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The Many Faces of the Hero in *The Lord of the Rings*

Stephen Potts

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Abstract

Guest of Honor address at Mythcon 22. Reviews various definitions and characteristics of the hero according to several folklorists and psychologists. Discusses Aragorn, Gandalf, Frodo, and Sam as heroes according to these definitions.

Additional Keywords

Hero, Theories of; Tolkien, J.R.R. The Lord of the Rings; Tolkien, J.R.R. The Lord of the Rings—Aragorn as hero; Tolkien, J.R.R. The Lord of the Rings—Frodo as hero; Tolkien, J.R.R. The Lord of the Rings—Gandalf as hero; Tolkien, J.R.R. The Lord of the Rings—Sam as hero

The Many Faces of the Hero in The Lord of the Rings

Guest of Honor Address given at The Mythopoeic Conference XXII

Stephen Potter

Virtually countless are the heroes available to the student of mythology and mythic fantasy, and all but countless the studies and theories attempting to interpret these heroes. As long as mythic and fantastic tales have been seriously gathered and analyzed—that is, roughly since the Brothers Grimm published their *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* in the era of Napoleon — folklorists and mythographers have been struck by the many similarities among humanity's oldest stories and greatest heroes.

Today those of us who have wandered long in the lands of faerie, myth, and hero saga take such similarities for granted; the Hero, we know, is an archetype, or a collection of related archetypes. That we do hold this truth to be self-evident is attributable to the work of those intellectual heroes who have skirmished in the field where myth and metaphysics meet, scholars of the past century such as Sir James George Frazer, Vladimir Propp, Lord Raglan, Carl Gustav Jung, and Joseph Campbell. Unfortunately, frequently the conclusions reached by these men concerning the archetypal characters and patterns appear to have less in common than the heroes and stories they are glossing.

For Frazer, British author of the encyclopedic work *The Golden Bough* (published originally in several volumes in 1913) most of the world's rituals and hero myths are rooted in the seasonal cycles of fertility: growth, death, decay, and rebirth. The central myth is that of the Fisher-King — represented in figures as widely disparate as Osiris, Adonis, Oedipus, and Christ — the hero whose spiritual and physical health determines that of his followers, who must allow himself to be sacrificed if necessary to permit his community to live, and who thus embodies in his own person the life-force of his people and their bond with nature and the cosmos.

Propp, in his 1926 monograph *The Morphology of the Folktale*, limited his study to Russian fairy-tales and found 31 motifs that appear with regularity in most of them; his system has been expanded by folklorists to include myth beyond the fairy tale and the Russian tradition.¹ A decade after Propp, the Anglo-Irish Lord Raglan took a strictly literary approach in his book simply entitled *The Hero*. Comparing a number of biblical and literary characters in the Western tradition, from Moses and Oedipus to Arthur and Robin Hood, he listed twenty-two points of likeness that suggest their stories are more mythical than historical.²

It was Swiss psychoanalyst Carl G. Jung who popularized the term "archetype" to describe the universal figures arising from the deep structures of the psyche. As he defines it, an archetype is a psychological and mythological motif common to all peoples at all times, which manifests itself recurrently in dreams, mythology, religion, and mass culture. While the conscious representations of archetypes may vary from culture to culture, and individual to individual, the basic templates remain the same: the Trickster, the warrior-hero, the tutelary Wise Old Man or Woman, the animus, the anima, the animal guide, and so on. We can credit Jung and his disciples for the idea that mythic, heroic, and fantastic tales reflect in public form the dream-life of the mind, that world mythology represents in fact the dreams of the species, expressing in symbolic and archetypal form the universal characteristics of the human condition. Like Frazer, Jungians recognize the importance of the repeating life cycles of growth, death, and rebirth, although they are most interested in how these natural cycles imprint in human psychology as the basis of the life-long quest of the individual for personal meaning. The hero, in all its archetypal forms, is the most important figure in this quest, because it represents the struggles of the Self for individuation, growth, and centering. In identifying with the hero, the individual travels with him in quest of the *numen*, a Latin term (from *nuere*, "to nod") that implies "divine will," borrowed by Jung from the religious psychologist Rudolph Otto to signify the inner powers of the psyche, the universal truth at the center of one's own soul.

Jungians have put together their own pattern for the hero cycle. As one outlines it:

These hero myths vary enormously in detail, but the more closely one examines them the more one sees that structurally they are very similar. They have, that is to say, a universal pattern, even though they were developed by groups or individuals without any direct cultural contact with each other — by, for instance, tribes of Africans or North American Indians, or the Greeks, or the Incas of Peru. Over and over again one hears a tale describing a hero's miraculous but humble birth, his early proof of superhuman strength, his rapid rise to prominence or power, his triumphant struggle with the forces of evil, his fallibility to the sin of pride (*hybris*), and his fall through betrayal or a "heroic" sacrifice that ends in his death.³

Joseph Campbell would have to be numbered among

the followers of Jung; he quotes Jung frequently in his own work, he edited the Viking volume *The Portable Jung*, and his own best known book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, likewise explores the boundary between mythology and psychology. Like the mythographers before him, Campbell sees an essential unity in the hero myths of all times and places, and attempts to account for them with yet another outline—in this case possessing sixteen points—of what he names, with a term borrowed from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, the “monomyth.”⁴

Frazer's anthropological nature-myth scheme, Propp's and Raglan's formalist schemes, Jung's and Campbell's psychological/metaphysical schemes, all represent very different, but intellectually popular, approaches to the study of the hero. If all are valid in some sense [it seems to me they are] they should be able to work together to explain the mythic tales. My own attempts to place the structural patterns and cycles side by side, however, have met with limited success. You do find the elements of death and rebirth at the center of both Frazer and Jung, although one is primarily concerned with seasonal growth cycles and the other with related psychological growth cycles. And one can trace some similarities in the outlines of Propp, Raglan, and Campbell. Propp's 31-point morphology, however, as well as Campbell's monomyth, are condensed to the central three points of Raglan's pattern (points 10-12). Propp and Campbell have more in common: the postponement of the hero's departure, the magic guide/token, the pursuit and rescue, the return, the throne. The differences between them are rooted in the more detailed interplay of subplots in Propp (based on his more specific source material, the Russian folk tale) and in Campbell's psychoanalytical emphasis on familial psychomachia: the brother-battle, the bride-stealing, the atonement with the father.

It is often difficult enough to make these different hero cycles fit traditional myth—especially when, as noted, they do not accord in every respect with one another. Nonetheless, some scholars of Tolkien have in the last quarter-century attempted to apply them to the Middle-earth myths, and especially to the work that continues to be the central one of Tolkien's canon, *The Lord of the Rings*. Prominent among recent studies along these lines are Timothy R. O'Neill's *The Individuated Hobbit: Jung, Tolkien, and the Archetypes of Middle-earth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979) and Anne C. Petty's *One Ring to Bind Them All: Tolkien's Mythology* (University of Alabama Press, 1979), which applies Propp, Campbell, and the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss. The common working assumption of such researchers is a good one: to wit, that given his thorough familiarity with mythology—particularly Western mythology (Teutonic, Celtic, Finnish, Classical, and Biblical)—and his effort to bring this intimate and inspired knowledge together in his own act of sub-creation, Tolkien's Trilogy is well worthy of analysis as myth itself.

Following these exegetes, let us begin with the charac-

ter in the Trilogy who appears to be the most traditional hero, Aragorn. C. S. Lewis was among the early critics who compared his story to those of Ariosto and Childe Roland, while Ruth Noel, in her 1977 book *The Mythology of Middle-earth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), details his links to Arthur, Charlemagne, and by extension all heroes we think of as central to the medieval romance tradition. Noel, in fact, places his history in the context of Raglan's scheme and discovers that he perfectly fulfills the first fifteen functions, from his royal and even semi-divine birth (recall that he has not only elves but Melian, the Maian mother of Luthien, in his ancestry), the attempt on his infant life, and his foster upbringing, to his victory over a figure of evil, his marriage and assumption of the throne, and his peaceful rule. Of the last seven points, the tragic downside of Raglan's hero cycle, Aragorn fulfills only two: he meets with a mysterious death, by his own will, at the top of a hill, the House of Kings near the summit of Minas Tirith (Noel 70-71).

Some early critics lamented the lack of a tragic dimension to Aragorn's history, that element of *hybris* and doom so characteristic of the traditional hero cycle. Even for a conventional hero Aragorn, they complained, lacked *parache*; he was too good and solid, to the point of dullness, without the “sharp taste for sin” often found in the heroes of tragic myth.⁵ The implication of this and like criticisms is that Aragorn evinces neither human flaws nor personal growth during the course of the story, as one would expect in an archetypal quest.

In point of fact, Aragorn does manifest flaws which he must outgrow, albeit minor ones. When we first meet him in the guise of Strider at the Prancing Pony, he is described as a “strange-looking weather-beaten man” in a dark corner, who later reveals “a shaggy head of dark hair flecked with grey, and in a pale stern face a pair of keen grey eyes” (I, 168-169).⁶ He is rangy, skulking, suspicious, and obviously middle-aged. Although he proves his worth as a protector and guide during the remainder of the trek to Rivendell, he remains but a Ranger until the Council of Elrond. There this unprepossessing figure is revealed as the heir of Isildur, to the skeptical glances of the hobbits and Boromir.

Turning to the patterns laid out by Propp and Campbell, we find that in both cases the hero receives a call to adventure which he does not immediately accept, hardly the case with Aragorn. Up to the Council of Elrond, however, Aragorn has functioned more in the role of helper than hero. Not until the Fellowship moves southward from Rivendell does he really begin to come into his own. And it is here that he picks up the cycles: in Propp's scheme, he hits point nine (hero receives a request and is dispatched) and in Campbell's point three (hero receives a supernatural guide and a token of power, respectively Gandalf and the reforged sword of Isildur). With the rest of the Company he moves through Campbell's fourth point, crossing the first threshold, to the fifth, the under-

world (Moria). Propp and Campbell agree on the next point, the road of trials, where the hero is tested and attacked.

With the rest of the Fellowship, Aragorn acquires himself superbly during the battles with the orcs in Moria. There can be little doubt, however, that the real hero of Moria, and thus far the real leader of the Fellowship, has been Gandalf. When he disappears with the Balrog from the bridge at Khazad-dum, Aragorn becomes leader by default, a transfer of power marked with his cry "Come! I will lead you now!" His assumption of the cloak of command, nevertheless, comes with deep doubts and, as he states at the beginning of Chapter 6, "without hope." Even as they leave Moria for Lorien, Aragorn takes them "by the road that Gandalf chose" (I, 349). He clearly has too little faith in his own ability, a too human flaw.

Aragorn continues to function true to Propp and Campbell. According to Propp, the first trials are followed by an encounter with a donor and the reception of a talisman; according to Campbell, the hero meets a goddess and is tempted. It is in Lorien, of course, that Aragorn is interviewed by Galadriel, who tests his heart with the others and finds it strong. In Jungian terms, she is the anima, the female mirror of the souls of the men; her aspect to each man depends on what he brings to the encounter, and, significantly, only Boromir finds her threatening. Aragorn later receives from her the Elfstone and a new name, Elessar, both indicative of his growing powers; in being rechristened the hero is reborn. And, indeed, at this moment the Company sees him anew, "for they had not marked before how tall and kingly he stood, and it seemed to them that many years of toil had fallen from his shoulders" (I, 391). As he gains in heroic stature, Aragorn paradoxically grows younger.

Though now officially the leader of the Fellowship, he remains "doubtful and troubled" about the path they must follow. The kingly hero and the uncertain man continue to co-exist during the river journey southward, nowhere more pointedly than as the Company passes the colossal statues of Isildur and Anarion on the approach to the Falls of Rauros. At that moment, as he faces his legacy, "the weatherworn Ranger" suddenly disappears:

In the stern sat Aragorn son of Arathorn, proud and erect, guiding the boat with skilful strokes; his hood was cast back, and his dark hair [no longer flecked with grey] was blowing in the wind, a light was in his eyes: a king returning from exile to his own land.

"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 Valandil Isildur's son, heir of Elendil, has sought to dread!"

Then the light of his eyes faded, and he spoke to himself: "Would that Gandalf were here! How my heart yearns for Minas Anor and the walls of my own city! But whither now shall I go?"

The decision is virtually made for him, of course, at the

breaking of the Fellowship, when Frodo and Sam take their own way, leaving Aragorn to pursue the other two hobbits. Although this pursuit misses its mark, it does bring Aragorn back to the reborn wizard.

Gandalf's "death" at Khazad-dum, we discover, caused a quantum growth spurt not only in Aragorn, but in the wizard himself. Like Obi Wan Kenobi in that Campbellian hero-tale *Star Wars*, his destruction has made him more powerful. Like Aragorn, he too is rechristened; as he, in a metaphoric act, throws off his gray tatters and reveals himself in his new guise, Legolas cries out "Mithrandir!" When Gimli calls him "Gandalf," the wizard replies, "Yes, that was the name. I was Gandalf." But if Gandalf still, he is Gandalf "the White." Before the bridge at Khazad-dum, he was a Proprian magical helper, a Jungian Wise Guide, the "tutelary" figure or guardian who enables the hero "to perform the superhuman tasks that he cannot accomplish unaided." (Henderson, 110). As of his resurrection, however, he appears heroic on his own; the story of his battle with the Balrog and his transfiguration itself suggests the archetypal heroic motif, characteristic of both Frazer and Jung, of death and rebirth. Although most of Gandalf's ordeal takes place offstage, we do see at second hand the descent into the underworld, the battle with the beast, the symbolic entry into the world of the dead, the magic flight, the successful return and the apotheosis — found to different extents in not only Frazer and Jung, but Propp and Campbell.

Indeed, this early in the story Gandalf has already reached the penultimate stage of the Campbellian monomyth, having become a master of two worlds, with power in both the material realm of Middle-earth and the spiritual realm of Valinor. No more does he appear the occasionally tired and cranky old man of his former incarnation. As Aragorn becomes the political leader of the West's forces, Gandalf becomes *spiritual* leader, in Campbell's term the *bodhisattva* who, though personally enlightened, chooses to remain engaged in the affairs of humanity to assist others, the divine returned in flesh from Paradise to share his spiritual wealth with a needy world. In fact, he closely resembles Campbell's description of the shaman that is glossed in his discussion of "The Road of Trials," which outlines the hero's crossing of the netherworld. The hero-shaman "undertakes for himself the perilous journey into the darkness by descending, either intentionally or unintentionally. . . . [to] a landscape of symbolic figures (any one of which may swallow him)." If he can overcome the monsters, he returns from the land of the dead cleansed and purified, with his energies and interests focused upon transcendental goals and actions. Finally, like Aragorn, Gandalf actually continues to grow in vigor and power as the battle against Sauron approaches its climax.

Aragorn and Gandalf serve their functions as heroes in tandem — indeed, almost archetypally as the projections of a single psyche. Together they rejuvenate Theoden and

defeat Saruman's orcs at Helm's Deep, with Gandalf presiding in the former, more spiritual function, and Aragorn in the latter, more physical one. For a time, Gandalf continues to give Aragorn the direction he still needs, as when he transmits Galadriel's advice to pass through yet another underworld, the Paths of the Dead. At the siege of Gondor, it is Gandalf who as the White Rider challenges his spiritual opposite, the Nazgul, and rallies the hearts of Minas Tirith, while Aragorn rallies the army of the dead and then the forces at the Mouths of the Anduin under the standard of Numenor, thus finally proving his worth as a warrior-king and earning his birthright as the successor to the throne. Aragorn's own spiritual function as Fisher-King, as bringer of life, comes to the fore in Gondor's Houses of Healing after the battle, when he uses *athelas* to cure Faramir, Merry, and Eowyn, among others.

At the climax of Campbell's heroic monomyth comes "The Atonement with the Father," which on its surface suggests reparations to and reconciliation with an authority figure, a positive sense suggested by Campbell's own breaking of the word into syllables: "at-one-ment." In practice, however, and even in the examples Campbell offers, the atonement often turns out to be a Freudian father-son battle, which ends as often with the overthrow of the father figure and the assumption of the father's authority by the son. It is in this sense that Anne Petty, in the aforementioned study, fits Aragorn's tale into the Campbell monomyth; Aragorn's triumph at the siege of Gondor challenges the father figure of Minas Tirith, the old, embittered Steward Denethor, who immolates himself in the voluntary mode of an aging Fisher-King whose reign has come to signify death and decay (Petty 60-1).

At Minas Tirith, Aragorn fulfills the requirements of the full-fledged "hero-warrior" by Campbell's definition: the sword edge of the hero-warrior flashes with the energy of the creative Source: before it fall the shells of the Outform. For the mythological hero is the champion not of things become but of things becoming; the dragon to be slain by him is precisely the monster of the status quo: Holdfast, the keeper of the past (Campbell 337).

In classic human (as opposed to divine) form, the hero-warrior is "the champion of creative life," clearing away the ogres and tyrants of the past so that new life can grow. Campbell's description of this hero's world sounds like nothing so much as Middle-earth at the end of the Third Age:

The world period of the hero in human form begins only when villages and cities have expanded over the land. Many monsters remaining from primeval times still lurk in the outlying regions, and through malice or desperation these set themselves against the human community. They have to be cleared away. Furthermore, tyrants of human breed, usurping to themselves the goods of their neighbors, arise, and are the cause of widespread misery. These have to be suppressed. The elementary deeds of the hero are those of the clearing of the field. (Campbell 337-8)

Or as he elsewhere expresses it, in the section on "The Hero as World Redeemer," the work of the hero is to slay the

tenacious aspect of the father (dragon, tester, ogre king) and release from its ban the vital energies that will feed the universe" (Campbell 352).

Aragorn's function as hero-warrior during this part of the tale is precisely that: defeating the dead hand of the past, by redeeming the broken promise of the ghostly army at Erech, displacing the ossified "holdfast" Denethor, and challenging the ancient ogre-tyrant Sauron at his own gates. There is nothing at this stage of Aragorn's earlier indecision, and little of the weatherworn, middle-aged Ranger in the man who ultimately receives the crown:

"Tall as the sea-kings of old, he stood above all that were near; ancient of days he seemed and yet in the flower of manhood; and wisdom sat upon his brow, and strength and healing were in his hands, and a light was about him" (III, 246).

Though comparisons to the "old" and "ancient" enter here, these refer to origins, not decay; Aragorn's crowning represents what Campbell — following his models, Frazer and Jung — sees as the cyclical nature of the monomyth, the return to spiritual life at the source.

It is fitting in every archetypal respect that the act that seals his kingship is the replanting of the White Tree: a symbol of life renewed with its roots deep in the soil of Aragorn's fathers, and a sign of the Numenorean *numen*, the Dunedain's bond to the divine will of Eru and the Valar. Aragorn is the new, fertile Fisher-King, the Master of the Two Worlds of spirit and life. In becoming king, he exchanges what Campbell calls "the virtuous sword" for "the scepter of dominion" (Campbell 345); he also wins his bride (Arwen) and takes the father's place on the throne in a pattern recognized not only by Campbell but by Raglan and Propp as well. This is Tolkien's *eucatastrophe*, a happy blend of the wish-fulfillment of fairy-tale and numinous power of myth.

Tolkien challenges the tragic *hybris* of the traditional mythic hero by having Aragorn magnanimously share the triumph; he acknowledges that his heroism is not an individual matter but dependent on the heroism of others by having Frodo and Gandalf pass the crown to him, instead of taking it himself from the tomb of the last king as is the custom in Gondor. Gandalf has already affirmed the importance of heroic teamwork at the Council of Elrond when he tells Bilbo, "only a small part is played in great deeds by any hero" (I, 283), so it should not be surprising that more than one hero appears in the Trilogy. Since Gandalf's own complementary role as hero-shaman has already been outlined, it is time to turn to the story's other recognized protagonist.

Frodo, like Bilbo before him, begins as an immature hero — essentially a child, concerned like all hobbits with the satisfaction of very basic desires: food, security, and companionship. In the Jungian scheme of archetypes, the immature hero should be a Trickster — often with animal characteristics like Coyote, Brer Rabbit, Bugs Bunny — who uses guile and deception to get his way. From the very

beginning, however, Frodo is much less the Trickster than his uncle. Indeed, even more than Bilbo Frodo has the quest forced upon him; his idea of such a journey, as he tells Gandalf, is "a kind of holiday, a series of adventures like Bilbo's or better, ending in peace" (I, 72), in other words, a classic fairy-tale journey. As predicted by Propp and especially Campbell, Frodo refuses the call to carry the Ring, offering it at each threshold to someone else: Gandalf, Aragorn, Elrond, and Galadriel.

Petty observes that the initiation of Frodo's quest most closely resembles Propp's fairy-tale morphology, beginning with the departure of a family member (Bilbo), the interdiction addressed to Frodo (not to use the Ring), and the reconnoitering of the villain (the appearance of the Black Riders in the Shire) (Petty 35ff.). True to Propp, after Frodo is dispatched, he has a number of adventures in which he is attacked and receives magical aid and tokens, and he receives a wound after direct combat with the enemy: he is rescued from the Old Forest and the barrow-wight by Bombadil; he receives the magic sword Sting; he takes a wound from the sword of the Nazgul. But with the Council of Elrond, Frodo's real quest begins — to carry the Ring to Mordor itself — and here the fairy-tale quest slides into the mythic quest of Campbell. No sooner does he leave Rivendell than, with the other heroes Aragorn and Gandalf, his road of trials commences with the descent into the belly of the whale, the underworld of Moria.

Frodo comes through this passage relatively unscathed, with no more than a bad bruise from an orc-spear; Moria, after all, is the great trial for Gandalf and Aragorn. But then, true to Campbell's cycle, Frodo must endure the meeting of the goddess and the temptation, with Galadriel again in the role of goddess-temptress.⁸ Having passed his test, he receives a magic token in the form of Galadriel's phial of elven light.

Until the breaking of the Company, Frodo's quest is tied to Aragorn's. Afterward, he continues along his own separate Road of Trials; here Petty points again to Campbell: "The original departure into the land of trials represented only the beginning of the long and really perilous path of initiatory conquests and moments of illumination. Dragons have now to be slain and surprising barriers passed — again, and again" (Petty 51; Campbell 109). In Frodo's case, the trials continue to follow the pattern established from the outset: threats by the enemy, temptations to break the interdiction and use the Ring, descents into the underworld, wounding, and a succession of helpers and donors. Early on his separate road, for instance, he is threatened by Gollum, only to win his aid. On the way to Cirith Ungol, he is captured and threatened by Faramir, only to win his. He is eventually led by Gollum into the belly of the beast at Cirith Ungol, and this time experiences a symbolic and nearly physical "death" through the action of Shelob and the orcs.

Unlike Gandalf and Aragorn, however, who emerge from their own journeys through the underworld of the

dead more powerful than ever, Frodo is weakened by his passage, both physically and morally. For the remainder of his quest, we see his body and soul increasingly dominated by the Ring, to the point where, as he moves underground for the last time at Mount Doom, it completely takes over, and he falls to the ultimate temptation to claim it. Petty, stretching the Campbellian monomyth to cover this episode, sees it as Frodo's atonement with the divine father, in this case Sauron. Carrying the atonement motif back to its Freudian-Jungian psychoanalytical roots, she regards Sauron as the punishing father figure and Frodo as "the son [struggling] against the father for the mastery of the universe" (Campbell 162; Petty 55). Actually, however, Frodo's act comes not out of heroic strength but out of weakness. If, like all trials in the underworld, this one signifies a rite of passage and a stage in the hero's growth, it is for Frodo the growth of recognition that he too can fall. His moment of greatest *hybris* leads immediately to the humble and somewhat horrified acceptance of his fallibility. He is, like that other wounded hero Oedipus, much saddened but wised by self-knowledge at the end of his trials.

On its surface, the rest of Frodo's story suggests Campbell's monomyth: the magic flight and rescue, the crossing of the return threshold, his celebration as hero (the master of two worlds), and his freedom to live. But, unlike the Campbellian hero in his last stages, Frodo has not discovered the bliss within him; he is not at peace with himself. Frodo's achievement of his quest came at too great a personal cost. In explaining the nature of his heroic "failure" to one fan, Tolkien wrote, "it can be observed in history and experience that some individuals seem to be placed in 'sacrificial' positions: situations or tasks that for perfection of solution demand powers beyond their utmost limits, even beyond all possible limits for an incarnate creature in a physical world — in which a body may be destroyed, or so maimed that it affects the mind and will."⁹

Though Frodo has been compared to a Christian martyr, the archetypal symbolism of his sacrifice goes back far further than the "blood of the lamb"; in fact, Frazer's work overflows with sacrificial gods, kings, and heroes. The sacrifice sits at the center of the Fisher-King myth: out of death, whether real or symbolic, comes renewed life. Frodo, therefore, must in his innocence give up everything — his physical, psychological and spiritual well-being, and ultimately life in Middle-earth itself — so that Middle-earth may thrive. Frodo alone will not enjoy the fruits of the Quest's completion; as he tells Sam, "I have been too deeply hurt . . . It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them" (III, 309).

Noteworthy, however, is that Frodo's heroic quest is completed according to the happier patterns of Propp and Campbell, just not by Frodo. This brings us to the character who is arguably the fourth major hero of *The Lord of the*

Rings, Samwise Gamgee. He does appear to be the least of the four; he functions for most of the story as Frodo's helper and sidekick, even as comic relief, and as a simple gardener, simple in every sense of the word; he seems from the outset to be of too humble stuff from which to make a hero. As Tolkien's gloss of his cognomen informs us, Sam is "half-wise," but if the name suggests dimness, it also reminds of the glass that is half full. Sam does have a small measure of wisdom, and this wisdom manifests itself in the course of the quest in Sam's increasing ability to make choices in the face of necessity. At first, like Frodo, he is thrust into events, essentially drafted, though not unwillingly, to be Frodo's companion by Gandalf and later Elrond. Sam's first independent commitment to the fulfillment of the Quest comes at the same time as Frodo's, when the Fellowship breaks up. Both hobbits defy interdictions to do so, Frodo the interdiction against using the Ring, Sam Aragorn's direct command to remain with the Company.

For most of the approach to Mordor, Frodo is still the leader of the little band including both Sam and Gollum, and provides the balance necessary to keep these very different helpers (both in some sense Jungian projections of Frodo's hobbit soul, as the Jungian O'Neill notes) from killing each other. When Gollum abandons them in Shelob's lair at Cirith Ungol, this psychic triumvirate collapses. When Frodo receives the sting of Shelob and "dies," Sam is left alone to make, as the chapter title has it, "The Choices of Master Samwise." Like Aragorn following the underworld "death" of Gandalf, Sam must evolve rapidly from helpmate to master of his own doom. That the hero's mantle passes here to Sam is evidenced by his assumption of Frodo's three magic tokens, the sword Sting, the phial of Galadriel, and of course the Ring itself. Although he must return the burden of the Ring upon Frodo's resurrection, he retains the sword and the phial. As Marion Zimmer Bradley observed in a 1966 essay on heroism in *The Lord of the Rings*, Sam becomes the "tall, towering elf-warrior" seen by the orcs of Minas Morgul.¹⁰

She also notes that their relationship has subtly altered by the time Frodo reawakens by drawing attention to the passage that reads, "Frodo . . . lay back in Sam's gentle arms, closing his eyes, like a child at rest when night-fears are driven away by some loved voice or hand" (III, 186; Bradley 121). From this point on Frodo, child-like, is helpless, weak and incapable of making his own decisions; Sam must encourage, prod, and even bodily carry him. Sam thus has evolved from the child-like subordinate to a gentle but parental authority figure, and for the rest of the Quest he is in charge. It is Sam who gets them to their goal at the Cracks of Doom, as it is ironically Gollum who delivers the Ring to the fires. Frodo has no will of his own anymore; he merely endures in the face of forces over which he has no control.

Having been strengthened by the quest, however, Sam — who enjoys with Frodo Campbell's rescue from without, magic flight, and crossing of the return threshold

— is the one who wins the fairy-tale rewards of Propp, the marriage (to Rosie Cotton) and throne (the mayoralty of the Shire). Like Aragorn, he rules long and wisely and, significantly for the Frazerian imagery of the story, brings fertility to the Shire, by spreading around the soil of Lorien (thus bringing to the Shire the golden mallorn trees of Lorien as Aragorn brings to life the White Tree of Valinor) and in being fruitful himself; according to the appendix, thirteen children are recorded from the union of Samwise Gamgee and Rose Cotton, from whom several enduring Shire dynasties emerge. It is also consonant with the Frazerian fertility motif that Sam's voluntary departure from the Shire, and his rumored departure from Middle-earth, come on September 22, the autumnal equinox.

If none of this seems proof that Tolkien intended Sam to be seen as a heroic figure (and I was frankly skeptical myself when the possibility was first proposed to me), he does confirm that and more in a 1951 letter to editor Michael Waldman. After expressly comparing the love story of Aragorn and Arwen (as "high" matter) to the "rustic" love of Sam and Rosie, he refers parenthetically to Sam as the story's "chief hero" (*Letters* 161). If Gandalf is hero as shaman-sage, Aragorn the hero as warrior-king, Frodo the hero as martyr-saint, what sort of hero is Sam?

Although Sam Gamgee lacks the semi-divine or tragic status demanded by most mythic paradigms, he does suggest a lower level hero, the fairy-tale fool of classic tradition, like the various Jacks, little tailors, and youngest sons who from unpromising raw material forge futures of wealth, honor, and power; for this reason, Sam best fulfills the folk-tale morphology of Propp, functioning in this position as a plebeian counterpoint to Aragorn. Tolkien himself describes Sam, in a 1963 letter, as "lovable and laughable" but "trying" vulgar and smug, in his "mental myopia" a "more representative hobbit" than any other in the story (*Letters* 329). He is, in short, the hero as humble Everyman, with his own mixture of virtues and vices, among the latter a petty *hybris*. But what makes his brand of heroism so special that Tolkien would name him "the chief hero" of the Trilogy?

Perhaps the author's own answer may be found in his essay "Ofemod," his afterword to his verse drama "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhtelm's Son." Here he praises his Old English model, the poem *The Battle of Maldon*, as "the only purely heroic poem extant in Old English." He points in particular to the lines spoken by the old retainer Beorhtwold ("Will shall be the sterner, heart the bolder, spirit the greater as our strength lessens.") as the best expression of the "northern heroic spirit . . . ; the clearest statement of the doctrine of uttermost endurance in the service of indomitable will."¹¹ Tolkien finds it especially noteworthy that these words are spoken by a subordinate, one who expects to gain neither honor nor glory from victory. Fighting for honor is the less meritorious "chivalric" motivation to heroic action of a Beowulf or, in this case, a Beorhtnoth. Beorhtwold, on the other hand,

does what he does out of “the heroism of obedience and love,” (Beorhnoth 22) when pressed by “bleak, heroic necessity” (Beorhnoth 20); this is the heroism which Tolkien holds to be “the most heroic and the most moving” (Beorhnoth 22). This is the heroism of Sam.

The above allusions to Tolkien’s own theory of the heroic bring up the question: to what extent did Tolkien himself consciously use heroic archetypes? The Jungian O’Neill makes the case that “Tolkien’s work is probably the clearest repository of Jungian themes in recent literature” (O’Neill 16), so much so that he predicated the direct influence of Jung on Tolkien. He cites as further evidence the alleged common origins of Jung’s *nomen* and Tolkien’s Numenor (O’Neill 163-4), even though Tolkien’s letters denied the derivation of Numenor from the Latin (*Letters* 361). Tolkien’s letters also show that he was not reticent about his distaste for psychoanalysis, and particularly psychoanalytical interpretations of myth and literature.

In fact, his various non-fiction writings consistently criticize reductions of the hero myths to formulas and patterns. While in the essay “On Fairy-Stories” he names some common elements of mythic tales, he also expresses his disapproval of the tendency of folklorists and anthropologists to reduce stories to outlines of similar motifs. He acknowledges that such scientific studies “may express (in undue abbreviation) some element of truth,” but maintains that they miss the point of story-telling,¹² to use his metaphor, they pick out the individual threads, but overlook the tapestry. I must suppose, on the basis of this evidence, that he would find Propp and Raglan reductionist, and Jung and Campbell misguided, although there is ample evidence that he was familiar with the nature-myths outlined by Frazer. Alongside the numerous fertility motifs already noted herein is the time frame of the Ring Quest itself, which begins on September 22, the autumn equinox, and ends on March 25, the beginning of spring.¹³

Actually, I do not believe, nor would I want to believe, that Tolkien needed to copy the formulas of the folklorists and mythographers. He had his own ample background in the mythic, and achieved through literature what the more scientific of the mythopoeic thinkers did with their studies: he brought together the many threads of the myths he knew, invested them with the colors and patterns of his own internal muse, and wove them into the cosmos we know as Middle-earth. In many places in his writings he disclaims having invented his characters and stories, regarding himself as the discoverer and chronicler of pre-existing forms.¹⁴ And in his conclusion to “On Fairy-Stories,” he refers to the “peculiar quality of ‘joy’ in fantasy which comes from “a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth” (71), that joyful, underlying truth Rudolph Otto and Jung would recognize as the *nomen*. It is not surprising, therefore, that Tolkien’s many heroes reflect in their various ways the archetypes and archetypal patterns more methodically delineated by the

writers of monographs. That they do is evidence that Tolkien had touched the numinous within himself.

It is a pity that Joseph Campbell did not address Tolkien’s opus when he explored modern mythopoeic literature in his volume *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology* (New York: Viking, 1968), preferring instead the more literarily respectable, at the time, modernist writings of Eliot, Joyce, and Mann. Campbell defines “creative mythology” as springing not “from the dicta of authority, but from the insights, sentiments, thought, and vision of an adequate individual, loyal to his own experience of value.”¹⁵ In other words, Campbell’s creative mythologist recreates the myths through the medium of his own poetic, mythopoeic spirit and offers them up to the modern world in new and transformed guise.

I do believe that Joseph Campbell would have approved of J. R. R. Tolkien more than Tolkien might have Campbell. In striving to revitalize for his time the myths he loved, like some Fisher-King of fantasy, Tolkien served the same aim as Campbell — to make us feel the numinous relevance of these archetypal tales. ♣

Notes

1. Much condensed to its basic motifs, Propp’s morphology runs as follows:
 1. A member of family departs from home (to travel, war, collect berries, or die)
 2. An interdiction is addressed to the hero (don’t look in this closet, don’t talk to strangers, don’t defile my shrine)
 3. The interdiction is violated
 4. The villain reconnoiters (seeks out hero or addresses him)
 5. Villain receives information about his victim
 6. Villain attempts to deceive victim to take possession of him or belongings
 7. Victim submits to deception and thus unwittingly helps enemy
 8. Villain causes harm or injury to member of family or [VIIIa. Member of family lacks or desires something]
 9. Misfortune is made known; hero receives request; is dispatched
 10. Seeker agrees to/ decides counteraction
 11. Hero leaves home
 12. Hero is tested, attacked, etc., leading to magical agent or helper
 13. Hero reacts to future donor /helper
 14. Hero acquires magical agent
 15. Hero delivered to object of search
 16. Hero and villain join in direct combat
 17. Hero is branded (wounded, marked, or receives token)

18. Villain is defeated
 19. Initial misfortune is ended
 20. Hero returns
 21. Hero is pursued
 22. Hero is rescued from pursuit
 23. Hero arrives unrecognized
 24. False hero presents claims
 25. A difficult task is proposed to the hero
 26. The task is resolved
 27. The hero is recognized
 28. False hero or villain is exposed
 29. Hero receives new appearance (new looks, castle, clothes)
 30. Villain is punished
 31. Hero is married, ascends throne
- The full outline can be found in *The Morphology of the Folk Tale*, 2nd ed., rev. (Austin: University of Texas, 1968).
2. Raglan's points are as follows:
 1. The hero's mother is a royal virgin.
 2. His father is king and
 3. Often a near relative of the mother, but
 4. The circumstances of his conception are unusual, and
 5. He is also reputed to be the son of a god.
 6. At his birth an attempt is made, usually by his father or maternal grandfather, to kill him, but
 7. He is spirited away, and
 8. Reared by foster parents in a far country.
 9. We are told nothing of his childhood, but
 10. On reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom.
 11. After a victory over the king and/or a giant, dragon or wild beast
 12. He marries a princess, often the daughter of his predecessor, and
 13. Becomes king.
 14. For a time he rules uneventfully, and
 15. Prescribes laws, but
 16. Later he loses favor with the gods and/or his subjects,
 17. Is driven from the throne and city, after which
 18. He meets with a mysterious death
 19. Often on top of a hill.
 20. His children, if any, do not succeed him.
 21. His body is not buried, but nevertheless,
 22. He has one or more holy sepulchers.

From *The Hero*. (New York: Vintage, 1956), 174-5.
 3. Joseph L. Henderson in Carl G. Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1964), 110.
 4. Campbell's points are as follows:
 1. Hero receives a call to adventure
 2. H. refuses the call
 3. H. receives supernatural aid (a guide, a talisman, a power)
 4. H. crosses the first threshold, often with brother-battle
 5. The belly of the whale, or underworld
 6. The road of trials (a series of tests, accompanied by helpers; at nadir, undergoes major ordeal, receives reward)
 7. Meets goddess, or is tempted by woman; sacred marriage
 8. Atonement with father, or recognition by divine father
 9. Apotheosis of hero
 10. H. receives ultimate boon, sometimes by stealing bride
 11. Begins return, after refusing it
 12. Magic flight
 13. Rescue from without
 14. Crosses return threshold
 15. Becomes master of two worlds (material and spiritual)
 16. Enjoys the freedom to live.
 5. According to William Ready, as quoted by Paul H. Kocher, *Master of Middle-earth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), 130.
 6. Volume and page references for *The Lord of the Rings* are from the Houghton Mifflin edition.
 7. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 2nd ed. (Princeton University Press, 1968), 101. Indeed, Gandalf shares a surprising number of the characteristics of the shaman Campbell details on page 284 of his book *The Masks of God: Oriental Mythology* (New York: Viking, 1962): "a mastery of and immunity from fire, ecstatic flight, invisibility, passage beyond the bounds of earth and to upper and lower realms, resurrection, knowledge of former lives, and miraculous cures."
 8. Galadriel's archetypal function as goddess manifests itself in, among other traits, her timelessness. Petty notes that Frodo's perception of her as "present and yet remote, a living vision of that which has already been left far behind by the flowing streams of Time" echoes Campbell's description of the goddess as "the incarnation of the promise of perfection . . . Time sealed her away, yet she is dwelling still, like one who sleeps in timelessness . . ." (Petty 50).
 9. *Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981), 327.
 10. "Men, Halflings, and Hero Worship," in *Tolkien and the Critics*, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbaro (University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 120.
 11. *The Tolkien Reader*, "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhtelm's Son," 20.
 12. *The Tolkien Reader*, "On Fairy-Stories," 18.
 13. For a fuller listing of Frazerian fertility motifs, see Hugh T. Keenan, "The Appeal of *The Lord of the Rings*: A Struggle for Life," *Tolkien and the Critics*, ed. Isaacs and Zimbaro. Keenan cites Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* as the best guide to "the Wasted-Land-and-Wounded-King theme" (72), but this book on the Grail legend is linked explicitly to Frazer by T. S. Eliot in his notes to *The Waste Land*.
 14. In a letter to Michael Waldman, for instance, he says of his stories, "They arose in my mind as 'given' things . . . always I had the sense of recording what was already 'there', somewhere: not of 'inventing.'" (*Letters* 145)
 15. *Creative Mythology*, 7. In modern secular times, according to Campbell in this volume, myth is no longer the ethnic and religious code it once was, but an expression of "elementary ideas." The mythopoeic thinker must intelligently make use "not of one mythology only but of all of the dead and set-fast symbologies of the past, [which] will enable the individual to anticipate and activate in himself the centers of his own creative imagination, out of which his own myth and life-building . . . may then unfold" (677). This process of "creative mythology" suggests Tolkien's own efforts at "sub-creation."