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Samwise Gamgee: Beauty, Truth, and Heroism in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

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## Abstract

*The Lord of the Rings* is a well-established part of fantasy's literary canon because of J.R.R. Tolkien's creative imaginary setting and his use of legendary characters. However, this story, and in particular, its use of the archetypal hero's journey deals not only in the Beauty of myth, but also in the universal Truth of Story. Tolkien combines aspects of well-established archetypes with unchanging Truth in order to create a fitting and ultimately Good depiction of heroism. This thesis seeks to examine how Samwise Gamgee, an unexpected hero, experiences or does not experience the stages of Joseph Campbell's Adventure of the Hero with the intention of discovering how both Truth and Beauty play into unconventional heroism.

Dedication

To my husband, Steven who did not quell my love for Tolkien and who, in patiently supporting my thesis-adventure, has unknowingly been woven into its pages and its very heart.

To my mother who told me stories of Sam fighting off Shelob before I could read.

To my father, who taught me that stories are a medium for deep truths.

To my sister, who helped me tape a broken foot onto my Sam action figure when we were children and who spent countless hours playing, reading, and adventuring with me.

To Taylor, my oldest and dearest friend.

To Sabrina, my Sam, and Caitlin, who loved Tolkien alongside me.

To Sean Astin for embodying and portraying beloved Sam, and for getting it right!

To Dr. Prior, who taught me about form and content, and to whom I owe a deep debt of gratitude.

To Dr. Heady, the inexhaustible wealth of knowledge, time, and generosity.

To Dr. Melton, my fellow Tolkien-lover and close-reader.

And to Professor Tolkien, without whom my life would be a little more drear.

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## Introduction: Situating Sam in a World of Heroes

Heroism in literature is an evolving entity, and many times, literary heroes embody traits that are characteristic of the age in which they exist or the time when their stories were written. Classical heroes, including figures like Prometheus, Jason, and Aeneas were established in Greek and Roman oral and written tradition, and typically were characterized by prowess, whether physical, mental, or moral. The very word “hero” is etymologically derived from the Greek *heros* which means “demi-god,” or “man who exhibits great bravery”;<sup>1</sup> “hero” originally connoted someone highborn and courageous.<sup>2</sup> The term evolved, though, as all vocabulary does, with the onset of Modernism,<sup>3</sup> characterized by a more jaded view of the world, especially the Western world, and Postmodernism, where identity and morality’s definitions wobbled. In the last century, “hero” has come to be associated with the term “protagonist.”<sup>4</sup> Despite the evolving definition of the literary hero, there are some enduring aspects of heroism that transcend the pendulum-swing of time, and J.R.R. Tolkien’s literary contribution and fleshing out of the heroic ideal, though not as exhaustive as those of some of his British predecessors’, is among them. *The Lord of the Rings*, the book that Tolkien wrote on and off for decades of his life, has become an icon not only of its age, but of the medieval, agrarian, and heroic ideal it represents. At the heart of *The Lord of the Rings*, which is subdivided (against Tolkien’s initial wishes) into three books—*The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*—is a heroic journey. The quest motif pervades the novel and causes its characters to be whisked away from a comfortable and predictable life and into a grand adventure without safety, assurance, or guaranteed comfort, but with friendship, unexpected lands, and, most importantly, the chance to

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<sup>1</sup> *Online Etymology Dictionary*

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Carlyle’s examination of the hero reinforces this idea: he begins by exploring the hero as “divinity”, using Odin as an example (160).

<sup>3</sup> Edith Kern, in a 1958 article, claims “the hero changes in accordance with a changing society” (326).

<sup>4</sup> *Online Etymology Dictionary*

rise to heroism. Randal Helms gives eloquent credence to the idea of reading *The Lord of the Rings* as an archetypal quest motif:

The story Tolkien has to tell—a story about being born into a world of heroic necessities and having continually to descend into the dark depths of experience to confront the black elements of one’s own self and the world and there to conquer them—shapes itself into the same pattern of experience undergone by every hero who has walked the storied earth. This pattern, to use another brand of jargon, is “archetypal. (51)

The archetypal heroic quest, which is simply a collection of “original form[s], image[s], descriptive detail[s], plot pattern[s], or character type[s]” (Harmon and Holman 43) in literature, is one that has been examined and re-examined by critics for centuries. Heroes who quest exhibit certain characteristics, such as bravery, loyalty, cleverness, and physical or mental prowess.<sup>5</sup> Many times, these heroes come from a royal or highborn heritage. Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* synthesizes the most common elements of the literary heroic journey and the archetypal hero, providing a form which he prescribes for mythical heroic adventures. Campbell divides this form, The Adventure of the Hero, into three stages and further subdivides those stages. Though Campbell’s pattern, laid out in *The Hero with A Thousand Faces* is by no means a perfect framework with which to assess the archetypes in *The Lord of the Rings*, its broad nature and synthesized elements of the classic adventure make for a good structure against which to examine the quest nature of Tolkien’s novel. Because Campbell draws from so many myths, stories, and histories, his The Adventure of the Hero is a viable medium through which to examine the extent to which *The Lord of the Rings* is an archetypal quest.

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<sup>5</sup> See *Beowulf*, tales of King Arthur, *The Odyssey*, *The Iliad*, etc.



The Adventure of the Hero represents classical heroic archetypes, many of which transcend time and geography, because heroism is a growing and shifting entity. What makes Campbell's framework so extensive, though, also leads to some limitations, mostly because his categories are broad and general. The stages and sub-stages that Campbell prescribes are not necessarily organized chronologically, either, and this fluidity of time within the stages makes for a loose framework which can drape over many different aspects of a hero's quest. Additionally, many of the myths and histories from which Campbell draws are Eastern-focused and filled with religious dissonance, an aspect which demonstrates a strong divide between Campbell and Tolkien. Though Campbell's framework is not ideal in every area, it examines many fundamental aspects of heroism and cannot be entirely discounted, because "[n]o critical system is universally applicable, and we have seen that as the fictional emphasis in a work of literature shifts from the relationship of the hero with his society to the relationship of the hero with eternity the limitations of the monomyth as a critical system become apparent" (Phillips 14). As Phillips suggests, characteristics that classical heroes may have possessed may not be necessary for more modern heroes, and characteristics that modern heroes exemplify may not have been necessary or even conceived of in ancient heroes. Despite the limitations of The Adventure of the Hero, Phillips concedes that overall, Campbell's framework "remain[s] useful" (14), as will be demonstrated in this examination of Campbell's breakdown of the quest and *The Lord of the Rings*.

Many characters in *The Lord of the Rings* display various heroic qualities, and these characters have been examined and reexamined by critics and fans alike.<sup>6</sup> There is one character, however, who emerges as an unlikely hero: Samwise Gamgee, a hobbit in *The Lord of the Rings*

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<sup>6</sup> For example, Anne C. Petty, Willis B. Glover, William Ready, Randel Helms, Steve Walker, Richard Roos, Frank Scafella, Christine Brook-Rose, Jim Ware, Kurt Bruner, Patrick Curry, Verlyn Flieger, Tom Shippey, and Peter Jackson, to name a few.

(1954-55) whose unique heroism, a combination of the Beauty of archetypal form and the Truth of universal Story, has not yet been the subject of an extended study. When the story begins, Sam is a simple gardener, born into a family of no significance who has never stepped foot outside of his homeland, the Shire. He is by no means articulate, but is bumbling, apologetic, and skeptical, mostly because of his limited geographic knowledge. Sam does retain an almost childlike sense of wonderment when it comes to tales of Elves or of legendary countries far from his home. When his master,<sup>7</sup> Frodo (a more classical hero, and one whose heroism is not necessarily diminished when compared to Sam's) receives a call to adventure, Sam considers this call to extend to himself and promptly joins Frodo on what becomes a journey of heroic proportions. Sam not only experiences versions of many stages of the hero's journey alongside his master, but many times, he steps up to lead when Frodo is weakened, bringing a different yet equally valid type of heroism to a largely Frodo-centered plot.

Sam is a character that early readers may not have expected to possess qualities of the classic archetypal hero; however, Sam has much in common with Modern and Postmodern literary heroes, because he both demonstrates and transcends Campbellian classifications, and because he emerges as a timeless protagonist in *The Return of the King*. Though Tolkien chose to model his novel after classical and Anglo-Saxon epics and tales, he situates Sam in a heroic light which seems to befit modernism (and now, post-modernism), which could explain why classically-oriented critics have not focused on or even identified Sam as expressly heroic. More importantly, though, Sam's character is a holistic representation of a hero, possessing aspects of the archetypal form while simultaneously vivifying that form with timeless Truth. In fact,

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<sup>7</sup> "Master" is a term that Tolkien uses to depict social status or "as an expression of respect, in the archaic sense of a title denoting high rank, learning, etc. Bilbo respects Gaffer Gamgee as a master gardener—distinct from Mister (As 'Mr Bilbo Baggins', 'Mr Frodo') which is a title of respect in the broader sense, and occasionally Master as a title applied to males not yet 'come of age'... Sam Gamgee himself becomes 'Master Samwise' at last in Book VI" (Hammond and Scull, *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide: Reader's Companion* 57).

Tolkien explicitly claimed that Sam was a hero, even when he was still drafting the novel:

Tolkien said in a letter to his son, Christopher,<sup>8</sup> “I think the simple “rustic” love of Sam and his Rosie (nowhere elaborated) is *absolutely essential* to the study of his (the chief hero’s) character, and to the theme of the relation of ordinary life (breathing, eating, working, begetting) and quests, sacrifice, causes, and the “longing for Elves” and sheer beauty” (qtd. in Hammond and Scull 667). Tolkien links both heroic maneuvers and decisions and everyday obligations or necessities to a holistic embodiment of heroism, and Sam, the down-to-earth gardener is the perfect example of the great and heroic potential that the simple life possesses. Tolkien, in a separate letter to his son in 1944 (ten years before the trilogy was published), addressed Sam’s heroism:

Cert[ainly] Sam is the most closely drawn character, the successor to Bilbo of the first book,<sup>9</sup> the genuine hobbit. Frodo is not so interesting, because he has to be highminded, and has (as it were) a vocation. The book will prob[ably] end up with Sam. Frodo will naturally become too ennobled and rarefied by the achievement of the great Quest, and will pass West with all the great figures; but S[am] will settle down to the Shire and gardens and inns. (qtd. in Hammond and Scull 77)

Tolkien conceived of Sam as a hero even as the book was developing, and he carried through to the end with this natal idea of Sam as the “chief hero” of the story. Sam is the character who endures in *The Lord of the Rings*, even after Frodo passes into the West with other lofty ringbearers; Sam has a rustic, practical heroism that Tolkien envisioned even while he was outlining and writing the story. Tolkien’s purposeful characterization of Sam as a hero and Campbell’s classical (though broadly-painted) heroic archetype can help to demonstrate Sam’s

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<sup>8</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien conversed with Christopher, who was away at war, often by letter. Many of these letters remain in Christopher’s possession, but copies and some of the originals are on display at Marquette University. Tolkien’s letters to his son are frequently cited as proof of Tolkien’s stances.

<sup>9</sup> Here, Tolkien is referring to *The Hobbit*, first published in 1939.

position as an initially simple, albeit True hero who eventually emulates the Beauty of classical heroism, partially because of his awareness of metanarrative. But ultimately, measuring Samwise Gamgee against Campbell's *The Adventure of the Hero* reveals the ways in which Tolkien's portrayal of the unexpected hero both fits and transcends archetypes, thereby pointing toward greater Truth.

Many critics have examined the archetypal heroic quest, categorizing literary heroes further and more specifically than Campbell, and these critics can aid in a more specified examination of Sam as hero. Thomas Carlyle's book *Heroes and Hero-Worship*<sup>10</sup> presents a detailed and systematic breakdown of the different forms heroes have taken over the past several centuries. Because Carlyle was from the British Empire,<sup>11</sup> and a highly popular author during the Victorian period, his work provides a viewpoint on heroism that is similar to what Tolkien would have had. *Heroes and Hero-Worship* examines how society viewed heroes in six different manifestations spanning from Scandinavian Mythology to the time of Oliver Cromwell: Hero as Divinity, Hero as Prophet, Hero as Poet, Hero as Priest, Hero as Man of Letters, and Hero as King. Sam Gamgee's heroism in *The Lord of the Rings* fulfills some of the heroic roles that Carlyle traces.

Additionally, Northrop Frye's essay, *Anatomy of Criticism* helps to situate heroes within Romances, namely, archetypal Romances. He says of the romantic hero: "In romance the suspension of natural law and the individualizing of the hero's exploits reduce nature largely to the animal and vegetable world. Much of the hero's life is spent with animals, or at any rate the animals that are incurable romantics, such as horses, dogs, and falcons, and the typical setting of

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<sup>10</sup> Published in 1950

<sup>11</sup> Scotland

romance is the forest” (36). Sam fits this description well because of his stewardship of and care for nature, which becomes a defining factor of his heroism.

Examinations of the quest motif and the heroic characters that partake in quests in Tolkien’s works are not new to academic scholarship. In fact, criticism on the heroism of Tolkien’s characters has distinctly evolved over the last several decades, but in spite of this evolution, criticism on Sam in particular seems incomplete because a holistic and synthesized account of his heroism has yet to be presented. Because of Frodo’s articulate nature, and because he is the Ring-bearer (the keeper of a magical object that must be destroyed), many or most critics starting in the 1960s and tapering off in the late 1990s considered Frodo to be the primary hero of the story and Sam merely to be his faithful sidekick. Frodo’s categorization as hero is not problematic, but when exclusively Frodo (to the detriment of Sam) is named hero by these critics of this time period, a “hole” in criticism can be detected. Though some late-twentieth century and twenty-first century critics have begun to examine Sam’s heroism, there has not yet been a complete and detailed analysis of his character in this light.

Anne C. Petty’s 1979 book, *One Ring to Bind Them All: Tolkien’s Mythology*, examines three heroic characters on their respective quests using Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with A Thousand Faces* as her framework. Because Petty presented her argument in the 1970s, only fifteen to twenty years after *The Lord of the Rings* was first published, hers is more a defense of Tolkien’s writing as myth, rather than an in-depth look at a particular character. What Petty argues about the value of Tolkien’s literary patterns, especially that of the quest motif, modern readers take for granted. Petty’s argument can be summarized by this statement:

Tolkien skillfully manipulates these mythic patterns and cycles into a finely meshed tapestry of life, which brings us to the question of the “ultimate boon” the returning artist-hero presents to contemporary literature. In the humanistic

context, the value of the trilogy for our age is translated in terms of psychic uplift. In Campbell's terminology, this means fully completing the circle of the mythic quest, extending the duty of the returning hero to the role of creative artist in the fourth function mythology." (5)

Petty, representative of the Tolkien criticism of her time, categorizes Sam as "the universal helper" (37), glossing over his heroic moments, and focusing chiefly on Frodo, Aragorn, and Gandalf. Willis B. Glover, author of "The Christian Character of Tolkien's Invented World," first published in 1971, also argues that exclusively Frodo, not Sam is "the hero of the tale" (42). The majority of critics during the 1960s and 1970s, because they were just beginning to explore Tolkien's nearly 1,000 page novel, did well to consider the heroic qualities of the more prominent characters; their recognition of the three aforementioned characters is by no means incorrect, but as Tolkien criticism continues it should evolve beyond a basic examination of prominent or "likely" heroes. Richard Roos is an example of a critic who has a more balanced view of Sam, especially considering that he wrote his article in 1969, only around fifteen years after the novels were published: "Of all the characters, the most lovable is Sam Gamgee. He seems at first to be thrown in for comic relief, but as the work progresses he grows in importance until in the last book, he is indispensable. He appears to be a bit dull-witted, but his love for Frodo sharpens his presence of mind. Sam's attractiveness comes from the simplicity of his total motivation: loving dedication to his Master" (1176). Roos has a more developed attitude toward Sam than many critics of his time, but is the exception, rather than reflective of Tolkien criticism in the sixties and seventies.

William Ready, author of 1966 book, *The Tolkien Relation* gives perhaps the most unsatisfactory gloss of Sam: "Sam, common, comical, loving Sam, as common as Tommy" (97).

Ready is among the many critics from the 1960s and 1970s who classified Sam as a rudimentary, rough-around-the-edges sidekick.

Beginning in the 1980s and 1990s, critics began to delve more deeply into *The Lord of the Rings*, making connections that were less obvious, some strong, some rather tenuous. Sam begins to show up more in articles, books, and other academic mediums in the 1980s and 1990s. Sometimes, critics labelled him as heroic, briefly discussing his heroism, and other times, they exemplified his “sidekick” nature. Frank Scafella does a biblical reading of *The Lord of the Rings* (which is common), and he at least examines Sam honestly, summarizing how Sam’s keen interest in Elves is reminiscent of the wonder that the Gospel should incite in its readers (319). Christine Brooke-Rose calls Sam an “adjuvant,” but in the same breath says, “without whom Frodo would not have succeeded in his quest” (70). Perhaps the most lovely rendering of Sam comes from the pen of Verlyn Flieger<sup>12</sup> who mentions Sam in a long list of Tolkien heroes (174), while also giving due attention to his commonality: “Sam with his earthy practicality and shrewd common sense—these are the stuff of the earth, its salt and savor” (149). During these two decades specifically, the trajectory of Sam criticism (or at least criticism including Sam) was headed upwards, seeming to improve both in scope and in legitimacy.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Tolkien criticism exploded, becoming not only much bolder, but actually chic or trendy within a certain demographic of critics and scholars. This is, of course, because of the introduction of Peter Jackson’s film trilogy adaption of Tolkien’s books. With the new movies to fuel the interest of both critics and would-be critics, and the internet to support their examinations of his work, Tolkien criticism became an extensive, scholarly, and sometimes bizarre thing. Religious writers rushed to make Christian

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<sup>12</sup> Professor Emeritus at The University of Maryland at College Park who taught courses on the works of Tolkien and comparative mythology, and who has published several works of fiction in the fantasy and archetypal categories.

connections to Tolkien's work, especially now that it was a piece of pop culture, some of them publishing academically and theologically-sound articles, others writing sadly lacking devotional-style books, not worthy of critical labels. Kurt Bruner and Jim Ware's devotional *Finding God in The Lord of the Rings* is the poster book for this sub-genre. The 2001 book applies broad moral themes to various episodes and characters from Tolkien's novel. These authors' perspective of Sam is "a fellow hobbit who was not particularly bright or brave. He did not have the wisdom of Gandalf, the courage of Gimli, or the instincts of Strider. But he was trustworthy and loyal, and that is just what Frodo needed most" (49). Bruner and Ware, in spite of their examinations based upon close reading, unnecessarily make trite Tolkien's grand themes and in particular downplay Sam's heroism.

Additionally, and in a completely different sphere than Bruner and Ware, critics of the last twenty years have, to some extent, violated Tolkien's authorial intention, bringing their own varied and creative meanings to the text. John Bishop, in a short article published by *Science Fiction Review* in 2002, used a combination of close reading and movie viewing to apply queer theory to Sam and Frodo's relationship. Bishop says, "It is obvious that Merry and Pippin are a couple and that Frodo and Sam become one..." (311). Roger Kaufman, too, suggests that Sam is a homosexual and even says that Sam and Frodo's nature embodies "primary homosexual archetypal themes" (11). Scholarship on Tolkien based only on close reading of the novel or personal opinions is not as founded or as firmly-rooted as scholarship that searches for biographical proof of Tolkien's intent, coupled with intentional research of those literary types that Tolkien read extensively and patterned *The Lord of the Rings* after. Though examinations like Bishop's and Kaufman's demonstrate the broad range of criticism on Tolkien's work, they should not be viewed as representative of his actual themes.



A good example of biographically and genre-founded criticism in recent years is Patrick Curry, author of *Defending Middle-earth: Tolkien: Myth and Modernity*. This study was published only ten years ago and puts Sam in a very heroic light: “The accent and idiom of Sam (arguably the real hero of the book) and most other hobbits are those of a rural peasantry, while those of Frodo, Bilbo, and their close friends range through the middle classes” (30). Curry frames Sam appropriately, not violating Tolkien’s characterization of Sam as agrarian and simple. Using an approach like this one, a unique heroic categorization of Sam Gamgee can be achieved, using *The Adventure of the Hero* as a framework.

Examining where Sam’s particular adventure parallels Campbell’s framework will shed light not only on the stages of Sam’s journey and how they adhere to or veer away from classic archetypes, but it will also demonstrate how Tolkien’s conception of the Quest and the greater idea of Story is made manifest in Sam, the unexpected hero. In Sam is the marriage of universal Truth and unconventional Beauty, which begets the Goodness of heroism in an unmistakably genuine form.

## Chapter One: Departure: “I want to see Elves, sir”

### Introduction

The beginning of Sam Gamgee’s adventure is reminiscent of Campbell’s first stage of *The Adventure of the Hero: Departure*, which is divided into five sub-stages. The Call to Adventure is the first of these sub-stages, and it includes the hero receiving a summons or discovering that he must take up an adventurous quest. The second sub-stage, Refusal of the Call is simply when the hero shows reluctance or denies his initial summons. Supernatural Aid is the third sub-stage, and according to Campbell, it usually takes the form of a crone or an old man with magical abilities who is present to help the hero before or during his quest. The Crossing of the First Threshold, the fourth sub-stage, marks the first trial the hero encounters, where he must step up to a heroic role after being removed from his comfortable life. The last sub-stage of Departure is The Belly of the Whale, in which the hero appears to have either perished or disappeared. Sam’s adventure demonstrates some of Campbell’s divisions, but does not resemble others.<sup>13</sup> Instead, Tolkien’s tale is a masterful combination of archetypes, social narrative, and biographically-influenced happenings.

### The Call to Adventure

#### Sam’s background: situating a hero

Sam’s Call to Adventure is subtle and undramatic; he is introduced in the novel quietly and unobtrusively, which befits his humble life and simple vocation: gardening. The first few paragraphs of the initial chapter of *The Fellowship of the Ring* provide details on Bilbo and his heir, Frodo, and when Sam is mentioned on the second page of the chapter, it is only in the context of his being the son of the Baggins’ gardener (*FOTR* 22). Sam exists within the mundane

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<sup>13</sup> At first, Frodo’s character seems to exemplify some of the classifications of Campbell’s *The Adventure of the Hero*, and Sam’s adventures merely parallel or are secondary to Frodo’s. However, Sam’s journey is a heroic arc, and his heroism grows to a climax throughout his journey, bringing him home to the Shire.

aspects of life and consequently seems upon his introduction to be a secondary or even tertiary character. J.E.A Tyler writes, “the Gamgees of Hobbiton were renowned for conservatism and a lack of aspirations, yet these faults, if faults they were, sprang from respectfulness and a love for their gentle craft; and if they were less progressive and ambitious than other Hobbits, then all agreed they were worthy citizens (and the potatoes grown by Sam’s father were locally much admired” (416). Sam’s quiet entrance into the novel and his role as gardener do not make him appear at all to be one who will gain reputation as a character and as a hobbit and be anything but one-dimensional. This introduction, though, is fitting for a character who will grow in heroic stature.

The Prologue to *The Lord of the Rings* sets the stage for the grand scope of the adventure by beginning at its roots: the Shire, homeland of all the hobbits, including Sam, a pristine and agrarian land, untouched by industry. Tolkien treats the novel as a history and a part of the greater Story,<sup>14</sup> and therefore writes about the hobbits as though they existed both in the past, in some sort of ancient England,<sup>15</sup> and that they still exist today: “[F]or they love peace and quiet and good tilled earth; a well-ordered and well-farmed countryside was their favourite haunt. They do not and did not understand or like machines more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom, though they were skilful (sic) with tools” (*FOTR* 1).<sup>16</sup> Tolkien’s

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<sup>14</sup> This approach is what Mircea Eliade calls “cosmogonic myth,” which “opens the *sacred history*; it is an *historical myth*” (87). Though Eliade does not categorize cosmogonic myth as compatible with Judeo-Christian models, Tolkien’s “historical myth” contains themes and characters that are implicitly Judeo-Christian; Sam seems to be representative of the incarnate Christ.

<sup>15</sup> Willis B. Glover discusses Tolkien’s historical and mythological aspirations: “Tolkien’s account of his imaginary world is, like the Bible stories, more like saga than myth; if we think of it as a fictional mythology, we need to remember that it is myth with a difference: it is a genuinely historical mythology. No event or situation is ever repeated or ever will be. History is irreversible and moves on to an unknown future that no myth can describe” (46).

<sup>16</sup> Dickerson and Evans’ perspective on Tolkien’s verb-tenses gives an interesting background to his purpose of writing a “history” for England: “What the reader is likely to miss, however, is Tolkien’s use of present-tense verbs in this and other paragraphs. The implications of this grammatical choice are clear: Hobbits have existed from ancient times, they still exist, and in some undefined way their world is our world” (80).

agrarian description of the Shire and Sam's place in it goes hand in hand with the archetypal "youth of the hero," which Northrop Frye discusses in *Anatomy of Criticism*:

In literature this phase presents a pastoral and Arcadian world, generally a pleasant wooded landscape, full of glades, shaded valleys, murmuring brooks, the moon, and other images closely linked with the female or maternal aspect of sexual imagery. Its heraldic colors are green and gold, traditionally the colors of vanishing youth... It is often a world of magic or desirable law, and it tends to center on a youthful hero, still overshadowed by parents, surrounded by youthful companions. The archetype of erotic innocence is less commonly marriage than the kind of "chaste" love that precedes marriage; the love of brother for sister, or of two boys for each other. (200)

Sam's vocation is, by and large, representative of a generalized and archetypal view of his fellow hobbits when the novel begins; he is a humble gardener who has never stepped foot outside of the Shire, but who has "a close friendship with the earth" (*FOTR* 1). Thomas Carlyle's<sup>17</sup> examination of Robert Burns, the Scottish poet who he classifies as exemplary of "The Hero as Man of Letters" is reminiscent of Sam at this stage: an agrarian poet who wrote largely in the vernacular and whose roots greatly influenced the subjects of his pieces. Sam's similarity to Burns helps to give credence and believability to his character; Tolkien, though his composition of the novel extended over decades and many revisions, intended for *The Lord of the Rings* to function as a mythological history for England (Carpenter 199), and in order to make his "history" convincing, crafting lifelike characters and perhaps even characters who called to mind historical figures, was essential. Sam's rural background coupled with his love for poetry and tales cause him to be parallel to Carlyle's depiction of Burns, though perhaps Carlyle gives a

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<sup>17</sup> who traced the evolution of the British hero through many centuries

more rustic and underprivileged caricature of the poet initially than Tolkien does of Sam: “This Burns appeared under every disadvantage: uninstructed, poor, born only to hard, manual toil; and writing, when it came to that, in a rustic special dialect, known only to a small province of the country he lived in” (275). According to Carlyle, these circumstances by no means prevented Burns from becoming one of the greatest British poets; in fact, they fueled his growth. The same can be expected for Sam, whose role as a gardener and steward of the earth is directly linked to his eventual Call to Adventure and extends into his heroic actions.<sup>18</sup>

Even in the first chapter, Tolkien distinguishes Sam from other hobbits by using several factors that will eventually play into his heroism. Firstly, Sam is literate, which seems to be an unusual trait among the lower-to-middle class in the Shire; these hobbits are even wary of literacy and its offspring, the composition of poetry or stories. Gaffer Gamgee, Sam’s father summarizes this suspicion: “Mr. Bilbo has learned him [Sam] his letters—meaning no harm, mark you, and I hope no harm will come of it” (*FOTR* 24). Sam is also fond of reciting and listening to poetry; he even composes verses himself at various stages throughout the novel. Literacy will eventually play a large role in Sam’s heroism, as he will record his adventures in book-form, but in the first chapters of *The Lord of the Rings*, it is simply a catalyst for his interest in stories and legends.

His infatuation with Elves and legends of distant lands, which stems from his literacy, is Sam’s second distinguishing trait. The Gaffer’s suspicion of these things is indicative of most hobbits’ view of the outlandish: “*Elves and Dragons!...Cabbages and potatoes are better for me and you. Don’t go getting mixed up in the business of your betters, or you’ll land in trouble too big for you...*” (italics in original, *FOTR* 24). But Sam is strongly contrasted to these “common”

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<sup>18</sup> Sam overhears Frodo’s Call to Adventure while he is trimming the grass, one of his many gardening duties. After hearing Frodo’s call, Sam responds with gusto.

hobbits, though his outward form and behaviors make him seem initially indistinguishable from them; when he speaks to other hobbits, though, he argues for Truth<sup>19</sup> in stories, even if they do seem outlandish: “[A]nd I daresay there’s more truth in some of them [stories] than you reckon. Who invented the stories anyway?” (*FOTR* 44). Sam understands that someone created the stories that are told and that the stories have a higher purpose than just entertainment or whimsy. Though he speaks largely in rough vernacular, Sam’s demeanor changes when he speaks of outlandish tales and peoples: “They are sailing, sailing, sailing over the Sea, they are going into the West and leaving us,” said Sam, half chanting the words, shaking his head sadly and solemnly” (*FOTR* 45). Sam has a profound depth of character, and senses the presence of Truth and Beauty,<sup>20</sup> even when he cannot articulate how and why. In answer to a dubious hobbit who asks what importance highborn creatures like Elves have for hobbits, Tolkien says that Sam “believed he had once seen an Elf in the woods, and still hoped to see more one day. Of all the legends that he had heard in his early years such fragments of tales and half-remembered stories about the Elves as the hobbits knew, had always moved him most deeply” (*FOTR* 45). Even though Sam is a humble gardener, he has “more on his mind than gardening” (*FOTR* 45) most of the time, as he frequently dreams of seeing more of Middle-earth than the Shire. Carlyle suggests that the first thing the poet (one of his categories for the British hero) must do is see, or perceive the world around him. (223). And Sam’s hopeful longing to see the tales that he so loves to read and to recite embodied by Elves in the flesh demonstrates his preparedness to accept the upcoming Call to Adventure and is exactly what permits him to see the great wide world of Middle-earth.

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<sup>19</sup> Absolute, concrete, unchanging Truth; transcendental Truth

<sup>20</sup> Sam’s change of demeanor and his chanting of the words “sailing, sailing, sailing” are a fitting form for the deep, sad Beauty intertwined with the Elves leaving Middle-earth. Even though Sam has not seen Elves in person, he has an innate understanding of their timeless and profound Beauty.

### Sam's Call

When Sam first encounters a Call to Adventure, the first sub-stage of Campbell's Departure, it is initially just a calling to be faithfully by his master Frodo's side. Frodo, instead is the one who receives a call similar to what Campbell describes: "[t]he herald's summons," "a rite, or moment of spiritual passage," an invitation or circumstance to be "the carrier of the power of destiny," because "destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown" (51, 58). As Frodo's gardener, Sam likely does not expect to receive such a summons or conceive of being called to such great deeds during this, the very inception of his adventure. As gardener of Bag End, Sam tends to the vegetable life surrounding Frodo's hobbit-hole, and his duties situate him closely to Frodo. Sam and Frodo's relationship is not merely one of employer and employee, though; Sam is also a companion and friend to Frodo, whom he calls Master.<sup>21</sup> Because he is dedicated to Frodo's well-being, Sam does everything from running errands for him to trimming his grass. Submission to authority, which Sam displays through his respect and admiration for Frodo also plays a role in heroism when Carlyle traces the evolution of the British hero: "Great souls are always loyally submissive to what is over them; only small mean souls are otherwise" (269). Again, Sam's believability and his connection to the actual figures Carlyle traces help to situate him amongst both literary and historical heroes. At the beginning of his adventure, though, it is Sam's dedication to his master and his daily denial of self to help and serve Frodo that help to set events in motion which will craft him into a unique hero.

Campbell uses the word "blunder" to describe the circumstances that can lead to the Call to Adventure, which is a situation that seems at first to be exemplified in Sam's experience of this stage (51). Campbell suggests that "[a] blunder—apparently the merest chance—reveals an

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<sup>21</sup> A term of respect, not dominion in Tolkien's economy

unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood” (51). The circumstances that place Sam within earshot of the wizard Gandalf<sup>22</sup> and Frodo’s discussion of the Ring of Power are a blunder on Sam’s part only because he is completing daily chores in a place where he can overhear their grave conversation while still appearing to be otherwise occupied. Gandalf seeks out Frodo, not Sam, with the sole purpose of discovering if the Ring he has inherited from Bilbo is indeed a Ring of Power. As they discuss deep and dark matters, a quest that Gandalf is calling for Frodo to undertake,<sup>23</sup> Sam is dutifully trimming the grass outside Frodo’s window (*FOTR* 46-54). Sam is “accidentally” present for this conversation only because he is doing his job, just as a devoted servant would, but he is swept into the adventure and into heroism because of his presence. After Gandalf has told Frodo of the great and ominous threat that the Ring possesses, Frodo volunteers to carry the Ring for a time, with the ultimate goal of destroying it and freeing the world of a great evil. Upon this pledge, though they abruptly discover that Sam has been eavesdropping outside their window because, as Sam says, “I heard a deal that I didn’t rightly understand, about an enemy, and rings, and Mr. Bilbo, sir, and dragons, and a fiery mountain, and—and Elves, sir. I listened because I couldn’t help myself, if you know what I mean. Lor bless me, sir, but I do love tales of that sort. And I believe them, too” (*FOTR* 63). Sam’s simple heart is open to a call to adventure, and when he eavesdrops on Gandalf telling Frodo about the perilous nature of the Ring (*FOTR* 63), all he needs to hear is “Elves,” and he is ready to respond. Tolkien pictures Sam, upon being “invited” to join Mr. Frodo on his quest as “springing up like a dog invited for a walk” and “burst[ing] into tears” (*FOTR* 64). He is so overjoyed that he can accompany Frodo that his emotion overtakes

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<sup>22</sup> Who, at this point, exemplifies Campbell’s description of “the loathly, underestimated appearance of the carrier of the power of destiny” (52), and also fits the description of Supernatural Aid, the third sub-stage in Departure.

<sup>23</sup> Reminiscent of “This fateful region of both treasure and danger may be variously represented: as a distant land, a forest, a kingdom underground, beneath the waves, or above the sky, a secret island, lofty mountaintop, or profound dream state; but it is always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delight” (Campbell 58).



him, and “[i]n so small a thing as the tears of a mere gardener is so great a thing as the Fellowship initially formed” (Wood 126). From the safety of Bag End, Sam cannot possibly understand the gravity of what he has volunteered to do, especially because he “knew the land well within twenty miles of Hobbiton, but that was the limit of his geography” (*FOTR* 72), but even if he possessed foresight, he still would have accompanied his master because of his dedication and his infatuation with tales.

Campbell presents a few more possible situations for the Call to Adventure; Sam, whose heroic growth is still seed-like in these early stages of the novel, experiences many of these chiefly because is drawn along by Frodo’s calling. A hero may be called to be a martyr or to begin a new stage of life, but his adventure will begin by “sound[ing] the call to some high historical undertaking” (Campbell 51). Either way, the call represents “a rite, or moment, or spiritual passage which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth. The familiar horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand” (Campbell 51). Sam begins to experience this high calling, but he does not seem to be fully aware of the significance of his journey at this stage in the novel. If anything, at this stage in his heroic development, he is not self-aware enough to comprehend that he is about to step over a threshold. Ultimately, Sam’s Call to Adventure is befitting of his germinating heroism; he is not yet ready to rise to ultimate heroism, but instead, he dutifully responds to a call directed first toward Frodo and then extended to himself. But Sam’s doughtiness and unswerving devotion, tokens of his heroic nature, will soon prove to be equal to the greatest of heroes.

## Refusal of the Call

Campbell's next sub-stage is Refusal of the Call, which generally involves the hero showing reluctance or outright distaste for his quest (59), because the one called will not "give up what [he] takes to be [his] own interest," possessing an unwillingness to sacrifice a "desperate fixation" (60, 62); though Sam is skeptical and cautious by nature, he does not refuse his call, but enthusiastically joins Frodo on the quest. To some degree, Sam exists outside of Campbell's archetypal division because of this enthusiasm, devotion to Frodo, and most importantly, his naiveté. This difference is significant, because Sam possesses both innocence and wisdom, an unusual combination of character traits for a hero, and Sam's type of heroism is representative of the Tolkienian hero, one who rises to greatness because of his humility and his daily sacrifice. He follows Frodo with the loyalty of a faithful dog, but also with a shrewd wit that proves itself to be much more than simply Shire idiom and vernacular: "If you don't come back, sir, then I shan't, that's certain," said Sam. "*Don't you leave him!* they said to me. *Leave him!* I said. *I never mean to. I am going with him, if he climbs to the Moon; and if any of those Black Riders try to stop him, they'll have Sam Gamgee to reckon with,* I said." (italics in original, *FOTR* 87). Sam's characteristic wit and fierce, realistic dedication to the quest are similar to Johnson, Burns, and Rousseau, whom Carlyle cites as examples of The Hero as Man of Letters, claiming that these writers "were men of such magnitude that they could not live on unrealities—clouds, froth, and all inanity gave way under them: there was no footing for them but on firm earth; no rest or regular motion for them, if they got not footing there. To a certain extent, they were sons of nature once more in an age of artifice; once more, original men" (268). Sam's general wonderment is tempered with a very real suspicion of new experiences, and it is both this and his hobbitish "down-to-earth" nature that makes him similar to these "original men." Though Sam dreams of meeting Elves one day and is fascinated by Bilbo's stories, this infatuation never

causes him to lose his grip on reality or in his rooted Shire-identity. Sam's joys in his life run deep, but they are fueled by the simplest and most repetitive actions, gardening, drinking, eating, and socializing.<sup>24</sup> His fascination for stories, however, does not make him any more comfortable with new experiences, though he does retain common sense and even some cautious suspicion when he encounters the unknown.<sup>25</sup> Though he possesses shrewd wit and unwavering suspicion of many new things Sam never forthrightly refuses to comply with or at least attempt what is asked of him. Therefore, his suspicions are not manifestations of Campbell's Refusal of the Call; they are merely deeply-rooted hobbitish traits which keep him grounded and will eventually play into his heroism. Though he is thrilled to encounter Elves, Sam's natural skepticism of two-story houses,<sup>26</sup> Strider, trees, and boats,<sup>27</sup> among many other things demonstrates that his initial response to the call to adventure may have been too enthusiastic when faced with the wide world about him, but he never suggests abandoning the quest and returning to the perceived safety of home.<sup>28</sup> Occasionally, Sam does think negatively or voices doubt about his adventures, though. For example, when the hobbits are crossing into Buckland, "[h]e scratched his head, and for a moment had a passing wish that Mr. Frodo could have gone on living quietly at Bag End" (*FOTR* 99). Dorothy Matthews, in "The Psychological Journey of Bilbo Baggins" says, "Just as a hero is mysteriously summoned, often despite his initial reluctance, to undertake a journey

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<sup>24</sup> For the majority of his journey, Sam carries pots and pans with him and is in charge of preparing and cooking food. He looks forward to stopping at inns along the way so that he can try new beers, and he exemplifies stewardship of the earth and its creatures along the journey.

<sup>25</sup> When Sam first meets Elves, he is entranced, but pretends to sleep while Frodo stays away to discuss matters of the Ring with them; he even pretends to snore so that he can overhear and watch over his master without seeming too suspicious. Much later in the book, Sam is the only member of the scattered fellowship who is able to find Frodo in a timely manner, and when he ends up taking on the quest himself for a brief time, he does not quail under the great responsibility.

<sup>26</sup> Tolkien writes, "Sam stared up at the inn with its three storeys and many windows, and felt his heart sink. He had imagined himself meeting giants taller than trees, and other creatures even more terrifying, some time or other in the course of his journey; but at the moment he was finding his first sight of Men and their tall houses quite enough, indeed too much for the dark end of a tiring day" (*FOTR* 152).

<sup>27</sup> See *FOTR* 368

<sup>28</sup> Sam's suspicion of new things pervades the novel, though, and is not demonstrated at this point (the very beginning of his adventure).

beset by perils in order to find some treasure, so each individual must pass through crucial periods of trial at which times part of his former self must die so that a new and changed personality may emerge” (32). By undergoing experiences that enact Sam’s cautious and even wary nature, he learns how to handle the circumstances that he once could only imagine. It is Sam’s hesitancy, though, that is a marker of his true hobbit nature, something that he does not lose as he develops into a hero. So in Sam, an initial enthusiasm for adventure and a firmly-rooted and very hobbit-like suspicion are formative in his heroic growth; it is because these traits are not reminiscent of Refusal of the Call that they ultimately prove Sam to be a unique, consistent, and developing hero.

### **Supernatural Aid**

Sam’s experience with the third sub-stage, Supernatural Aid, is very clear and is also nearly identical to Frodo’s.<sup>29</sup> Campbell describes the supernatural aid as “a protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass” (69). Furthermore he writes, “What such a figure represents is the benign, protecting power of destiny,” who normally takes masculine form: “some little fellow of the wood, some wizard, hermit, shepherd, or smith” (71, 72). Sam experiences Supernatural Aid in several forms; the first of these is when he meets a company of Elves on his journey out of the Shire, and the second, chief source of Supernatural Aid to Sam is Tom Bombadil.

Sam’s lifelong dream comes true when he encounters a company of Elves<sup>30</sup> in a wood on the outskirts of the Shire, and these Elves provide “protection,” “mercy,” “pity,” and emanate “magnificence” (Campbell 71) when they meet the hobbits, embodying Campbell’s Supernatural Aid to some degree. Frodo informs Sam that “[o]ne can meet them sometimes in the Woody

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<sup>29</sup> At this point in the novel, Sam’s adventure parallels Frodo’s. Eventually, his adventure and his heroic acts will break apart from Frodo and will become clearer and more dominant.

<sup>30</sup> Elves in *The Lord of the Rings* are not trite, impish figures. Instead, they are wise, ethereal, and humanoid in figure and form. Elves, like wizards, are immortal and are among the oldest of the free peoples of Middle-earth.

End. They don't live in the Shire, but they wander into it in spring and autumn, out of their own lands away beyond the Tower Hills...Few of that fairest folk are ever seen in the Shire" (*FOTR* 79). These Elves are leaving Middle-earth, but rest for the evening, and their leader or spokesperson, Gildor, whom Anne C. Petty calls, "the universal helper" (37) provides the hobbits with shelter, food, and an innervating drink for their journey; Sam benefits from their physical gifts and protection, and he even speaks with them privately (*FOTR* 87). Upon meeting them, his longing to see the tales he so loves embodied is satisfied, and he gapes at the Elves, overjoyed and bemused at meeting this people group he has so longed to see (*FOTR* 81). Sam describes these Elves as "above my likes and dislikes," (*FOTR* 87) and summarizes his experience with their food and merriment by saying, "Well, sir, if I could grow apples like that, I could call myself a gardener. But it was the singing that went to my heart, if you know what I mean" (*FOTR* 82). Sam has an innate sensitivity to higher joys, those above food, drink, and other basic needs. His appreciation for the Elves' singing demonstrates that their aid to him personally was indeed supernatural, because it transcended his basic needs and provided him with social, emotional, and spiritual nourishment. Briefly, Sam speaks with the Elves, and after doing so, he seems to be changed to Frodo.<sup>31</sup> After Sam muses about his encounter with the Elves, "Frodo looked at [him] rather startled, half expecting to see some outward sign of the odd change that seemed to have come over him. It did not sound like the voice of the old Sam Gamgee that he thought he knew. But it looked like the old Sam Gamgee sitting there, except that his face was unusually thoughtful" (*FOTR* 87). Sam's love for Elves and his finally seeing

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<sup>31</sup> At this point in the novel, Tolkien narrates Frodo's thoughts. Eventually, he will switch to narrating Sam's thoughts, almost exclusively, but only after Sam shows significant growth. Tolkien does provide snatches of what Sam is thinking even in the first few books.

them represents the Truth of the fairy story.<sup>32</sup> Frank Scafella summarizes Sam's first interaction with Elves:

[Sam] has realized in actuality the wonder in whose direction his mind has been turned imaginatively by stories of Elf-magic. This function of the fairy story, both within larger stories and in its effect on its readers, is one that it would appear to share with the Gospel narratives. Sam Gamgee's experience of astonished joy is, in miniature, an instance of something else as well, namely, of the surprising "turn" that often occurs in the fairy story. This is part of the consolation that such stories give to their readers. (319)

Sam's first interaction with Elves, one form of Supernatural Aid, leaves an indelible mark upon his character, proving to him the Truth of the stories he has been nourished by, a Truth that Tolkien expounds upon in "On Fairy-Stories": "It is...essential to a genuine fairy-story...that it should be presented as 'true'" (14), mimicking creation as "new form is made" which gives shape to Truth (22). And when he is with the supernatural Elves, Sam is already beginning to gather experiences that will eventually contribute to the elements, both form and content, of his heroism. He staunchly and beautifully claims that effect of the Elves upon him:

After last night I feel different. I seem to see ahead, in a kind of way. I know we are going to take a very long road, into darkness; but I know I can't turn back. It isn't to see Elves now, nor dragons, nor mountains that I want—I don't rightly know what I want: but I have something to do before the end, and it lies ahead, not in the Shire. I must see it through, sir, if you understand me. (*FOTR* 87)

After Sam meets the Elves, one of the most enigmatic forms of aid that he and the other hobbits encounter near the beginning of their journey is Tom Bombadil and his female

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<sup>32</sup> Or, the ability for eternal standards of Truth to be conveyed through myth and story form.

counterpart, Goldberry.<sup>33</sup> Tom seems to be the best example of Supernatural Aid in Tolkien's story, as he comes quite literally to the hobbits' aid, embodying the "little fellow of the wood" (72) that Campbell describes. He is neither stunning nor serene like the Elves, though. Instead, Tom's actions are whimsical and nonsensical at times, but beneath the surface, he runs deep, as an underground spring that bubbles forth. Much of Tom's speech is in verse, and even the speech he delivers in prose has a sing-song meter to it: "Hey! Come merry dol! derry dol! My darling! / Light goes the weather-wind and the feathered starling" (*FOTR* 119). Critic Steve Walker suggests that deep meaning can be found even in the nonsensical meter of Tom: "however preposterous, it can be conceptually contributive. Nonsense in *The Lord of the Rings* reveals significance. Meaning in Middle-earth can be rendered even from ridiculousness" (82). Part of this meaning could be that Tom is deeply representative of nature, living off the land with Goldberry, but residing in absolute safety and comfort; he seems to be an embodiment of a healthy and well-cultivated earth. Tolkien uses nature imagery to describe Tom: "his face was red as a ripe apple," he wears a feather in his cap, he "charg[es] through the grass and rushes like a cow going down to drink" (*FOTR* 119), and he wears clothes that are "blue as rain-washed forget-me-nots" (*FOTR* 132). Some of the aid that Tom brings to Sam and the other hobbits is from the earth itself, and he demonstrates a few of the generalized qualities of Mother Nature that Campbell details (72); he and Goldberry provide them with hearty natural foods like honeycomb and cream and clean rainwater (*FOTR* 120). Goldberry, too is the embodiment of nature. She has a "clear voice, as young and as ancient as Spring, like the song of a glad water flowing down into the night from a bright morning in the hills" (*FOTR* 122). She and Tom are contrasted, because she is the picture of grace and he of cheer, but together "they seemed to

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<sup>33</sup> Tom is featured not only in *The Lord of the Rings*, but in a separate book of poetry by Tolkien, *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*. Bombadil is only mentioned in three of the sixteen poems in the collection, which further adds to his enigmatic nature.

weave a single dance, neither hindering the other, in and out of the room, and round about the table” (*FOTR* 132). Tom’s and Goldberry’s origins are nebulous, and their longevity and changelessness make them appear supernatural, but they come to the hobbits’ aid physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and are a combination of Campbell’s male and female examples of Supernatural Aid, providing Sam and the others with food and shelter, peace of mind, and true rest.

Arguably, the most bizarre aspect of Tom is his seeming “immunity” to the Ring’s power, making him appear to be a supernatural or transcendent being. He is able to wear it on his finger without becoming invisible or being affected, as Frodo is (*FOTR* 132-33). Likewise, Tom’s perception is not altered when others wear the Ring; Frodo slips it on his finger as they dine, and he skulks into a corner, but Tom can still see the hobbit (*FOTR* 133). Dickerson and Evans add to the discussion of Tom’s categorization: “The supernatural aspect [of Tom Bombadil’s house] is also highlighted by the dreams the hobbits have there “(161). However, Sam sleeps as contentedly as a log while at Tom’s house, and wakes without remembering any dreams (*FOTR* 128). The aid that Sam receives from Tom is simple and fulfills his basic needs of sleep and nourishment, which is fitting for such a down-to-earth hero. Tom has great power over nature and those who enter his house, and he meets the differing needs of each of the hobbits, including Sam’s, embodying the combination of Supernatural Aid and stewardship of the earth; eventually he will again come to the hobbits’ aid in another situation that tests Sam’s heroism.

Sam’s Supernatural Aid is seems to parallel Campbell’s classifications. Gildor and the Elves and Tom and Goldberry are combinations of outstanding and transcendent beings who help the hobbits in their quest, but who also help him to realize the significance of Story’s physical form. Sam’s reactions to these different forms of aid vary, but they each help him in a specific manner, solidifying archetypal manifestations in his heroic quest.



## The Crossing of the First Threshold

The Crossing of the First Threshold, the fourth sub-stage in Departure, which is characterized by stepping into “regions of the unknown” where the hero encounters destructive forces delivering “threats of violence and fancied dangerous delight...against the individual and his society” (Campbell 79), can be represented by a number of situations Sam encounters;<sup>34</sup> some of these are crossings of internal thresholds, where Sam makes decisions that are contrary to his complacent nature, some include thresholds crossing over Sam, and others are outward examples of Campbell’s sub-stage. In some ways, when Sam decides to leave the Shire, with all its comforts (and excellent beer) (*FOTR* 70), he is enacting this stage. Matthew Dickerson and Jonathan Evans, authors of *Ents, Elves, and Eriador: The Environmental Vision of J. R. R. Tolkien* discuss how Sam’s exiting the Shire for the first time is a monumental moment:

These details highlight the significance of the event for Sam, a stereotype of Hobbit parochialism who also serves as an index character for the exploration of the natural world of Middle-earth. In the course of the story, it is Sam who develops most as a character, and crossing the border of the Shire into the wilder world outside is the first step in his initiation into maturity; for him, this is a significant threshold moment.” (150)

Sam begins to feel the gravity of his adventure even before he leaves the Shire, when he crosses from a more familiar part of his homeland into Buckland, a less familiar one: “He had a strange feeling as the slow gurgling stream slipped by: his old life lay behind in the mists, dark adventure lay in front” (*FOTR* 99). Sam crosses several thresholds in the first few stages of his journey, encountering threats in the form of Black Riders, and successfully escaping and moving on to

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<sup>34</sup> Anne C. Petty, a critic from the 1970’s suggests that the hobbits entering Rivendell is when they cross the first threshold (45). This viewpoint discounts a great portion of the book.

different, but still sinister thresholds. Each of these thresholds is formidable, though, and as Anne C. Petty says, “The first step taken upon the Road of Departure for the quest-journey is always a formidable one, involving anticipation, trepidation, and an odd sense of buoyance coming from the excitement and expectations of distant lands” (9).

The most literal example of The Crossing of the First Threshold, though not the first chronologically, is when Sam and the other hobbits trek into the Old Forest, a suspicious and mostly-avoided wood on the border of the Shire, where Sam is able to prove himself heroic. Campbell writes, “With the personifications of his destiny to guide and aid him, the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the “threshold guardian” at the entrance to the zone of magnified power. Beyond them is darkness, the unknown, and danger; just as beyond the parental watch is danger to the infant and beyond the protection of his society danger to the member of the tribe” (77-8). In *The Lord of the Rings*, though there is no living guardian of the threshold, there is a gate guarding the entrance to a forest—which is very ominous and foreboding. Tolkien writes of the looming forest and the gate, that “[the forest] was dark and damp. At the far end it was closed by a gate of thick-set iron bars. Merry got down and unlocked the gate, and when they had all passed through he pushed it to again. It shut with a clang, and the lock clicked. The sound was ominous” (*FOTR* 110). Sam and the other hobbits literally step through an entrance in this threshold moment. Campbell also makes note of the dangerous entities contained within the dark places that follow the first threshold: “The folk mythologies populate with deceitful and dangerous presences every desert place outside the normal traffic of the village” (78). The Old Forest certainly has a reputation and has been “populate[d] with deceitful and dangerous presences” (Campbell 78), namely, its suspicious trees, all connected to one sinister force. Merry, the hobbit most familiar with the forest says, “And the trees do not like strangers. They watch you. They are usually content merely to watch you, as long as daylight

lasts, and don't do much. Occasionally the most unfriendly ones may drop a branch, or stick a root out, or grasp at you with a long trailer" (*FOTR* 110). But next, Merry reveals that at night, the trees come very much more "alive," and that there was once a point in history where they attempted to subdue the land on the border of the Old Forest and the Shire (*FOTR* 110). The trees alone are foreboding enough to make the Old Forest a viable reflection of Campbell's descriptions of the Threshold, over which Sam passes on his journey to heroism.

Campbell suggests that the threshold contains creatures or beings that the hero encounters which are ambiguous in nature: they may look comforting, safe, or even seductive, but when their true character is revealed, they are terrifying. One such instance is a seemingly sleepy, shade-giving willow tree by the river, providing a place for the hobbits to rest for a moment; but the other hobbits' lapse in judgment is a chance for Sam to enact his first heroic rescue. Frodo, Merry, and Pippin all feel inexorable (and sudden) sleep stealing over them and lie down to shut their eyes (*FOTR* 116-17). When the four hobbits encounter Old Man Willow, Sam is the only one of the four who nurtures a nagging suspicion about the tree. As the others drop off one by one, "Sam sat down and scratched his head, and yawned like a cavern. He was worried. The afternoon was getting late, and he thought this sudden sleepiness uncanny. 'There's more behind this than sun and warm air,' he muttered to himself. 'I don't like this great big tree. I don't trust it. Hark at it singing about sleep now! This won't do at all'" (*FOTR* 117). This suspicion and mistrust blooms into Sam's first real heroic act; he is the only one of the four hobbits who is not tricked into sleep by the great willow, instead pinching himself to stay awake and watch out for trouble, he sees that the willow is actually very much "alive" and ambulatory, with a nefarious plot to entrap the hobbits. When the sinister tree begins moving and slowly entangles his friends, Sam's vigilance pays off. He rescues Frodo from the clutches of a root, and then they discover that the other two hobbits are trapped within the trunk of the willow, which has opened, drew

them in, and then snapped shut again. Randall Helms also gives credence to the argument that Sam's trial with Old Man Willow is a significant heroic step: "The earliest outward sign of Sam's worth appears in the second preliminary adventure, when he saves the charmed and sleeping Frodo from Old Man Willow. Here...Frodo is powerless to act in his own defense, requiring help from both a rapidly maturing Sam and Tom Bombadil" (86). When Sam crosses the threshold of the Old Forest and encounters strange and wonderful beings, his heroism experiences its first extended test where he must make quick, initially unaided decisions, and Sam demonstrates that he possesses more than just a quiet, bumbling nature; his shrewdness and mistrust of strange things prove heroic and even salvific for both himself and his friends, adding elements of Truth to an already-established archetype.

### **The Belly of the Whale**

For the fifth and final sub-stage of the Departure category, the hero experiences The Belly of the Whale, where "the hero appears to have died or disappeared" (Campbell 90). At this point in the adventure, "[t]he hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown," and his companions may think he has been literally swallowed, as Jonah was by the great fish, or simply that he is deceased (90-91). In chapter eight of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, "Fog on the Barrow Downs" the tale is told first from the third person plural; the hobbits are described as a group. But when the hobbits become separated, the narration switches from "they" ("Their going was very slow") (*FOTR* 138) to "he" ("he looked back and found that he was alone") (*FOTR* 139). For pages, the tale is told mostly from the perspective of Frodo, a shift which is important, because it takes the focus off of Sam, from whose perspective the adventure with Old Man Willow was told and helps to make it appear that he has perished. After leaving the Old Forest, the hobbits venture through an open land on horseback. Enjoying the warm sun and green grass, they decide to lie down for a moment beside

some ancient ruins and the inevitable happens: they accidentally fall asleep, with Sam among the guilty this time. When they awake they find that the bright and cheery resting spot has become an ominous and foggy one: “they awoke suddenly and uncomfortably from a sleep they had never meant to take...The sun, a pale and watery yellow, was gleaming through the mist just above the west wall of the hollow in which they lay; north, south, and east, beyond the wall the fog was thick, cold, and white. The air was silent, heavy, and chill” (*FOTR* 137). The four hobbits become separated in the dense fog, and Frodo cannot find his three companions; this is where the shift in perspective occurs. He is taken by a Barrow-wight, a ghastly spirit that haunts the ruins and when he wakes up he sees a frightening sight:

Sam, Pippin, and Merry. They were on their backs and their faces looked deathly-pale; and they were clad in white. About them lay many treasures of gold maybe, though in that light they looked cold and unlovely. On their heads were circlets, gold chains were about their waists, and on their fingers were many rings. Swords lay by their sides, and shields were at their feet. But across their three necks lay one long naked sword. (*FOTR* 140)

To Frodo’s eyes, Sam, the first character listed in Frodo’s account, appears to be dead or at least in a deep sleep after he disappears (*FOTR* 141). Alarming, “Round the corner a long arm was groping, walking on its fingers towards Sam, who was lying nearest, and towards the hilt of the sword that lay upon him” (*FOTR* 141). With the combination of the cold steel sword, the burial-type clothes, and the imminent threat of the Barrow, Sam’s death at this point in the story seems feasible both to readers and to Frodo himself. Upon the Barrow-downs, Sam appears to have perished, just as he was beginning to step up to a heroic role.

Ultimately, of course, though Sam was in danger of death, he is not killed, and he is able to emerge from this frightful experience with the help of Frodo and Tom Bombadil, who comes

to the hobbits' aid again in the nick of time. Sam's brush with death demonstrates his humanity and also helps to solidify Bombadil's role as a source of Supernatural Aid. The adventure in "Fog on the Barrow-downs" is the beginning of many tests and trials that Sam will encounter and rise above.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the beginnings of Sam's heroic journey prove to be archetypal while still allowing him to be a very original and unique character manifesting unconventional Beauty and foundational Truth. Sam, who initially does not appear to be heroic at all, starts on his adventure simply as a companion and servant for his master, Frodo, but quickly proves to be an integral part of the journey. In the first book of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Sam saves Frodo and helps to save the other hobbits from danger. His journey resembles many of Campbell's sub-stages in the larger stage Departure, but he also retains his individualism and personality. Sam's heroic growth has only begun at this point; he will continue to rise to heroism, breaking expectations, challenging archetypes, and proving himself to be a True hero.

**Chapter Two: Initiation: “Yet such is oft the course of deeds that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere”**

**Introduction**

The second stage of Campbell’s Adventure of the Hero, Initiation, consists of many trials and unexpected happenings along the way. This stage is subdivided into six sub-stages, the first of which is The Road of Trials, a series of difficult or harrowing experiences the hero must encounter and overcome. Next is The Meeting with the Goddess, where the hero is introduced to an otherworldly or transcendent female; she may be his love interest, or she may embody a mother-figure. After The Meeting with the Goddess, the hero experiences the third sub-stage of Initiation, Woman as Temptress. This woman could be the goddess figure, or she could be another, more sinister female. After the hero overcomes the temptation, he, according to Campbell, experiences Atonement with the Father, where he comes to terms with either a father-figure, or an inverse father-figure, which Campbell names the “ogre.” The fifth sub-stage, which is clearly reflected in Sam’s journey, is Apotheosis, a keen moment of spiritual revelation for the hero. Lastly, the hero receives The Ultimate Boon, a magical object which signifies the climax of his quest (Campbell 97).

Sam certainly experiences an Initiation, though not in all the ways Campbell prescribes. As Sam continues on his journey with Frodo and the other hobbits, the tests, temptations, and trials with which he is met provide him with a definite chance to either rise to heroism, or sink into death and obscurity. This particular stage of Campbell’s framework fittingly reflects Sam’s adventure, because in varying ways, Sam experiences at least a version of most of these sub-stages, though not necessarily in the same chronology as Campbell presents them. Some of Sam’s actions and the situations he finds himself involved in are extremely archetypal; others are

Tolkien's fresh take on common storylines and adventures. Either way, Sam continues to both fit into and transcend archetypes because of his innate heroic qualities and his fitting reactions to tests of faith, of devotion, and of tenacity.

### **The Road of Trials**

The first sub-stage in Initiation, The Road of Trials, reflects the largest portion of Sam's particular adventure, for he is constantly encountering trials and harrowing experiences.

Campbell says that after the hero crosses the first threshold, he "moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials...covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into the region. Or it may be that he here discovers for the first time that there is a benign power everywhere supporting him in his superhuman passage" (97). Sam certainly experiences the "succession of trials" (97) which Campbell outlines, and throughout these trials, he is assisted by various and unexpected individuals; even when he finds himself alone, he still feels that the strength found in light and goodness bolsters him up and gives him courage to continue on the quest.<sup>35</sup> Though some of Sam's trials increase in potency as he journeys nearer and nearer to Mordor, his reactions to them can functionally be categorized by three different forms of heroism: heroism stemming from loyalty to Frodo, heroism rooted in a shrewd wit and love for story, and heroism grafted onto a simple love for and stewardship of Middle-earth. These individual motives drive Sam, whether he is aware of them or not and help him cope with external pressure. Additionally, they embody characteristics that he possessed even before he left the Shire. Sam possesses the ability to develop into a hero because of his bravery, willingness, and good sense, but it is his daily, unflagging strength of character and his reactions to the trials

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<sup>35</sup> Sam finds hope when he gazes up at the stars (*ROTK* 922) and at blooming flowers growing amidst wreckage (*TTT* 702).



he encounters<sup>36</sup> that provide fertile soil where the seeds of heroism can be nourished and eventually grow and thrive.

### **Loyalty**

According to Colin Duriez, “servanthood and loyalty are...heroic qualities,” and Sam’s unwavering loyalty to Frodo is an aspect of his heroism, especially during his version of Campbell’s *The Road of Trials* (115). Before he even leaves the Shire, Sam and the other hobbits encounter their first trial: they are pursued by Ringwraiths, and in this initial test, Sam demonstrates both loyalty to Frodo and a knowledge of their pursuers that is more extensive than the other hobbits’. The frightful Ringwraith who nearly discovers the hobbits “seem[s] to crouch in the saddle [and is] wrapped in a great black cloak and hood, so that only his boots in the high stirrups showed below; his face was shadowed and invisible...From inside the hood [comes] a noise as of someone sniffing to catch an elusive scent...his head turn[s] from side to side of the road” (*FOTR* 74-5). Though the Ringwraiths are an imminent physical threat, much of the horror they induce is connected to what Campbell refers to as “psychological danger” (104). Unknown to the hobbits, they are like night terrors come to life, “the beginning of the long and really perilous path” (Campbell 109). The hobbits narrowly escape, but it is only Sam who can answer their queries about the Black Rider: “I know where he comes from. It’s from Hobbiton that this here black rider comes, unless there’s more than one. And I know where he’s going to” (*FOTR* 75). In the weeks and months prior to Frodo’s departure from the Shire, Sam has been gathering information and preparing for a potential journey to ensure Frodo’s safety and comfort; Sam is knowledgeable about this subject both because he has been ever-vigilant of Frodo’s safety and because he has loyally been following Frodo’s instructions (*FOTR* 73-4). In fact, Sam is the

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<sup>36</sup> This is what David Colbert, in *The Magical Worlds of The Lord of the Rings: The Amazing Myths, Legends, and Facts Behind the Masterpiece* calls “the process of becoming noble,” where hobbits develop from “Ugly Ducklings” into heroes (13).

“chief conspirator” among the hobbits (*FOTR* 90-1). Because of Sam’s role in conspiring for Frodo’s safety, Purtill claims that “Sam’s growth in stature [is] convincing” (90). Though Sam’s information is a poor indicator of the strength and terror that the Black Riders possess, he, at this point, knows more about the wraiths than Frodo and helps to identify them as a direct menace and threat to Frodo and the rest of the hobbits. Sam’s “behind-the-scenes” sleuthing and his quiet gathering of information are indicative of his loyalty to Frodo, but also helps him to pass through an initial trial unscathed, thus demonstrating that Sam’s trials reflect this portion of Campbell’s categorization of the hero.

Even his characteristic willingness to serve can be seen as an aspect of Sam’s heroic loyalty; Purtill links Chesterton’s description of Saint Francis to Sam’s vocation, demonstrating that it is a life-calling: “He found his vocation in being the secondary character, the servant” (89). When Sam volunteers to accompany Frodo and the Fellowship of the Ring on the journey to Mordor, this act of servanthood results in a class promotion of sorts, giving him equal status among the heterogeneous members of the company (hobbits, and Elf, a Dwarf, a Wizard, and Men) (*FOTR* 272). Though Sam is not highborn, his membership in the Fellowship of the Ring proves that in Tolkien’s economy, heroics are not based simply on status; heroism is either earned or spurned and is not fixed. Sam chooses to be loyal to Frodo, which, in turn, enables him to interact with and be equal to varied and honorable inhabitants of Middle-earth. And Sam’s devoted servanthood plays an important part in the company—he aids in cooking meals and keeps watch on a rotating schedule with the other members. At one point, his vigilance alerts the company that they are being pursued by enemies, causing them to adopt extra measures of safety and secrecy and they travel through Hollin (*FOTR* 284-5). Sam refuses to be separated from Frodo and volunteers to continue on the next leg of the journey. He proves to be more than just a

companion to his Master; Sam is already a valuable member of the company and is growing in heroic stature as he grows in social stature, in part because of his willingness to loyally serve.

Additionally, Sam demonstrates that his loyalty to Frodo and the quest is higher than any other attachments he may have, proving he is dedicated despite the trials he encounters. When Frodo is seized by the Watcher in the Water, a tentacled creature that has been residing in the lake outside of Moria; Sam has to make an instant judgment call of loyalty: to choose between Bill, whose reins he is still holding, and Frodo, whose life is in danger from an unknowable foe. As the spooked pony dashes away in one direction, “Sam leaped after him, and then hearing Frodo’s cry, he ran back again, weeping and cursing” (*FOTR* 308). Even amongst a company of warriors, Sam is the first to react when the tentacles seize Frodo’s leg. He stabs at it with a knife in spite of “the horror that seemed to have rooted all but Sam to the ground where they stood,” (*FOTR* 309). Helms claims that Sam’s heroic rescue of Frodo from the Watcher in the Water should remind the reader of the first time Sam rescued Frodo, in the Old Forest; both rescues involve the hero being pulled from water (91). So, water, according to Frye is often associated with death and thereby has an archetypal significance that can be applied here: watery depths “traditionally belong to a realm of existence below human life, the state of chaos or dissolution, which follows ordinary death, or the reduction to the inorganic. Hence, the soul frequently crosses water or sinks into it at death” (146), and it is into this unknown and unknowable water that Sam is willing to go to save his master. After they have fled into the present shelter and safety of Moria, “Sam, clinging to Frodo’s arm, collapsed on a step in the black darkness. “Poor old Bill!” he said in a choking voice. “Poor old Bill! Wolves and snakes! But the snakes were too much for him. I had to choose, Mr. Frodo. I had to come with you,”” (*FOTR* 309).<sup>37</sup> Sam

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<sup>37</sup> Though stewardship of animals also plays into Sam’s heroism, at this point in the story, Sam chooses his loyalty to Frodo over his loyalty to the pony, but in this action, too, Sam is stewarding Frodo.

demonstrates his loyalty to Frodo above all else, even his beloved pony, and this unswerving devotion is a manifestation of his heroism on his Road of Trials.

Sam also demonstrates the utmost loyalty to Frodo when he is put to the test in various sword-to-sword battles with creatures the likes of which Sam has only heard of in stories. The hobbit does not shy from battle with Orcs, creatures that are twice his size, but draws his sword to protect himself, his friends, and chiefly, his master, slaying his first orc with the blade he attained from the Barrow and earning a scar on his forehead: “A fire was smouldering in his brown eyes that would have made Ted Sandyman step backwards if he had seen it” (*FOTR* 325). In his first battle, which he participates in because of his loyalty to Frodo, Sam is developing into a version of the “heroic warrior” that Carlyle discusses (206), one of the many facets of the hero. Later in his journey, Sam continues to show loyalty to Frodo in confrontations when he readies himself to challenge Faramir, “plant[ing] himself squarely in front of Faramir, his hands on his hips, and a look on his face as if he was addressing a young hobbit who had offered him what he called ‘sauce’” when he feels the man has threatened his master (*TTT* 665), and when he fights Gollum both outside of and within Mordor, armed only with a walking stick and a fierce determination (*TTT* 726). As Sam remains devoted to Frodo, he grows in courage and bravery, meeting each challenge on his Road of Trials as a hero with a loyalty both to his master and to the completion of the quest.

### **Shrewd wit and love for story**

Sam’s down-to-earth nature and his common sense shape his reactions to each trial he encounters as he experiences tests reminiscent of Campbell’s *The Road of Trials*, and his unique form of expression throughout his journey demonstrates that Beauty is more than articulateness. Sam is, as Duriez aptly suggests, “the shrewd, honest, and heroic figure considered a fool by the great and powerful” (101). Duriez compares Sam to the incarnate Christ: considered a fool by the

wise, with an exterior that masks deep wisdom and heroism (101).<sup>38</sup> Sam's grim humor and rustic nature are innervating, both for himself and for his companions, and he frequently comes up with witty or even poignant proverbs that uncannily describe his situations. Sometimes, though, Sam's frequent self-deprecation makes a grim situation lighter, because his humor is deeply rooted in a colloquial sense of home. Many of the insults that Sam directs at himself are reminiscent of his Gaffer's speech and bring memories of the Shire to Frodo. For example, When Sam suddenly remembers he has a coil of rope stored in his pack after Frodo has already attempted to climb down a sheer cliff he says, "Rope! Well if I don't deserve to be hung on the end of one as a warning to numbskulls! You're nowt but a ninnyhammer, Sam Gamgee" (*TTT* 608). Sam's humor is hardly articulate, but instead of being gloomy and despondent, it is inundated with memories of home and moves Frodo to laughter. The words Sam chooses and the manner in which he speaks are fitting for his person and for his specific, growing heroism; Sam's rustic, occasionally rough speech is Beautiful. Though Sam is frequently suspicious, negative, and self-deprecating, these traits should never be confused with despair or loss of hope. His rootedness in the Shire and his constant desire to see the journey through to its end and return home provides him with a firm grounding—a worldview of sorts—and his wit and clever quips are a clear indicator of how he views his trials. Sam's very speech reflects his unique heroism, and Porter discusses a 1987 verb study done by *Mythlore*, where Sam's action verbs are distinct. She reports that "Sam alone of the hobbits 'blushes', 'protests', 'ventures', 'grunts', 'whistles' and 'muses'. In particular, 'ventures' and 'muses' indicated a more cerebral Sam who thinks things through, indicative of his 'good hobbit sense'" (Porter 48). His practicality corresponds to deep, earthy wisdom, a motivator for his reactions to trials. During his experiences which reflect

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<sup>38</sup> Nils Ivar Agoy also reinforces the "celebration of the weak" in *The Lord of the Rings*, comparing Tolkienian heroes to "the humiliated, tortured, and finally executed carpenter's son and his ragtag following of poor and marginalized people"(81).

Campbell's *The Road of Trials*, Sam's verbalizations demonstrate that his heroism is as evolutionary and Beautiful as his speech.

Additionally, Sam demonstrates not only stewardship and bravery, but staunch and humorous common sense to combat another trial: the crossing of the pass of Caradhras. As the company ascends, snow begins to fall with increasing thickness. Sam is one of the first to voice his concern, even if in the lighthearted vernacular of hobbits: "I don't like this at all...Snow's all right on a fine morning, but I like to be in bed while it's falling. I wish this lot would go off to Hobbiton! Folk might welcome it there" (*FOTR* 288). Still cognizant of the Shire, Sam stays faithful to the quest, and trudges on. When the company is forced to shelter themselves against an outcropping of the cliff, Sam responds again with skepticism, but in his own comical way: "Shelter!" muttered Sam. "If this is shelter, then one wall and no roof make a house." (*FOTR* 289). Though Sam is negative in this situation and grumbles about the snow, his comments indicate a deep love for the Shire and a keen purpose for the quest. Sam often copes with trials by grumbling instead of panicking or despairing, and the adventure on the mountain pass is no exception to his forms of expression.

As Sam experiences the continued trial of pursuit by the Ringwraiths in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, he does not give in to terror, and he even brings humor and lightheartedness to a dark and frightening situation via poetry, demonstrating his hobbitish, down-to-earth heroism. Even in the midst of doubt, toil, and trials, Sam still keeps a positive attitude, though he does so while simultaneously being protective of Frodo. When they come upon the stony remains of some trolls, Sam entertains the party with his own rendition of a poem about trolls, complete with nonsensical rhyme, sing-song meter, and some humorous expletives (*FOTR* 206-208). Verlyn Flieger suggests that "Sam's use of aphorisms [and] his expletives... exemplify Tolkien's use of idiom, dialect, and idiosyncratic speech for purposes of characterization" (7), and this

poem combines both witty aphorisms and lighthearted expletives like “darn,” (*FOTR* 207).

Frodo’s observation of a blushing post-recitation Sam is poignant and almost prophetic: “I am learning a lot about Sam Gamgee on this journey. First he was a conspirator, now he’s a jester. He’ll end up by becoming a wizard—or a warrior!” (*FOTR* 208). A humble and embarrassed Sam replies, “I hope not... I don’t want to be neither” (*FOTR* 208). Sam brings indigenous humor to circumstances that are otherwise terrifying and grueling. His lighthearted, though deeply-rooted rendition of the troll poem demonstrates his solid, unshakeable heroic character, which is no respecter of the trials he encounters.

Sam’s love for poetry and song is dispersed throughout his adventure, but his keen interest for tales and verse is intrinsically tied into his bravery and wit during his trials and journey. For example, Sam is the member of the company who is most interested in Gimli’s song about Moria, as he expresses a desire to learn the verses after Gimli has finished singing them (*FOTR* 317). His insatiable desire for story continues to be whetted as he encounters new lands, both drinking in their respective stories and verses, and composing stories and verses of his own. In Lothlorien, for example, Sam both listens to a poem recited by Legolas, and composes one of his own (*FOTR* 339-41, 360). The best way that Sam can describe his awe of Lothlorien is, “I feel as if I was *inside* a song” (*FOTR* 351, italics in original), demonstrating that his deepest and highest feelings of amazement are intrinsically connected to verse.<sup>39</sup>

Because Sam’s life before the quest was immersed in story (Bilbo’s tales and poetry and Sam’s own keen interest in accounts of Elves and distant lands), he is well-acquainted with Middle-earth’s archetypal makings of a hero, which shapes (whether consciously or unconsciously) the way he reacts to tests and trials. In fact, “Sam turns out to be an extraordinary

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<sup>39</sup> Katie Trumpener explores the role of the Romantic bard and the importance of oral tradition in regional storytelling in her book *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Felluga 115-16). Sam’s connectedness to story and verse is reminiscent of Trumpener’s bard.

scholar for someone born into an illiterate family. By studying with Bilbo, he learns about elves and the history of the First Age, and with that knowledge, he manages to survive [trials]" (Kraus 144), and become established as a hero of Middle-earth. Though Sam is not initially conscious that he himself is in a story that will grow to heroic proportions, he eventually has moments of self-awareness, where he wonders if fathers will tell their children the tale of Frodo and the Ring of Power. Sam's immersion in heroic tales and his revisiting of them through witty recitations, his own clever composition, and an eventual awareness of participating in a heroic story himself provide him with a heroic foundation and pattern to emulate.

Sam's love for verse and keen awareness of and connectedness to the idea of Story is a theme that runs throughout his entire adventure and most especially through his trials.<sup>40</sup> He turns to both oral and aural recitation of verse to make sense of his trials and to comfort those around him, with stories or lines that are both simply witty and profoundly meaningful. A most significant heroic gesture in Sam is his evolving understanding of his participation in a greater story that will one day be told to posterity. Throughout his trials, Sam relies on the hope and the foundational Truth that his actions are not insignificant, but will one day be a Beautiful vein in the great story of Middle-earth, providing a spiritual underpinning to his archetypal quest.

### **Stewardship**

Stewardship is a pivotal aspect from which Sam's heroism grows, because many of his heroic acts stem from care for living things; his protectiveness of Bill the pony carries through many of his initial trials and demonstrates one aspect of this heroic trait in Sam. Duriez reinforces that stewardship is a facet of the heroic in *The Lord of the Rings*, saying that "[s]tewardship is also a heroic quality valued in Tolkien's world," though he connects this

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<sup>40</sup> Porter explains the importance of Sam's tales when she discusses how through many revisions of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien emphasized Sam's love for story and verse, "even in early versions of the story" (41).



particular aspect to Aragorn and not to Sam (114). Sam's individual expression of this quality is indicative of his manifestation of heroism which is strongly connected to the earth. Kindness to animals and respect for Middle-earth's natural resources demonstrate Sam's stewardship, which, in turn, contributes to his heroism. One example of Sam's stewardship occurs when the pony-less hobbits are forced to purchase "[a] poor old half-starved creature" (*FOTR* 179) who has been mistreated by its former master. The pony, who Sam affectionately names Bill,<sup>41</sup> becomes a useful and beloved member of their company for a time. As the hobbits leave Bree by the main road, accompanied by Strider and Bill (who is carrying their luggage and stores), the man who once owned the pony appears, mocking and jeering their company. Sam quickly puts this man's mocking to rest: "With a sudden flick, quick as lightning, an apple left his hand and hit [him] square on the nose. He ducked too late, and curses came from behind the hedge" (*FOTR* 181). Nursing a specific hatred for those who mistreat animals (and those who threaten their quest), Sam represents justice when he makes a fool of Ferny. Sam's commendable act of justice is representative of his stewardship-focused worldview, which at this point in his journey extends from vegetable life (his role as gardener) to animal life; his dedication to Bill the pony, even while they travel under the threat of Black Riders, plays a role in his growing heroism.

Sam's role as the "cook" during his journey is another way that he shows stewardship of the earth despite trials; he carries pots, pans, and utensils with him and prepares meals for himself and his companions until he reaches the bitter end in Mordor.<sup>42</sup> Salt is a precious commodity that he cherishes and uses sparingly, and he also has a working knowledge of herbs that can be used in stews. Occasionally, Sam can light a fire and boil a stew in relative safety, and one of these specific times occurs when he and Frodo are journeying with Gollum. Sam

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<sup>41</sup> Sam's choice of this name is clever; the pony's namesake is its former wicked master, demonstrating Sam's wit and his sense of irony.

<sup>42</sup> Purtill connects Sam's handling of the "practical aspects," like food to his grounded heroism, a hobbit-like sensibility that aids him on the journey (91).

sends Gollum off to find food as he prepares a pot of boiling water with herbs. When Gollum brings back rabbits and tries to eat them raw, Sam is mortified; he sternly instructs Gollum on how to cook rabbit and sets out to finish his stew (*TTT* 653-4). Sam is an expert at conserving resources and using them well. He frequently goes without food so that Frodo can eat, and when he has the ability to combine ingredients, he is a good cook. Though Sam is not well-traveled before his adventure, he knows how to stretch resources and live off the land, demonstrating his resourcefulness and stewardship of Middle-earth; both of these aspects help him and Frodo to survive during their various trials and demonstrate Sam's connectedness to the earth, which plays into his eventual and fully-developed heroism.<sup>43</sup>

Overall, the Road of Trials is a sub-stage that Sam's adventure parallels. From the moment his journey begins, Sam is pursued by Ringwraiths, hedged in by trees and barrow-wights, beset by evil creatures and foul weather, and attacked by companies of Orcs. Sam rises to each of these challenges with various heroic actions, including devotion to Frodo, wit that is rooted in an innate understanding of Story, and love and care for Middle-earth. Sam's heroism takes a form that is both archetypal and ultimately True as he responds to his trials in a manner befitting Gandalf's initial trust in him; the roots of the Shire run deep and drink from boundless wells.

### **The Meeting with the Goddess and Woman as Temptress**

The second and third sub-stages of Campbell's Initiation include Meeting with the Goddess and Woman as Temptress, and Sam's experience with the goddess figure in *The Lord of the Rings* proves his purity of heart and his devotion. This goddess figure "represents the totality of what can be known....and can always promise more than [the hero] is capable of comprehending" (Campbell 116). In Sam's case, the "goddess" and the "woman" are the same:

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<sup>43</sup> See Chapter Three: Return

an Elf-queen of the land of Lothlorien, Galadriel. Galadriel's meeting with Sam and his temptation by her occur so closely in *The Lord of the Rings* that there is no need to examine these stages separately. However, Campbell does describe this archetypal goddess<sup>44</sup> in a way that is applicable to Galadriel: "Whatever in the world has lured, whatever has seemed to promise joy, has been premonitory of her existence," but she can also represent an alluring and mysterious aura (111). Her reputation precedes her; Boromir says, "And now we must enter the Golden Wood, you say. But of that perilous land we have heard in Gondor, and it is said that few come out who once go in; and of that few none have escaped unscathed" (*FOTR* 338). Aragorn, the friend of Elves, corrects him: "Say not *unscathed*, but if you say *unchanged*, then maybe you will speak the truth...[Lothlorien is] fair and perilous; but only evil need fear it, or those who bring some evil with them" (*FOTR* 338). Kocher describes the land of Lothlorien as "the purest essence of faery" (94), a fitting home for Galadriel, the ethereal queen. So, Galadriel and Lothlorien are known to members of the fellowship other than Sam; the Elf-queen is a formidable presence both in their recollection and in their imaginations, and well represents the goddess Campbell describes.

Galadriel is formidable, and Sam is both suspicious and enamored of her as he and the rest of the fellowship journey toward Lothlorien's central city. They do not know that they are followed by several Elves native to that land who claim, "[Sam] breathe[s] so loud that they could shoot [him] in the dark" (*FOTR* 342). Sam spends much of the next few pages "trying not to breathe loudly" (*FOTR* 342), demonstrating his respect and awe of the Elves who are to bring him to Galadriel, along with hobbitish embarrassment. Eventually, though, the company must be brought before the Lady and Lord of the wood: Galadriel and Celeborn. Initially, Tolkien

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<sup>44</sup> Ronald Hutton connects Galadriel to "the great noble, royal, or fay enchantresses of the middle ages, and...the pagan sorceresses like Circe and Medea" (101).

describes them as a unit: “Very tall they were, and the Lady no less tall than the Lord; and they were grave and beautiful. They were clad wholly in white; and the hair of the Lady was of deep gold...but no sign of age was upon them unless it were in the depths of their eyes; for these were keen as lances in the starlight, and yet profound, the wells of deep memory” (*FOTR* 354).

Tolkien’s introduction of Galadriel reflects the goddess archetype, and eventually Tolkien depicts Galadriel as a powerful queen: “She lifted up her hand and from the ring that she wore there issued a great light that illuminated her alone and left all else dark. She stood before Frodo seeming now tall beyond measurement, and beautiful beyond enduring, terrible and worshipful” (*FOTR* 366). Campbell additionally mentions that the archetypal goddess has been sealed away by time, “yet she is dwelling still, like one who sleeps in timelessness, at the bottom of the timeless sea” (118). Galadriel’s deep eyes, her ageless appearance, and her worshipful mien are representative of archetypal goddesses, someone who will test Sam on his journey to heroism.

Galadriel’s ageless keen mind, which is “extraordinary even for her race,” (Kocher 89), seeks out each of the company and searches the thoughts and intentions of each one, including Sam, who passes her test of temptation because of his realistic worldview. When she looks at Sam, he “quickly blush[es] and [hangs] his head” (*FOTR* 357). Later, when Pippin asks him why, Sam replies, “If you want to know, I felt as if I hadn’t got nothing on, and I didn’t like it. She seemed to be looking inside me and asking me what I would do if she gave me the chance of flying back home to the Shire to a nice little hole with—with a bit of garden of my own” (*FOTR* 357-8). So Galadriel offers him what seemed like a viable chance to go home, to desert Frodo and his other companions, and to return to his coveted quiet and simple life. Several other members of the fellowship also disclose that they saw visions of their deepest desires when they looked at Galadriel, and Gimli says, “it seemed to me, too...that my choice would remain secret and known only to myself” (*FOTR* 358); the same can be deduced of Galadriel’s tempting, but

seemingly private offer to Sam. Even Sam's greatest and most secret desire in the form of temptation by Galadriel is just a simple life, not prowess or power, demonstrating his purity of heart.

In the middle of his stay in Lothlorien, Sam expresses his evolutionary thoughts upon Elves, which have expanded as a result of seeing Galadriel, and Sam's response to this most recent interaction with Elves reaffirms his groundedness, a fundamental aspect of his heroism. After having met Elves in the Shire, Sam was amazed, spellbound. But now that he has come through unspeakable trial and loss to the beauty and rest of Lothlorien, he has a fuller conception of Elves and as a result, he is able to articulate a greater Truth about them:

I reckon there's Elves and Elves. They're all Elvish enough, but they're not all the same. Now these folk aren't wanderers or homeless, and seem a bit nearer to the likes of us: they seem to belong here, more even than Hobbits do in the Shire. Whether they've made the land, or the land's made them, it's hard to say, if you take my meaning. It's wonderfully quiet here. Nothing seems to be going on, and nobody seems to want it to. If there's any magic about, it's right down deep, where I can't lay my hands on it, in a manner of speaking...It's like being at home and on a holiday at the same time, if you understand me. I don't want to leave. All the same, I'm beginning to feel that if we've got to go on, then we'd best get it over. (*FOTR* 360-61)

Sam has a simple manner of speech, but his perception of the world is wise and accurate. He can be amongst Elves and appreciate their otherworldliness while still being firmly grounded to his world and the task at hand. Even the temptation of Galadriel's immediate light, comfort, and beauty is not enough to deter Sam from the task, which demonstrates his unshakeable heroic commitment.

After her thorough tempting and searching of the fellowship, Galadriel puts both Sam and Frodo to another test that is reminiscent of Campbell's *Woman as Temptress*; Sam passes this test because of his growing awareness of the vitality of the quest. Even though Frodo, not yet Sam is the Ringbearer, Galadriel beckons Sam to come along (*FOTR* 361). She leads them silently to a hollow in a private garden where stands a lone basin which she fills with water, the Mirror of Galadriel.<sup>45</sup> Seeming to address neither hobbit individually, but both at the same time,<sup>46</sup> Galadriel says, "I have brought you here so that you may look in it, if you will" (*FOTR* 361). After Frodo does not immediately respond, Galadriel turns to Sam and specifically asks him to look in the mirror, because he claimed he wanted to see "elf magic," and he also wants "a glimpse of home" (*FOTR* 362). When Sam looks into the mirror and sees the Shire, polluted and mangled, he is instantly tempted to return and save his home from this external, yet unknown oppressor, though Galadriel warns him that "the Mirror shows many things, and not all have yet come to pass. Some never come to be, unless those that behold the visions turn aside from their path to prevent them. The Mirror is dangerous as a guide of deeds" (*FOTR* 363).<sup>47</sup> Sam, torn between the Shire and Frodo, decides "I don't want to see no more magic" (*FOTR* 363), but gains wisdom and foresight after looking in the mirror—and he still chooses to stay with Frodo, but says "somebody's going to catch it hot!" (*FOTR* 363) if he finds out the Shire has been destroyed, thereby foreshadowing the adventures to come. When faced with more temptation from Galadriel, Sam experiences what Ralph C. Wood calls "moral growth"; though he sees the distinct possibility that his beloved home is under attack, he volitionally stays with Frodo to

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<sup>45</sup> Colbert connects Galadriel's mirror to the archetypal oracle: "a person or object able to show the future" (48). He also discusses the untrustworthiness of the mirror in relation to the untrustworthiness of ancient oracles (50).

<sup>46</sup> Galadriel appears to be using the plural "you" here, based upon Frodo's response. This grammatical construction is significant, because the "goddess" figure is including Sam in her test, which indicates his status as potential hero. Galadriel does not dismiss Sam and ask only for Frodo; she gives Sam an equal chance to look in her mirror.

<sup>47</sup> Scafella's reminder of the mirror's possible connection to Christianity is poignant: "Our response to the mirror (like that of Sam Gamgee) must be to entertain and remember what has been seen against that future time when, the journey at its end, we no longer see through a glass darkly, but face to face. It is only in this way that we have Christian history at all" (325).

faithfully continue the quest, and this choice is essential in his heroic maturation (85). Sam passes the test of temptation in his meeting with Galadriel as he continues to grow into a hero.

A holistic look at Galadriel's mirror, which takes into account Tolkien-as-man, instead of just Tolkien-as-writer, reflects Sam's consciousness of his role in a greater story after he looks into the mirror, as Scafella argues:

We can be sure that, when writing this, Tolkien was fully conscious that the mirror is an ancient symbol of the literary text. We can be sure, too, that Tolkien was not merely exploiting this symbol for aesthetic or dramatic purposes alone. For Tolkien wrote not as one who manipulates language to fit an imaginative schema already fully developed in his mind, but as one who looks into the mirror of his own invention and finds it at once a window and a door to other world where wills and powers other than his own exist and wield their influence on him. (323-4)

Tolkien's consciousness of metanarrative and stories-within-stories adds to the depth of Sam's heroic adventure. Sam himself is aware of being in a story (*TTT* 711-12), and Galadriel's mirror helps to demonstrate that the choices of characters in these stories can directly affect their development into heroes or their decline into obscurity. Sam's encounter with the mirror helps him to realize that he must be steadfast and not waver from the quest, even when tempted with the comfort and security of his old life.

The last encounter that the hobbits have with Galadriel before they leave Lothlorien is when she bestows gifts upon them, and her gift to Sam is meaningful and plays directly into his cumulative act of heroism in *The Return of the King*. When they see her for the last time, "She seemed no longer perilous or terrible, nor filled with hidden power. Already she seemed to him, as by men of later days Elves still at times are seen: present and yet remote, a living vision of

that which has already been left far behind by the flowing streams of Time” (*FOTR* 373). Each member of the company receives an appropriate object, given to him by Galadriel, but what she gives to Sam is unique: a simple box of earth from her orchard containing one acorn for him to plant where he will—a fitting and immeasurable gift (*FOTR* 375). In parting, she blesses Sam and hands him the box, which is adorned with a simple G:

For you little gardener and lover of trees...I have only a small gift. Here is set G for Galadriel...but also it may stand for garden in your tongue. In this box there is earth from my orchard, and such blessing as Galadriel still has to bestow upon it. It will not keep you on your road, nor defend you against any peril; but if you keep it and see your home again at last, then perhaps it may reward you. Though you should find all barren and laid waste, there will be few gardens in Middle-earth that will bloom like your garden, if you sprinkle this earth there. (*FOTR* 375)

After encountering and being tempted by Galadriel, Sam emerges stronger, wiser, and blessed, bearing the simple and fitting gift of soil that will eventually factor directly into his heroism. Sam’s encounters with this goddess figure are fantastic, daunting, and magical, fleshing out Campbell’s goddess archetype with Truth.

### **Atonement with the Father**

The fourth sub-stage of Initiation is Atonement with the Father, and Sam’s journey does not clearly reflect Campbell’s description or examples of this stage. Atonement with the Father is the moment when the hero comes to terms with his own ego, superego, and id, according to Campbell. He may encounter a very powerful external force, or he may conquer a psychological menace that he has inwardly suppressed. Campbell uses the example of a father-figure and says that in this stage, the hero has a sharp reversal of a previous perception about this “father.” In this



case, the hero ceases to view his father or a god-figure as ogre-like, or insurmountable, but begins to see him as praiseworthy or awe-inspiring (Campbell 148-49). This figure may need to be defeated, or may just need to be better understood, but either way, “this requires an abandonment of the attachment to ego itself, and that is what is difficult. One must have a faith that the father is merciful, and then a reliance on that mercy” (130). The absence of a father figure in Sam’s journey seems to be significant, though Sam never verbalizes any sort of wistful longing for parental guidance. Instead, Sam must come to terms with himself and both the inward and outward pressures of the quest, relying on universal Truths (albeit wrapped in hobbit vernacular) that he has internalized to guide him. Therefore, Sam’s journey is not parallel with this stage constructed by Campbell, because Sam conquers his internal qualms gradually throughout his journey and does not have a moment of “atonement” where he comes to terms all at once, especially not with a father-figure. Sam’s personal growth, without the aid of a father-figure is significant, because he does not adhere to any established system or archetype; instead, he must forge his own path based upon the Truth he knows instinctively.

Sam’s literal father, the Gaffer Gamgee does not approve of hobbits going on adventures, but his belief in hard, honest work and commitment to the tasks at hand are reason enough for him to support Sam’s journey alongside Frodo; the Gaffer’s interactions with Sam are not catalytic, though, so he does not seem to parallel Campbell’s stage. When Sam returns from his adventure, some of the Gaffer’s first words about him come in an inquiry to Frodo: “And I hope my Sam’s behaved hisself and given satisfaction?” (*ROTK* 1014). Frodo replies in the affirmative and says that Sam is now among the most famous people in all of Middle-earth if the Gaffer can believe it. Sam’s immediate coloring, in spite of the Gaffer’s reply that his son’s new armor and attire befitting a warrior is not becoming, demonstrates that Frodo’s praise means more to him than the Gaffer’s approval (*ROTK* 1014). Because the Gaffer’s wary approval of

Sam when he returns home is such a minute portion of the novel, Sam's relationship with his biological father does not embody Campbell's stage.

Gandalf and even Frodo at times could also reflect the father-figure for Sam, and though the fluidity of Campbell's categories makes them non-exclusive, the wizard is better suited to enact the Call to Adventure than act as the Father. Additionally, Sam's reversal of roles with Frodo, going from servant to leader, seems to negate his master's possibility of fully representing the father-figure. Sam's initial interactions with Gandalf inspire awe in the hobbit, but his understanding that Gandalf is not to be feared is so quickly realized that the moment of "atonement" as Campbell describes is ill-fitting for Sam's interactions with Gandalf. Similarly, though Sam absolutely views Frodo as a leader at the beginning of their quest, he steps up to help Frodo as their journey increases in difficulty, eventually making decisions for the both of them when Frodo is exhausted by the physical and psychological weight of the Ring. Ultimately, in his development as a hero, Sam does not clearly experience a stage like Campbell's Atonement with the Father, because he realizes his heroism gradually, and does not depend on his father's (or a father figure's) approval alone.

### **Apotheosis**

The fifth sub-stage of Initiation is Apotheosis, the point at which the hero has endured many trials or tests and achieves a high level of understanding. Though Campbell uses highly sexualized psychoanalysis to encase his descriptions of this stage (Sam's sexuality is not deeply explored in *The Lord of the Rings*; he marries and begets children, but even these events happen at the very end of his adventure and function more as indicators of his settling down into hobbit life after he returns from his journey) some fundamental aspects of Apotheosis can still be seen in Sam's journey. This stage represents a climax in heroic development, which is delivered via an almost spiritual realization, sometimes made corporeal, and sometimes realized in the soul

(Campbell 171). For example, Campbell uses transubstantiation as the example of the spirit taking body with great and holy significance (171). Sam's experience of Apotheosis builds gradually with small realizations and then spikes after an encounter with a monster; he finally understands the significance of his role and finally sees his responsibility as a hero of Middle-earth.

At this point in the journey, the Ring has become an almost unbearable burden for Frodo, and Sam is both his physical and psychological support; through this experience, though Sam is able to articulate his revelation about quests, adventures, and storytelling:

I used to think that [the brave things in the old tales and songs] were things the wonderful folk of the stories went out and looked for, because they wanted them, because they were exciting and life was a bit dull, a kind of sport, you might say. But that's not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind. Folk seem to have been just landed in them, usually—their paths were laid that way, as you put it. But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn't. And if they had we shouldn't know, because they'd have been forgotten. We hear about those as just went on—and not all to a good end, mind you; at least not to what folk inside a story and not outside it call a good end. You know, coming home, and finding things all right, though not quite the same—like old Mr. Bilbo. But those aren't always the best tales to hear, though they may be the best tales to get landed in! I wonder what sort of a tale we've fallen into? (*TTT* 711-12).

Sam's revelation is simply spoken, but comes from a deep well of wisdom. His realization that his quest is archetypal,<sup>48</sup> as described in more detail above, reaches out beyond the imaginary borders of Middle-earth and finds its target in the hearts of Tolkien's readership. Because Sam understands that he is taking part in a story that will one day be told to hobbit children, just as Bilbo told him the stories that whet his appetite to see Middle-earth, Sam's own story takes on meta-significance.

But Sam's heroic journey is far from complete, and his consciousness of being part of a greater story acts now as a catalyst for the next leg of their journey, which helps him to summon courage and strength of will. As Sam and Frodo continue to trek through the passage of Cirith Ungol, they come to "utter and impenetrable dark," where the air is "still, stagnant, heavy, and sound fell dead" (*TTT* 717-18). The hobbits are left alone in a cave, filled with an ominous presence; its windowed eyes appear in the darkness and they hear "a gurgling, bubbling noise, and a long, venomous hiss" (*TTT* 719): they are in the lair of a monstrous female spider.<sup>49</sup> The hobbits stand, frozen as the spider advances, and it is Sam who shakes them out of their fright and back into reality with one last hope: "Master, master... The Lady's gift! The star-glass!<sup>50</sup> A light to you in dark places, she said it was to be" (*TTT* 720). The creature who is pursuing them is a spider, Shelob,<sup>51</sup> who has not seen a light this bright and beautiful in many an age, and it drives her back into hiding.<sup>52</sup> But Shelob has not yet been defeated; she sneaks from another exit and

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<sup>48</sup> Frye defines this word in a way that reflects Sam's understanding of story: "...archetype: that is a typical or recurring image. I mean by an archetype, a symbol which connects one poem to another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experience" (98).

<sup>49</sup> Shelob is reminiscent of Barbara Creed's first example of the Monstrous Feminine: the archaic mother.

<sup>50</sup> Galadriel's parting gift to Frodo in Lothlorien.

<sup>51</sup> Petty's perspective on Shelob is unusual, but fitting for a discussion on Campbell: "A complex piece of irony is developed here through manipulation of parallels and opposites. Shelob is actually a reverse meeting with the goddess, in evil terms with disastrous results, directly opposed to the episode with Galadriel. She, too is a female incarnation of the forces of nature so ancient as to be timeless, but manifested as malice rather than benevolence" (53).

<sup>52</sup> Shelob's name is representative of Tolkien's interest in etymology: Colbert explains, "In Old English, *lob* means "spider"; so Tolkien gives us "she-lob" for a female spider" (97).

overtakes Frodo from behind, and when Frodo is overcome by the spider, Sam is given his most difficult choice between his master and the quest. Though he tries to rescue his master, Sam, come too late, finds Frodo “lying face upward on the ground, and the monster was bending over him...intent upon her victim. Frodo was already bound in cords, wound about him from ankle to shoulder, and the monster with her great forelegs was beginning half to lift, half to drag his body away” (*TTT* 728). It is here that Sam’s heroism comes to fruition: “Sam did not wait to wonder what was to be done, or whether he was brave, or loyal, or filled with rage. He sprang forward with a yell, and seized his master’s sword in his left hand. Then he charged. No onslaught more fierce was ever seen...” (*TTT* 728). He fights the arachnid, which has grown swollen to an abominable size, and stabs her in the eye and in the belly, but is beaten back. When the battle seems lost, “[e]ven as Sam himself crouched, looking at her, seeing his death in her eyes, a thought [comes] to him, as if some remote voice ha[s] spoken, and he fumble[s] in his breast with his left hand, and [finds] what he sought: cold and hard and solid it seem[s] to his touch in a phantom world of horror, the Phial of Galadriel” (*TTT* 729). He holds the star-glass aloft and cries out in a language that he does not know, infused with a transcendental strength, a conduit for the heroic. Sword in hand, Sam cries, “Now come, you filth!...You’ve hurt my master, you brute, and you’ll pay for it. We’re going on; but we’ll settle with you first. Come on, and taste it again!” (*TTT* 730). Sam’s heroic prowess culminates in this battle when he defeats the spider; archetype meets innate, heroic Truth.

Though Sam has defeated this foe, he is not awarded with praise, not even from Frodo, beside whose body he lies for some time; instead, Sam is faced with the most difficult choice he has ever encountered. The prospect of Frodo’s death is almost too much to bear for Sam, because his commitment to the quest has, in reality, been a commitment to Frodo himself. Sam set out on his adventure entirely because of a dedication to Frodo, and now that Frodo is no longer capable

of bearing the Ring to its destruction, Sam is faced with a moral dilemma: stay with his master's body and fulfill his role as servant, or assume the role of Ringbearer and attempt to fulfill the quest. It is only now that Sam realizes that his commitment to follow Frodo to the land of Mordor must be motivated by more than just devotion to his master; it now must be motivated by a love and compassion for all the free lands of Middle-earth. (*TTT* 717-42). Sam remembers his commitment to Frodo, made months before, but can finally view it in a renewed light: "*I have something to do before the end. I must see it through, sir, if you understand.*" (italics in original, *TTT* 731). Going on and completing the quest means that Sam must part from his truest friend and companion; moreover, he must leave Frodo unburied and exposed to the horrors of Mordor. Helms says, "The Halfling gardener goes on to attempt the completion of the quest himself, the culmination of heroic growth that began in the first adventure" (86). Sam makes a difficult choice: motivated by both vengeance for his master and by a higher calling to destroy a great evil, he takes Frodo's sword, the star-glass, and the One Ring, prepared to make the final journey to Mount Doom.

Aspects of Apotheosis are additionally demonstrated by Sam's next series of choices as he decides to take up the Ring himself and finish the quest alone. Tolkien sets up a moral and theological conundrum with Sam's actions in this chapter. Sam oscillates between thinking he is choosing to finish the quest and that he is fated to complete the quest, and these moments of confusion demonstrate his humanity; this internal debate that Sam experiences is reminiscent of the spiritual struggle and eventual revelation that Campbell sets up in his Apotheosis discussion. On the one hand, Sam makes the conscious decision to assume the role of Ringbearer in his master's stead, which demonstrates clear growth into heroism. This kind of growth in heroism is discussed by W.H. Auden, in his essay "The Quest Hero": "[M]y subjective experience of living is one of having continually to make a choice between given alternatives, and it is this

experience of doubt and temptation that seems more important and memorable to me than the actions I take when I have made my choice” (90). Even in his struggle between conscience and dedication, Sam’s heroism is significant because, as Auden suggests, he is experiencing mental and spiritual stimuli which spur him to heroism (90). Sam rises from the role of “sidekick” or companion, and, because he is the only member of the original fellowship left, he takes on the indisputable role of hero. However, after wishing that he was not the final member of the company left, he decides that he has not simply “put himself forward” or volunteered to take the Ring to Mount Doom: “But you haven’t put yourself forward; you’ve been put forward. And as for not being the right and proper person, why, Mr. Frodo wasn’t, as you might say, nor Mr. Bilbo. They didn’t choose themselves” (*TTT* 732). Perhaps an answer to whether Tolkien was advocating heroism as intrinsically connected to choice or as intrinsically connected to fate can be found in the title of the chapter: “The Choices of Master Samwise.” Sam seems ultimately to be spurred to heroism by his choices (*TTT* 732). Kocher reinforces this idea when he discusses the “cosmic order” in Middle-earth: “So Tolkien cannot allow his cosmic order to be a fixed, mechanistic, unchangeable chain of causes and effects. The order must be built flexibly around creaturely free will and possible personal providential interventions from on high” (39). Sam now realizes the gravity of the quest and begins to be able to see beyond his loyal, albeit simple devotion to his master; he is prepared to destroy the Ring on his own in a last heroic gasp.

### **The Ultimate Boon**

The sixth and final stage of Initiation is The Ultimate Boon, the time during which the hero steps up to his role and fulfills the quest (Campbell 172), and Sam demonstrates ultimate heroism as his journey culminates into a final struggle. Most of the archetypal examples that Campbell cites are quests where the hero seeks to attain a magical object, but in *The Lord of the Rings*, the heroic quest centers on the hero *ridding* himself of a magical object. Though the

ultimate goal of the adventure in *The Lord of the Rings* is the opposite of many of the quests Campbell uses as examples, The Ultimate Boon is loosely represented by Sam's actions, which culminate in what Rob Smith calls "[t]he real theme...moral existence or, to put it another way...achiev[ing] true humanity" (82). In Sam's case this stage and his attainment of "true humanity" begins when he thinks Frodo has been killed by Shelob, and overlaps to some degree with Campbell's previous stage, Apotheosis. Once Sam realizes that the responsibility to destroy the Ring has now fallen on him, he chooses to take the Ring and its chain from around Frodo's neck and sets his will to cast it into the fire himself, demonstrating what Lakowski calls "dogged do or die determination" ("Types of Heroism in *The Lord of the Rings*"). Campbell says that "[t]he agony of breaking through personal limitations is the agony of spiritual growth" (190), and Sam must realize that he has to assume the quest to break through his perceived limitations. Hammond and Scull record Tolkien's own words in a letter to his son about Sam's heroism: "[Sam possesses a] supreme plain dogged commonsensible heroism in aid of his master... Sam now begins to rise to supremely heroic stature. He fights the Spider, rescues his master's body, assumes the ghastly burden of the Ring, and is preparing to stagger on alone in an attempt to carry out the impossible errand" (494).<sup>53</sup> With his will set, Sam begins the final stage of the quest, reminiscent of Campbell's The Ultimate Boon—alone.

Only moments after Sam leaves Frodo's body behind and begins down the corridor, he starts to feel doubt, wondering, "Have I got it wrong?...What ought I to have done?" (*TTT* 733); even in his heroic actions, Sam is still deeply human. But as Rob Smith suggests, "The people who make a difference do not set out to be heroes. They are simply people who, like everyone

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<sup>53</sup> Again, Petty seems to gloss over Sam's heroism; she gives him barely half a page: "Confusion threatens the quest as Frodo's capture by orcs guarding the watchtower compels Sam to take the Ring, for the quest must go forward. Another battle must be fought (mostly among the orcs themselves) before Frodo can be rescued by Sam and resume custody of the Ring" (Petty 54). Even Petty's grammatical construction signifies her dismissal of Sam's heroism. She uses the passive voice to write about his fighting the orcs and rescuing Frodo, though she does mention later on the page that "Sam is required to carry him (Frodo)" (54).



else, have made choices. Morality requires the identification of the *real* issues, and not just exerting power greater than that of the enemy. The key is to retain a sense of humanity in the midst of the struggle” (85). Sam’s doubt and reluctance do just this: they demonstrate that his questioning represents the retention of his humanity. In fact, Tolkien calls the hobbit’s final steps out of the tunnel, “the heaviest and most reluctant he had ever taken” (*TTT* 733). In “Corruption of Power” Perkins and Hill say that “Sam Gamgee is without question one of the most lovable characters in Tolkien’s works. He serves as the practical, clear-eyed realist who repeatedly brings any high-flown or overtense situation back firmly to earth. At the edge of Mordor he finds himself in a predicament he did not foresee... So Sam becomes the Ringbearer, determined for better or worse to try to take it to its destruction...” (70). Sam’s reluctance and questioning of his own strength do not detract from his heroism; they simply make him more identifiable and more human “during the long physical and moral struggle toward Mount Doom” (Kocher 118). Even in his pain and doubt, his practicality and his love for Frodo, elements of his heroic journey that break out of pre-established archetypes, help him to continue with the quest.

When Sam is in possession of the Ring, it tempts him greatly, but he overcomes the temptation to take the Ring for his own because of his rootedness in reality and his love for the Shire. He comes to the realization that he must either “forbear the Ring, though it would torment him; or...claim it, and challenge the Power that sat in its dark hold beyond the valley of shadows” (*ROTK* 901). Either way, Sam feels a great temptation, greater than any he has ever felt, as he ponders these two choices. He imagines himself as a doughty warrior with the power to govern and rule:

Samwise the Strong, Hero of the Age, striding with a flaming sword across the darkened land, and armies flocking to his call as he marched to the overthrow of Barad-dur. And then all the clouds rolled away, and the white sun shone, and at

his command the vale of Gorgoroth became a garden of flowers and trees and brought forth fruit. He had only to put on the Ring and claim it for his own, and all this could be. (*ROTK* 901)

Just as in his temptation by Galadriel, Sam's enticement is always connected to gardening, though when outside forces are tempting him, his role as gardener becomes a grand and kingly one. But just as he did in Lothlorien, Sam overcomes this temptation:

In that hour of trial, it was the love of his master that helped most to hold him firm; but also deep down in him lived still unconquered his plain hobbit-sense; he knew in the core of his heart that he was not large enough to bear such a burden, even if such visions were not a mere cheat to betray him. The one small garden of a free gardener was all his need and due, not a garden swollen to a realm; his own hands to use, not the hands of others to command. (*ROTK* 901)

Sam's strength comes from his simplicity, from his down-to-earth nature. Even a stronger character may have succumbed to the temptation of lordship, but Sam realizes that the joys of a simple life far outweigh the accolades of prestige and awe-inspired fear. Shippey discusses the Ring as "addictive," saying that Sam's ability to overcome its pull on his imagination is reminiscent of an early addiction or craving being overcome by willpower (139). Sam's point of view and his will in this section of the book are pivotal, even when his inner thoughts show his temptations and reluctance: "The climax of the story, in fact most of the sixth book, is seen through Sam's eyes. Sam has been described as the only true hero of the book, because he alone gives up the ring willingly,<sup>54</sup> but even he feels some reluctance at the end" (Perkins and Hill 71). As Sam journeys to destroy the Ring, he continues to demonstrate his heroism by not giving in to its temptation.

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<sup>54</sup> Arguably, Bilbo, too gave up the ring willingly in *FOTR*, though Gandalf was there to help him.

In the terrifying land of Mordor, Sam does more than resist temptation; he manages to retain his hobbit-like humor and hope mingled with incredible bravery. Summoning all his might and willpower, Sam runs past two fear-inspiring guards in front of the Tower of Cirith Ungol: “That’s done it!...Now I’ve rung the front-door bell! Well, come on somebody!...Tell Captain Shagrat that the great Elf-warrior has called, with his elf-sword too! (*ROTK* 903). Sam, spurred on by the thought of a wounded or tortured Frodo, seeks out the Orcs who have his master. He comes upon them in little groups, and engages one in battle: “He was no longer holding the Ring, but it was there, a hidden power, a cowering menace to the slaves of Mordor; and in his hand was Sting, and its light smote the eyes of the orc like the glitter of cruel stars in the terrible elf-countries, the dream of which was a cold fear to all his kind” (*ROTK* 907). In the moment of his despair when “the darkness cover[ed] him like a tide,” and his way is blocked, Sam is suddenly infused with inexplicable hope: “And then softly, to his own surprise, there at the vain end of his long journey and his grief, moved by what thought in his heart he could not tell, Sam began to sing” (*ROTK* 908). In answer, Sam hears a faint cry, and discovers a captive, but living Frodo. Sam’s bravery and unquenchable hope, which are directly connected to his Shire-roots, enable him to act as hero and rescue Frodo from certain death, a heroic quality that cannot be captured by an archetypal form alone.

Sam’s capacity for hope transcends his circumstances; even in Mordor when his outcome seems grim, the hobbit, who has grown into a formidable hero because of his dire circumstances and because of his intrinsic heroic qualities, is able to find hope. As they scramble through the land haphazardly, guided now by Sam’s intuition and bravery, Frodo is no longer capable of leading; Sam must guide them. Though exhausted and losing hope, he finds transcendent faith just when his circumstances seem the most dreadful:

There, peeping among the cloud-wrack above a dark tor high up in the mountains, Sam saw a white star twinkle for a while. 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 small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty for ever beyond its reach. (*ROTK* 922).<sup>55</sup>

Sam has a resolute ability to derive hope from hopelessness. He can see beyond his circumstances, whether they are simple pleasant tasks, like cooking and gardening, or terrible ones like creeping through Mordor, and understand a higher and deeper meaning of them. Kocher says, “This is far more than the sighting of the physical beaming of a star. It is a spiritual vision of beauty and permanence which Sauron and his passing vileness can never stain. It puts everything into right perspective for Sam and gives him peace” (48). Sam’s peace is steadfast, even in the middle of the terrors of Mordor; he understands the Truth of higher powers which transcend his circumstances when he sees in the star “a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth” (“OFS” 71). The examination of the demonic world that Frye, too presents is akin to Tolkien’s Mordor, including the possibility of hope being associated with the heavens, just as Sam gleans hope from the star: “The demonic divine world largely personifies the vast, menacing, stupid powers of nature as they appear to a technologically undeveloped society. Symbols of heaven in such a world tend to become associated with the inaccessible sky, and the central idea that crystalizes from it is the idea of inscrutable fate or external necessity” (147). It is Sam’s capacity for hope or his innate understanding of Truth, mingled with his common sense which continually evidences his heroism.

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<sup>55</sup> Ready says, “Tolkien heroes never despair; they know that although the night will be a smothering blanket of dark and the floods of Evil will lap against the very brim of their protection, even break through here and there and devastate, the dawn will come, has come so far already, the dark is getting paler all the time, the walls will hold, the water will ebb” (39).

Sam must step up as both leader and guide and demonstrate heroism, though he does not know the topography or geography of the land on the last leg of their journey. Sam realizes “the bitter truth...at best their provision would take them to their goal; and when the task was done, there they would come to an end, alone, houseless, foodless in the midst of a terrible desert. There could be no return” (*ROTK* 934). And though Sam yearns to see the Shire and Rosie Cotton one last time, he knows that it is his responsibility to help see the task through: “But even as hope died in Sam, or seemed to die, it was turned to a new strength. Sam’s plain hobbit-face grew stern, almost grim, as the will hardened in him, and he felt through all his limbs a thrill, as if he was turning into some creature of stone and steel that neither despair nor weariness nor endless barren miles could subdue” (*ROTK* 934). In this moment we see what Verlyn Flieger calls “the essence both of Tolkien and of his work...the alternation between the vision of hope and the experience of despair—between light and dark...[which] operates on all levels—literal, metaphoric, symbolic” (4). Frodo is so burdened by the Ring that he is nearly crazed, sometimes thinking Sam is an enemy, sometimes lying down like a dead thing. Sam’s empathy helps Frodo to continue; Sam reminds him of the food and drink of the Shire. At last, an utterly spent Frodo cannot continue walking, and begins crawling up the side of the mountain, a pitiful sight. Sam, gaining a second wind, lifts Frodo onto his back and begins staggering up the mountain (*ROTK* 940). J.A.E. Tyler claims that “without [Sam’s] stout support Frodo would never have reached the Cracks of Doom” and suggests that his common sense is what helps him to both renounce the power of the Ring and continue to have strength when Frodo’s has been sapped (418). Sam’s dedication to the task, his last burst of strength, and his selfless, yet adamant will enable Frodo to reach the Cracks of Doom, and though Sam himself does not destroy the Ring, he is a heroic vehicle that enables its destruction and saves Middle-earth from probable enslavement.

## Conclusion

When Sam's adventure is compared to Campbell's second stage, Initiation, similarities abound, but there are also some very significant differences, differences which isolate Sam's adventure and highlight it as unique. Sam's experiences with Galadriel are not sexual, as Campbell suggests a hero's encounter with a goddess may be, though portions of Campbell's Meeting with the Goddess and Woman as Temptress are well-represented by Sam's encounter with Galadriel, and these help to show Sam's purity of heart and his commitment to a higher calling than his own personal gain. Sam's journey also parallels the Road of Trials, because it is such a broad categorization, but he meets his particular trials with bravery that comes in various shapes and forms (each evidencing Sam's particular manifestation of universal Beauty and Truth); each of these contributes to his growing heroism. Atonement with the Father is one of Campbell's sub-stages that is not reflected in Sam's adventure, and the absence of a catalytic father-figure helps again to show Sam's innate heroic qualities and his consciousness of transcendent Truth instead of his simple adherence to a form or archetype. However, Sam does have other experiences which reflect some sub-stages of Campbell's; his version of Apotheosis is clearly demonstrated as he steps up to an ultimately heroic role by taking the burden of the Ring upon himself. Finally, when Sam rescues Frodo from the clutches of the orcs, and carries his master up the slopes of Mount Doom, he plays a vital role in what reflects an inverse of the Ultimate Boon, which in *The Lord of the Rings*, is the final destruction of the Ring of Power.

## Chapter Three: Return: “Well, I’m back”

### Introduction

The third stage of Campbell’s Adventure of the Hero is Return—and setting aside the hero’s return as a complete entity of its own is fitting, especially when Sam’s journey is considered. Once the Ring is destroyed, the story continues on, and Sam as the eternally-minded yet down-to-earth hero still has much work to do as he journeys to and arrives at his home. Sam’s return journey reflects aspects of Campbell’s Return, while also containing events which are dissimilar to the author’s sub-stages. These include Refusal of Return, which in Campbell’s economy includes reluctance to bring home the magical object acquired on the quest or return from the beautiful world he has ventured to, The Magic Flight, where the hero must escape or simply make his way out of his once-destination and back home, Rescue from Without, where the hero may find assistance in escaping or leaving, The Crossing of the Return Threshold, a physical or a psychological return from his quest to his old life or home, Master of Two Worlds, where the hero has “[f]reedom to pass back and forth across the world division” (229), and Freedom to Live, the final and extending result of the hero’s adventure. (Campbell 193). Sam’s return journey is unique, breaking archetypal boundaries, and his particular heroic growth is amplified when he completes his heroic arc by entering the Shire again, almost exactly a year after he set out on the quest.

### Refusal of Return

The first sub-stage of Return is Refusal of Return, which Campbell explains as a struggle, normally of desire, that the hero encounters when thinking of journeying back to his home (193); just as Sam did not refuse the call to his quest, he does not refuse the chance to return home, whether he is amongst the Elves or in Mordor, as his deepest desire is to see the Shire again. Whether he is faced with the temptation of light and beauty in Rivendell and Lothlorien or the

terror of torture and death in Mordor, Sam's ultimate goal is to complete the quest and return home to his beloved Shire.

Campbell describes the hero venturing home with the boon that he has won or been given, (193) but also mentions that the hero may be so pleased with the new world he has encountered on his journey that he does not want to return home (196). Along his journey, Sam is most "pleased with the new world[s]" of Rivendell and Lothlorien because of his curiosity about and infatuation with Elves. Though Sam recognizes that the Elves represent an idealized form of Beauty he is both practical and wise enough to know that if he and Frodo cannot fulfill the quest and destroy the Ring, even the Beauty and the power of the Elves will not be enough to keep Sauron at bay. Therefore, Sam's innate understanding of sacrifice and duty enables him to emerge from Rivendell and Lothlorien with little to no real reluctance.

When he is in Mordor, though, Sam's heroic journey does not represent Refusal of Return, because Mordor is a dark and destitute land, and he must cling to the hope of escaping it. The archetypal settings that Campbell uses to assemble the Refusal of Return stage include aesthetically and spiritually appealing lands (like Rivendell and Lothlorien); however, Mordor, the land to which Sam ultimately must journey on his adventure, is the opposite of these, and Sam's deepest desire is to leave its borders instead of remaining there. Additionally, in many heroic and archetypal stories, and in all that Campbell cites, the hero goes on a quest to win a trophy or a boon, not to destroy one. Because of the nature of Sam's quest, he demonstrates the reverse of this sub-stage by questing to destroy a magical object—and succeeding—instead of reinforcing it. Sam's ultimate love is of Master and of homeland, and he embodies the "kind of 'sometimes things must be given up' sacrifice that seems to make Sam the greatest among men and hobbits because he is the ultimate servant" (Walker 36). Therefore, he always considers Frodo, and his desire to return home in every stage of his quest, even as they are sitting amidst



the crumbling rock and fire of Mount Doom after the Ring has been destroyed. Sam says, “[T]he journey’s finished. But after coming all that way I don’t want to give up yet. It’s not like me, somehow, if you understand” (*ROTK* 950). Sam’s positivity persists, even when Frodo seems resigned to death and says, “[I]t’s like things are in the world. Hopes fail. An end comes. We have only a little time to wait now. We are lost in ruin and downfall, and there is no escape” (*ROTK* 950). Sam begs Frodo to at least venture down the mountain as far as they can, and they sit on a volcanic ridge, in the path of more ash and fire. In what he thinks will be his last moments, Sam wonders what the end of their story will be, and if his and Frodo’s tale will ever be told hearthside to a riveted audience (*ROTK* 950). So Sam waits for death, while remembering the homeland to which he so desperately wants to return, “Tolkien’s Great Good Place...the quiet little land ruled only by the swing of the seasons” (Helms 60), so different from Mordor which he is trying to escape. By constantly yearning to fulfill the quest and return home, Sam’s experience in Mordor does not reflect Campbell’s Refusal of Return, but he proves himself to be a hero whose quest has not interrupted his original self; even in what he believes to be his last moments, Sam does not despair, nor does he wish to remain in the land he has journeyed to but thinks hopefully of the Shire, where his faith is rooted.

### **The Magic Flight**

Campbell’s second sub-stage, The Magic Flight is not reflected in Sam’s journey, save by one small association. Though Sam and Frodo flee often, Campbell clearly places The Magic Flight chronologically after the hero has won (or in the case of Sam’s particular adventure *destroyed*) a magical object, and Sam and Frodo’s numerous flights occur before the Ring has been cast into Mount Doom. The only clear reflection of The Magic Flight in Sam’s journey is when, according to Campbell, “[the hero] is...explicitly commissioned to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society” (196-97). Sam still carries the box of earth given

to him by Galadriel, though he cannot yet conceive of the role it will play in his heroic journey. Other than this connection, Sam has no Magic Flight, which Campbell describes as a “lively pursuit” in some cases and in other cases a much more dangerous one (197). Sam and Frodo do not flee from any living enemies after the Ring is destroyed, for the whole of Mordor begins to crumble around them as the Mountain of Fire begins to erupt. Instead, they flee from disaster, and hide their faces from imminent death. Sam does not holistically experience Campbell’s The Magic Flight, partly because of the unique nature of his quest; he does however, align with a small portion of Campbell’s description of this stage, because he holds fast to Galadriel’s box, which contains a gift far greater than he can imagine.

### **Rescue from Without**

After the Ring has been destroyed, Sam and Frodo experience a Rescue from Without that is reminiscent of Campbell’s stage, where “[t]he hero may have to be brought back from his supernatural adventure by assistance from without. That is to say, the world may have to come and get him” (207). Just as Sam and Frodo, “forlorn, hand in hand upon a little hill, while the world shook under them... gasped, and rivers of fire drew near” (*ROTK* 951), the *deus ex machina* Eagles,<sup>56</sup> which function as a literary device, come in the nick of time and catch them up in their talons, lifting the hobbits away from the volcanic catastrophe and back to the safety of cleaner lands.

This “sudden, joyous turn”<sup>57</sup> is the embodiment of Tolkien’s term, *eucatastrophe*, which occurs after “apparently disastrous events, the moment past all hope when we know that everything is going to be all right. Tolkien makes it clear, however, that the joy of the turn, the consolation of *eucatastrophe*, is dependent on the fear of its opposite, the bad turn toward sorrow

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<sup>56</sup> The Eagles are a common (and sometimes troubling) trope in Tolkien’s world. They make appearances in many of his books, and normally function as *deus ex machina* figures, which appear just as characters are in need of rescuing. They are a symbol of hope and strength.

<sup>57</sup> A phrase that Tolkien uses in “On Fairy-Stories”

and failure. The ever-present possibility of *dycatastrophe* is what makes the joy at deliverance so piercing, and less to the denial of universal final defeat” (Flieger 27). The two hobbits, as a result of this joyous turn, are brought back to Ithilien, and then to Gondor, the city where Aragorn will now reign as king, and they are held in the highest honor. Both Sam and Frodo are modest, and uncomfortable with such praise; Sam is even bashful. George H. Thompson explains that “[t]he hobbits, unable to live long on the heights, are free of this hazard [: pride]. One of their most ingratiating qualities is the happy surprise they feel at their own heroics. It is not modesty, but innocence about their own greatness” (55). Just when hope seems to have deserted Sam, he experiences a transcendental mercy, a rescue done by powers outside of his control, the physical embodiment of the “light and high beauty” that he recognized in his darkest moments in Mordor.

### **Crossing of the Return Threshold**

The next sub-stage of Return is Crossing of the Return Threshold, in which the hero ventures back to the “ordinary world,” bringing with him the wisdom and experience of his quest, and Sam is able to bring home with him the insight he has gained while abroad, demonstrating aspects of Campbell’s sub-stage while also embodying simple, but enduring Truth. Campbell divides the hero’s home and the world into which he ventures into “the divine and the human...distinct from each other—different as life and death, as day and night” and he says that finally returning home is “coming back out of that yonder zone” (217). Though Mordor, Sam’s ultimate geographical goal is not distinctly divine, and the Shire is not exclusively human, Sam does experience transcendental epiphanies while in Mordor, and his deepest sense of self is rooted in the Shire. But Sam does not gain wisdom only in Mordor. His experiences in the various lands through which he travels and those amongst the Elves, Dwarves, Men, and other members of Middle-earth heighten his awareness of the delicate balance that has

enabled years of peace in the Shire. It is the connectedness of all these places, though, or at least Sam's realization that the Shire is directly affected by goings-on in the rest of Middle-earth that solidifies Sam's heroism, because he understands that safety and peace cannot be achieved in isolation. Campbell affirms this connection when he says "here is the great key to the understanding of myth and symbol—the two kingdoms<sup>58</sup> are actually one... There must always remain, however, from the standpoint of normal waking consciousness, a certain baffling inconsistency between the wisdom brought forth from the deep, and the prudence found to be effective in the light world" (217). When Sam returns to the Shire, his understanding that his homeland cannot be kept safe by seclusion from the rest of Middle-earth is completed; the Shire is guarded by great powers outside of it, and Middle-earth is saved by quiet, deeply-rooted powers within the Shire.

In Rivendell, where Sam and Frodo stop to take a few days' rest before they cross the threshold of the Shire, Sam expresses a desire to continue the journey home, despite the fact that he is surrounded by the Elves that he so desperately wanted to see before he even left the Shire. He says, "Well, Mr. Frodo, we've been far and seen a deal, and yet I don't think we've found a better place than this. There's something of everything here, if you understand me: the Shire and the Golden Wood and Gondor and king's houses and inns and meadows and mountains all mixed. And yet, somehow, I feel we ought to be going soon. I'm worried about my gaffer, to tell you the truth" (*ROTK* 986). Sam's heart is in the Shire, and an entire adventure across Middle-earth has not changed his fundamental character or desires<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup> Here, we can apply to "two kingdoms" to mean the Shire and the rest of Middle-earth.

<sup>59</sup> Frodo does not share this sentiment with Sam. Though he loved the Shire, the quest changed him. At this point in the novel, Frodo longs to see the Sea, which foreshadows his desire to pass into the Undying lands. For the rest of the novel, Frodo struggles with pain in the shoulder where he was stabbed with the Morgul-blade, especially on the anniversary of the attack.

When at long last, Sam and the other hobbits ride into the Shire, a reflection of Campbell's Crossing of the Return Threshold, they find it much changed; what once was agrarian is now largely industrialized, and Sam's swift action in setting the Shire aright is the manifestation of his heroism. Because Sam plays a large role in restoring or "Scouring" the Shire,<sup>60</sup> the heroic prowess he has gained on his quest is literally brought home and made practical, befitting Sam's character. As the hobbits return one dusk, still wearing their battle-armor and bearing their swords, they find "the Shire under martial law" (Caldecott 224), a great gate erected at its borders where once there were only fields, rivers, and forests. When they knock and are told they cannot be admitted after dark (according to a posted notice), Sam replies, "Of course we can't read the notice in the dark...And if hobbits of the Shire are to be kept out in the wet on a night like this, I'll tear down your notice when I find it" (*ROTK* 998). Sam's reaction to the perceived audacity of the sign befits his common-sense, bravery, and practicality. When the hobbits on guard behind the gate finally come out to see the four travelers, these gatekeepers are astounded by their wild and outlandish look and treat them with immediate respect, deference, and fear. Sam helps to round up the most audacious of the hobbits guarding the gate and gate-house, and even though they claim to have "arrested" Sam, Frodo, Merry, and Pippin, the four hobbits make their "captors" run beside them while they ride deeper into the Shire on horseback (*ROTK* 1003). Quickly, the four hobbits realize that the Shire is not what it was when they left it over one year before. It has been overtaken by ruffians, some men, some corrupted hobbits; grotesque houses have been erected,<sup>61</sup> and great ugly mills have been built. Much harm has been done to the land; trees have been felled, gardens uprooted, and quarries put in their place. Sam's heart is most broken by the felling of the Party Tree, which lies "lopped and

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<sup>60</sup> The title of this chapter in *The Lord of the Rings*

<sup>61</sup> Hobbits prefer living in holes under the ground—made very much in the fashion of houses, just not raised high above the earth. Occasionally, hobbits will live in one-story houses, but dislike two-story houses.

dead in the field” (*ROTK* 1017). Sam reflects Campbell’s sub-stage upon his return, and with the wisdom he has incurred, he recognizes that it is his responsibility to set the restoration of the Shire in motion.

Additionally in this sub-stage, Campbell suggests that many heroes struggle to integrate back into the structure of their homelands and are viewed more as outsiders because of their quests (217); Frodo certainly reflects this description, as the extended burden of the Ring deeply wounded his psyche, ruining him for re-integration into Shire-life, but Sam defies this categorizing and gains honor and respect in the Shire almost immediately upon his return. He does not have trouble with what Campbell suggests is a problem for many heroes upon return: “to accept as real, after an experience of the soul-satisfying vision of fulfillment, the passing joys and sorrows, banalities and noisy obscenities of life. Why re-enter such a world?” (218). Sam’s eventual casual reunion with the Cotton family demonstrates his easy assimilation back into his old life. His greeting to Farmer and Mrs. Cotton and their daughter, Rosie (with whom Sam has been quietly in love for years) (*ROTK* 1006) is so familiar, and in such vernacular, that it seems his quest has not changed him at all. Though Sam has not seen the Cottons in over a year, he rushes into their house, says “Good morning,” and “Hullo” to Mrs. Cotton and Rosie respectively, and then gets straight to the point: “We’re setting about the ruffians, and I’ve got to get back to Mr. Frodo. But I thought I’d have a look and see how Mrs. Cotton was keeping, and you, Rosie” (*ROTK* 1008). He speaks to his old friends as if he had never left the Shire, and they speak to him as if he belongs there. Even though Sam has journeyed through both magical and terrible places in Middle-earth, he adjusts to life back in the Shire almost immediately after Crossing the Return Threshold, because the Shire is his ultimate and his first love and because of his unique and deeply-rooted heroism.

Sam both reflects and moves beyond Campbell's sub-stage, Crossing of the Return Threshold. While he does not have any qualms about returning to the Shire, but intensely desires to be back home, he does "survive the impact of the world" (Campbell 226) when he returns to his homeland. Robert Plank suggests that "[t]he motif of the hero coming home from victory in battle is of course a very old one. Tolkien could have patterned his story of the return of the classical hero after Agamemnon...or any number of such heroes" (117), but Sam's return is hardly similar to that of a classical hero, and it is vastly important that he is not hailed as the savior or conqueror when he rides home across the Shire's borders. Because of the simple, earthy nature of Sam's heroism, praise and adulation upon his return to the Shire would embarrass him (just as it did when he was honored in Ithilien) (*ROTK* 953). Instead, Sam will carry out a quiet, extended sort of heroism, slowly restoring the Shire. Sam is sorely hurt by what he finds when he returns home, the industrialized polluting of the Shire, but he sets to work immediately to right the wrongs and heal the ills, and in doing so, he demonstrates his heroism which transcends archetypes.

### **Master of Two Worlds**

The fifth stage of Return is Master of Two Worlds, which Campbell describes as a balance between the corporal and transcendent after the hero's return, and he uses the example of the Transfigured Christ to represent the hero's ability to exist with a knowledge of the divine in the human world (229). Though Sam is not supernatural himself, the knowledge of Middle-earth's cultures, geography, and history that he brings home and his realization of his small part in greater matters, along with the box from Galadriel bring a supernatural element to his corporeal life. Another example that Campbell gives of this stage which is intrinsically tied into the balance the hero achieves relates to the eternity of the hero's story—he says that the true hero's story will endure beyond his time, making the actual historical existence of the hero less

important than the greater story he symbolizes (230-1).<sup>62</sup> And eventually, minstrels do sing of Sam and Frodo's quest (*ROTK* 954): their adventure has been made into a tale that will be told and retold throughout the ages, and the hobbits' tale being turned into a story-within-a-story is not an arbitrary plot device to be taken lightly. In fact, this meta-story has significance both within *The Lord of the Rings* and within the hearts and minds of its readers. Flieger suggests that when Tolkien's audience reads about the hobbits' rescue, return to safe lands, and ultimate inclusion in a great story, that they will experience "the ultimate 'turn'... For the true lover of fairy-story, to read of the turn is to experience it, and to undergo a change of mood from despair to joy, from dark to light. This is *metanoia*... a reversal of the direction of the mind. The same word means 'repentance.' The turn, then is a kind of conversion, and what we feel at the turn of a fairy-story is, to however small a degree, a conversion experience" (29). Flieger goes on to insist on the power of words themselves; just as Christ is the Word become Flesh, authors have the potential to set words in a powerful, change-affecting order (41). Sam's story can direct its readers back "home," to the fundamental, resonating Truth that Goodness and Beauty are enduring absolutes, both in Middle-earth and in our earth. Sam's Story carries with it the power of conversion, a Truth that an archetype alone cannot convey.

Sam seems to have a keen understanding of the power of storytelling, and though he may struggle to be articulate initially, his joyous weeping at the discovery of his inclusion in a great tale is an indicator of his sensitivity to the vitality of the Story. Glover affirms the connectedness of Sam's adventure to both history and story:

Whether for good or evil, historical creation has consequences for subsequent history; it is thus that past and present are linked together in historical continuity,

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<sup>62</sup> Because Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings* as a mythological history of England, he likely would not have agreed with this observation of Campbell's. History is of moment in Tolkien's economy and in Sam's, too.



and evil, or sin, as well as justice achieves a corporate existence. A sense of every age's dependence on the past and responsibility for the future is very strong in the author of the Ring books. Sam found it very easy to think of the great adventures he and Frodo were involved in as a story like the stories of past adventures he had delighted in; and with a sudden insight he recognized that all the stories were a part of one big story and that he was taking part in the *same* story as his heroes from the past. (48-49)

The Master of Two Worlds sub-stage, especially its focus on balance between home and abroad, and history made into Story is best exemplified as Sam begins his long-term work restoring the Shire.

Once the hobbits have won back the Shire from the wicked men who usurped it, Sam is able to begin a great ecological project: replanting trees and gardens. This final action completes Sam's heroic arc, because his story begins when he is humble gardener in the Shire, and it ends with him playing a salvific role in its restoration. Sam's role, as Dickerson and Evans claim, has grown to maximum importance: "But Sam's role, now far more important than that of Frodo's yardman or gardener, has grown to encompass elements of...major ecosystems" (156).

Highlighting the great length of time it takes for Middle earth and specifically the Shire to be "set back to order," Rob Smith says, "it is not achieved quickly or easily," but that "[t]he process is characterized by Sam Gamgee" (97). Tolkien's description of the fouling of the Shire outlines the extent of the ecological harm done: "The trees were the worst loss and damage...they had been cut down recklessly far and wide over the Shire; and Sam grieved over this more than anything else. For one thing, this hurt would take long to heal, and only his great-grandchildren, he thought, would see the Shire as it ought to be" (*ROTK* 1022). In his mourning, Sam remembers the box that Galadriel gave him. He opens it to find a grey soil surrounding "a seed,

like a small nut with a silver shale” (*ROTK* 1022). Sam chooses to divide the soil evenly among as many gardens as he can in the Shire, planting saplings where he remembered particularly beautiful trees once thrived. With great care, “he put[s] a grain of the precious dust in the soil at the root of each” (*ROTK* 1023). The silver seed he plants where the Party Tree once stood. Then, Sam waits patiently through the winter months to see what will happen. Dickerson and Evans note that Sam’s action here demonstrates the Christian idea of stewardship:<sup>63</sup> “the benevolent, selfless custodial care of the environment rather than as a “cover term” justifying the exploitation of our natural resources for commercial, corporate, or personal gain. In our sense, a steward is not one who owns property or is the lord over a domain but one who is responsible for the care of something placed in his or her custody” (Introduction xx). Sam’s stewardship of Middle-earth is rewarded when spring dawns, and to his delight, the trees grow with redoubled speed, making up for the year of desolation. The sapling<sup>64</sup> in place of the Party Tree “was the wonder of the neighbourhood. In after years, as it grew in grace and beauty, it was known far and wide and people could come long journeys [sic] to see it: the only *mallorn* west of the Mountains and east of the Sea, and one of the finest in the world” (*ROTK* 1023). As a direct result of Sam’s adventure and of his dedication, even in the smallest matters, the Shire has the most prosperous agrarian year it has known in centuries. Sam is “the gardener and forester, who emerges as the real “hero” of the reconstruction—and the only Hobbit ever elected mayor for four terms in the Shire” (Dickerson and Evans 18), thriving as a hero who has achieved balance between far-off lands like Lothlorien and the Shire, just like the gardens he has so lovingly tended to; his

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<sup>63</sup> The authors give the etymological origin of “steward” coming from *stig* and *weard* (“hall” and “lord,” “keeper,” or “guardian” respectively). They say that “the word implies a set of responsibilities, and medieval law and social custom specified a number of things that a good steward could and could not do” (Dickerson and Evans 40).

<sup>64</sup> This sapling is reminiscent of Carlyle’s *Igdrasil*, or the Life-Tree which “has its roots down deep in the Death-kingsdoms, among the oldest dead dust of men, and with its boughs reaches always beyond the stars; and in all times and places is one and the same Life-tree” (*Past and Present* 36).

restoration of the Shire by way of seed and soil from Lothlorien reflects Campbell's sub-stage, Master of Two Worlds but also brings love and life to a formulaic archetype.

While Sam prospers in the Shire, wedding Rosie Cotton, and moving in with Frodo to continue to take care of him, Frodo noticeably fades, causing Sam's return to differ distinctly from Frodo's. Leon Pereira says, "The priest-like Frodo becomes a saint, but not Sam... Sam grows in wisdom and virtue, and returns to the Shire, to an ordinary life, but he returns as an extraordinary man, becoming a leader of his people" (183). Frodo is unable to live contentedly in the Shire (Dickerson and Evans say he is "unable to cope" (18)); bearing the Ring, being attacked on Weathertop, and going on the quest whet his appetite for something more and also wounded him beyond Sam's understanding. At last, Frodo realizes that it is time for him to pass on; he cannot be the Master of the Two Worlds and live in the Shire bearing the knowledge and experience he gained on the quest. In preparation for his final journey, Frodo gifts to Sam the book which holds many of the stories of their adventures, and has space for many more; "The last pages are for you," he says to Sam (*ROTK* 1027). Though Frodo knows that he cannot be fully healed from his wounds and stay in the Shire, he tells Sam, "But you will be healed. You were meant to be solid and whole, and you will be" (*ROTK* 1026). The passing of this book from Frodo to Sam marks a momentous spot in time: the quest has moved away from "magic, illumination, or extrasensory powers, toward the common man, the common-sense mode of the Western rational tradition" (West 105). Sam is to remain rooted in the Shire, a hero and Master of Two Worlds returned to his people in order to protect and govern them; but importantly, he is also to record his story so that it may be passed to posterity.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> In the Appendices of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien records that Sam passes this book to his daughter, Elanor (named for a flower that grows in Lothlorien) (1097).

Sam goes on his last brief journey with Frodo: to the Grey Havens, able to glimpse eternity without becoming dissatisfied with his present role, straddling the gulf between the Shire and the worlds beyond. The Grey Havens are just shy of an allegory for transcendence, a heaven-like place where several of the members of the Fellowship journey once their work in Middle-earth is done. Frodo is one of these. He asks Sam to ride with him to the Havens and stay with him as he boards a ship which will carry him over the Sea, saying “Do not be too sad, Sam. You cannot be always torn in two. You will have to be one and whole, for many years. You have so much to enjoy and to be, and to do” (*ROTK* 1029). Sam is pained to see his Master go, but he understands that his time in the Shire is far from over and that he cannot forever live divided between his devotion to his Master and his love for his family and his homeland. Sam returns to the Shire with a “joy ...like swords” (*ROTK* 954). He knows that the Undying Lands will be his destination one day, but his current role, his thriving, blooming heroism, lies in the Shire; he is the Master of Two Worlds.

### **Freedom to Live**

The last sub-stage of Return is Freedom to Live. It is in this final stage of his Adventure that Campbell’s hero finally rests in balance and satisfaction, “effecting a reconciliation of the individual consciousness with the universal will. And this is effected through a realization of the true relationship of the passing phenomena of time to the imperishable life that lives and dies in all” (238). Campbell speaks of the great potential of the hero in this final sub-stage, “[t]he champion of all things becoming” (243). Once Sam sees Frodo off to the Undying Lands, departing from him with tears that are sorrowful, but not bitter, he returns to the Shire, to his wife, his daughter, and his lifelong homeland with the soliloquy, “Well, I’m back” (*ROTK* 1031). This statement is short and simple, representative of his hobbit roots, and according to Verlyn Flieger, “[i]t is fitting that Sam should have this last word [and] seems to be a typically

Gamgeean locution—short, factual, to the point” (“Gilson, Smith, and Baggins” 85). But the statement contains a world of significance; Sam has indeed returned to the Shire, where he can comfortably and justly live out his days and play a role in the governing of his homeland, but he has returned without his dear friend and Master, Frodo. Flieger’s emphasis, “Well, *I’m* back” (“Gilson, Smith, and Baggins 93) suffices to summarize the loss that Sam feels when Frodo passes over the Sea while he is meant to return to the Shire, for his story is not yet finished. Candler calls this final line “profound” because “[Sam] recognizes that what the new situation [restoring and governing the Shire] calls for is not nostalgic recovery, but *anammesic*<sup>66</sup> recreation, in which the Shire is ‘raised’ again—not just as it was, but differently. In fact, it is not yet what it will be” (157). And practical Sam, now grown in wisdom, is finally able to devote his full attention to his beloved Shire,<sup>67</sup> tending to its gardens, its banquets, and its simple, quaint affairs. Dickerson and Evans discuss just how essential the mundane is in Sam’s heroism: “The fact that the trilogy concludes with Sam undertaking a long project of ecological and social restoration on behalf of his family, community, and land is also important” (Foreword xii). Though he brings back with him not only a knowledge and understanding of Elves, but a bit of their soil to help restore his gardens, he still remains firmly rooted in reality and does not pine for enchantment and magic any longer. Patrick Curry, in his essay “Enchantment in Tolkien and Middle-earth,” suggests that in Sam’s returning to the Shire, “Tolkien *gestures*... to the deepest existential realities of human life, with its challenges and what we have to face them with: chiefly courage, hope, and an appreciation of what is small and apparently insignificant” (110). And for years, Sam thrives in what was the once insignificant Shire, fathering several fair hobbit-

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<sup>66</sup> Candler defines this term as “analogous activity which renders all human activity significant because it is the possibility of the past returning to us again and again, ever new” (156).

<sup>67</sup> Carlyle discusses the necessity of a place to call home, a place where he can flourish, for the hero: “Not a hero only is needed, but a world fit for him... We shall either learn to know a hero, a true governor and captain, somewhat better, when we see him; or else go on to be forever governed by the unheroic” (292).

children, and even serving as Mayor for an extended time. Because of his Adventure, his devotion, and his love of the Shire, Sam joins Beauty and Truth together, adding depth, breadth, and life to Campbell's Return archetype.

### **Conclusion**

Sam's Return is perhaps the most significant part of his heroic adventure, because he is able to use the knowledge he has gained on his quest to restore his beloved homeland. Though Sam's adventure does not reflect or mimic several of Campbell's sub-stages, his work replanting the Shire's gardens, his possession of Galadriel's box and his stewardship of its contents, as well as his ability to live contentedly in the Shire even after all he has experienced do align with several portions of Campbell's Return stage, but additionally suggest deep Truth beyond what Campbell prescribes. Because Sam does not systematically fit each sub-stage of Campbell's collected archetypes, his character helps to demonstrate the living, intricate nature of Truth on a Return journey that adheres to some established archetypes but depicts novel and fitting heroic acts as well. Sam emerges as a hero quite different from Frodo, ultimately more down-to-earth, simpler, but no less praiseworthy. Sam's Return journey and his settling down in the Shire evince that his heroism can finally put down roots and thrive where it was first planted.

## **Conclusion: From Seed to Tree: the Hero Incarnate**

### **The Gardener's Growth**

Just as an acorn has the potential to develop into an oak, from the time of his inception, Samwise Gamgee has the potential to become a hero.<sup>68</sup> His Call to Adventure befits his untested heroism but is equally befitting of the strength and adamant will his exterior and mannerisms seem at first to belie. His first set of adventures reflects Campbell's Departure and provides him with the possibility of heroic growth while simultaneously allowing him to emanate deep Truth. When Sam begins to experience The Road of Trials in tests similar to Campbell's Initiation, his seed of heroism endures, germinates even, despite (or because of) the surrounding environment. Ultimately, though, Sam's heroic growth during these trials and tests is not because he simply adheres to a prescribed archetype, but because of his choice—he can enact this potential heroism or choose to spurn it. And Sam certainly rises to the challenge, drawing from his innate stores of wisdom and devotion and blooming into a True hero as he helps Frodo to finish the quest and then returns home to restore the Shire. Sam's heroic growth and his love for gardening become one as he replants the gardens of the Shire, helping to heal his homeland by bringing home wisdom and beauty from his quest. Fittingly, it is the Shire that reaps the Beautiful firstfruits of Sam's heroism.

### **The Story Incarnate**

Tolkien situates Sam as a timeless, relatable hero in a medieval world, but his heroism represents more than just a disconnected tale of bravery, loyalty, wit, and prowess. He is called to a quest that seems far beyond his abilities and certainly beyond his power of conception; however, his journey is indicative of a higher calling, a representation of universal Truth and Beauty, and his actions while on his adventure are worthy of emulation by those both in fictional

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<sup>68</sup> See pages 4-5.

Middle-earth and more importantly, on our Earth, seeking to have a meaningful, purposeful existence. In fact, “[t]he close kinship between the Gospel and the central call of the Quest is not far to find. Jesus commands his disciples not to save their lives for their own sake but to lose them for his sake and the Kingdom” (Wood 163), and Sam demonstrates again and again his willingness to lay down his own life for Frodo and for the quest. Sam’s heroism is intrinsically connected to sacrifice, and hearkens to the Christian ideal of continually dying to self and the Story of redemption. Additionally, Sam frequently encounters reminders of mercy, whether from interactions with other inhabitants of Middle-earth, from the higher, transcendent power that seems to guide and protect him on his quest, or from within his spiritually maturing self. The combination of sacrifice, mercy, and redemption within Sam’s heroic tale demonstrates the unaltered existence of Truth within *The Lord of the Rings*, which even when wrapped in the guise of fantasy, “does not destroy or even insult Reason” (“OFS” 54).

Even though Sam’s heroism is of an earthy, not a highborn or classical type, he finds himself in the middle of a very epic tale; his realization that he is taking part in a greater story than simply that of his own adventure aids in the fleshing out of his heroism. Using his knowledge of legends and heroes of the past, Sam is able to imitate, perform mimesis, even so that he can become a hero. Because Sam is familiar with the “fairy tales” of Middle-earth, he has built up a vast store of heroic figures to which he can aspire, and in his aspiration and imitation, which are coupled with a natural tendency for heroic acts, Sam himself becomes a hero worthy of recognition among the “greats” of Middle-earth. Archetypes alone, whether those to which Sam aspires or those that Campbell prescribes, do not make Sam’s adventure ultimately heroic. It is the combination of these archetypes with faith, love, and Truth, which guide and sustain Sam on his quest and which help to craft him into a fresh, yet recognizable hero.



Ultimately, Sam's role as a hero aware of the story in which he is participating embodies the central theme that runs throughout *The Lord of the Rings*: that myth has the power to convey Truth, perhaps more effectively, even, than didacticism or argument. Myth is that "splintered light," the act of subcreation that redeemed humanity undertakes when mimicking Creator God. And simple Sam innately understands the power of myth, the power of Story. Truth, then, is carried along by a powerful vehicle in *The Lord of the Rings*, one that, as William Ready suggests, "is the stuff of the fairy tale, of myth and legend, of the folk tale that contains the matter of Man, far beyond what it seems to be. Tolkien brings our dragons home to roost. Orcs and Trolls, dwarves, elves, and Ents surround us, only their guise is different. All the life in the Trilogy is related to Man; he makes sense of the lot of it" (Ready 165). Sam's humanity, his relatability, and his down-to-earth nature make him a believable hero, even though his hobbitish form is imaginary. Because Tolkien chose to use Story, and Sam as a central character in that story, he makes deep Truth palatable in an effective and memorable way. Verlyn Flieger summarizes the role that Story, this vehicle for Truth, plays in the Tolkien adventure:

For Tolkien, story is the most effective carrier of truth because it works with images rather than concepts, with forms rather than abstract ideas, and with action rather than argument. It is more effective to show light than to try and explain it, easier to imagine darkness than to analyze it, simpler and more direct to illustrate through character and event than to expatiate on the relative natures of hope and despair, belief and doubt, good and evil. Certainly it was easiest of all for one who loved and lived in words to picture light and dark as actualities and allow them to embody their own values. The polarities of light and dark that generate the elements of Tolkien's fictive world and motivate its action are created, reflected, and conveyed through the power of the word. (10)

And Flieger's summation accurately reflects Tolkien's own purpose: "I would claim... to have as one object the elucidation of truth, and the encouragement of good morals in the real world by the ancient device of exemplifying them in unfamiliar embodiments, that may tend to 'bring them home'" (qtd. in Purtill 10). So Tolkien recognizes that "God, the Primary Author, cannot really be kept out of the sub-creation, the story told by his creature, the Secondary Author, Tolkien. Nevertheless, Tolkien weaves God into the fabric of the story, like the canvas rather than the painting on it. God is best revealed in and through the story, juts as a canvas is revealed by the brush-strokes on it" (Pereira 177). Sam, then, represents subcreation—imperfect, fragmented, splintered light, but he is representative of a perfect, greater, divine tale; and indeed, Sam's actions, are "universally valid," as Petty says, "no matter how otherworldly their trappings may be" (104). Sam, the gardener who grows into a hero, represents the True Myth of the past, transcending archetypes and embodying love, like the Word become Flesh, living and walking amongst us.

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