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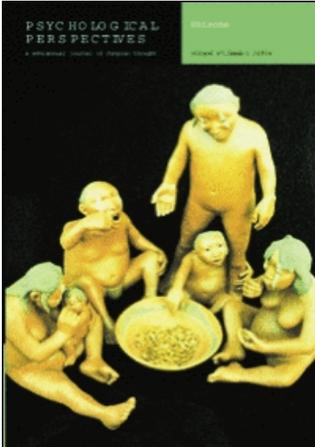
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Seven Paths of the Hero in *Lord of the Rings*

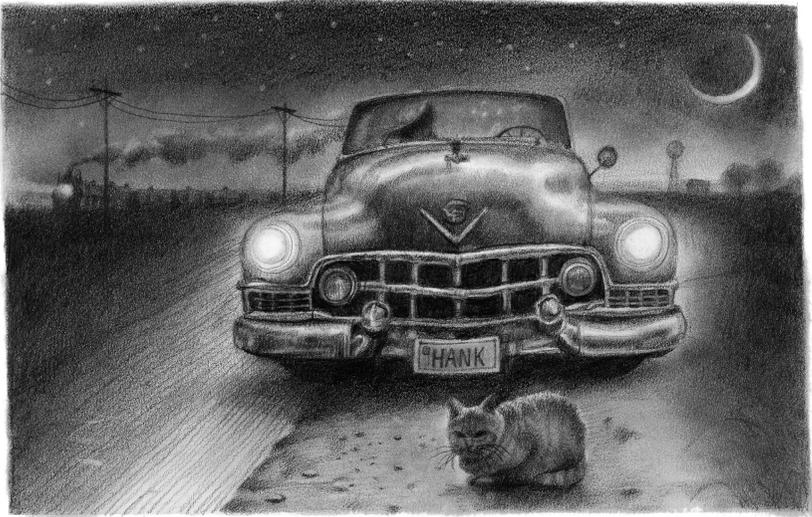
Introduction

Robin Robertson

This article is the first installment of the serialization of *Frodo's Quest*, a book that describes seven paths of the hero in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* as models of the path of individuation. In this introductory chapter, the history and significance of *The Lord of the Rings* are summarized, and the seven paths are briefly introduced: (1) the Path of Curiosity (Merry and Pippin); (2) the Path of Opposites (Gimli and Legolas); (3) the Path of the Wizard (Gandalf); (4) the Path of the King (Aragorn); (5) the Path of Failed Individuation (Gollum); (6) the Path of Love (Sam); and (7) the Path of Transcendence (Frodo). The second installment of this book follows in this issue.

Tom Shippey has called John Ronald Reuel Tolkien “the author of the century.”¹ And his masterwork, *The Lord of the Rings*, vies with a very small number of other books—Joyce’s *Ulysses*? Orwell’s 1984?—as the book of the century. As the 21st century heads toward its first decade, it appears that the popularity and appeal of *The Lord of the Rings* may, if anything, rise still higher. Even before the current hugely successful movie series began, *The Lord of the Rings* had sold over 50 million copies worldwide. It has been translated into virtually every modern language, including such unexpected ones as Catalan, Estonian, and Vietnamese. If you add in Tolkien’s other books, especially the two most closely related to *The Lord of the Rings*—the children’s book *The Hobbit* and the dense, scholarly *The Silmarillion*—Tolkien has sold over 100 million copies.²

Of this enormous popularity, Tolkien once wrote a reader: “Being a cult figure in one’s own lifetime, I am afraid, is not at all pleasant. However I do not find that it tends to puff one up; in my case at any rate it makes me feel



Drawing from Ry Cooder's album, *My Name Is Buddy*.
Illustration by Vincent Valdez, 2006.

extremely small and inadequate. But even the nose of a very modest idol cannot remain untickled by the sweet smell of incense.”³ He did, however, like the financial security his books’ sales provided and once ingenuously told a younger friend, “I’ve been a poor man all my life, but now for the first time I’ve a lot of money. Would you like some?”⁴

As one might expect with any book so popular, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy has polarized readers and critics, who either love it or hate it, with very little reaction in-between. Those who hate it find all this nonsense about hobbits and elves and dwarves and wizards childish. They characterize the clear moral dichotomy it draws between the light and the dark as overly simplistic in a time when the morality of “serious fiction” is more often grey and ambiguous. Perhaps most telling, the overall concept of a hero’s quest is considered to be proper subject matter only for children’s books, with little or no resonance for adults. Yet resonance it has for those who respond to it.

THE FEAR OF DRAGONS

Ursula K. Le Guin, author of science-fiction, fantasy, and children’s books and herself an admirer of *The Lord of the Rings*, wrote an essay, “The Fear of Dragons,”⁵ about the fear Americans have of fantasy. She opened her essay with a telling anecdote about a friend who had gone to look for a copy of *The Hobbit* in the children’s section of her local library. The librarian told her friend, “Oh, we keep that in the adult collection; we don’t feel that escapism is good for children.” Le Guin goes on to add that the librarian’s comment “was merely reflecting, in perfect good faith, something that goes very deep in the American character: a moral disapproval of fantasy, a disapproval so intense, and often so aggressive, that I cannot help but see it as arising, fundamentally, from fear.”⁶

Why fear fantasy rather than simply disregard it as childish or insignificant? After all, much of the overt criticism of *The Lord of the Rings* is, on the surface, merely dismissive, though the extremes of scorn are telling. We are accustomed to supposed “serious” literature mirroring the world around us, and our morally ambiguous values within that world. Fiction with plot, likeable characters, and especially strong moral values is automatically relegated to a genre category such as science fiction or mystery. Perhaps this is as it should be, merely a mark that Americans as a people have passed from adolescent optimism into middle-aged maturity? Or perhaps we have moved too quickly from childhood into old age. Perhaps when things didn’t come our way quickly enough, we settled for too little. Youthful hubris always thinks that it has all the answers. Then when the answers prove insufficient, it is far too easy to become cynical, confusing cynicism with realism.

In contrast, a good work of fantasy awakens a sense of wonder that many of us lost as we grew from children to adults. But isn't that escapism? Many critics argue so. They agree with René Descartes, who wrote that "what we commonly call being astonished is an excess of wonder which can never be otherwise than bad."⁷ In disagreement, essayist Adalgisa Lugli argues for a sense of wonder "as one of the essential components of the study of nature and the unraveling of its secrets . . . wonder defined as a form of learning—an intermediate, highly particular state akin to a sort of suspension of the mind between ignorance and enlightenment that marks the end of unknowing and the beginning of knowing."⁸

If I may interject a personal note, I've been an amateur magician for most of my life. I've found that most people love to see magic; they turn off their adult preconceptions and once more experience the delights of childhood. But there is also a minority who look at a magic trick as if it were a puzzle that they had to solve, and who get angry when they can't solve it. They come up with the most ridiculous solutions—solutions a magician would never use—but insist they are right because they can't abide not knowing how anything works. Far too many people in our time look at the world that way, but even if we view the world as a puzzle to be solved, it is more like a series of Chinese boxes where once we open one box, another is revealed inside. But this still doesn't do justice to the world around us; the world is alive and we are part of that life. When we approach the world with a sense of wonder, it becomes numinous and we are enriched by our participation in it. When we try to reduce it to something we can fully understand, we ourselves are reduced in the process.

Tolkien had little patience with critics who accuse fantasy of being escapist. At about the same time he began to write *The Lord of the Rings*, he wrote a now-famed essay "On Fairy Stories," in which he argued that "not only do they confound the escape of the prisoner with the flight of the deserter, but they would seem to prefer the acquiescence of 'the quisling' to the resistance of the patriot."⁹ Turning their argument on its head, he said that so-called "'serious' literature is often no more than play under a glass roof by the side of a municipal swimming-bath. Fairy-stories may invent monsters that fly in the air or dwell in the deep, but at least they do not try to escape from heaven or the sea."¹⁰

In fact, rather than feeling defensive about the value of fantasy, Tolkien felt that fantasy is the highest, purest form of art, and the form that could have the most impact on the imagination. He saw no conflict between fantasy and reason, that "the keener and clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make."¹¹ A good work of fantasy presents a portrait of an alternate reality that, despite differences from our own world, or perhaps because of those

differences, may force us to step back and look critically at the world in which we live. And this can be deeply troubling.

... Tolkien felt that fantasy is the highest, purest form of art, and the form that could have the most impact on the imagination. He saw no conflict between fantasy and reason...

Le Guin understood this troubling possibility well and in speaking of *The Lord of the Rings*, argued: "That it is told in the language of fantasy is not an accident, or because Tolkien is an escapist, or because he was writing for children. It is a fantasy because fantasy is the natural, the appropriate language for the recounting of the spiritual journey and the struggle

of good and evil in the soul" (p. 64).

Tolkien was a deeply religious Catholic, a point I refer to often in the pages to come. For him, the description in Genesis was significant: "God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (1:27). In the creation of fantasy, Tolkien felt that we come closest to reflecting that parentage. In nearly poetic terms he pleaded that "fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker."¹²

With proper humility, he felt that the rightful role of the writer of fantasy was to be a "sub-creator," one who creates new fictional worlds. It is incumbent on the writer to make those worlds as inwardly consistent and detailed as possible, so that the reader can explore them to any desired depth without running into inconsistencies. A world of fantasy should be three-dimensional like the real world, not a flat stage set in which, if you look from behind the curtains, you see that it is only made of cardboard. In Tolkien's view, if God could create the immensity of the world, and we shared in His divinity, we had the capacity within us for a level of creativity that went far beyond simply aping the world we saw around us. Rather, it was incumbent upon us as sub-creators to look to deeper realities inside ourselves and then to make our best attempt to fully capture those realities in print. Tolkien achieved that goal to an extent unequalled in literature. Though a deep spirituality suffused his work, it emerged naturally out of the depth of the world he created, not from any overt presentation of his particular religious beliefs. This style of presentation contrasted with the work of his best friend, C. S. Lewis, as we will next see.

ALLEGORY VERSUS SYMBOL

Tolkien received his degree from Oxford, then, like most British men of his generation, served in the armed forces during World War I. The war was to have a lasting impact on Tolkien and his work, as we will discuss later when we talk about the view of evil presented in *The Lord of the Rings*. After the war, he worked for 2 years on the Oxford English dictionary. Of that time he said, "I learned more in those two years than in any other equal period of my life."¹³ As enriching as this time was for Tolkien, it was essentially a part-time job that barely paid the bills. In late 1920, at the age of 28, he became a professor and remained one for the rest of his life, first at the University of Leeds, and then as Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford.

In 1925, when Tolkien returned to Oxford, the English School (what we in America would call the English Department) was divided into two opposing camps: language and literature. Language actually meant philology, and so, of course, Tolkien was part of the language faction and wary of those in literature. The following year, a young man named Clive Staples Lewis was elected Fellow and Tutor in English Language and Literature, hence on the other side of the divide. Despite this, Tolkien and C. S. Lewis ("Jack" to Tolkien and his other friends) became fast friends, in large part due to their joint interest in Anglo-Saxon.

They complemented each other well. Lewis was a large, cocky extravert. Tolkien, who was smaller and shyer and always a little prone to self-doubt, probably needed someone like Lewis in his life. Both were men who enjoyed, and spent a great deal of time in, the company of other men, a commonplace of the time for upper-class males to a degree that is hard for us to appreciate. Though Tolkien had a long and largely happy marriage, he was always to feel more comfortable with men than with women. We will go into this later, in discussing the women in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Tolkien and Lewis read and commented on each other's work as it developed. Though Tolkien valued his opinion highly, he never accepted any of Lewis's suggested changes to his work. Either he left the work as it was without comment, or he rewrote it entirely, a habit that was never to change for Tolkien. As Lewis said, "No one ever influenced Tolkien—you might as well try to influence a bandersnatch."¹⁴ Lewis was more important to Tolkien for his friendly support than for any editorial or critical assistance he could provide, as Tolkien freely admitted: "The unpayable debt that I owe him was not 'influence' as it is ordinarily understood, but sheer encouragement. He was for long my only audience. Only from him did I ever get the idea that my 'stuff' could be more than a private hobby."¹⁵

Lewis had been brought up Protestant, with a dislike of Catholics, then became agnostic in his teens. He found more spiritual sustenance in pagan

mythologies, which for him contained something great and nourishing, but which he did not have to believe in literally. Inevitably, given Tolkien's vast knowledge of mythology, coupled with his staunch Catholicism, the two talked at great length about religion and its relationship to mythology. Tolkien slowly chipped away at Lewis's somewhat naïve beliefs until, in 1929, Lewis gave way and professed a belief in God (though not yet in Christianity and certainly not in Catholicism). Two years later, 12 days after a memorable late-night walk and discussion with Tolkien and a joint friend (Hugo Dyson), Lewis decided that he now accepted Christianity (though he was never to become Catholic, as Tolkien had really hoped). The deciding factor seems to have been Tolkien's argument that Lewis was being unreasonable in accepting the essential truth captured in the mythology of non-Christian religions, while denying it within Christianity.¹⁶

With Lewis's conversion to Christianity, their friendship deepened still more, though Tolkien always felt saddened that, instead of making a conversion to Catholicism, Lewis reverted to the religion of his youth: "He would not re-enter Christianity by a new door, but by the old one: at least in the sense that in taking it up again he would also take up again, or reawaken, the prejudices so sedulously planted in childhood and boyhood."¹⁷ By the mid-1940s, though Tolkien still regarded Lewis as his closest friend, he was troubled by the fame Lewis was experiencing for his popular books on Christianity, such as *The Problem of Pain* and *The Screwtape Letters*. Tolkien, who considered Lewis's theological views to be simplistic, referred to him disparagingly as "Everyman's Theologian."¹⁸

Tolkien grew still more disappointed when, in 1949, Lewis began to read the first of his "Narnia" stories to him: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. By this time, *The Lord of the Rings* was nearing completion (though it would not be until 1954 that the first volume, *The Fel-*

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lowship of the Ring, would be truly completed and published). Lewis (and others in a group called "The Inklings") had heard every hard-won page of what was to be *The Lord of the Rings* read out loud by Tolkien. Though Lewis was enthusiastic about much of it, he also offered criticism (especially of the poetry) that often offended Tolkien (though, as already noted, such criticism did not, in any way, dissuade Tolkien from the path he was taking). Now Lewis was writing his own fantasy novels, knocking them off them at lightning speed, with little or no deliberation or forethought.

The result, to Tolkien, was a hideous hodgepodge of incompatible parts—in his words “about as bad as can be.”¹⁹ Lewis was merely pulling in sources wherever they occurred to him, from Father Christmas to Dryads, and throwing them all into the pot. It was absolutely the opposite of Tolkien’s own belief that a fantasy should create a world that was internally as consistent as (or perhaps even more consistent than) the world in which we live. And worst of all, these stories were not really stories at all; they were *allegories*, in which Lewis preached thinly disguised sermons on his (to Tolkien’s mind) vacuous version of Christianity. As this growing series of books became enormously popular, at a time when Tolkien was still struggling to complete his mammoth work, inevitably he found himself somewhat estranged from Lewis and was never to fully recover their deep friendship of earlier years. But Lewis never seemed to even notice, and, happily for both, their friendship never faded entirely.

The *American Heritage Dictionary*, Second College Edition, defines *allegory* as “a literary, dramatic, or pictorial device in which each literal character, object, and event represents a symbol illustrating an idea or moral or religious principle.” Some critics have confused archetypal symbolism, which emerges ineluctably from within a true fantasy, with allegorical symbolism, which is imposed from without by the author. Some have argued, for example, that *The Lord of the Rings* is an allegory for the struggle against Hitler in World War II. Tolkien disagreed strongly, insisting that he was writing a story and nothing more. In the introduction to *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien remarks:

I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think many confuse “applicability” with “allegory”; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author.²⁰

Tolkien’s view accords closely with what C. G. Jung called the “symbolic attitude”: a view “which *assigns meaning* to events, whether great or small, and attaches to this meaning a greater value than to bare facts.”²¹ Jung contrasted the symbolic attitude with the semiotic and the allegorical:

The concept of a *symbol* should in my view be strictly distinguished from that of a *sign*. . . . Every view which interprets the symbolic expression as an analogue or an abbreviated designation for a *known* thing is *semiotic*. A view which interprets the symbolic expression as the best possible formulation of a relatively *unknown* thing, which for that reason cannot be more clearly or characteristically represented, is *symbolic*. A view

which interprets the symbolic expression as an intentional paraphrase or transmogrification of a known thing is *allegoric*.²²

Lewis's stories interwove explicit Christian theology within storylines designed to express those values. Thus he was creating an allegory: "an intentional paraphrase or transmogrification of a known thing." In contrast, *The Lord of the Rings* was a true symbolic creation; the values Tolkien expressed emerged ineluctably from the necessary actions of his characters within the world he created. Though a deeply religious man, he felt strongly that there should be no overt expression of his religious beliefs in *The Lord of the Rings*. If these values were indeed eternal, they could best be seen simply through their realization in the lives of his characters—characters that he considered to be as real as any person we read about in history. Because each was forced in his or her own way to deal with the great darkness presented in the book, each person's story was necessarily a possible individual human solution to a more than human situation, a situation guaranteed to push each to the limits.

Tolkien had been deeply affected by the great mythological tales of many cultures: as a child, by the fairy books of Andrew Lang; as a school boy, the Old English poem *Beowulf*, the Middle English poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the Finnish collection of poems *Kalevala* (Land of Heros); as an undergraduate at Oxford, the Old Norse prose of *The Younger Eddas* and the collection of poetry known as *The Elder Eddas*. Those great stories sunk deep into Tolkien, there to be transformed, then emerge like dreams to form the core of *The Lord of the Rings*. As Ursula le Guin tells us: "The great fantasies, myths and tales are indeed like dreams: they speak *from* the unconscious *to* the unconscious, in the *language* of the unconscious—symbol and archetype. Though they use words, they work the way music does: they short-circuit verbal reasoning, and go straight to the thoughts that lie too deep to utter."²³

The words of these mythological stories themselves reflect the process of transformation within their very structure. Each of the words we use so casually in our everyday speech contains a rich history within itself. Words appear seemingly from nowhere, mutate over time, disappear suddenly, then reappear in some new guise or setting. Because we think largely in words, the words available to us structure the way we think and act. Tolkien understood this basic reality at some visceral level long before he could articulate it in his writing. His biographer, Humphrey Carpenter, points out that Tolkien's fascination with the roots of language first emerged when he was a schoolboy:

It was one thing to know Latin, Greek, French and German: it was another to understand *why* they were what they were. Tolkien had started to look for the bones, the elements that were common to them all: he had begun,

in fact, to study philology, the science of words. And he was encouraged to do this even more when he made his acquaintance with Anglo-Saxon.²⁴

In his writing, Tolkien was thus inspired not only by the stories these great myths told, but equally by their linguistic underpinnings, which determined *how they were told*. And, perhaps most important of all, because of his religious faith, he trusted enough to look deeply within and let his own creativity emerge. In doing so, Tolkien tapped archetypal roots that give *The Lord of the Rings* a resonance lacking in more contrived tales. He didn't feel that he was inventing lands, characters, and events: rather he was *discovering* them.

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Tolkien's goal was to create something that didn't exist: a full mythology for his beloved England that had all the majesty found in these earlier archetypal tales. As he said of this earlier goal, recollecting it in his later days: "Do not laugh! But once upon a time (my crest has long since fallen) I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic to

the level of romantic fairy-story—the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths—which I could dedicate simply: to England; to my country. . . . I would draw some of the great tales in fullness, and leave many only placed in the scheme, and sketched. The cycles should be linked to a majestic whole, and yet leave scope for other minds and hands, wielding paint and music and drama. Absurd."²⁵

SEVEN PATHS OF THE HERO

The Lord of the Rings was thus only a part of his great goal, but what a part! It is the story of a quest, but a quest like none other before it, a hero's journey in which not one hero but several emerge, each faced with a different set of challenges unique to his or her personality, each taking a different path toward achieving his or her own destiny, while simultaneously serving the greater needs of the quest: the fight against the great darkness that threatened Middle Earth. Because Tolkien tapped archetypal roots, we each contain all of these characters within us, but no man/woman is all men/women.

Though each of their stories speaks strongly to all of us, and each mirrors some part of development that we must all ultimately pass through, we are likely to respond most strongly to one or another of these heroes. We may laugh at Merry and Pippin, thrill to the wisdom of Gandalf, gasp at the revealed majesty of Strider/Aragorn, be touched by Gimli's adoration of the lady Galadriel, watch in wonder as Legolas runs effortlessly across the top of snow-capped mountains, suffer with Frodo as the weight of the ring grows ever heavier, or perhaps even weep at the loyalty of sweet Samwise. We can each find our heroic ideal pictured in *The Lord of the Rings*, yet we can also each contain all its heroes within the possibilities hidden within us. "In the long run," as author P. L. Travers says, "whatever it may be, every man must become the hero of his own story; his own fairy tale, if you like, a real fairy tale."²⁶

Throughout these articles, we are going to use a favorite term of Jung's: *individuation*. Individuation is the process of becoming an individual separate from the collective values around us, the process of becoming the person we are intended to be. An alternative term that Jung also used is *self-realization*. Psychologist Abraham Maslow coined still another term for this process: *self-actualization*. But it is important to realize that the "self" to be "realized" or "actualized" is something more than the ego; it is a transpersonal Self of which the ego is only a part. "Becoming the person we are intended to be" assumes that we each have some higher purpose with which we are born; Jung called it our "myth" and said that we each had to discover our own myth. When we individuate, we do more than bring together all the scattered aspects of our individuality into a comfortable whole. Individuation requires looking deeply into the darkness inside each of us, a darkness that goes beyond our existence as individuals. We have to descend into that darkness, fight battles within, then emerge once more into the light. And that is a lonely journey that few undertake willingly. But, as Jung says, a person has to "be alone if he is to find out what it is that supports him when he can no longer support himself. Only this experience can give him an indestructible foundation"²⁷

Because individuation by its very nature drives people to find themselves as individuals, it often brings them into conflict with the collective values of society. Critics have often confused this process with an egoistic desire for self-gratification. Responding to such criticism, the late Jungian analyst Marie-Louise von Franz commented that "such an attitude has nothing at all to do with narcissism or with egoistic individualism,"²⁸ because it transcends such values. Maslow argued that we all have a hierarchy of needs. At the lower end are deficiency needs, where we require something that we lack: food, water, shelter, safety, love, recognition, etc. Once these needs are met, we become aware of "growth" needs, culminating in the need for self-actualization. The desire for self-gratification, no matter what form

it takes, comes from a deficiency, something we lack. Individuation necessarily forces us to find values that are beyond egoistic desires as much as they are beyond collective restrictions. Tolkien understood this distinction between egoism and individuation quite well; he regarded the values he presented through his characters in *The Lord of the Rings* as eternal values,

values expressed by human beings (and elves, dwarves, wizards, and hobbits) in their finest moments.

The best way to understand individuation is to observe it in someone's development. In this series of articles, we will trace seven such paths of individuation, each represented by characters within *The Lord of the Rings*.

Tolkien understood this distinction between egoism and individuation quite well; he regarded the values he presented through his characters . . .

THE PATH OF CURIOSITY

Though at the start, the young hobbits Merry and Pippin care only about creature comforts, they are also, like many young creatures, insatiably curious about anything and everything. It is that curiosity that drives their individuation process. In the early parts of the quest, they constantly cause trouble through their monkey-like curiosity, but that curiosity also leads them to encounter more of Middle Earth than almost anyone else in the book. As they accumulate experience, they grow morally as well. Ultimately these two small figures have grown so strong that when they return to the Shire and find it taken over by human thugs, they are able to easily set things right with no need for the help of any of their supposedly stronger friends. The hobbits in the Shire have little interest in this quest business, but they recognize quality when they see it. To them, Merry and Pippin have become far more important figures than Frodo. Ultimately, in the days after the period of *The Lord of the Rings*, Merry and Pippin become important figures in the history of Hobbiton.

THE PATH OF OPPOSITES

Gimli the Dwarf and Legolas the Elf—Earth and Air, Fire and Water—are representatives of opposing races and cultures who despise each other. No one is as rooted in the earth as a dwarf, digging his tunnels, accumulating his wealth. No one is as airy as an elf, bound not even by mortality. For millennia

the two great races have been, if not enemies, deeply suspicious of each other. Yet over the course of the quest, Legolas and Gimli grow first to respect, then to love, their opposite, until they are as inseparable as Merry and Pippin. Their path of individuation portrays for all of us the possibility of union of seemingly irreconcilable opposites within us.

THE PATH OF THE WIZARD

A wizard, already the wisest of the wise, must resist arrogance and serve those less wise. He must ultimately accept death willingly in order to save others, and be transformed in the process. Saruman fails his test, whereas Gandalf passes. Gandalf the Grey becomes Gandalf the White, taking on Saruman's mantle. Where once Saruman was the stronger, now Gandalf easily surpasses his powers. But, at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf's time, the time of the wizard, has passed, as has that of Gimli the Dwarf and Legolas the Elf; Gandalf passes over the sea to the Undying Lands, where all dwell in immortality. It is now the time for men . . . and perhaps hobbits. But we can each learn much from the wizard's path about service and humility.

THE PATH OF THE KING

A king must be willing to first lower himself and live the life of a common man before rising once more to his full stature. Boromir fails this test (he who should have realized that he was a steward, not a king), but finally redeems himself in death. Strider/Aragorn fully passes his test and, unlike Boromir, does not die but instead triumphs over death, actually raising the Army of the Dead to help him in a great battle. After the quest is completed, the ring destroyed, Strider becomes Aragorn, reunites Gondor and Arnor, and is crowned king. His is the traditional path of the hero, who must go through many trials without protest, without recognition, and yet who must be willing to accept his true status when others need his leadership. This would have been the ending of any other hero's journey, but not *The Lord of the Rings*, which is far wiser. There remain three final paths: those of Gollum, Samwise, and Frodo.

PATH OF FAILED INDIVIDUATION

Driven by greed and avarice, Gollum loses his identity, reduced to little more than desire for his "precious" ring. Yet, even in failure, even while committing evil, Gollum plays an indispensable part in the quest. Subdued, almost won over by Frodo's kindness, he leads Frodo and Sam to Mount Doom. There, in

Frodo's moment of weakness, it is necessary for Gollum to bite off Frodo's finger in order for Frodo's destiny to be fulfilled. Gollum's path might be seen as the modern equivalent of the Greek tragic hero: Though fated to fail personally, he yet serves greater needs. We each have a Gollum within us: Who has never experienced greed and avarice? We each have to treat the Gollum inside with the same kindness displayed by Frodo, the same firmness displayed by Sam.

THE PATH OF LOVE

Sam's is the simplest, yet the most touching, of all paths: his loyalty and love for Frodo make him the single person who never wavers in his task. Though they are all engaged in momentous events, Sam always remembers that the sun coming up in the morning is a glorious sight, and that hobbits have to eat. When Frodo can no longer even walk and will not let Sam carry the ring, Sam carries Frodo. Then, when Gollum joins them, Frodo's kindness has to be balanced by Sam's stern limits. Ultimately, Sam's outcome is the happiest of all those on the quest: He has been able to see the Elves, who so fascinated him, able to serve as Frodo's companion on the greatest of all quests, and now able to return to his blessed Shire, to marry his loving Rosie, have many children, and live happily ever after. Sam's path teaches us that heroes come in many flavors, that sometimes simplicity and love and loyalty are the most heroic values of all.

THE PATH OF TRANSCENDENCE

Then there is Frodo—and Frodo's path transcends that of any other hero in literature. Seemingly the least, always aware of his own fears, his own limitations, he yet accomplishes more than any of the seemingly greater figures—the Elves and Dwarves, kings and wizards. When the great quest is complete and everyone is satisfied at the accomplishment, Frodo alone knows no peace, for he can never again be whole. *The Lord of the Rings* is wise enough to recognize that there can be no happy ending for Frodo. Like Hamlet, Frodo can find no peace on earth. He has been too damaged in the process and has passed beyond all the normal hopes and desires of our world. At the end he is left to journey away with the Elves to a world that will undoubtedly fit him no better than this one. Beyond that, we presume he must find some new answer unique to him, some way to transcend the limitations of life, as must each of us.

Over the course of this series of articles, we will follow each of these paths. In ordinary times, few of us are forced to take paths as difficult as those of the

heroes in *The Lord of the Rings*. But in these strange transitional days when the old world is passing away and the new has not yet appeared, perhaps we all have to take one or another of these paths as we journey toward the dark lands of Mordor and confront the darkness we find there. As we follow these seven paths taken in *The Lord of the Rings*, it would be well to remember the words of Isaac Bashevis Singer that “there’s more wisdom in a story than in volumes of philosophy.”²⁹

“The Path of Curiosity” is the next article in this issue.

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NOTES

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2. Patrick Curry, *Defending Middle-Earth* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), p. 12 for information on sales and translations, as of 1997.
3. Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1977), p. 232.
4. George Sayer, “Recollections of J. R. R. Tolkien,” in Joseph Pearce, ed., *Tolkien: A Celebration* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), p. 15.
5. Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Language of the Night*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1989).
6. Both quotes from Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Language of the Night*, p. 34.
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8. Quotation by Adalgisa Lugli in Wechsler, Lawrence, *Mr. Wilson’s Cabinet of Wonders*, p. 89–90.
9. J. R. R. Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories,” in *Tree and Leaf*, included in *The Tolkien Reader* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966), pp. 60–61.
10. J. R. R. Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories,” p. 63.
11. J. R. R. Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories,” p. 54.
12. J. R. R. Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories,” p. 55.
13. Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography*, p. 101.
14. Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography*, p. 201.
15. Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography*, p. 148.
16. See Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography*, pp. 143–148.

17. Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography*, p. 131.
18. Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography*, p. 151.
19. George Sayer, "Recollections of J. R. R. Tolkien," in Joseph Pearce, ed., *Tolkien: A Celebration* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), p. 14.
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21. C. G. Jung, *Psychological Types, CW6* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series XX), par. 819.
22. C. G. Jung, *Psychological Types, CW6* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series XX), pars. 814–815.
23. Ursula le Guin, *The Language of the Night*, p. 57.
24. Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography*, p. 34.
25. Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography*, pp. 89–90.
26. P. L. Travers, *What the Bee Knows: Reflections on Myth, Symbol and Story* (London: Penguin/Arkana, 1989), p. 297.
27. C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy, CW 12*, par. 32.
28. Marie-Louise von Franz, "Self-Realization in Individual Therapy," in *Psychotherapy* (Boston & London: Shambhala, 1993), p. 14.
29. Patrick Curry, *Defending Middle-Earth*, p. 19.