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CALL TO ADVENTURE:

A comparison between the outsets of Bilbo Baggins and Frodo Baggins in J R R Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore and analyse two specific events in J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth mythology, namely the departures from Hobbiton of the two hobbits Bilbo Baggins and Frodo Baggins. These departures are presented in the children's book *The Hobbit*, and the more adolescent book *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the latter the first part of *The Lord of the Rings*, the sequel to *The Hobbit*. With the help of Joseph Campbell's theory regarding the monomyth or the hero's journey I will focus on the first steps of these journeys and compare the circumstances around the departures and take into consideration, whether the magician Gandalf is actively involved of their respective choices. The monomyth is shown to be useful in revealing the similar structure of literary works from different genres.

Keywords: J.R.R. Tolkien, Joseph Campbell, Call to adventure, monomyth, the hero's journey, Bilbo Baggins, Frodo Baggins

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1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In 1979, I wrote a thesis (Lundberg, Per, *Encounter with A Magician*, University of Gothenburg, 1979) as part of my studies at the English department at the University of Gothenburg. At that time I was probably correct in believing that few people in Sweden knew anything about the man behind the Middle-earth mythology and focused more on the author J.R.R. Tolkien and his personal background than on anything else. Now 37 years later, in 2016, when I return to the English department to write yet another thesis, a search on the internet reveals that a lot has been written about him and his books, in the form of books, articles, theses and dissertations. Films have been produced and Tolkien societies have emerged.

When I filter the results to only show essays, theses and dissertations where “Tolkien” is found among the keywords the number of hits dwindles to less than 500. They cover such areas as heroism, evil, Christianity, queer hobbits, female characters, language, music, the monomyth and more, something that I did not anticipate in 1979. In my conclusion in my previous thesis I asked these questions (without any clear intent of suggesting those as possible future research questions):

...too much is left out and most things have just been superficially looked at. Why have I not touched upon the fact that Tolkien was a tree lover, when I mentioned Sam Gamgee and his interest in gardens? And why has nothing been said about the relative absence of women in his books? Does that hint at a homosexual author or a male chauvinist pig? And why not more about Middle-earth itself? What did it look like? The different languages, what about them? And many more whys (Lundberg 19).

In *The Image of Heroism in Tolkien's The Hobbit* (Wiklander, 2011), for example, Wiklander shows how Bilbo differs from the conventional outlook on a hero, not only in lacking the traditional attributes as muscles and being a warrior but also in stature. In Conor Lane Brace's master thesis in music (Brace, 2009) he mentions that his composition builds on Joseph Campbell's theory of the hero's journey and he states: “By focusing on just those elements that I felt were most crucial, I was able to create a musical arc that felt faithful to the classic hero story while still allowing myself a great deal of freedom with the specifics.”

However, for this thesis my aim is to narrow the field even further and to explore and analyse two specific events in J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth mythology, namely the departures from Hobbiton of the two hobbits Bilbo Baggins and, almost eighty years later, his adopted heir Frodo Baggins, and compare how Tolkien has described the circumstances around these departures. These departures are presented in the children's book *The Hobbit*, and the more adolescent book *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the latter the first part of *The Lord of the Rings*, the sequel to *The Hobbit*. With the help of Joseph Campbell's theory regarding the monomyth or the hero's journey I will focus on the first steps of these journeys and compare the circumstances around the departures and take into consideration, whether the magician Gandalf is actively involved of their respective choices. The aim is specifically to show how the monomyth is useful in revealing a similar archetypal structure in literary works from different genres.

The choice to look at the two hobbits in the same paper arrives from my search for similar theses. When I turned to University of Stirling and their informative page "How to find a thesis" (University of Sterling, 2015) I found that there are less than 200 academic papers on Tolkien, less than 100 academic papers on monomyth, and around 500 for heroism and narratology each. Any combination of Tolkien, monomyth, narratology and heroism yields only single digit results. To me this shows that it has been easier and more popular to concentrate on other characters or other topics concerning the Middle-earth mythology. This only strengthens my conviction that no one, so far, has written an academic paper on any level in English on the topic Bilbo's and Frodo's call to adventure.

After a first read-through of the opening chapters the following questions naturally arose:

1. What motivates Bilbo and Frodo to answer the call to adventure, even though Tolkien describes hobbits as unadventurous?
2. How is Gandalf portrayed in the two preludes?

In order to be able to make the comparison I will read the opening chapters closely, examine first how Bilbo and then Frodo react to the call to adventure and what motivates them to heed the call and finally review and compare the findings as seen from the questions. After that I will examine the wizard Gandalf's participation in the decision of the two hobbits.

For this thesis I intend to use the conception monomyth as a theoretical approach. The monomyth as a theory was developed by Joseph Campbell in 1949 and is described in *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*. In the preface to the 1949 edition of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell quotes Sigmund Freud; “The truths contained in religious doctrines are after all so distorted and systematically disguised, that the mass of humanity cannot recognize them as truth.” Campbell claims, that the symbols of mythology are not manufactured but are the spontaneous productions of the psyche (Campbell, 1-2).

In order to explain the path of the mythological adventure Campbell has drawn from a variety of sources: Greek mythology, Oriental images, canonical works and religious scriptures, but he states that “the adventure of the hero normally follows the pattern of the nuclear unit above described: a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return” (Campbell, 27-28). In both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* we will see this pattern; Bilbo and Frodo leave Bag End, Hobbiton and the Shire.

Campbell then describes in seventeen stages how the ordinary person is transformed into a hero and what he or she has to experience in order to receive the boon and be able to share it on the return (Campbell, 28-30). The following stages compose the Departure and are also the theory segments that I will utilize in my thesis.ⁱ

1. The first stage is the *Call to Adventure*, where the hero-to-be is leading a normal life but is summoned by an object, another person or a circumstance.
2. The second stage is the *Refusal of the Call*. If the hero-to-be refuses the call this stage shows the audience what the consequences will be. Campbell gives the Minotaur as an example of the result of the disobedience of king Minos toward the gods, when the king refused to sacrifice the white bull, which Poseidon had sent him, but kept. As we learn from the Greek mythology this disobedience affected the whole royal family, king Minos subjects and the inhabitants of Athens.
3. The third stage is the *Supernatural aid*. When the hero-to-be answers the call he or she is presented with both a guide and some kind of object to guide and protect during the journey.
4. The fourth stage is *The Crossing of the First Threshold*, where the hero-to-be encounters his or hers first challenge, the threshold guardian, is victorious and the journey can proceed. Campbell points out, that “[b]eyond them is darkness, the

unknown, and danger... The usual person is more than content, he is even proud, to remain within the indicated bounds” (Campbell, 64).

5. The fifth stage is the *Belly of the Whale* or the passage into the realm of night. Campbell calls this a form of self-annihilation, where “instead of passing outward, beyond the confines of the visible world, the hero goes inward, to be born again” (Campbell, 77).

While Campbell’s intention is to follow the hero all the way from departure to return and record every change on the way, my aim is to look closer at the first phase – the departure – and record what happens when the hobbits leave a normal comfortable life up to the moment they realise that there is no turning back and the only way is forward.

By using the five steps of the monomyth described above it will enable one to follow the progress in each character and also to detect the similarities in the heroic quest. Through these analyses the archetypal patterns of heroic transformation will be revealed to some extent.

1.2 Sources and material used

In the background section I use Humphrey Carpenter’s *J.R.R. Tolkien A Biography* and *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* as well as Leslie Ellen Jones’ *Myth & Middle-earth*. In the following section on Bilbo my primary sources are J.R.R Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. On Frodo my primary sources are J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first part of *The Lord of the Rings* and again Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Finally, on Gandalf my primary sources have been J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Leslie Ellen Jones’ *Myth & Middle-earth* and Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

1.3 Disposition

My thesis is made up of three parts; an introduction, four descriptive and analysing sections and a conclusion. In the first of these sections I will give a short personal background to J.R.R. Tolkien and the books. The second section will deal with Bilbo and the circumstances around his departure from Bag End. I will look next at Frodo’s departure and his circumstances. Before the final section, where I will look at how Gandalf is portrayed and in what way he might have persuaded the protagonists or forced them to answer the call and set

out on their respective adventures, I will also make a comparison between the two outfits. In the conclusion I will look back on the three characters and describe my findings in the light of the questions asked.

2 Backgrounds

2.1 J.R.R. Tolkien

John Ronald Ruel Tolkien (Ronald to the family and Tolkien to his colleagues and friends) was born on January 3rd, 1892 in Blomfontein, South Africa, and died on September 2nd, 1973 in Bournemouth. He was the eldest son to Arthur Ruel Tolkien, bank manager, and his wife Mabel (née Suffield). He had one younger brother, Hilary.

In the spring of 1895 Mabel Tolkien returned to England with her two young sons. The father was to join them in England shortly afterwards, but before he could set out on the return voyage he died. Their friend in need became Father Francis Xavier Morgan of Birmingham Oratory and he played an important role during Tolkien's upbringing, as friend, guardian and spiritual guide.

Tolkien showed, from an early age, a keen interest in stories, especially those containing dragons. Likewise, he was intrigued by words and sounds ranging from the local dialects via Middle English, Latin, and Greek to Welsh and Icelandic. The instigator of his professional line of work was his form-master George Brewerton at King Edward's, who was a medievalist and who lent Tolkien a primer in Anglo-Saxon. Tolkien would obtain the professorship in Anglo-Saxon in Oxford in 1926 and keep it until he retired in 1959.

2.2 Writing the myth

Tolkien was reunited with the love of his life, Edith Bratt, in January, 1913, just when he had turned 21 and had come of age. This reunion was also inspiring Tolkien to concentrate on his studies. At the outbreak of the Great War in August, 1914, Tolkien enrolled in a program that allowed him to continue his studies until he had finished his degree and at the same time train as an officer in the Lancashire Fusiliers. In March, 1916 he and Edith married, he got his degree and was shipped off to France in June. His experiences of war lasted until November that same year when he came down with trench fever and was sent back to England to recuperate. He spent the rest of the war going in and out of the hospital.

It was during this recuperation that he was urged by one of his old friends from school, Christopher Wiseman, to write his mythology for England. "You ought to start the epic" (Carpenter A Biography 98). The front of the note book held the title *The Book of Lost Tales*. Tolkien kept working on these tales for the rest of his life and they were first published in

1983 and 1984, edited by his third son Christopher Tolkien. *The Silmarillion*, which was published in 1977, was also edited by Christopher, and deals with the same material but from a different perspective. The other two books, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, also took a long time to write.

Next I am going to look at the circumstances when Bilbo Baggins was called to the quest of the dragon-gold. The five steps that Campbell has outlined for the departure phase are dealt with separately and then summarized.

3 Bilbo

“*In the midway of this our mortal life, I found me in a gloomy wood, astray/Gone from the path direct.*” (Dante, Canto I, lines 1-3)

The Hobbit was published on the 21st of September 1937 by the publishers Allen & Unwin as a children’s book. The plot in short is that thirteen dwarves and a magician are looking for someone who can help them, both to obtain entry to an underground mountain realm as well as retrieve the riches that the dragon Smaug has gathered there and jealously guards. For that reason, they have come to the Shire and meet the hobbit Bilbo Baggins, a man-like being approximately 3 feet high.

While Dante Alighieri’s *The Divine Comedy* is an allegory on the Florentine and Medieval societies “Tolkien angrily resisted any attempts to read *The Lord of the Rings* as an allegory” (Ellen Jones 44). I have not found any suggestions that *The Hobbit* could be read as an allegory, but it is reasonable to assume that Tolkien’s answer to such a remark would have been the same. Dante places his protagonist straight away in a dark and ominous wood on the threshold of the Inferno, Tolkien, however, lets us follow Bilbo on *his way to his* ominous wood.

In *The Hero with a thousand Faces*, Campbell describes how a future hero is called to adventure, what the consequences will be if the call is not heeded but also what the consequences are once it is. Campbell then goes on to describe how the future hero is met by the first obstacle which he/she has to overcome in order to continue the journey. But the final step is when the hero fully understands and accepts that the ways of the past are over and that there is no way back. The way it is done is by appearing dead to the old world and being reborn to the new one.

In the following five subsections I will argue that Tolkien deals with these steps one by one, not all together faithfully to Campbell’s intentions, but nevertheless revealing consistent patterns in the heroic quest.

3.1 Call to Adventure

On the twenty-sixth day of April in the year 2941 of the Third Age, Bilbo Baggins steps out of his home Bag End, in Hobbiton, in the Shire to enjoy a quiet smoke and to ponder on the glorious spring day and regard the quiet surroundings of the Shire. It is a habit of this fifty-

year old hobbit, something that he has no intention to break. But before he can sit down a stranger comes by. Bilbo invites him to sit down with him and share a fill of his pipe tobacco. The stranger declines and mentions that he is looking for someone to share in an adventure.

When Campbell describes the typical call and where it occurs, the few lines from Dante's *The Divine Comedy* which introduced this part of the analysis is a better setting than the opening pages of *The Hobbit*. Here, outside of Bilbo Baggins house, "the sun was shining and the grass was very green" (Tolkien TH 6). And "the carrier of the power of destiny" (Campbell 43) is not particularly loathsome and does not have an underestimated appearance. If anything the pointed hat, the grey cloak, the silver scarf and the black boots that the stranger wears along with the staff indicate more of a seasoned traveller. As we will learn he is neither a stranger to the Shire, nor to the hobbits in general or to Bilbo in particular. When the stranger reveals his name, Bilbo remembers with fondness all the stories told of and by the man and all the fireworks produced and performed by him. His name is Gandalf. "Gandalf, Gandalf! Good gracious me! Not the wandering wizard..." (Tolkien TH 8). Bilbo reveals an agitation when he remembers the stories of dragon, goblins and giants, but also those the one allegedly responsible for making lads and lassies going off into the Blue for mad adventures. "Bless me, life used to be quite inter – I mean, you used to upset things badly in these parts once upon a time" (Tolkien TH 8). A *blunder* Campbell calls this and refers to Freud, who in his *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* argues, that blunders are not chance but the result of suppressed desires and conflicts. On the one hand, Bilbo gets excited about the stories about dragons, goblins and giants, even elves, because that is the adventurous side of him, the Took side. On the other, that is a side that is not respectable if you are a Baggins and a decent hobbit. That side has to be repressed.

We see here that Tolkien has avoided what Campbell would call the typical setting. It does not take place in a dark wood but in the open on a sunny day in front of a comfortable hobbit home. For Bilbo Baggins the day is just as blessed as always in the Shire, no clouds on the sky. But we also learn that a person, who is no stranger but a long-forgotten friend to the family, appears and once recognised, stirs something inside Bilbo in conjunction with the proposal, to go on an adventure, something that all decent hobbits should repress. So at the end of the first step it is not clear whether Bilbo is willing to heed the call or not. Next, we will look at what the consequences will be if he does not heed the call.

3.2 The Refusal of the Call

Bilbo rather vehemently refuses Gandalf's suggestion to join him in an adventure, stating that *that* is not done in the Shire. But to soften his rejection Bilbo invites Gandalf to tea on the following day. To his big surprise not only does Gandalf come but also thirteen dwarves, who are in search of a treasure hunter. Bilbo believes that they are mistaken. He has certainly not advertised anything and definitely not let on as being an expert treasure hunter, or even a simple burglar. Both the dwarves and Gandalf assure him that he is wrong and Gandalf confesses that he was the one who had put a mark on the door, to which the dwarves has responded. Over tea, dinner and evening entertainment the dwarves propose that Bilbo should become the fourteenth member of their gang. Like Gandalf they coax him with the tales of the dwarves of old, how they in their realm under the Misty Mountains had mined gold and made wonderful things for kings and elves; but also how the dragon Smaug had invaded their halls and caverns and now guards the treasures greedily. It is their obligation to return there, expel Smaug from his hiding, kill him and then retrieve both the treasures and the kingdom. For his partaking he will be rewarded with a fourteenth of the value, if he survives the adventure. The Tookish side of him almost gets the better of him, but with an effort he refuses and suggests that they all should go to bed so the dwarves can rise to an early start.

In her essay "J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*: An Unlikely Hero Driven to Heroism", Giraud argues that "[t]he word 'adventure' has no attraction at all for Bilbo, on the contrary it seems to be for him a synonym of danger and discomfort – things he is not used to and rejects." But as it is told in *The Hobbit* Bilbo Baggins is struggling. If he listens to his Tookish side adventure is, in spite of dangers and discomforts, appealing. But when the Bagginsish side once again takes control of him, he shivers in horror over the appeal. Therefore, we can conclude that Bilbo Baggins rejects the call for fear of discomfort. But if *The Hobbit* had continued in the footsteps of the traditional myth what would have awaited him? Campbell is very clear on this. "Refusal of the summons converts the adventure into its negative" (Campbell 49). Present ideals, virtues, goals and advantages would be fixed and would lead to a calamitous effect. As one example, Campbell tells the story about the Wandering Jew who denied Jesus rest on his way to crucifixion on Golgotha, but urged him on. His punishment was to remain on Earth (and not to die) until He returned. Campbell refers to Werner Zirus' *Ahasverus, Der Ewige Jude (Stoff- Und Motivgeschichte Der Deutschen Literatur)* (German) from 1930, but there are several other earlier references.

What we have found in this part is that Bilbo is tempted by what the dwarves tell him during the long party and also what Gandalf is telling him, but any such temptations must be repressed. It is not the manner of a decent hobbit to listen to such things and to act on them. So Bilbo is struggling with what to do, but in the end decides that comfort and society rules are the best options. He clearly has rejected the call and if we are to believe Campbell the consequences for him and his community should be dear. So will Bilbo be punished in the same way as the Wandering Jew? That will be discussed in the section after the next one, but first we will look at Bilbo's guide.

3.3 Supernatural aid

In the traditional mythology, Campbell argues, that the supernatural aid, whether it is a guide, an amulet or other kind of magical charm, is presented first when the hero-to-be has accepted the call to adventure. Once again, Tolkien has made a twist by introducing Gandalf at a time when Bilbo is unaware of the proposition. To Bilbo it must have seemed that Gandalf appeared out of the blue, a figure that he suddenly sees in front of him, while we readers may suspect that Gandalf very quietly approached Bilbo, possibly not to frighten him. After all, the two had not encountered one another since Bilbo's parents Bungo and Belladonna Baggins still were alive and Bilbo himself was very young. While Campbell argues that the female companion in the form of a helpful crone or a fairy godmother is a familiar feature in the European fairy lore, and in the Christian saints' legends this role is played by the Virgin, the guide infrequently can be masculine (59). While Dante wandered through the Inferno and the Purgatory he was guided by the poet Virgil, but Virgil was not considered worthy to bring Dante into Paradise. But as a mentor, teacher and protector Gandalf unites the motherly (protective) and the fatherly (dangerous) into the supernatural principle of guardianship and direction, something Tolkien is very familiar with from Father Francis.

I have indicated, that while Campbell has written that it is only when the hero has heeded the call to adventure that the guide and/or the amulet is presented to the hero, Tolkien once again strays from this rule. He introduces the guide at an earlier stage than expected, but not before he has established where Bilbo lives and what his circumstances are. Gandalf tells of the coming quest, but does not reveal how many beings the company will consist of, or what kind of beings there will be. Tolkien cleverly reveals the scope of the quest in two parts;

first a general request from Gandalf and then the direct request from the dwarves. And that, as will be pointed out in the chapter on Gandalf later on, raises the question who decides what.

The next section deals with the crossing of the first threshold, which Campbell calls the entrance to the zone of magnified power.

3.4 The Crossing of the First Threshold

According to Campbell, as we could see in section 3.2, the Refusal of the Call, if the future hero does not heed the call not only is he/she punished, but also the hero's family and his/her community. So why does this not happen to Bilbo? The answer to that question is simple – by reversing his rejection to an acceptance by hurrying after the gang of thirteen, who were expecting him at the Green Dragon Inn.

The day Bilbo Baggins ran as fast as he could to Green Dragon Inn to catch up with the dwarves started cheerfully and sunny. But mood and weather changes during the course of the day as the group progresses into uninhabited land where they can only detect abandoned castles on dark hills. The weather turns from sunny to raining to pouring and to add to their misery one of the ponies falls into the water and loses all the baggage it carried. But they keep on going and when the sun sets they find themselves in an ominous forest, just as Dante had in the opening lines of *The Divine Comedy*.

There they discover a red glow and the dwarves decide that Bilbo ought to be their scout. Silently but reluctantly Bilbo trots off and discovers three large trolls sitting around a fire. While trying to pick-pocket one of the trolls, he is caught in the act. The trolls want to eat him but cannot agree upon how to cook him. During their disagreement Bilbo can slip away. Unfortunately, the dwarves appear to see what had happened to Bilbo, why he did not return to them, and they in turn are caught. But before any of the dwarves are prepared to be cooked dawn arrives and while the sun rises the trolls turn into stone.

The crossing of the first threshold is the first time when the future hero encounters a task or an obstacle, which prevents him from either turning back or going forward. He may be struck by fear, as Bilbo is when he encounters the trolls, but eventually he finds it inside of him to solve the problem. Campbell tells about the Future Buddha, how he as Prince Five-weapons, defeated and outsmarted an ogre. Even though his arrows, his sword, his spear and his club stick to the ogre's hair and eventually even when the prince also tries to beat the ogre

by striking him with hands, feet and his head it is his fifth weapon, his thunderbolt or knowledge within, that makes him victorious. If the ogre will tear even the tiniest piece of the prince and eat it, the prince's fifth weapon will also kill the ogre. By subduing the ogre to let him go, Prince Five-weapons was victorious (69-72). Bilbo is using the same technique in his predicament. He implores the troll Bert not to cook him. "I am a good cook myself and I cook better than I cook, if you see what I mean" (Tolkien TH 44). Instead of thinking of how to cook Bilbo, the trolls get into a fight that only stops when the dwarves come out one after another and are caught in a sack. But they are all victorious in the end by help of Gandalf and the rising sun, turning the trolls into stone.

We find that by heeding the call to adventure the actual journey starts. In Bilbo's case, he heeds the call, after having discovered that the longing to experience foreign countries, foreign peoples and the possibility to encounter a dragon is far too strong to repress and stay sensible. And in the light of a sunny April day, what could go wrong? But we also learn that the day turns from sunny to rainy, friendly habitats get scarcer to eventually all together disappear, the mode changes as the weather changes from cheerful to gloomy and eventually Tolkien places the company on the threshold of the entrance to the magnified power. Tolkien also shows, that the company cannot defeat the guards/the trolls by sheer force, but something else has to be added to the equation to be victorious.

Next, I will explore what Campbell describes as the belly of the whale, the final stage where the normal person is transformed into a hero.

3.5 Belly of the Whale

The belly of the whale represents the final stage where the normal person is transformed into the hero. Campbell calls this "a transit into the zone of rebirth" (Campbell 74). In order to do this the hero has to vanish from the surface of the earth and appear as dead to his companions.

After Bilbo and Gandalf have freed the dwarves from their sacks, they discover the cave where the trolls have stayed during daytime and where they have stacked food and other loot. Thorin and Gandalf retrieve two exquisite swords that later in the story are identified as the Orcrist and the Glamdring. Bilbo is also equipped with a dagger or a short blade, which later will be known as the Sting after Bilbo has "stung" a number of spiders in the Mirkwood forest.

One way of vanishing from the surface of the Earth is to approach the Temple as a worshiper, challenge the guards, pass into the temple and be put to test by the high priest. If the hero is successful and prevails he will be reborn otherwise he will be dead. This is a theme that we recognise from the plot of Mozart's opera *Die Zauberflöte (The Magic Flute)*, where Tamino, in order to be able to succeed Sarastro as the high priest and marry his daughter Pamina, must undergo the ordeals to be found "worthy". Campbell gives an example from one of Herakles' adventures, when he is pausing in Troy and learns that a monster is plaguing the city. The monster is a punishment by the sea-god Poseidon. The beautiful princess Hesione has been chosen by her father, the king, to be the next propitiatory sacrifice. Herakles awaits the monster's return and when it opens up its maw, he dives into the throat and cuts his way out through the belly. The monster is dead, but both Herakles and the princess survived (Campbell 75). In *The Hobbit* this transition is not as dramatic. After the trolls have been turned into stone, the company finds the cavern where the trolls would have stayed during the day. At first they will not be allowed entrance (they cannot open the entrance door), but when Bilbo presents a key that had fallen to the ground during the scuffle among the trolls they can all enter. In the cavern they find loot in the form of clothes and weaponry from the deceased, pots of gold and food, fit for them to eat. They can leave the cavern and its foul smell, step out into the sun and continue their journey.

Later on, Bilbo involuntarily and unintentionally has to repeat this feat, when he is separated from the company while they are travelling under the Misty Mountains. It is also during this ordeal that Bilbo finds Gollum and the Ring (Tolkien TH 81-105).

We find that by out-smarting the trolls, admittedly by the help of Gandalf and rising sun, Bilbo has saved the company from a disaster in spite of him feeling numb in front of the obstacle. And later, he demonstrates his skill as treasure hunter by finding the one object that lets them into the trolls' cavern. Tolkien lets the entrance into the cavern become the return to the womb and when they leave the cavern, it is a symbolic act of rebirth. Bilbo has climbed across the threshold into the zone of magnified power.

Looking back upon the hobbit's progress so far, it can be summarized in the following way: He was approached by his guide, who suggests that they go on an adventure. The hobbit tries to reject the proposal but he finally accepts. The hobbit and his company are brought to a dark wood, where he is exposed to his first obstacle and prevails. His life as a normal and

sensible hobbit symbolically ends with the company entering the cavern but he is just as symbolically reborn by exiting it again, now equipped with a weapon that could be identified as a hero's equipment. He has fully accepted that the way back only goes forward.

In the next chapter, I will explore what happens to Frodo Baggins when he is called to adventure and as we will see there will be differences, but again the general mythic patterns underlie the quest.

4 Frodo

“How first I entered it I scarce can say,/Such sleepy dullness in that instant weighed/My senses down, when the true path I left;” (Dante, Canto I, lines 10-12)

The Fellowship of the Ring, the first part of *The Lord of the Rings*, was published on the 29th of July 1954 by the publishers Allen & Unwin as an adolescent book. The plot in short is that the original hobbit, Bilbo, decides to leave Hobbiton for good to live his remaining years in peace and quiet. For this reason, he stages a spectacular farewell and hands everything over to his heir Frodo. But times are not as peaceful in Middle-earth as they have been. There are rumours of evil spreading throughout Middle-earth and that it is coming to the Shire. But it takes years before Frodo acts and leaves the Shire, in order to destroy the One Ring, which has been in his possession since Bilbo left.

Just by skimming the subheadings in this chapter, we can detect that something has changed between Bilbo's story and that of Frodo. The order of the five stages in Campbell's theory monomyth is the same and is static. What has changed is that Tolkien has rearranged the plot and in the next five subsections I will explore how this has affected Frodo in the light of the monomyth.

4.1 The Postponement of the Call

As we recall, the first step in Campbell's theory is fixed to the call to adventure. If the future hero heeds the call he is presented with a guide and goes on a journey, if not, not only himself but all of his family and his community will be punished and bereft of any boons. But Campbell does not discuss about the twist that Tolkien has presented. What about postponement? Campbell does not discuss in his monomyth theory what happens to the future hero who is hesitant, not hesitant about the quest but about his own abilities. Therefore one has to assume that as long as the hero-to-be does not directly refuse to heed the call he will receive guidance and help. And while he begins to realise that in order to save the others in the Shire he has to go into exile and bring the Ring with him.

Bilbo reveals to Gandalf at the time when he departs from Hobbiton, that Frodo would gladly follow on the adventure, if he was asked and he summarizes “But he does not really want to, yet” (Tolkien TFR 45) and Frodo confirms that when he discovers that Bilbo is gone by saying “I hoped until this evening that it was only a joke” (Tolkien TFR 48). Once again

Tolkien has made a twist or even a double twist. Firstly, he has allowed the hero to refuse the call without any dire consequences to Frodo or his community, but I would argue that Tolkien also has turned the order. Firstly, by finally letting Bilbo escape the stamp of the hero and pass it on to the next generation and secondly by informing us that while Frodo knows what happened during the year Bilbo was away, he has not been summoned yet even though the wish to experience adventures is more openly displayed than it was with Bilbo. It could also be argued that by letting Bilbo have his party and then quietly slip away, Tolkien has been able to close the tale on Bilbo. Tolkien can start focusing on a more mature theme, a darker theme.

Next, I will explore when Frodo eventually heeds the call and is forced into exile together with trusted friends.

4.2 The Call to Adventure

Contrary to what happened in *The Hobbit* Frodo had to wait for 18 years before Adventure called him and he was mentally prepared to answer the call. In the year of 3019 of the Third Age there are disturbing whispers of the evil Lord of Mordor and rumours of strange things happening outside of the Shire. While Frodo talks things through with Gandalf he realises that his quest has to be to destroy the One Ring in order to prevent that Sauron gets hold of it and thereby turn Middle-earth into darkness. “There is only one way: to find the Cracks of Doom in the depths of Orodruin, the Fire-mountain, and cast the Ring in there, if you really wish to destroy it, to put it beyond the grasp of the Enemy for ever” (Tolkien TFR 74).

Once again, we can observe that there are variations in Tolkien’s narrative of heroic departure. If the narrative had followed the pure archetype, Frodo would have been called without any previous knowledge of adventure. He would have been unprepared for the hardships and the dangers. Instead, Frodo is very well prepared, after having read Bilbo’s account of what happened almost 80 years previously, Gandalf having been a welcomed and dear guest at the Baggins’s, Bilbo and Frodo having taken hikes near and far in the Shire: Frodo is not unaware of the outside world and what happens there. But still, his hesitation and why he had not been punished is not clearly told but one could argue that the possession of the One Ring might have helped. One should point out that in that intermediate time between Bilbo’s disappearance and Frodo’s departure Sauron is looking for the One Ring to retrieve it. One could argue that even though Frodo does not use the ring in the manner that Bilbo did,

Sauron's powers to home in on the ring and its position are improving. One could also argue that by not acting immediately after Bilbo's departure Frodo has been punished by increasing the risk to the hobbit population of being invaded and enslaved.

In the next subsection, I will explore what Campbell says about supernatural aid and how Tolkien handles that.

4.3 Supernatural aid

“For those who have not refused the call, the first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure... who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass” (Campbell 57). Again, contrary to Bilbo's departure from the Shire, Frodo did not receive any supernatural aid in the form of an amulet from Gandalf. Because Frodo knew Bilbo's past and the powers of the Ring, Gandalf only provides him with general advice. Frodo has brought the Ring, as the purpose of the quest is to destroy it and we learn that it is more sinister than benevolent. The definite help from Gandalf comes later in the book and is not covered in this thesis. Instead we are introduced to Frodo's initial company consisting of Sam Gamgee, Pippin Took, and Merry Brandybuck, who in turn save the company from being captured by the Black Riders; Sam by his excellent hearing, Pippin by being the intermediary between farmer Maggot and Frodo, and earning Frodo a forgiveness for past trespassing and theft of mushrooms. In addition they are provided both a ride to the ferry and extensive provisions for the journey. And finally, by Merry, who brings them in the neck of time onto the ferry to get them to Crickhollow.

In this passage, we have found that the supernatural aid is missing; the one that Campbell indicates will appear after the future hero has heeded the call, in the form of a guide or an amulet. You could argue that Gandalf has presented the call and also told what consequences lie ahead if nothing is done, but at the actual departure the hobbits are alone and instead of magical aid they have to rely on hobbit wit and abilities. We also learn that the company is carrying an amulet that is not there to help them but does everything to prevent them from escape. One proof for this is the constant appearance of the Black Riders.

Next, I will explore Frodo and company's crossing of the first threshold and how they resolve that obstacle.

4.4 The Crossing of the First Threshold

“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” (Campbell 64). In *The Hobbit* Bilbo encounters the three trolls early and Gandalf is there to help. For Frodo and company the “threshold guardian” is the Black Rider, who is in search of Mr. Baggins. The Black Rider has been in pursuit since the company left Hobbiton. “The adventure is always and everywhere a passage beyond the veil of known into the unknown,” Campbell states and continues, “[T]he powers that watch at the boundary are dangerous; to deal with them is risky; yet for anyone with competence and courage the danger fades” (67-68). By constantly escaping the Black Rider, Frodo and company overcome the risk and they feel more confident, if not comfortable. But before arriving at Crickhollow there is a water barrier. While Tolkien does not linger on this in this part of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, it has been stated in *The Hobbit*, both that any decent (and sensible) hobbit does not have anything to do with boats but also that Frodo’s parents allegedly died in a boating accident. So in order to cross that threshold there, I would argue that there is also a psychological barrier to conquer.

In this passage, where the crossing of the first threshold has been discussed, we have found that Tolkien has presented both a guardian of the threshold in the form of a Black Rider and then a physical and psychological barrier in the form of a river. The Black Rider is outwitted and appears after they have crossed the river.

By crossing the river the company has defeated the obstacle and they can continue to their next stop, the house in Cickhollow. In the next subsection, I will explore how Frodo and company prepare for the ultimate transformation.

4.5 Belly of the Whale

As mentioned above, the belly of the whale represents the final stage where the normal person is transformed into the hero. Campbell states that “the passage of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation” (77). Campbell argues that it is an inward journey, an act of rebirth. Both for Bilbo and Frodo, the annihilation is not intangible or spiritual, but very much tangible and concrete. For Bilbo it was taking possession of the cave where the trolls stayed. For Frodo and company it is a flight. When they had left the house in Crickhollow, collected their ponies and

ridden for an hour, a tunnel takes them to a gate that marks the border of the Shire. On the other side lies the Old Forest and exile.

One could argue that Tolkien extends the annihilation physically. If the house in Crickhollow is the entrance of the womb, into which the company members enter and shed their worldly outfits, and the gate bordering to the Old forest is the exit point, where they reappear reborn and equipped to meet the magnified powers, then the company could very well be considered dead to the world.

I have explored the departure of Bilbo and that of Frodo and for each hobbit pointed out how one could use the steps of the monomyth to describe their journeys, which indeed differ. We find that Campbell's model is useful in showing how pliable mythic narrative is. My belief is also that Tolkien chose this path in order to distinguish between the more childlike telling of Bilbo Baggins' adventure and the more adult approach to Frodo's. Next I will compare the findings of these departures.

4.6 Comparisons between Bilbo and Frodo

When I began to write this thesis, I expected to find many similarities between the opening chapters of *The Hobbit* and *The Fellowship of the Ring*. However, I have found that there are few similarities but many differences between Bilbo and Frodo. If we look at the personal side they both belong to the Bagginses, a family with a long reputation of decency and sensibility. They both live in the luxurious Bag End. They are male hobbits and they are 50 years old when they set out on their respective adventure. But they are also descendants from the Took and Brandybuck families, and the hobbits of Hobbiton blame their adventurous longing upon that fact.

Their actual call to adventure differs in the respect that Bilbo is unprepared mentally and physically, while Frodo has had time to prepare himself. Through suggestions from the dwarves and Gandalf Bilbo's longing to see what is beyond the Shire, to experience other vistas, other peoples, and other creatures, is awoken and he accepts the call. Frodo, on the other hand, has read Bilbo's narrations, has met Gandalf and the dwarves, and he has accompanied Bilbo on his walks near and far in the Shire. After Bilbo has left Bag End to spend his last years in peace and quiet in Rivendell, Frodo experiences that the longing for adventure grows stronger, but it still takes 18 years before both he and Gandalf realise that the

events in the world around the Shire will very soon hit upon the hobbits and force at least Frodo to go into exile.

I have also stated that at first Bilbo refused the call by trying to be rational and sensible and try to forget about the proposition, but that when he learns that dwarves are awaiting him at the local inn he eagerly follows. For Frodo, I found, that while he was eager to accompany Bilbo on his last adventure, Frodo was too young and not really ready to leave his comfortable life. He postponed heeding the call without any obvious effects to him or his community.

The supernatural aid that is offered to both also differs. Gandalf follows Bilbo closely from the start, but when Frodo and his companions hurriedly leave Hobbiton they do not have any magical guide or guarding amulet, but a malevolent ring and Gandalf only joins the company after several days in exile.

Bilbo's first obstacle was his encounter with the three trolls. He defeated them by sheer cunning and with some help from Gandalf and not with brute force. Frodo's repeated encounters with the Black Rider are avoided by help from his friends and especially from Sam Gamgee.

I also have found that both the trolls and the Black Riders were the guardians that are put there to challenge the heroes (heroes-to-be) and prevent them from entering the realm of the unknown to gain knowledge. When Bilbo defeated the trolls, his company of dwarves and Gandalf were able to enter the cavern to equip themselves with provision, clothes and weaponry. This is a symbolic act of returning to the womb, to die to the world, and then reappear.

While Bilbo physically defeated the trolls Frodo has two struggles to overcome. The river that will take Frodo and his company to Crickhollow is a mental barrier for the hobbits of Hobbiton, who unwillingly deal with water or transportation on the water. It is also a physical barrier. When the company crosses the river by ferry, it presumably stops the Black Riders from crossing it, or at least hinders the latter and gives the former a head start.

The companies are also made up differently. Bilbo accompanies thirteen dwarves plus Gandalf to help the dwarves regain their treasures and their kingdom under the mountain and

they are there from the start. At Frodo's outset his company contains Sam Gamgee and his friend Pippin Took but is then supplemented by his other friend Merry Brandybuck (before they leave Crickhollow), and later on in the story by Gandalf, one elf, one dwarf, and two men.

I have now compared the respective call to adventure of the two hobbits and while I expected that they would be described in similar ways I found, in reality, that the differences outnumbered the similarities. In my opinion this shows how flexible monomyth is, that there is a structure, but upon closer inspection one will find each story needs be told differently. If Frodo's adventure had exactly mimicked that of Bilbo's we would have had the same story though told about or told by another character. Then it would have been easy but rather uninspiring to compare the two hobbits success as a hero. In a way you could compare this to a child's account of an event to that of an adult's of the same event. The child emphasizes on certain aspects, the adult on others. But it would still be the same event. Here two different hobbits tell of similar experiences under different circumstances and they have followed the same but not identical path on their respective journeys. It is now time to determine whether Gandalf has forced either of them to go adventuring or if they have gone on their own accord.

5 Gandalf

“But when a mountain’s foot I reached, where closed/the valley that had pierced my heart with dread,/I looked aloft, and saw his shoulders broad/Already vested with that planet’s beam/Who leads all wanderers safe through every way.” (Dante Canto I, lines 13-17)

In this chapter I will examine whether Gandalf is the one that persuades both Bilbo and Frodo to risk adventure. Campbell and Ellen Jones both argue that the supernatural aid, and in this case Gandalf, could be someone “that lures innocent souls into the realm of trial” (Campbell 60). However, neither Bilbo nor Frodo can be characterized as gullible, even though they are inexperienced in heroic deeds.ⁱⁱ

5.1 What is Gandalf's part in all of this?

In notes from August 1967, Tolkien mentions that the origin of Gandalf’s name can be found in the *Völuspá*, “*The Song of the Sibyl*,” the first poem in the *Poetic Edda* (Carpenter Letters 379). In the 12th stanza you will find his name together with an explanation to its meaning among a list of dwarfs: “Magic Elf” (*Völuspá*). By following what Tolkien has written in *The Silmarillion* and in his letters, it is possible to give a background to the Gandalf that appears in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

Gandalf is of the angelic spirits that became emissaries and were sent to Middle-earth to watch human affairs (those of men and hobbits) and help to fight evil. The wizard is embodied in a physical body capable of feeling pain, fear and weariness and can stray and err. And his appearance is always as an old man and a wanderer. In this he mimics both the Norse god Odin and Wotan in Wagner’s *The Ring of the Nibelung*. “[B]efore he returns for ever [to the West] he sums himself up: ‘I was the enemy of Sauron... for that purpose I was sent to Middle-earth’” (Carpenter Letters 203).

Campbell hints that Gandalf could be perceived as a trickster-hero, someone that lures a creature, a human or a hobbit to do something unexpected (Campbell 74). In that respect, he would be like the Norse god Loki, who sometimes brought havoc to the other gods and humans, and at other times helped them out, or the god Hermes from the Greek mythology. Ellen Jones does not only hint but vehemently argues that not only do “Gandalf and Merlin share characteristics of magic, wisdom, power and especially humor; both have a habit of leaving their charges to deal with adventure themselves but nonetheless appear out of the blue to save the day when really needed.” (Ellen Jones 75). Ellen Jones goes as far as to state that

the underlying archetype is the trickster. However, there is nothing in *The Hobbit* that indicates that Bilbo Baggins is tricked or forced to join the dwarves for the quest of the dwarf gold. When he wakes up in the morning, after the unexpected tea party, and finds both Gandalf and the dwarves gone “he could not help feeling just a trifle disappointed. The feeling surprised him.”

‘Don’t be a fool, Bilbo Baggins!’ he said to himself, ‘thinking of dragons and all that outlandish nonsense at your age’” (Tolkien TH 34)! And when Gandalf hands him the letter the dwarves had left behind, it is Bilbo who decides that he wants to join the adventure, not Gandalf forcing him. Later on, after Bilbo has escaped the goblins but the party has not yet set eyes on him, Gandalf confesses that “[a]fter all he is my friend... and not a bad little chap. I feel responsible for him. I wish to goodness you had not lost him” (Tolkien TH 107).

This avuncular attitude towards hobbits continues with Frodo. Gandalf is a regular guest at Bilbo’s and Frodo’s when the latter moves in with Bilbo. Bilbo goes frequently adventuring during the 60 years after his return with the One Ring. Whether Frodo ever accompanied him on these adventures or if they occurred during the time when Bilbo lived alone, up to his ninety-ninth year, is never revealed. However, Frodo and Bilbo hike together through to the Shire. But at the time when Bilbo has decided that it is time for him to leave Bag End and Hobbiton on his one-hundred-and-eleventh birthday, Gandalf has to force his will upon the hobbit to leave the ring behind and not bring it with him.

I have not found any indication that Gandalf is persuading either of the two hobbits, but they go of their own free will. Neither can I agree with Ellen Jones that Gandalf is a trickster, leaving to others to perform a task. On the contrary, I find him the stern but just mentor, who is friend, guide, mentor, teacher and protector.

6 Conclusion

The Hobbit and *The Lord of the Rings* have produced a swell of academic papers during previous years and many of them have had either Bilbo Baggins or Frodo Baggins in focus. However, in my research I have not found an academic paper, which compares the circumstances around the departures of the two hobbits. My aim was to examine these departures, to see if Tolkien has structured them in a similar way. With the help of Joseph Campbell's theory regarding the monomyth or the hero's journey, I have focused on the first steps of these journeys and have compared the circumstances around the departures, and taken into consideration, whether the magician Gandalf had been actively involved in their respective choices.

The only found specific similarities are about the protagonists' life situation. They are of the same species, sex, height and age. The fact that they are living in Hobbiton, belong to the family Baggins and that they meet Gandalf are also specific similarities. However, there are repetitive patterns; Bilbo and Frodo are approached by Gandalf, they both host a party before they leave their home, they leave the Shire, they approach an obstacle which needs to be conquered, and finally they vanish and appear to be dead to the world. These repetitive patterns are why the monomyth is useful.

The differences, on the other hand, are more numerous. The number of participants in Bilbo's company amounts to fifteen, while Frodo's amounts to only eight beings of different species. Bilbo's departure happens on a sunny April day, the same day as he heeds the call, while Frodo's departure happens in September after years of postponement. Gandalf is travelling with Bilbo, while he is absent from Frodo's side for several days. Bilbo encounters the first obstacle in a dark wood and prevails, while Frodo's obstacle is crossing a river. Bilbo's return to the world navel or the womb to be reborn again happens when he enters a cave. For Frodo it is entering the house in Crickhollow.

I have not found any real external events having been incorporated into the opening chapters of the two books. Even though the general uneasiness of Gandalf and Frodo, and the way the Black Rider appears again and again, looking for Mr. Baggins, could suggest a similarity to the prelude to World War II, there is, however, no definite proof of this.

It is also obvious that Gandalf's involvement in their respective departures is described differently. While it has been suggested that Gandalf tricked Bilbo into going on an adventure, I argue that Gandalf is more avuncular and his suggestions genuinely awakens the adventurous side of Bilbo.

The thesis has been an attempt to compare how Tolkien has presented two departures in the Middle-earth mythology from the same place but with two different main characters and under different circumstances. A starting point for further research could be to investigate how and in what way the knowledge they acquired during their respective adventures and the boons they received were of use to themselves and to the Shire. Another research topic could be to dive deeper into imaginary or real references to world experiences in the books.

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End notes

ⁱ The next phase is the Initiation and Campbell divides them into six stages:

6. *The Road of Trials* or the dangerous aspect of the gods.
7. *The Meeting with the Goddess* or the bliss of infancy regained.
8. *Woman as the Temptress* or the realization and agony of Oedipus.
9. *Atonement with the Father*.
10. *Apotheosis*.
11. *The Ultimate Boon*.

These stages represent the hero's struggles, his victories, and his encounters during his journey up to and including when he is presented with the boon. In Bilbo's case the boon includes the victory over the dark forces and the recovery of the dwarf kingdom under the Mountain and his reward as described in the contract.

The final phase is the Return and Campbell divides them, once again, into six stages.

12. *The Refusal of the Return* or the world denied
13. *The Magic Flight* or the escape of Prometheus
14. *Rescue from Without*
15. *The Crossing of the Return Threshold* or the return to the world common day
16. *Master of the Two Worlds*
17. *Freedom to Live*, the nature and function of the ultimate boon (Campbell, 28-29)

When the hero has obtained the boon, he is reluctant to return to his former life. He has evolved, and, in the case of both Bilbo and Frodo, matured. The experiences he has undergone have made him unwilling to live a different life. Circumstances, however, push him in the homeward bound direction. Campbell compares the crossing of the return threshold as moving from one world into another, from sleep to being wide-awake. "The first problem of the returning hero is 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" (Campbell, 189).

ⁱⁱ Types of heroes

"I am looking for someone to share in an adventure that I am arranging, and it is very difficult to find anyone (Tolkien TH 7)." If the events in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* had occurred in ancient Greek Gandalf would have had three types to choose from; the gods, the heroes and the warriors. When it came to dealings with the gods it was always tricky as a mortal easily could be misconstrued to challenge or defy the gods. However if one god would choose to help Gandalf that would have been Hermes as he was "a god of fertility and a god of boundaries" (Buxton 77) and his "province... is theft, guile, craft" (78). And those were properties that Gandalf was looking for in his adventurer. When it came to heroes they were not immortals but often a relative to the gods. "They test the limits of human potential, attaining the heights of success and plumbing the depths of disaster" (104). And most likely Gandalf would not have found any of the more well-known heroes like Perseus, Jason and the Argonauts or Herakles at home but already on a mission somewhere

else. As for warriors they too would have been hard to find, employed as they surely would be and occupied in internal affairs of one kind or another.

But Gandalf did not live in that period but in the Third Age of Middle-earth, when man still was inferior in numbers and power to other peoples. So when Gandalf mentions to Bilbo that spring morning in the year 2941 of the Third Age that it is hard to find someone who could accompany him he was right. The traditional type, strong, unafraid, burly, skilled in weaponry, who heads into the unknown without a thought of possible defeat, they were elsewhere on that particular day. Gandalf needed someone who was not sure of himself, had doubts if this was the right thing to do and was not skilled in battle but would not back away to help others to overcome an obstacle. In a sense you could say that Tolkien invented the modern anti-hero.