillion* begins with an exquisite creation myth; continues with the conflict of the angelic Valar and Maiar with the Luciferian Melkor/Morgoth; chronicles the activities of the immortal and supernatural elves; and comes at last to the doings of men.

The men and women of Numenor decline from a stage not unlike that of the unfallen Adam and Eve to a fallen race. By the time of the Third Age, we are fully enmeshed in historical time. Many of the events of *The Silmarillion* are now the stuff of legend. The heroes of *The Lord of the Rings* are largely of human stature, although some have a tough of supernatural power (e.g. Aragorn's ability to heal). Indeed, one of the most poignant aspects of *The Lord of the Rings* is the sense of loss which comes with the realization that it represents the end of an age. When the elves and wizards leave Middle-earth they take much of the magic with them, and the Fourth Age is the Age of Men.

Although by and large *The Silmarillion* deals with the tragic hero, the story of Beren and Luthien may be said to involve a supernatural hero (or more accurately, heroine)-Luthien Tinuviel. Her special powers of enchantment enable her to escape imprisonment by her father, survive the attack of Sauron, and bring down the very walls of Beren's prison. These powers also enable her to put Morgoth himself asleep long enough to take a silmaril. Perhaps her most heroic act, however, involves not the use of elven specialness but the renunciation of it, when she chooses to forsake immortality for love of Beren. Not only does this act have consequences well beyond its own time in founding the dynasty of Numenorean kings which would eventually produce Aragorn, but it prefigures that greater theme of renunciation which so infuses *The Lord of the Rings.*

Of all the heroes of *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf retains the strongest element of the supernatural. Although as one of the istari he has magical powers, in *The Hobbit* and the earlier sections of *The Lord of the Rings* his most important role is a

combination of the herald who calls the hero to adventure, and the Wise Old Man of myth and fairy tale who helps, protects and advises the Hero.

Gandalf comes into his own as the supernatural Hero of *The Lord of the Rings* after his archetypal descent into the underworld to battle the monster and his emergence as a transformed being-his death and rebirth. The battle itself, taking place in deep water at the bottom of a great abyss, suggests (not surprisingly) Beowulf's battle with Grendel's mother. Ellwood has also pointed out similarities in the Judeo-Christian tradition, both in the Old Testament (Jahweh's battle with the sea-monster Rahab, or Leviathon) and in the theme of "explicit conflict between Christ and Satan" developed by certain of the Church Fathers.[3] The reborn Gandalf is a figure of great power, although he is able to cloak it when necessary and appear much the same as before. His initial appearance to Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli in Fanghorn, however, suggests the angelic appearance of the resurrected Christ to Mary Magdalene. We have come a long way from the humorous old wizard of *The Hobbit* and the early chapters of *The Lord of the Rings*, whose greates claim to fame was the excellence of his fireworks.

The Assertive Hero: Tragedy and Epic

These two types of the Hero can be considered together because they share the characteristics of self-assertive pride set against an inimical environment. The tragic Hero defies authority and places himself in conflict with cosmic law, but such a Hero can be vilified or admired depending on one's own acceptance or rejection of the situation which the Hero defies. Lucifer and Prometheus are two sides of the same coin, both aspiring to usurp part of the power and authority of the deity. One is more often regarded as evil, however, because more people accept the authority of the Judeo-Christian deity than that of Zeus.

What the Greeks called hubris is related to the Jungian concept of inflation. The Self represents the unified totality of the conscious and unconscious aspects of the psyche, whereas the ego is the seat of the conscious, individual personality. Inflation occurs when the ego identifies with the Self; the part gets above itself, so to speak, and imagines itself the whole. Although inflation is generally considered in negative terms of arrogance and pride, it can also be a positive act necessary to achieve a higher level of consciousness.

The story of the Garden of Eden was viewed very differently by the Ophites, a Gnostic sect. To them Jahweh was the villain of the piece, keeping humankind in ignorance, and the serpent the road to self-realization. In this view, Eve emerges as something of a Promethean figure. More often, the act of inflation is "foolhardy and disastrous." The important thing is to know what one is doing in such a situation, and to remember that "dependence on the superior wisdom of others is often an accurate appraisal of the reality situation."[4]

Consider the contrast between Feanor and Aragorn. The latter generally sought the counsel of others, especially Gandalf, and usually followed it. Feanor, on the other hand, ". . . asked the aid and sought the counsel of none that dwelt in Aman, great or small, save only for a little while of Nerdanel the wise, his wife." (*The Silmarillion, p. 66*)

Aragorn is capable of necessary act of inflation when he knows what he is doing, as he does when he uses the palantir against the advice of Gandalf, but Denethor's use of a palantir is "foolhardy and disastrous." Denethor is the only real tragic hero in *The Lord of the Rings*, although he fits the pattern well. Pride is his greates flaw, and in his arrogance he sets himself against an adversary too great for him. There are Christian reverberations too: Sauron's wiles lead Denethor into a state of despair, the sin of Judas. This is the greatest sin a Christian can commit, denying as it does the possibility of God's grace.

To return to Feanor, it is pride and arrogance once again that bring about the Hero's downfall. His pride in his creative abilities and in the supreme accomplishment of the silmarils leads him to value them so highly with a selfish possessiveness that he refuses to give them to Varda to save the light of the Two Trees. Both pride and arrogance precipitate Feanor's oath, which binds him and his descendants to generations of suffering. This is a classic example of ego inflation, in which the individual consciousness overwhelms psychic wholeness. The essence of tragedy is the fall from a height, and the subsequent history of Feanor and his Noldor followers continues in a downward direction throughout the "Quenta Silmarillion."

There are echoes of the epic Hero in all this, particularly the Northern European model. Tolkien was a complex man who seems from an early age to have possessed both a dark vision and a light. The events of his early life certainly made him aware of the dark side of human existence: the early deaths of his father and later his mother, leaving him orphaned at twelve; estrangement from his mother's family because of her conversion to Catholicism; financial hardships; obstacles placed in the way of his marriage; the horror of World War I and the loss there of all but one of his closest friends.

Tolkien has clearly stated his admiration for the heroic ideal of courage in the face of inevitable defeat (in his Beowulf lecture).[5] We can see this in *The Silmarillion* in the elves who battle Morgoth even though Manwe has told Feanor that, as a Vala, Morgoth is beyond their power to defeat. It occurs also in *The Lord of the Rings* when the armies of the Free Peoples prepare for battle with Sauron's overwhelmingly greater forces, believing that the Quest has failed and their defeat is certain. The traditional epic Hero is, however, more concerned with glory and praise than any in Tolkien. Even those heroes of *The Lord of the Rings* most suggestive of the epic model–Boromir and the Riders of Rohan–fight for causes greater than themselves.

The Submissive Hero: The Christian Model

Despite the many negative influences in his life as noted above, it is Tolkien's vision of the light (though not unmixed with shadow) that suffuses *The Lord of the Rings*. His Christian faith was one of the most positive elements in his life, and it is this viewpoint that is embedded in the eucatastrophe of *The Lord of the Rings*. Middle-earth is not obviously Christian; what little suggestion of religion exists in *The Lord of the Rings* is more implied (and that mostly in the appendix) than stated. It is not until *The Silmarillion* that Tolkien's "theology" really becomes apparent. It is in the nature and behavior of *The Lord of the Rings* Heroes that the Christian

character of Tolkien's secondary world is most apparent.

Joseph Campbell defined the Hero as "the man of self-achieved submission." (Campbell, p.16) In *The Lord of the Rings* the Heroes submit their individual wills to the higher moral order. Frodo, Sam, Aragorn and Gandalf can all be seen as figures of Christ, who is the submissive Hero most congenial to Tolkien. Gandalf and Aragorn also have echoes of the Church Militant about them however. Aragorn suggests such Christian warriors as St. George or King Arthur, and Gandalf too is capable of acting as a warrior when the need arises. Gandalf's most important act, though, is one of renunciation–he refuses to use the Ring. In Saruman we see a pale echo of what Gandalf might have become had he succumbed to that temptation.

When Aragorn first appears in the trilogy as an unassuming Ranger he puts himself at the service of Frodo, just as "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve." (Matthew 20: 28; Ellwood, p. 135.) When he has come through great trials and earned his kingship he does not take it immediately, his first actions are quiet ones of healing. Aragorn's Christlike quality is also emphasized by his total forgiveness of Boromir after the latter has essentially repented and done his penance.

Frodo is of course the epitome of Christ as sacrifice. He takes the burden of the Ring willingly, but not eagerly, because it seems ordained that he should do so. A detailed comparison of the final stages of Frodo's journey to Mount Doom and the events of Christ's Passion has already been done (Ellwood, pp. 125-6) and I shall not repeat it. Instead I shall deal with the point at which Frodo departs from the pattern–perhaps the most enigmatic moment in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Christ did not submit easily to the will of his Father. In Gethsemane he asked to have the cup taken from him; on the Cross itself he cried out that he was forsaken. But submit he did, and the task was consummated. But Frodo fails his task. At the last moment the individual possessive will reasserts itself, and chooses to keep the Ring. It is only the apparent happy chance of Gollum's action that saves the Quest.

This seems curious and inexplicable at first. But it is well to remember that although he is Christlike Frodo is not Christ; he is Hero but not deity. As a devout Roman Catholic Tolkien believed in Christ as God, and it was perhaps going to far for him to give his Hero too many of the attributes of deity. It is also well to remember the belief that in a fallen world, man cannot achieve salvation on his own, but only through the grace of Christ's redemption. Frodo has done all in his power, but the salvation of the world is beyond that power. Such salvation can only come through a combination of human effort and the Grace of God.

The Hero in Society: Fellowship and True King

Just as the Hero can have more than one relationship to the Cosmic order, i.e. defiance or submission, so he can have more than one relationship to his society. The rebel as hero is a familiar figure, especially among the Romantics and in the present day (where he may be hero or anti-hero). In Middle-earth, however, heroic acts are carried out in a social context. The individual will is subordinate not only to the moral order but to the social–no single person can accomplish the Quest alone. It takes four Ringbearers to bring the Ring to its destruction: Bilbo, Frodo, Sam and Gollum. The Ringbearers always have the aid of others: Gandalf helps by both action and advice; the Fellowship travels along in the beginning, supported by the advice of the council of Elrond. From the beginning Frodo has not had to travel alone, for Merry and Pippin accompany him in the beginning and Sam till the bitter end.

Some assistance fits the traditional pattern of the supernatural helper who aids the hero along his road of trials, such as that given be Gandalf (in his more numinous moments), Galadriel and the elves in general. Significant, also, is the fact that the Fellowship represents all of the free peoples (except the ents, who assist in their own way). This helps counteract the dissension Sauron has been brewing among the various races. The Fellowship does more than achieve the Quest; it proves the falsity of Sauron's lies and cements relations among the peoples involved through their representatives. From the end of *The Fellowship of the Ring* to the end of the trilogy, two great movements carry forth the Quest. In order for Frodo and Sam to reach their goal, Sauron must be distracted, and this is the major task of the rest of the characters. They know that there is no real chance of defeating Sauron by force of arms, but they mobilize for war in hope that their actions and sacrifices will keep Sauron's attention away from his real danger.

Elves and wizards and rightful kings can be found elsewhere, but hobbits are unique to Middle-earth. They are very social creatures who seem to favor unobtrusive but essentially democratic government (although they turn into monarchists later). If Gandalf is the supernatural Hero and Aragorn the noble Hero, the hobbits represent the common man as hero. People like Gandalf and Aragorn are expected to be heroes, they are born to it–it's part of their job, so to speak. Hobbits are not born heroes.

Indeed, as it turns out, Frodo does not quite have the strength to complete the heroic act on his own. If we consider the three who travel with the Ring into the heart of Mordor–Frodo, Sam and Gollum–we see that these three become as one being. The closer Frodo comes to Mount Doom, the more the Ring saps his physical strength. It is as if all his energy must be directed toward his spiritual battle, leaving none left for the physical. He becomes increasingly passive, focused on his inner task, and chooses to go weaponless. In the end he has to be carried by Sam, and at this point they are essentially one being, with Frodo carrying the spiritual burden and Sam the physical.

Sam, of course, becomes for a while a Ringbearer too. More than one commentator has pointed out that Sam, the humblest of the humble, is the greatest hero of the Quest. For one thing, Sam chooses to take on his burden totally alone, far from the supportive presence of the Council of Elrond, and if he did succeed it is unlikely anyone would know it was he who accomplished the Quest. Secondly, Sam takes the Ring "knowing its full terrible power–which no one else had dared to do."[6]

When Sam finds that Frodo is not dead after all, Sam performs another remarkable action–he gives back the Ring.

In this he "achieves what no one else has been able to do. No one but Bilbo has ever given up the Ring of his own free will, and Bilbo, who did not know its power, could only do so with all Gandalf's help." (Ibid., p. 38.) Perhaps Sam's power to resist the lure of the Ring comes from his overriding motivation: a totally selfless love for others, especially Frodo. He is briefly tempted by the Ring, but two things sustain him: "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." (*Return of the King*, p. 177)

There is no light without dark to define it, however, and this brings us to Gollum. He is the dark side of the hobbits, especially to Frodo; in Jungian terms, their Shadow. But the Shadow, though hard to face, is an essential part of the psyche. Without it, the psyche is not whole, and an important source of power is gone. It is Gollum who actually performs the last vital act of the Quest: he casts the Ring into the Cracks of Doom, albeit accidentally, and himself with it. This action has double significance if viewed from different perspectives.

From the Jungian viewpoint, the task is not to destroy the Shadow but to face it and integrate it into the whole Self (as Ged does in LeGuin's *A Wizard of Earth-sea*). Tolkien, however, does not share the view of Jung, Campbell and many others that dualities, including those of Good and Evil, are only apparent. In his Christian view Good and Evil have separate identities and the latter is to be destroyed, not incorporated. Nevertheless, it is significant that after losing Gollum Frodo is never quite whole again (physically or psychically) and unable to function in the world. The Quest has been accomplished, but at the loss to Frodo of more than his finger.

We have other hobbits to consider, however, and the last task of the hero, i.e., the return and reintegration with society, which the Hero "may find the most difficult requirement of all." (Campbell, p. 36.) Actually, Frodo finds it impossible. That task is left to Sam, Merry and Pippin. The latter two have truly come of age in the course of the Quest; their increase in stature is not only physical. It is they who accomplish the scouring of the Shire, bringing life back to its social structure as Sam does to its earth. They bring life in another way, also, through their children. Frodo seems to have been drained both of the power of action and of generative power.

The restoration of society is not limited to the Shire however, all of Middle-earth is restored because the True King has re- turned. It is probably true that "the desire for a True King is powerful in the deeps of man." (Ellwood, p. 131.) There is something remarkably compelling even to dedicated democrats in the image of Arthur or Charlemagne or Christ the King. Ara- gorn is a symbol of more than monarchy. He is government itself: legitimate government, the lawful exercise of power, the Rule of Law, order against chaos. He represents the union of sacred and secular which we have lost.

It is well to remember also that Aragorn's accession marks the end of the Third Age and the beginning of the Fourth. It marks the ascendency not just of Aragorn but of the race of men (and hobbits). This restoration is not without cost, however. With the passing of the Third Age comes the loss of much that is beautiful and wonderful in Middle-earth. Victory is not gained without great price, and even the Joy of the eucatastrophe is not unmixed with grief.

The task of the Heroes of old was to seek out the dragon and destroy it, use whatever power they had to battle against the foe. If *The Silmarillion* has one great theme it is that of the consequences of pride and prideful action, but tinged with admiration for the courage displayed. *The Lord of the Rings* has many major themes: the power of love, the far-flung consequences of actions, the need for group effort, the price of victory. One theme stands out above all these, however, and that is the renunciation of power. Helms has dealt with this at length,[7] so I shall not do so now. I find it interesting that in serious fantasy the use of power and the relationship between ends and means is viewed as an increasingly complex problem. It is central to LeGuin's Earthsea trilogy, for example, and important also in McKillip's "Riddle-Master" trilogy and Donaldson's "Chronicles of Thomas Covenant."

Underneath it all, however, Tolkien's message and the message of most high fantasy is one of hope. The negative view of irony may at first seem a more appropriate reflection of the immediate environment, but the ironic attitude is maladaptive. The future does not just happen to us; to a large extent we create it. Our expectations shape events. We see what we expect to see, and must be able to conceive of something before we can realize it. The function of fantasy is much more important than the immediate pleasure of reading it. It enables us to keep as broad a view of the possibilities as possible, which is necessary not only for our betterment but for our very survival-because, in Virgil's words, "we make our destinies by our choice of gods."

Notes

[1]Quotations in the text refer to the following editions of Tolkien's works: *The Lord of the Rings*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967); *The Silmarillion*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).

[2]Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 315-16.

[3]Gracia Fay Ellwood, *Good News from Tolkien's Middle-earth*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, c1970), pp. 113-16.

[4]Edward F. Edinger, *Ego and Archetype*, (Baltimore: Penguin, 1973), p. 27.

[5]J.R.R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," *Preceedings of the British Academy* 22 (1936): pp. 66-7.

[6]Marion Zimmer Bradley, *Men, Halflings and Hero Worship* (Bal- timore: T-K Graphics, c1973), p. 37.

[7]Randel Helm, *Tolkien's World*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), p.54.

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