

5-2015

# Underworld journeys in *The Faerie Queene* and *The Lord of the Rings*: exploring the “Belly of the whale” of Joseph Campbell’s Monomyth and the effect on the hero’s return from adventure

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## Recommended Citation

Kirkendall, Kayla M., "Underworld journeys in *The Faerie Queene* and *The Lord of the Rings*: exploring the “Belly of the whale” of Joseph Campbell’s Monomyth and the effect on the hero’s return from adventure" (2015). *Honors Theses*.

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines Joseph Campbell's theory of the monomyth—the idea that great myths (heroes' journeys) throughout history adhere to a single, basic structure. The most important step of this structure is arguably the Belly of the Whale/Descent into the Underworld, as can be seen in the Redcrosse Knight of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene (Book One)* and Gandalf, Frodo, and Aragorn of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. These individual heroes reveal that the way in which they overcome (or fail to overcome) their underworlds determines the success or failure of the character as a Campbellian hero. Most importantly, these characters show that this phase determines the ability of the hero to reintegrate into his home society: if he overcomes his Belly of the Whale, then he is able to return home and reintegrate, but if he does not overcome this crucial step, then even if he does find his way back to his ordinary world, he is unable to rejoin society. As we will see, Redcrosse and Aragorn prevail in their underworlds, so they are able to ascend and reenter the real world, and are changed in a way that will help them complete the rest of their journeys. Gandalf and Frodo, however, fail in this phase and therefore must leave Middle-earth and travel to the Undying Lands at the end of the novel. They are too changed by their failure in the underworld to return and reintegrate.

## INTRODUCTION

Myth is at the core of human culture and personal experience. In *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell writes,

It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation. Religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth.

(Campbell 15)

Campbell, best known for his work in comparative mythology and comparative religion, posits that at the heart of every major myth, regardless of time and place of origin, is the same basic structure, which Campbell calls the monomyth. In the preface to *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, his book on the subject, Campbell quotes the Vedas: “Truth is one, the sages speak of it by many names,” which is the basis of his theory. Campbell believes that myth has been used throughout human history as a way for mankind to explain the natural world and man’s place within it, especially in regard to rites of passage in life. Myth gives humanity examples to live by, and Campbell reveals that most cultures follow the same basic code, though they term it differently.

Authors and poets throughout history have followed this same pattern, knowingly or not, when constructing heroes and their stories. Surprisingly, perhaps, the implications the steps have for each other, specifically the Belly of the Whale and the Return and reintegration into society (essentially rites of passage within myth) do not seem to change from the time of classic myth to modern literature, showing the truly lasting nature of the

monomyth that Campbell presents and the ultimate importance of these two phases to the hero's journey.

CAMPBELL'S MONOMYTH

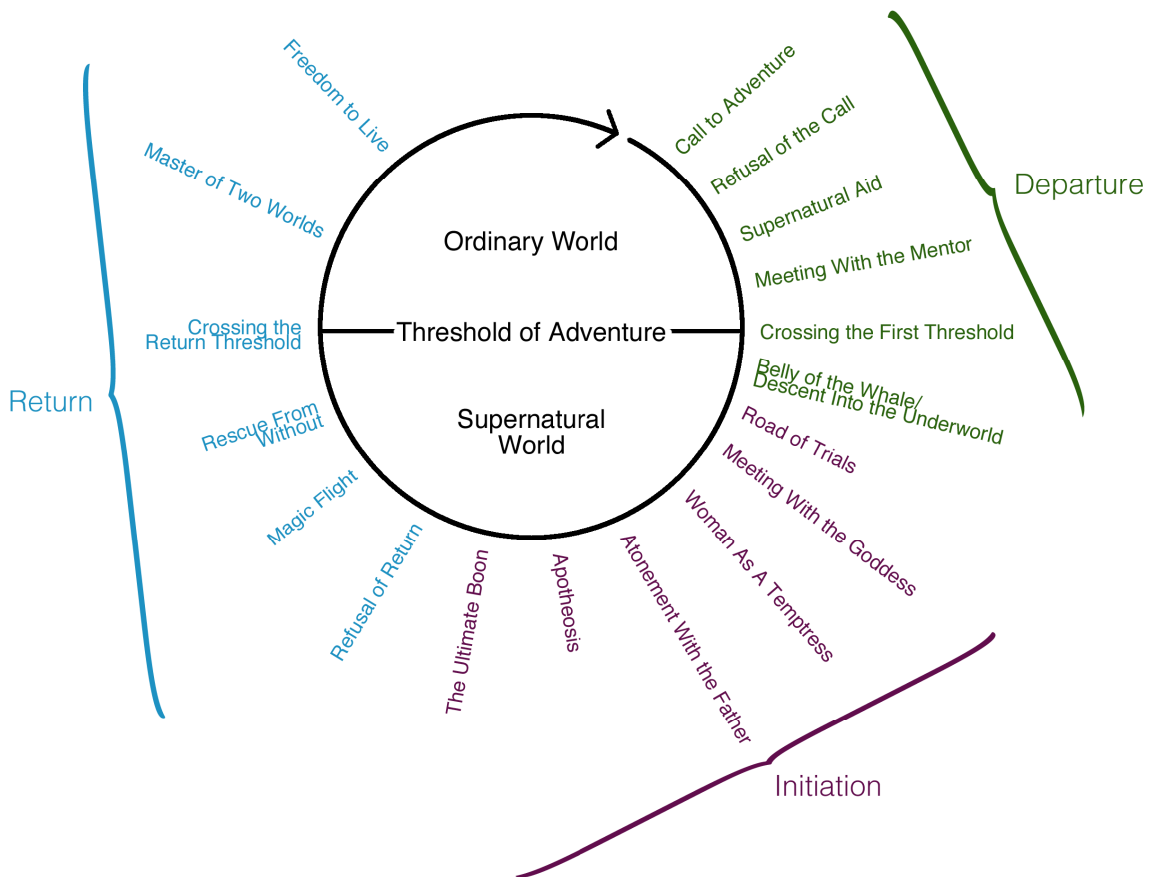


Figure 1: The Cycle of the Hero's Journey

As depicted in Figure 1 above, there are seventeen steps in Campbell's monomyth (Supernatural Aid and Meeting with the Mentor are combined). Each step does not have to be present for a narrative to be considered a hero's journey by Campbell's standards, but certain stages are crucial to his interpretation. A hero generally must begin in an ordinary world and then travel to a supernatural place; this could mean something obvious, such as Luke Skywalker leaving Tatooine with Obi-Wan Kenobi and journeying

into the outer reaches of the galaxy, or something more obscure, like a character retreating from the world and into his own mind as Superman does through his Fortress of Solitude. The Belly of the Whale phase is the next key part of the journey, for this phase is one in which the hero descends into an underworld to face evil and grow into a hero worthy of finding the elixir and completing the journey. Every hero must go through some form of the Road of Trials, though this varies immensely from hero to hero. Finally, the hero must Cross the Return Threshold and become the Master of Two Worlds, meaning that he is able to reintegrate into the society of the ordinary world after his adventure in the supernatural world. Without these core steps, it is difficult for a hero to succeed in his quest, at least by Campbellian standards.

These steps, most importantly the Belly of the Whale, are prominent in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene (Book One)* and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Both stories have clear heroes with underworld journeys that affect the outcome of the plot. These heroes—Redcrosse Knight, Gandalf, Frodo, and Aragorn—adhere to a medieval heroic code, which shapes their journeys and the way that they each approach their individual underworlds. It is *how* they face their underworlds that is most important to the hero's journey, because success or failure in this step determines success or failure of the hero and possibly of the quest as a whole. Additionally, this step determines the hero's ability to reintegrate into his home society. He must undergo a proper amount of change (which differs between characters), but never change so completely as to lose himself in the underworld. Triumph in the Belly of the Whale allows the hero to reconcile his original self and the self he gained on the journey, and this is key to being able to return and reintegrate.

THE MONOMYTH IN *THE FAERIE QUEENE* AND *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

There are three overarching stages of the monomyth: Departure, Initiation, and Return, under which the seventeen steps all fit. In the Departure, the hero begins in an ordinary world with “familiar horizons” and is then Called to Adventure by “the carrier of the power of destiny” (Campbell 51-52). The hero will likely Refuse the Call at first, but receives Supernatural Aid—for example, the Redcrosse Knight from Una and Prince Arthur, and Frodo and Aragorn from Gandalf—that pushes him to take up the challenge. Then, he must Cross the First Threshold—Redcrosse sets out from the city of Gloriana and Frodo slips away from the Shire. The hero enters the Belly of the Whale and is transformed in a way that allows him to complete the rest of his journey successfully. Then comes the Initiation. This second portion of the journey includes a Road of Trials: “the departure into the land of trials represented only the beginning of the long and really perilous path of initiatory conquests and moments of illumination” (Campbell 109). This is an extended part of the journey, and is often woven throughout the other steps—Redcrosse faces countless trials, such as Archimago, Duessa, and the Sans brothers; Frodo and Aragorn go through a Road of Trials just to get from Bree to Rivendell, not to mention what they face as the Fellowship and beyond. There is a Meeting With a Goddess—Redcrosse meets Lucifera and Caelia (goddesses/queens of Pride and Holiness, respectively) and Frodo and Aragorn find Galadriel. The other side of that coin is the Woman as the Temptress—sometimes this is the same woman as the goddess figure, and she serves to distract the hero from his quest by offering him immediate reward if he gives up what he is really searching for. Then Campbell describes Atonement With the Father, which can be applied in this case to Redcrosse and

God/Christ (Redcrosse finally comes to God in the House of Holinesse), Frodo and Bilbo (Frodo completes the journey that his uncle began), and Aragorn and Isildur (Aragorn is Isildur's heir and it is because of Isildur's initial greed that the Ring is still in Middle-earth). Each of these heroes must come to terms with who they are and whom they serve before they can complete their journeys. Next comes an Apotheosis in which opposites and contradictions come together, such as Redcrosse giving up his pride and despair for humility, Frodo reconciling the Sméagol and the Gollum within himself, and Aragorn learning that he can maintain parts of Strider and still become king. This is followed by the securing of the Ultimate Boon: that which the hero has been seeking since the beginning of his quest—holiness for Redcrosse and the salvation of Middle-earth for Gandalf, Frodo, and Aragorn. At last comes the Return that, like the Initiation, begins with a Refusal. The hero at first Refuses to Return to the ordinary world, believing that the supernatural world he has entered is infinitely better. When the hero does decide to go back, there is a Magic Flight and a Rescue from Without, and the hero barely escapes alive—Redcrosse is saved by Una and brought to the House of Holinesse; Frodo and Sam are plucked from the fires of Mordor by eagles. The hero then Crosses a Return Threshold and becomes the Master of Two Worlds, for he now encompasses the ordinary and the extraordinary and has brought back an elixir of salvation and wins for himself the Freedom to Live (Campbell 49-243). But the coming home is not always so easy: "The return and reintegration with society, which is indispensable to the continuous circulation of spiritual energy into the world, and which, from the standpoint of the community, is the justification of the long retreat, the hero himself may find the most difficult requirement of all" (Campbell 36). Reintegration is imperative to the ultimate success of

a hero's journey, because if he is unable to become one of the people again, he has failed and lost himself along the way. The clearest example of this is Frodo, who completes his quest and returns to the Shire, but cannot reintegrate because he does not overcome his underworld. He "dropped quietly out of all the doings of the Shire, and Sam was pained to notice how little honour [Frodo] had in his own country" (Tolkien 1002). Though the Ring is destroyed, Frodo does not succeed in his hero's journey.

#### THE MEDIEVAL HEROIC CODE

Two major hero types emerge in English literature in the post-classical and post-biblical tradition. The first is the Anglo-Saxon (particularly Germanic) warrior king: a powerful lord in vein of *Beowulf's* Hrothgar with a *comitatus* willing to fight and die for him if need be. The second is the medieval Christian knight who adheres to a different set of virtues than his forebears. Not only must he uphold the Aristotelian ideals that Spenser personifies in *The Faerie Queene*, but the medieval knight is also subject to Christian virtue. No longer does the hero fight for lord and land, but for Christ and the church. The former type of hero tends to be of noble blood, born to be strong and heroic, while the latter is often of humbler origins and earns his might and virtue over the course of his journey. Both heroic models were used as examples: the first shows how a lord should behave and the second depicts the virtues that a common man should strive to uphold.

These different hero types can be found in *The Faerie Queene* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Redcrosse is the medieval Christian knight in borrowed armor in search of holiness. Frodo is also the Christian knight, or as Verlyn Flieger calls it, "the fairytale hero, [...] the unlikely hero who stumbles into heroic adventure and does the best he can"



(Flieger 124). Frodo contrasts sharply with Aragorn, the Germanic lord or the “traditional epic/romance hero, larger than life, a leader, fight, lover, healer” (Flieger 124). Spenser uses the Christian knight typing with Redcrosse because it was the tradition of his time, and in writing a medieval knight as the hero of his allegory, he immediately gives his readers something familiar to hold on to though they may struggle with the deeper Protestant Christian meanings within the story. Tolkien is a different case entirely. He makes it clear that he gained much of his inspiration for *The Lord of the Rings* from Anglo-Saxon culture and language, but he was writing during the period following the First World War. Having participated in that war, he possessed a naturally altered perspective on heroism, yet he chose for the heroes of his epic to return to the medieval stereotypes, perhaps to distance them from his own experience physically in order to focus on the emotional similarities his characters had with himself and his fellow soldiers. He mixes these distinct types of heroes in Frodo and Aragorn, giving Aragorn the fairytale ending of love and a kingdom and allowing Frodo to experience a Germanic “defeat and disillusionment—the stark, bitter ending” (Flieger 125). Furthermore, Frodo has his own *comitatus* in the fellowship, and in the end of the novel, Aragorn merges Germanic and Christian ideas of the healer king. In this way, Tolkien does not allow his narrative or his characters to be too easily defined. He takes the old and makes it into something new, while maintaining enough of the old to allow *The Lord of the Rings* to be categorized as a modern epic in the medieval tradition. In her essay, “*The Lord of the Rings: Tolkien’s Epic*,” Jane Chance writes, “As a synthesis, then, of Tolkienian ideas, Germanic heroic or medieval and Christian, *The Lord of the Rings* reconciles value systems over which its critics have debated incessantly” (197). It reconciles them

because, perhaps, the emotional responses of his characters are what were most important to Tolkien, beyond adhering to a specific heroic code. The fairytale hero is the one that most readers are able to identify with, for he is the one who makes mistakes and is not always brave enough or strong enough to face the task assigned to him. Tolkien likely identified with such a hero, but felt that the fairytale ending was out of reach of the common soldier from World War I. The bleak, Germanic ending could have been more true, especially in light of the second war that followed the first.

#### THE BELLY OF THE WHALE IN *THE FAERIE QUEENE* AND *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

As stated above, the Belly of the Whale, also known as the Descent into the Underworld, is possibly the most important step in the hero's journey. Campbell writes,

The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale. The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died.  
(Campbell 90)

This part of the journey acts as a crucible for transformation. The hero must die to himself and to his own needs and flaws and be reborn as a hero worthy of the quest he has been chosen for. Redcrosse and Aragorn succeed in conquering their underworlds and find healing and strength in them, but Frodo fails when he has to face Shelob, and Gandalf is transformed so thoroughly that he is unrecognizable, which is a different kind of failure—he does defeat the Balrog and return, but the hero in Campbell's monomyth must return *and reintegrate* into his home society in order to truly succeed. Both Gandalf

and Frodo exhibit this failure by being unable to remain and reintegrate into Middle-earth, and must instead travel to the Undying Lands. By examining these successes and failures, one can see why the ultimate quest of the hero is completely dependant on the transformations that occur in the Belly of the Whale and how the outcome of that stage determines the final failure or success of the hero in any given story.

These characters, though arising from the same traditions, all face their underworld journeys in vastly different ways. Redcrosse hardly faces his at all, but is dragged through it by Una, who saves him again and again until he is able to let go of his pride and become virtuous and holy at the end of his long underworld experience. Aragorn's underworld seems almost easy for him, and the reader finds it difficult to connect with Aragorn as he braves all the horrors of the Paths of the Dead as easily as if he were strolling leisurely through Rivendell. Redcrosse's underworld is a fight for his life, while Aragorn's is the culmination of his choices and his final acceptance of his role as Isildur's heir. They both succeed and complete the tasks assigned to them of their own free will. Frodo is a different case entirely. He faces his underworld bravely, but ultimately it is Sam, not Frodo, who confronts the beast, Shelob, and defeats her, while Frodo lies poisoned and helpless a few feet away. Therefore in the end, Frodo gives into the evil of the Ring because he has not overcome the evil within himself (represented by Shelob) and an outside force—in this case Gollum and his lust for the Ring—must intervene or the Ring might never have been destroyed and Frodo's quest would have failed at the precipice of doom.

## THE BELLY OF THE WHALE IN CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY

To understand Campbell's purpose in writing *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, one must look outside of a specific time, culture, or genre and see myth and story as a whole. Campbell believed in a connectedness of myth and the idea that myth can reveal deeper parts of human nature than humans themselves might be able to see. A classical example, then, of a hero of monomyth is Odysseus. *The Odyssey*, a text that was familiar to both Spenser and Tolkien, can be seen as a possible influence to these two authors and the underworlds their characters experience, for, like the heroes we will examine, Odysseus's underworld journey determines the course of the remainder of his quest. Odysseus's literal underworld journey can be used as an example of the effect of the Belly of the Whale: After travelling many years trying to get back to Ithaca, Odysseus and his men land on Circe's island. Circe explains to Odysseus that if he wants to get home, he must first go to the Underworld, where he will speak to the prophet Tiresias. Without doing so, she says, Odysseus will never make it back to Ithaca.

Once in the land of the dead, he pours out libations to the dead and offers a "sleek black ram" to Tiresias in the hope that the prophet's spirit will appear and guide him home at last. Tiresias appears to him and says, says, "You and your crew may still reach home, suffering all the way, if only you have the power to curb their wild desire and curb your own" (Homer, *The Odyssey* XI.252). Odysseus's fate is in his own hands, even though Poseidon has been against him throughout his hero's journey. There is a chance for Odysseus to get home as long as he is able to control himself and his men. Tiresias goes on to describe the situation on Ithaca with the suitors, and says that once Odysseus gets back and rids his home of the suitors, he must atone with Poseidon, after all this

time. If he does this, he will live to an old age and die in peace, far from the sea. Already, his underworld experience is changing Odysseus, shaping him into a more humble man that learns that he needs to atone with the gods rather than think himself above them.

Then, Odysseus sees his mother, who has died of grief at his long absence. She tells him that Penelope, his wife, is still loyal and waiting for him, that she has not remarried, and that she and his son, Telemachus, have not given up the throne to the suitors. Speaking to her opens Odysseus's eyes to the suffering his absence has caused the people he loves at home, and urges him to return to Ithaca even faster.

Next, Odysseus meets Agamemnon, an old friend from the Trojan War, who tells him what happened when Agamemnon returned home from Troy—his wife and her lover carried out a plot to murder him. He is understandably bitter toward women (except Penelope, who he says is perfect). Odysseus sees what he is missing. Yes, he could stay with Circe forever and be happy, but it would be a superficial happiness of the flesh, and he would miss out on true happiness with Penelope, his queen. She is the goddess he is searching for, and he realizes that it is in fact Penelope's mortality that makes her real and worth the struggle.

Finally, there is Achilles, a great hero of the Trojan War. In *The Iliad*, which precedes *The Odyssey* chronologically, Achilles is given a choice: he could live a short but glorious life in Troy and gain eternal fame, or he could return to his home, Phthia, and live to a happy old age in obscurity. Before Patroclus's death, Achilles is ready to choose life in Phthia over death in Troy, but then Patroclus goes into battle and is killed. Achilles tells his mother, "I will not live nor go about among mankind unless Hector falls by my spear, and thus pay me for having slain Patroclus" (Homer, *The Iliad* XVIII). His

desire for vengeance clouds his judgment, and his mother even tells him, “Then, my son, is your end near at hand—for your own death awaits you full soon after that of Hector” (Homer, *The Iliad* XXII). In the Underworld, Odysseus praises Achilles, claiming, “there’s not a man in the world more blest than you— / ... / Time was, when you were alive, we Argives / honored you as a god, and now down here, I see, / you lord it over the dead in all your power. / So grieve no more at dying” (Homer, *The Odyssey* XI.548-553). Odysseus, in a way, envies Achilles’s death because of the *kleos* (glory) that it brought him. Personal *kleos* is at the core of the Greek heroic code, and Odysseus believes that Achilles should be pleased with the glory that he received after his death in the Trojan War. But Achilles responds, “No winning words about death to me, shining Odysseus! / By god, I’d rather slave on earth for another man— / some dirt-poor tenant farmer who scrapes to keep alive— / than rule down here over all the breathless dead” (Homer, *The Odyssey* XI.555-558). Achilles envies Odysseus’s life, even though Odysseus faces so many trials. The vibrance of being alive is worth more than all the *kleos* of the dead. This shows Odysseus that he does in fact need to atone with Poseidon so that he can live into old age with Penelope as Tiresias said. It is in this moment that Odysseus realizes that while he can go on many adventures and seek personal glory, it is the things at home that are actually worth living for and coming back to.

When he does return home at last, it is this experience in the underworld and the things that he learned there that allow him to reintegrate and become king of Ithaca once more. Had it not been for this experience, it is likely that he would have gone out again in search of personal *kleos* and perhaps lost his home to other suitors. This is a fairly straightforward example from the classical tradition, and as we will see in a moment, the

underworlds of *The Faerie Queene* and *The Lord of the Rings* are more complicated in comparison, due in part, to a changing of heroic codes that comes into play in the medieval world.

## THE FAERIE QUEENE

In his explanatory letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Edmund Spenser expresses fear that his massive allegorical poem, *The Faerie Queene*, might be misconstrued by sixteenth-century readers, and writes the letter for the “avoyding of gealous opinions and misconstructions” (Spenser 205). Spenser goes on to say that, to some, “this methode will seeme displeasaunt, which had rather have good discipline delivered plainly in way of precepts, or sermoned at large, as they use, then thus cloudily enwrapped in allegoricall devises” (Spenser 206). As *The Faerie Queene* was written during the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation, this statement is a means of belittling the Roman Catholic Church, which Spenser does throughout the poem. Protestant Christians of this period were skeptical of allegory—a story with a distinct meaning embedded in the obvious literal interpretation—because of its perceived abuse by the Church; instead, one of the main thrusts of the early Reformers was a recovery of the “plain sense of scripture.” The primary symbol of the Roman Catholic Church in *The Faerie Queene* is Archimago, a sorcerer and a deceiver who is “symbolically a ‘miracle worker’ or false teacher—hence from the poet’s Protestant stance, a Roman Catholic teacher pictured as a conjuring hypocritical whisperer” (Waters 159). Archimago’s interactions with Redcrosse and Una act as a warning to 16<sup>th</sup> century readers: In the spirit of the Protestant focus on the individual soul, Spenser is urging his readers to find religious truth on their own—even if that means looking deeper into allegory—and to not be deceived by the false interpretations of the Catholic church. St. Peter’s assertion about the “priesthood of all believers” (1 Pet. 2:5) became Luther’s hue and cry against the Catholic magisterium. But while Luther generally scorned the use of allegorical interpretation, Spenser recovers



it as an imaginative possibility for believers. Through Book One of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser offers Christians the option of deciding for themselves: “so much more profitable and gracious is doctrine by ensample, then by rule” (Spenser 206), and he sets up just such an example in the Redcrosse Knight, who must learn to see the Truth for himself and in so doing, become holy—the central virtue of Book One and Spenser’s key to proper interpretation of his poem as well as scripture.

Spenser’s fear of the “misconstruction” of his allegory was due, in part, to a then-popular way of interpreting scripture called the “fourfold sense of reading,” which viewed scripture through four levels of meaning: the literal (surface level), the allegorical (a spiritual meaning beneath the surface, which for the Christian Church usually had to do with the New Testament), the tropological (moral or doctrinal value, referring to the fate of individual souls in practical conduct), and the anagogical (referring to eschatology and the ultimate destiny of the Church and humanity) (Baldick, “Typology”). The fourfold sense was not limited to the Christian Bible, but could be used as a means of study for other literature, especially something as theologically driven as *The Faerie Queene*. Of the four levels, Spenser was most concerned with allegory, which he reveals throughout the poem to be a more useful interpretation than the literal, and the one that the Redcrosse Knight, like the reader, must learn to look for and understand.

It is only in the Belly of the Whale phase of Redcrosse’s hero journey, which consists of four repeated descents into an underworld, that Spenser’s knight is able to discover truth, learn to look beyond the literal level to see into the allegorical world beneath the surface, and acquire the virtue of holiness. The four repeated descents are symbolic of the fourfold sense of reading, with each descent representing a different level

of interpretation. By structuring the poem in this way, Spenser shows that it is impossible to get full meaning out of a text by only looking at the literal. The allegorical is the realm of the holy, which Una sees from the beginning of the journey and Redcrosse seeks throughout it in order to ultimately complete his quest. He must be able to look beyond the surface meaning of the world so as not to be deceived by it. There is a constant sense of juxtaposition throughout the poem: literal and allegorical, reason and truth, pride and humility; and Redcrosse and Una are physical embodiments of each of these, respectively. Through Redcrosse's journey, Spenser makes it clear that Redcrosse's vices (literal, prideful, relying on reason alone) must give way to Una's virtues (allegorical, humble, relying on faith) in order for Redcrosse to be able to ascend from the underworld and become holy. Redcrosse's journey thus reflects the journey of Spenser's reader, who must look beyond the literal and into the allegorical in a humble way in order to see what God has planned, rather than read it in the prideful way of the Catholics, who (in the view of Protestant Reformers) manipulated scripture to best suit their own needs and desires. Protestant Reformers generally sought a literal interpretation of scripture, but Spenser writes to reform Christians' view of allegory as a medium for learning holiness. Spenser was a Protestant with Calvinist, reformist sympathies, and he appears to be demonstrating—perhaps against the tide—the strength and potential of allegory to shape holy readers. By representing the literal in Redcrosse and the allegorical in Una, the reader sees by the end of Book One that it is prideful to believe the Bible can be understood by man *only* on a literal level, and that holiness is found in the humility of surrendering to the deeper, more complex meaning in allegory.

In the first book of the poem, the Redcrosse Knight searches for holiness, but he fails continuously to find it within himself because he only looks at the literal level of things: he concerns himself solely with the physical world around him and falls victim to physical sins. Redcrosse takes pride in his armor (which makes him *appear* knightly) and in his physical victories (such as his first battle with Sansfoy). He takes things at face value instead of looking for a deeper meaning, and is therefore easily deceived by Archimago and Duessa. On the other hand, Una, who represents Truth and Holiness, can see through exterior glamour and know the true heart of things: she is the first to recognize Error as the monster she is, which saves Redcrosse's life, just as Truth and humility are the tonic that the Church most needed during the Reformation. Una must be separated from Redcrosse early in the narrative so that Redcrosse can learn to see beneath the surface of things on his own, and in so doing learn humility and grow closer to holiness. The reader must make the same journey, and the descent into the underworld is the catalyst for Redcrosse's growth as a hero and a Christian.

The letter to Raleigh sets up the history of the Redcrosse Knight. Spenser describes the events that occur chronologically before the first lines of the poem proper: namely the feast of the Queen of Faerie when Redcrosse meets Una and she explains the details of her family's misfortune. Redcrosse, who is simply described as "a tall clownish younge man," first approaches the Queen and asks her to grant him a quest, "which during that feast she might not refuse" (Spenser 207). This gives insight into Redcrosse's past, as he is clearly seeking knighthood, but is yet untested. Since he asks the Queen at a time when she cannot refuse, Redcrosse seems to have had trouble finding someone willing to grant him a chance to prove himself through a quest. Before Book One, he is

no one, and is not granted a name until Una presents him with armor bearing a red cross. He is even unworthy to share a table with the feasters: after the Queen grants his wish, Redcrosse “rested him[self] on the floore, unfitte through his rusticity for a better place” (Spenser 207). After starting his journey, Redcrosse easily succumbs to pride, perhaps in an effort to overcompensate for his humble beginnings. When Una appears to beg the Queen for aid against a dragon that has besieged her home, Redcrosse immediately asks to be granted this challenge. Both Una and the Queen are hesitant, but “in the end [Una] told him, that unlesse that armour which she brought would serve him (that is, the armour of a Christian man specified by Saint Paul, vi. Ephes.), that he could not succeed in that enterprise” (Spenser 207). It does fit him, however, perhaps revealing potential that the reader does not fully see at this point in the narrative. Redcrosse must be holy or destined to be so if the armor does “serve him” as Una says. It transforms the “clownish younge man” into a knight and makes him seem the “goodliest man in al that company” (Spenser 208). But this is only goodness in appearance, which Spenser reveals to be of little import throughout the poem. Redcrosse must become the “goodliest man” in his own heart before he will be truly holy.

Pride quickly becomes the greatest obstacle on Redcrosse’s journey to holiness, which is the ultimate goal of his quest. This pride soon becomes Redcrosse’s chief sin and the stimulant for his descent into the underworld. In this case, the descent consists of four smaller ventures into an underworld, perhaps representing the four parts of the fourfold sense ingrained in Renaissance culture. It begins when Duessa leads Redcrosse to the House of Pride, where his struggle with pride is revealed. The descent continues when he is captured by the giant, Orgoglio, then repeats when he falls into the Cave of

Despair after being rescued by Una, the dwarf, and Prince Arthur, and finally ends at the House of Holinesse, where Redcrosse is healed and sees the need for heroes to be humble and virtuous about all else.

Redcrosse must be separated from Una early in the narrative to show his lack of holiness and his need to seek it out. Una represents the holiness that Redcrosse pursues, and also embodies the One Truth of (Protestant) Christianity that Spenser propagates throughout the poem. She begins the journey riding “upon a lowly Asse more white then snow, / Yet she much whiter, but the same did hide / under a vele, that wimpled was full low, / and over all a blacke stole shee did throw” (I.4.2-5). The fact that she is “much whiter” than her white donkey is a physical symbol of her holiness. Not only does she ride a donkey, which is a parallel to Christ entering Jerusalem, but the whiteness of her skin is a symbol of her purity and holiness. Una hides these things under a “blacke stole.” The literal meaning of this is that she is in mourning for her kingdom that is presently under attack by a dragon. However, the allegorical interpretation is that she is veiling her holiness as a sign of humility—a key trait of the holy. In some ways, Una represents the “veil of allegory” herself, as she is holiness hidden beneath a cloak, and Redcrosse is just the opposite—his armor causes him to appear holy, but in fact he is sinful and full of pride under his exterior, much like the Catholic Church that Spenser slanders. The pair is travelling with a dwarf, who is commonly thought to represent Reason in the poem (Bell 111). Reason is helpful to Redcrosse over the course of his adventure, but cannot unveil allegorical truth the way that Una is able to, because Reason is a product of the literal mind, rather than a mind that searches for the spiritual meaning that Reason cannot always explain. Reason is represented by a dwarf to show that it has a purpose, but is

only a small part of what makes a hero (and a holy man). When Redcrosse, Una, and the dwarf stumble upon the Den of Error while wandering in the forest, it is Una who recognizes the danger and tells Redcrosse, “the peril of this place / I better wot then you” (I.13.1-2). But Redcrosse is “full of fire and greedy hardiment” so he enters into the “darksom hole” nonetheless (I.14.1-3). Error herself is a terrible monster, described as “halfe like a serpent horribly displaide, / but th’other halfe did womans shape retaine, / most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile distaine” (I.14.7-9). The monster Error is symbolic of the Roman Catholic Church, and Una, representing Protestant ideals, tells Redcrosse, “Add faith unto your force, and be not faint” (I.19.3). Una is telling Redcrosse that he cannot defeat Error without the help of God. Symbolically, the monster Error represents “learned” or “intellectual” error,” shown through her “vomit full of bookes and papers” (I.20.6). This is “a form of religious error [of the Roman Catholic Church]—that specious and mundane wisdom which is folly in the sight of God” (Waters, 163). Una sees that faith is ultimately more important than wisdom or strength when fighting religious error, and it is through her that Redcrosse is able to see the monster for what she is. This is where the Protestant Christian message of the poem comes heavily into play, as Una is advocating that God is on their side, rather than the side of the Roman Catholic Church, represented by Error. Spenser uses this scene to show the power of Protestant faith as opposed to the pride the Roman Catholic Church has in its own supposed knowledge, figured here as “vomit.” D. Douglas Waters, argues that “because of the presence and guidance of Una (Truth) and hence the exclusion of an external weakness in the situation, the Red Crosse Knight hung the cog of faith on the monster Error’s neck”

(Waters, 163). Una sees things beyond the external, thus taking away Redcrosse's weakness to external deception, and as such she can recognize Error more quickly.

Una is the truth that Redcrosse cannot seem to see, and therefore he must be separated from her to learn how much he needs her. They are separated in the first canto when they visit the hermitage of the sorcerer Archimago. Archimago appears as a Catholic friar at his first meeting with the pair, and is later revealed that he is a maker of false images. Archimago is deceptive, and shows Redcrosse an image of Una "in wanton lust and leud embracement" with another man, which is untrue, but Redcrosse does not think about anything other than the physical world before him, and so he believes the enchanter (II.5.5). Una is asleep, and it is up to Redcrosse to see the Truth for himself, but he cannot. Instead of having compassion for Una, he takes pride in his own virtue and believes himself to be better than Una in that moment. He leaves Una, taking the dwarf with him, and continues the journey without her, though she has actually been asleep and done nothing wrong. The fact that she was not awake to show Redcrosse the truth of the situation shows that he still needs to learn to find the truth on his own, and the splitting of Redcrosse from his sense of Truth is an essential part of his later descent into the underworld. He must be separated from her in order to learn how necessary Truth is for success on his journey. Una recognizes danger and religious error before it is able to harm Redcrosse, and had they stayed together for the entirety of the poem, Redcrosse might never have had a descent into the underworld. If he learned to listen to Una, she might have saved him from the perils of the descent, but he would not have grown into the hero of the poem. By separating Redcrosse from his guide, Spenser makes the comment that holiness is not something that can be given to the hero by another person,

just as the teachings of the church cannot make a person a Christian. It is up to the individual to give up his pride and seek out the truth on his own, which is what Spenser suggests throughout the allegory of *The Faerie Queene*.

#### THE HOUSE OF PRIDE

The beginning of Redcrosse's descent into the underworld occurs when he allows Duessa, whom he meets after leaving Una at Archimago's, to lead him to the House of Pride, which is representative of the literal level of the fourfold sense of reading. He cannot see Duessa (literally "duality" and the opposite of the "oneness" of Una) for the deceiver that she is, for he looks only at the appearance of faith ("Fidess") that she puts forth to him. Reason is now his single guide, and the dwarf sees only what is on the surface, like Redcrosse, and therefore cannot help him. Redcrosse lets Duessa take him to this house: "A stately Palace built of squared bricke, / Which cunningly was without mortar laid, / whose wals were high, but nothing strong, nor thick / And golden foile all over them displaid" (IV.4.1-4). This place is gilded, but like Redcrosse, the people that take the high straight road to get there see it as a "glorious vew," for they do not bother to look beneath the pretty exterior (IV.7.2). What Redcrosse and the dwarf Reason fail to see is that the House "did on so weake foundation ever sitt: / For on a sandie hill, that still did flitt, / And fall away, it mounted was full hie, / That every breath of heaven shaken itt," and Una is not there to reveal to them those weak foundations and crumbling walls (IV.5.4-7). The House is very much symbolic of Redcrosse himself, who appears to be a holy knight because of borrowed armor, but within he is just a proud boy playing dress up, and he has not yet gained the humility of holiness that would allow him to see beyond



black veils and gilded walls. In this way, the House of Pride can be seen as the first level of the fourfold sense: the literal. Though there are hidden weak foundations, the House of Pride presents itself very literally—most things can be taken at face value, even if Redcrosse and the dwarf do not see that the house is a place of sin.

Within the House, they meet the Queen of Pride, Lucifera, whose name is a reference to Lucifer, who fell from grace because of his own excessive pride. Like her home, Lucifera shines with a “bright blazing beautie” that is entirely external—a direct contrast to Una’s beauty, which she hides beneath a cloak and veil—for she is in fact a symbol of pride as the worst of the vices and the cause and effect of all other sin. This is most clear when Lucifera’s train of advisors enters: Idleness (Sloth), Gluttony, Lechery, Avarice, Envy, and Wrath. They are driven from behind by Satan himself, who, like Lucifera, is an embodiment of Pride above all else: he is called “proud Lucifer” (IV.37.6). Together, these eight figures represent the cycle of sin, and comment that if pride is involved, there is no end to the chain, for it merely repeats itself perpetually.

Sansjoy then appears to avenge his brother, Sansfoy, a pagan knight whom Redcrosse defeated earlier in the poem. Because of Redcrosse’s pride in this victory, he has been displaying the shield he won from Sansfoy, and so Sansjoy is able to find and challenge him. Redcrosse accepts, and his defeat of the second Sans brother makes him all the more proud. He seems willing to stay at the House of Pride indefinitely, until the dwarf Reason points out that they are standing on the bones of those who have succumbed to vice in this place. Reason makes Redcrosse leave, but is unable to help the knight learn from this experience and turn toward humility because Reason without Truth has no direction and merely tends toward self-preservation rather than the search of

something higher, such as holiness. Protestant Reformers believed that Reason itself was corrupt, and needed to be redeemed through Truth before it could be properly used on the path to holiness.

#### THE DUNGEON OF ORGOGLIO

The next step in the descent comes in the dungeon of the giant Orgoglio. After defeating Sansjoy at the House of Pride, Redcrosse and Duessa find a place to rest near a stream, which (unknown to the pair) has been cursed by the goddess Diana so that any man who drinks of it will lose his “manliness.” In this instance, Redcrosse removes the armor given to him by Una for protection in order to make love to Duessa, and therefore he gives up his identity as a man of God. He puts down his shield, which by the Red Cross it bears can be recognized as the “shield of faith” described by Paul in Ephesians: “In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one,” a verse Spenser cites in the letter to Raleigh (Ephesians 6.16). Redcrosse has not lost faith in God, but he is putting it aside for the sake of sin and so he must be punished. The knight is “both carelesse of his health, and of his fame,” showing that it does not matter to him that he is sinning with Duessa, and this careless sin allows him to be overcome by Orgoglio (VII.7.3). In this moment of sin, Redcrosse is not battle-ready: “But ere he could his armour on him dight, / Or gett his shield, his monstrous enemy / With sturdy steps came stalking in his sight” (VII.8.1-3). S. K. Heninger writes that Orgoglio can be read as “the earthquake heralding the Last Judgment” prophesied in the Book of Revelation, as “Orgoglio has been generated by a boisterous wind blowing through the caves of the earth” which identifies him as an

earthquake by “principles of Renaissance mythology” (Heninger 177, 172). The giant can be seen as an embodiment of the wrath of God on sinners (Heninger 173). In this way, Orgoglio is the punishment that Redcrosse has earned for his sin with Duessa.

The wages of sin are death, and Redcrosse almost comes to death in the dungeon of Orgoglio’s castle, but for the “heavenly grace” that saves him. Without his shield and armor, Redcrosse is easily overcome by Orgoglio, who brings Redcrosse and Duessa back to his home. Redcrosse is thrown in the dungeon, where he wanes almost to death: his “feeble thighs, unable to uphold / His pined corse, him scarce to light could beare, / A ruefull spectacle of death and ghastly drere” (VIII.40.7-9). He should have died in this dungeon, “were it not [for] heavenly grace, that did him bless” (VII.12.3). Even though he has sinned, he is still one of the elect, and God does not abandon Redcrosse in his moment of weakness. Meanwhile, Orgoglio takes Duessa up as his consort. He adorns her with a “gold and purple pall to weare” and a “triple crown” to “endow her with royall majesty,” and gives her a “monstrous beast” with “seven great heads” to ride (VII.16.3-4, VII.16.8, VII.17.7). This effectively makes her into the Whore of Babylon from the Book of Revelation:

I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: ‘Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations.’ (Revelation 17.3-5)

Therefore, “Orgoglio, as Duessa’s consort, does become an embodiment of pride—the pride of Catholic despots, of the Pope, of Antichrist” (Heninger 179). Orgoglio’s name in Italian means “pride” and so he has often been read as the pride of the Roman Catholic Church, effectively associating Catholicism with this sin.

Prince Arthur, however, in his great faith, represents the Protestant church and its victory over the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church. Una, showing true and unconditional love, continues to search for Redcrosse even after he abandons her in Archimago’s hermitage. She looks for him for months; Una discovers Arthur on her journey after being parted from Redcrosse, and she sees the Truth of the holiness within Arthur. She says to him, “faire Sir, I hope good hap hath brought / You to inquere the secrets of my grieffe, / Or that your wisdom will direct my thought” (VII.42.5-7). Una is willing to tell Arthur her story, showing that she trusts him to succeed where Redcrosse has failed, and he does so in his battle with Orgoglio. Prince Arthur’s shield is “all of diamond perfect pure and clean” (VII.33.5.) This is the true shield of faith that Redcrosse has not yet built up for himself. It is the prized piece of Arthur’s armor, and clearly well maintained: “His warlike shield all closely cover’d was” (VII.33.1). In Psalms 84, the Psalmist writes, “For the Lord God is the sun and shield unto us,” so Arthur’s shield represents the fruits of unbreakable faith, unlike Redcrosse, who puts down his shield in sin (Ps. 84.11).

As the House of Pride represents the literal level in the fourfold sense of reading, Orgoglio’s dungeon is the allegorical. All the other descents show things as they are: the House of Pride is full of vice (each vice is named blatantly and literally spurred on by Satan himself); Despair is a character in his cave; and the House of Holiness is the mirror

(yet the opposite) of the House of Pride. Orgoglio's portion is veiled. Orgoglio represents pride and corruption, but not in the obvious way of Lucifer, the Queen of Pride. During the rescue of Redcrosse, Arthur and his squire fight the giant, and though Orgoglio is powerful, Arthur is about to overcome him with his sword and shield of faith. When Orgoglio does strike at Arthur's shield, he accidentally "did loose his vele by chance, and open flew: / the light whereof, that heavens light did pas, / such blazing brightness through the ayer threw, / that eye mote not the same endure to vew" (VIII.19.2-5). This light, which has until this point been veiled, (a symbol of faithful humility already displayed in Una) stuns the giant and blinds Duessa's beast. It is important for the sake of Spenser's message that the clearest picture of the Protestant way (represented by Arthur and the light) overcoming the Catholic, embodied in the fight between Arthur and Orgoglio, is shown through the section of his story heavily veiled in allegory. Protestants of the time despised allegory for the way Catholic leaders used it to twist the Bible and instead, Protestants favored a very literal reading of scripture. Spenser, as a Protestant and an advocator of allegory, uses this part of Redcrosse's descent to show that Protestants, through faith, can take allegory and use it in a way to properly interpret scripture, as long as they choose for themselves what to think, rather than allow the church to instruct them in their own faith.

#### THE CAVE OF DESPAIRE

Throughout Book One, Spenser stresses that humility is the opposite of pride and the only way to overcome pride is to become humble instead. However, even after his time in Orgoglio's dungeon, and despite his rescue by Arthur and reunion with Una,

Redcrosse has not learned this crucial lesson. As long as he is prideful, he cannot be holy, and so he must go through yet another descent. Falling victim to his pride once more, Redcrosse believes he can take on the monster Despaire (“with firie zeal he burnt in courage bold”—just as he was “full of fire” when he entered the Den of Errour), though he is still weak from his previous trials (IX.37.4, I.14.1). Redcrosse and Una follow a knight they have met, Sir Trevisan, to the Cave of Despaire, which lies “Low in a hollow cave, / Far underneath a craggy clift ypight, / Darke, dolefull, dreary, like a greedy grave” (IX.33.2-4). Despaire himself appears corpse-like, recalling the imagery of Redcrosse while held captive in Orgoglio’s dungeon, and Redcrosse marches in to confront him with “firie zeale,” though he sees the horror Sir Trevisan feels after facing Despaire (IX.37.4). Immediately, Despaire begins a debate with Redcrosse over Death and the fate of his soul. He wishes for Redcrosse to kill himself—for Despaire yearns to commit suicide but cannot, so he relishes in the death of others.

This debate reveals that Redcrosse is still prideful, that he does not understand the mercy of the God for whom he is fighting, and that he still needs Una to reveal to him the Truth. It begins with Despaire telling Redcrosse that Death is the best and only way to escape the miseries of life: “Sleepe after toyle, port after stormie seas, / Ease after warre, death after life does greatly please” (IX.40.8-9). But Redcrosse is not swayed by this argument, and replies, “The terme of life is limited, / Ne may a man prolong, nor shorten it,” meaning that only God can choose when a man dies, and Redcrosse does not believe it is his place to take his own life. The debate begins simply, with no biblical doctrine yet stated, and so it is easy for Redcrosse to see through Despaire’s faulty logic. However, when Despaire moves on to discuss sin, it is not so simple. Despaire argues that

Redcrosse has already sinned enough in his life, and that the only way to prevent future sin is to die as soon as possible: “Thou wretched man, of death hast greatest need, / If in true ballaunce thou wilt weigh thy state” (IX.45.1-2). For emphasis, he then lists the worst of Redcrosse’s sins: he has “dared warlike deed” and as such committed murder, he betrayed Una, and he “sold [himself] to serve Duessa vild, / With whom in al abuse [Redcrosse] hast [himself] defild” (IX.45.3, IX.46.8-9). Despaire invokes scripture, telling Redcrosse “Let every sinner die,” but he twists it to his own advantage and tries to convince Redcrosse that the only thing to be done is to kill himself, for that is what his sin deserves:

Shall he thy sins up in his knowledge enfold,

And guiltie be of thine impietie?

Is not his law, Let every sinner die:

Die shall all flesh ? What then must needs be donne,

Is not better to doe willinglie,

Then linger, till the glas be all out ronne?

Death is the end of woes: die soone, O faries sonne. (IX.47.3-9)

Despaire knows that Redcrosse is guilty of “impietie,” as he shows through the listing of Redcrosse’s sins, but his question here does not take into account the whole truth of the mercy of God, or Una for that matter, who has forgiven Redcrosse for leaving her. Rather, Despaire corrupts scripture, revealing only the things that will bring about the ends he seeks. Finally, Despaire tries to move Redcrosse to suicide by repeating that it is better to die “willinglie,” and in so doing, prevent his future sins.

After this, Redcrosse is ready to kill himself, and would have done so were it not for Una, who snatches away the knife that Redcrosse intends to stab through his heart. She calls him a “faint hearted knight” and a “fraile, feeble, fleshly wight” because in all this time, after everything Redcrosse has been through, he still thinks himself beyond the mercy of God, which is in itself another type of pride, though it is disguised as despair (IX.52.6, IX.53.1). Una, as has been the case throughout the poem, shows Redcrosse the Truth: “In heavenly mercies hast thou not a part? / Why shouldst thou then despire, that chosen art?” (IX.53.4-5). This is the deeper meaning of scripture that Redcrosse has forgotten. Mercy is the first and greatest gift of God to His elect. Redcrosse *is* one of the elect, and Una has known this since he was first able to don the armor she brought with her to the Faerie Queene, but Redcrosse has allowed pride and despair too deeply into his mind and has forgotten that God’s mercy covers all his sin. Only because of Una is Redcrosse able to leave the Cave of Despaire and continue on his journey. She is doctrinal truth that Redcrosse, and perhaps the Catholic Church, have forgotten in their own pride.

This third descent reflects the tropological reading of scripture—the level of the fourfold sense that deals with morality and religious doctrine, which are crucial to the debate in the cave. Despaire argues for corrupt doctrine—corrupt because incomplete in its emphasis on divine justice and not divine grace—thus twisting the words of scripture so as to cause Redcrosse to lose hope and, indeed, succumb to despair. But Una saves him with True doctrine, showing him that the moral and godly choice is not for Redcrosse to kill himself, but instead for them to leave the cave and move on to defeat the real enemy: the dragon. Furthermore, the tropological deals with the fate of individual



souls, and this scene depicts a classic argument over exactly that. Redcrosse's soul alone is on the line in this descent, and it is necessary for him to have his own heart right with God before he can move on to saving others.

As the third of four descents into the Underworld, the Cave of Despaire is Redcrosse's lowest point in the poem, but it is also the first in which he has Truth to guide him from beginning to end. Were it not for Truth, this would have been the end for Redcrosse, but Una saves him with the mercy of God, rather than with strength or pride, which Redcrosse has primarily relied on thus far. She shows him that it is humble, but not lowly, to accept mercy and after this descent is able to lead him to the House of Holinesse, which will prepare Redcrosse for his ultimate ascent to conquer the dragon.

#### THE HOUSE OF HOLINESSE

The final descent, or the beginning of the ascent, is the most important to Redcrosse's hero journey. Thus far, he has gone through three descents, but has not taken enough away from them to be able to "ascend" and reenter the world. Instead, the previous descents have simply acted as means for Redcrosse to more fully reveal pride, his vice. The last descent to the House of Holinesse is the learning experience that Redcrosse has been lacking, and through the purging of his sin that occurs there, he is able to come to terms with who he is as a hero. The House of Holinesse is a direct contrast to the House of Pride in stanza four, but it is important to note that the goodness displayed in the House of Holinesse is not simply a reaction *against* evil and vice, but it has roots in Christianity that create a positive source for virtue. In other words, light is not in the world to eradicate darkness, but to act on its own altruistic behalf.

Una leads Redcrosse to the House of Holinesse following his near-death encounter with Despaire. He is now trusting Truth to guide him, rather than the deception and duality of Duessa, who led him to the House of Pride. When Una and Redcrosse reach the house, Spenser describes it as,

Renowned throughout the world for sacred lore,  
 And pure unspotted life: so well they say  
 It governd was, and guided evermore,  
 Through wisdom of a matrone grave and hore;  
 Whose only joy was to relieve the needes  
 Of wretched soules, and helpe the helplesse pore. (X.3.2-7)

This is a place of purity and truth, unlike the gilded walls and weak foundations of the House of Pride. Lucifera was there to greet Redcrosse and Duessa, eager to show off her home and her train of advisors. Caelia, the “matrone grave and hore,” rules her home with mercy and wisdom, and is in prayer when Redcrosse and Una arrive. Here, they are met by the porter, Humiltá, who takes them down the “streight and narrow way,” where they must “passe in stouping low”—taking on a physical posture of humility—opposed to the “broad high way” that led to the House of Pride (X.5.9, X.5.8, IV.2.8). Caelia’s daughters are Fidelia (Faith), Speranza (Hope), and Charissa (Charity), all of which are essential to God’s elect. Fidelia, the eldest, represents faith, which must come before everything else—faith is the basis of Christianity. Faith and Hope are the first to instruct Redcrosse in their ways: “Fayre Una gan Fidelia fayre request, / To have her knight into her schoolehous plaste, That of her heavenly learning he might taste” (X.18.3-5). When Fidelia reads to him from her “booke that was both signd and seald with blood,”

Redcrosse begins to see and truly regret his sin for the offence it would do to God, rather than for the punishment that he might have to suffer. Though the reasons are different, Redcrosse has a similar reaction after his episode in the Cave of Despaire: “That wretched world he gan for to abhore, / And mortal life gan loath, as thing forlore, / Greev'd with remembrance of his wicked wayes, / And prickt with anguish of his sinnes so sore, / That he desired to end his wretched dayes” (X.21.4-8). This time, however, Hope is there to bring him out of his suicidal reverie, like Una was there in the Cave.

But this is not enough for Redcrosse to become the hero that he will need to be to defeat the dragon. He must first be cleansed of his “inward corruption and infected sin” by the virtues of Patience, Amendment, Penance, Remorse, and Repentance (X.25.2). After his penance is complete, these virtues “trew Repentaunce they to Una brought; / Who joyous of his cured conscience, / Him dearly kist” (X.29.2-4). Redcrosse cannot be brought back to Truth until he has purified himself. But still, he is not complete in his transformation. Una passes him along to Mercy:

Both gracious, and eke liberall:

To whom the carefull charge of him she gave,

To leade aright, that he should never fall

In all his waies through this wide worldes wave,

That Mercy in the end his righteous soule might save. (X.34.5-9)

Mercy is the gift of God to the faithful elect, who still sin, as Redcrosse has throughout the poem. Without Mercy, no one would be able to become holy, for it is only through God's forgiveness of sin that man is saved, as shown in the Book of Titus: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the

washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Titus 3.5). This is what Redcrosse learns in the House of Holinesse. Caelia, seen by scholars to represent the Holy Ghost, runs a house of healing, renewal, and regeneration of the spirit, where Mercy follows repentance and Redcrosse learns that he cannot save himself through his deeds. Only God can ultimately save his soul.

Redcrosse must undergo one final step before he can leave the House of Holinesse and finally ascend and return to his quest. Mercy takes him by a “painful way” to a “hill that was both steepe and hy” upon which sits a “sacred chapel” and the “litle hermitage” of Contemplation (Reason redeemed), where Redcrosse enters into a conversation with Contemplation himself, mirroring the debate that the knight had with Despaire in the previous canto (X.46.1-4). Like Despaire, Contemplation has a withered appearance, but his is self-inflicted so that he can spend all his life contemplating God rather than wasting time eating or sleeping. In their conversation, Contemplation shows Redcrosse an image of the New Jerusalem and reveals to the reader (and to Redcrosse) Redcrosse’s true identity: “Saint George of mery England, the signe of victoree” (X.61.9). But he can only achieve this sainthood after defeating Una’s dragon and serving the Faerie Queene Gloriana for the six years he promised her. While Redcrosse sees the true beauty of New Jerusalem and knows that it far exceeds the beauty of Cleopolis, the city of Gloriana, he still does not come to terms with what it will mean for him to become a saint. He asks Contemplation, “But deeds of armes must I at last be faine, / And Ladies love to leave so dearely bought?” showing that he does not want to give up war and women (X.62.5-6). This is indicative of the refusal to grow that Redcrosse has exhibited throughout the poem, but Contemplation has a ready answer: “What need of armes;

where peace doth ay remaine.../ and bitter battailes all are fought? / As for loose loves they'are vaine, and vanish into naught" (X.62.7-9).

As the House of Pride was once a symbol of the Redcrosse Knight, so becomes the House of Holinesse once he has learned the virtue of humility. Now, he has earned his armor, and is holy both within and without. He has put aside the pride that was poisoning his soul and taken up the mantle of a virtuous Christ-like life. No longer does Redcrosse need his armor as gilding—he is now a true knight. He is ready to face the dragon of sin, for he now hates sin for the proper reason: not because God will exact his wrath upon sinners, but because the holy genuinely wish to do right by God.

Like the anagogical, this stage completes the fourfold sense of reading. The anagogical deals with eschatology—the study of the end of time and the final events of human history, including the ultimate destiny of humanity. This canto reveals how Spenser views the Christian religion through a lens of faith and mercy that lead to holiness, a view in contrast to the perceived Catholic view of the time—that God requires works and penance for men to earn their own salvation. Protestant ideals, especially among Calvinist puritans, led away from the overbearing magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church and toward a personal view of salvation: that God's mercy is for everyone, as long as they first have faith, which is in itself a gift of God toward the elect. Redcrosse makes his own choices throughout the poem, and as such faces the consequences for each of them, and the reward for finally coming to Christ in the House of Holinesse. However, it can be argued that since Spenser shared Calvinist sympathies, he wrote Redcrosse as one of the elect, and therefore Redcrosse always has faith in God, though it is at some points hidden under the mistruths that he believes. In this way,

Spenser furthers the Protestant Reformation, which he has advocated over the course of Book One and will continue to do for the rest of the poem.

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Spenser uses Redcrosse's Belly of the Whale/ Descent into the Underworld and his renewal therein to show the four levels of the fourfold sense of interpreting scripture, but allows the reader to come to this understanding on his own. Redcrosse is easily deceived by Archimago, Duessa, Lucifera, and Despaire, and only escapes in each instance due to the guidance of Reason or Truth, who together reveal to him the nature of things beneath the surface. It is not until the House of Holinesse that Redcrosse is able to glimpse the New Jerusalem and the future that he is striving toward, and that does not come until he learns humility from the virtues that live with Caelia. Once he is able to look beyond the literal, he is able to ascend and defeat the dragon of sin that plagues Una's family, symbolizing the way in which readers, once they learn to look for their own meaning beneath the surface of scripture, will then also be able to conquer their own dragons and reach holiness and closeness with God.

As we will discover in a moment, Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings* in a similar medieval fashion to Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, but with a few key differences. *The Lord of the Rings* has three heroes with underworld journeys, opposed to the singular hero of the Redcrosse Knight, and each of these characters (Gandalf, Frodo, and Aragorn) represents a different type of medieval hero. Redcrosse fits clearly into the category of Christian knight, but Tolkien, writing in a later time and with interests in the Anglo-Saxon world, is able to blend that idea with that of the Germanic warrior-king in Frodo and Aragorn. Gandalf, like Arthur, functions as a Christ figure in the narrative, but

unlike Arthur, Gandalf experiences an underworld of his own. The most striking difference between the two works is that *The Lord of the Rings* has heroes who fail their underworld journeys. Redcrosse needs help getting through his various descents, but in the end he is able to become holy and return to society as a changed man still able to reintegrate—perhaps representing the ultimate goal of the Protestant Christian in search of salvation. Gandalf and Frodo, however, do not fully overcome their underworlds. Because of this failure, Gandalf and Frodo cannot reintegrate into Middle-earth, though Aragorn, having succeeded in his underworld, is able to do so. Frodo and Gandalf instead travel to the Undying Lands, as there is no place for them left in the West.

## THE LORD OF THE RINGS

*The Lord of the Rings* does not content itself with a single hero, but follows the journeys of many heroic figures of Middle-earth. In the introduction to his collection of essays, “The Seven Paths of the Hero in *The Lord of the Rings*,” Robin Robertson writes that this novel is “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” (Robertson 12).

However, many of the heroes do not go through the Belly of the Whale phase of Joseph Campbell’s monomyth—Legolas, Gimli, and Boromir in particular have no encounter with an underworld designed to test them; they enter the Mines of Moria, but the true test is for Gandalf alone—and some that *do* have an underworld, such as Merry and Pippin (in Fangorn Forest), and Sam (who experiences Frodo’s underworld in Shelob’s lair), do not emerge irrevocably changed in a way that allows them to finish their journey. Instead, their descents act more as profitable detours than as a crucible for heroic development.

Still, there are three key descents in *The Lord of the Rings*: Gandalf’s descent in the Mines of Moria described in Book III, Frodo’s descent into Shelob’s lair in Book IV, and Aragorn’s descent to the Paths of the Dead in Book V. Only Aragorn completely overcomes the darkness that he faces in his underworld: he accepts his legacy as heir to the throne of Gondor and defeats the inner demons that bring him fear and doubt. Gandalf does not fully defeat his underworld because he is changed from Gandalf the Grey, a very human character, into Gandalf the White, someone much more angelic and supernatural who can only remain in Middle-earth until his task to help the Fellowship is complete. Frodo shows the greatest failure in his underworld journey: he is not able to overcome the monster Shelob and instead gives in to the darkness of Mordor and the Ring. Shelob’s



sting saps the last of Frodo's physical strength, leading to his capture by the orcs and his eventual inability to destroy the Ring in the fires of Mount Doom. Through these three descents, Tolkien shows the power of courage and light and how it is only by overcoming the darkness inside oneself that the hero's journey can be successfully completed and the hero can return and reintegrate into society.

It is important to note the heroic differences between these three men as individuals. As stated above, Aragorn is representative of the Germanic warrior king and Frodo falls into the tradition of Christian knight. Gandalf has aspects of both these types: he is mysterious and powerful like Aragorn, but he is more of a wise guide than a warrior king. In the tradition of Christian heroes, he sacrifices himself for the rest of the Fellowship and for the success of the quest. Because of this combining of traits, Gandalf is a greater figure than both types of hero, acting a Christ figure in the novel. But, like Christ, he is not able to remain in the world of men. Reintegration is the ultimate goal of Campbell's monomyth, so in this way, Gandalf succeeds as a savior, but fails as a hero.

#### THE MINES OF MORIA: GANDALF

Gandalf's descent comes first, actually occurring at the end of Book II, but not described to the reader until his reappearance in Book III, and although he wins strength and power through his transformation, he loses Gandalf the Grey, and therefore has no choice in the end of the novel but to leave Middle-earth. Gandalf the Grey is a very human character—he is one of the Maiar, defined in the *Silmarillion* as “of the same order as the Valar, but to a lesser degree” (Tolkien 30), but also has his feet firmly planted in the world of Men and hobbits. When he first appears in *The Lord of the Rings*,

Gandalf is driving a cart full of fireworks through the Shire in preparation for Bilbo's birthday party. Though rather "queer," the hobbits do not fear him:

Small hobbit-children ran after the cart all through Hobbiton and right up the hill. [...] At Bilbo's front door the old man began to unload: there were great bundles of fireworks of all sorts and shapes [...] and the old man was Gandalf the Wizard, whose fame in the Shire was due mainly to his skill with fires, smokes, and lights. (24-25)

Hobbits, by nature, are wary of anything out of the ordinary, even their own kind ("It beats me why any Baggins of Hobbiton should go looking for a wife away there in Buckland, where folks are so queer"), but they welcome Gandalf in spite of his differences because he is quite human (22). This likens him to Christ, who was of godly origins, but came to earth to live among men as one of them and to act as a guide and example.

When the Fellowship is formed, Gandalf is quickly recognized as the leader, but he is not as kingly or infallible as Aragorn. He is just as prone to mistake as the other members of the company. Gandalf is unable to open the doors to Moria with his own knowledge and magic immediately, and takes time to solve the simple riddle that will allow their entrance into the mines:

Many times he repeated these words in different order, or varied them. Then he tried other spells. [...] Nothing happened. [...] Lifting up his arms he spoke in tones of command and rising wrath. '*Edro, edro!*' he cried, and struck the rock with his staff. [...] Then he threw his staff on the ground and sat down in silence. (553-554)

This fallibility—Gandalf’s trial and error method of leadership—is necessary to the other members of the Fellowship. Had Gandalf begun the journey all-powerful and all-knowing, it is possible that they never would have split up: Boromir might have lived, Pippin and Merry might not have been captured by the Uruk-hai, and Frodo and Sam might never have sought help from Gollum. All these obstacles, however, are crucial for the success of the mission to save Middle-earth, and equally vital for the personal journeys toward heroism that each of these characters embarks upon following Gandalf’s apparent death.

In the Mines of Moria, Gandalf sacrifices himself to the Balrog so that the others can escape. They reach the Bridge of Khazad-dûm and Gandalf tells the others, “Fly! This is a foe beyond any of you. I must hold the narrow way. Fly!” (321). He knows that he alone can prevent the Balrog from crossing the bridge and destroying the Fellowship, but in doing so, he is pulled down into the depths of Moria, where they “fought far under the living earth, where time is not counted (490). Eventually, “[Gandalf] threw down [his] enemy, and [the Balrog] fell from the high place and broke the mountain-side where he smote it in his ruin” (491). Gandalf defeats the Balrog, but is not able to leave his underworld yet, as the underworld is meant to be a transformative experience. He explains, “Then darkness took me; and I strayed out of thought and time, and I wandered far on roads that I will not tell” (491). Throughout this period, Gandalf is changed—by or for whom or what, it is not revealed, though Gandalf tells Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas, “Naked I was sent back—for a brief time, until my task is done” (491). He is not in Middle-earth as he was before: instead, he is a guardian figure, in the world but not a part of it. No longer is he Gandalf the Grey, the somewhat bumbling leader of the Fellowship.

He has transformed into the more eternal and ethereal Gandalf the White: “Yes, I am white now. Indeed I am Saruman, one might almost say, Saruman as he should have been” (484). Gandalf and Saruman are of the Maiar—both volunteers to stay in the West with the mortal races. However, Saruman fails in his duty by giving into the temptation of Sauron’s power. Rather than remaining pure, he becomes “Saruman of Many Colours,” diluting his goodness and wisdom with Evil. Gandalf steps up to take Saruman’s place by taking on the white robes, symbolically becoming the “greatest of the order” (499). He takes on a wider knowledge of things that are and things that could be: “I have passed through fire and deep water, since we parted. I have forgotten much that I thought I knew, and learned again much that I had forgotten. I can see many things far off” (484). However, in doing this, he has put aside the part of him that allowed him to live in Middle-earth—the part that *was* mortal and worldly, and now may only remain until the task of the Fellowship is complete and the world is put into the hands of Men. Christ, too, had to return to heaven rather than remain on earth once his task was complete. While this is necessary for the fate of Middle-earth, it is not the path of a Campbellian hero, and therefore in the end, Gandalf cannot be considered a successful hero according to that model.

#### SHELOB’S LAIR: FRODO

The fall of a character does not often emerge out of a single mistake; usually, there is a build up of failures that culminate in an eventual, ultimate fall. This is what happens to Frodo, and his failure to defeat his underworld is a key factor in his unwillingness to destroy the One Ring, and further, his inability to reintegrate into the

Shire, leading to his disappearance into the Undying Lands at the end of the novel. Of all the characters discussed—Odysseus, the Redcrosse Knight, Gandalf, and Aragorn—Frodo is the only one who utterly fails to conquer his Underworld. Gandalf has aspects of failure, but it is Frodo alone who fails and continues to fail after this key part of his journey. This is one among several failures, and all are important to Frodo's quest. The first defeat comes at Weathertop, where Frodo puts on the Ring at the approach of the Ringwraiths:

[Frodo's] terror was swallowed up in a sudden temptation to put on the Ring [...] He felt Sam looking at him, as if he knew that his master was in some great trouble, but [Frodo] could not turn towards him. [...]

Resistance became unbearable, and at last he slowly drew out the chain, and slipped the Ring on the forefinger of his left hand. (191)

This is the first time that Frodo chooses to put on the Ring (the only other time that he has worn it, it slipped unto his finger accidentally at the Inn of the Prancing Pony) and represents Frodo's first step into darkness. The Ring allows the Ringwraiths to see Frodo clearly and the Witch-king of Angmar is able to stab Frodo with a Morgul blade, giving him a wound that he will carry for the rest of the journey and the rest of his life. In this moment of darkness, he is saved by a bearer of Light—Aragorn, who “[leapt] out of the darkness with a flaming brand of wood in either hand” to fend off the Ringwraiths (191). This becomes important later in the quest, when Galadriel presents Frodo with the Light of Eärendil, the hobbit's saving grace in Shelob's lair. Light often saves Frodo from darkness, but it tends to come just too late. This wound has a deep effect on Frodo: “His senses were sharper and more aware of things that could not be seen. One sign of change

that he soon had noticed was that he could see more in the dark than any of his companions” (303-304). This first failure allows darkness to infect Frodo’s heart, and this darkness will grow and create a blindness to evil (such as the evil in Gollum that he refuses to see) that leads to his failure to overcome Shelob in his underworld at Cirith Ungol and that in turn leads to his fading out of the Shire instead of reintegrating and returning to his life in Middle-earth.

Frodo’s next failure occurs when he decides to trust Gollum to guide him to the Black Gate of Mordor. The pity Frodo feels for Gollum is not where he fails: indeed, pity is viewed as a good and noble thing throughout the novel: “It was Pity that stayed [Bilbo’s] hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need. [...] Be sure that he took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity” (58). But allowing that pity to become trust is reckless, as Sam rightly points out several times throughout the narrative. Sam’s practicability serves as a balancing force to Frodo’s pity, and one without the other might never have been able to succeed on this quest. Gollum is a ruined form of the creature he once was—Sméagol, who was almost hobbit-like in nature before finding the Ring—and Gollum is a creation of the Ring, which uses those under its influence to achieve evil ends. Frodo sees himself in Gollum, and fears for his own future, so he insists that Gollum can still revert to Sméagol and still can be trusted to help them on their quest. But the Ring cannot be trusted, and Frodo blinds himself to the fact that Gollum is indeed a product of many years of exposure to the Ring. While choosing to look for the good in others does not seem to be an evil thing, it is possible that the Ring and Frodo’s wound from Weathertop

are both factors urging him to trust Gollum, who will ultimately betray him in the underworld of Shelob's lair.

After climbing the treacherous steps of Cirith Ungol, Gollum leads Frodo and Sam to a tunnel "out of [which] came a stench, not the sickly odour of decay in the meads of Morgul, but a foul reek, as if filth unnameable were piled and hoarded in the dark within" (701). It is a dark place, dark as the depths of Moria: they are enveloped in "a black vapour wrought of veritable darkness itself that, as it was breathed, brought blindness not only to the eyes but to the mind" (702), and in this darkness Gollum abandons the hobbits to their doom, as Sam has so often expected the creature might do. Frodo is more susceptible than Sam to the "blindness of the mind" because he is already under the influence of the Ring. Frodo has a light that can help them through—the Light of Eärendil from Galadriel—but when he and Sam are trapped between Shelob and her webs that cover the tunnel's exit, it is Sam who remembers the gift:

'The Lady's gift!' [said Sam.] 'The star-glass! A light to you in dark places, she said it was to be. The star glass!'

'The star-glass?' muttered Frodo, as one answering out of sleep, hardly comprehending. 'Why yes! Why had I forgotten it?' (704)

This light keeps Shelob at bay long enough for the hobbits to break through her thick webs to the open sky beyond, saving their lives and keeping the Ring out of Gollum's searching hands.

While cutting the webs with his sword Sting, Frodo gives the light to Sam to hold, and does not ask for it back. He gives it up, which is his greatest failure in the underworld and leads to more doom. Frodo bursts out of the tunnel and in his joy at escape, he begins

to run, but he has not defeated Shelob, the monster of his underworld and the representation of the darkness within himself, meaning that he cannot successfully leave the underworld just yet. Frodo does not notice that Shelob has followed them out of the tunnel or that orcs are waiting for him ahead. It is Sam, holding the light, who notices:

Dread was round [Sam], and enemies before him in the pass, and his master was in a fey mood, running heedlessly to meet them. Turning his eyes away from the shadow behind and the deep gloom beneath the cliff upon his left, he looked ahead, and he saw [...] that the sword which Frodo still held unsheathed was glittering with blue flame. (708)

Frodo still holds his own light in Sting, but does not see the warning the sword is trying to give that orcs are near. He has not overcome his underworld, and so he still maintains the “blindness of the mind” that Shelob’s lair brought on. Sam, on the other hand, is able to shake off that darkness well enough to also see that Shelob is stalking them and has placed herself between the two hobbits: “Either she did not see Sam, or she avoided him for the moment as the bearer of the light and fixed all her intent upon one prey, upon Frodo, bereft of his Phial, running heedless up the path, unaware yet of his peril” (709). By describing Sam as the “bearer of the light,” Tolkien contrasts him to Frodo, who is the bearer of the darkness of the One Ring. When Frodo gives the light to Sam, he is failing to hold both darkness and light inside him simultaneously, and is physically choosing darkness and doom. The phial of Galadriel might have saved him and allowed him to defeat Shelob when she attacks Frodo, but Sam holds it and is too far behind. Like Aragorn at Weathertop, Sam is too late to save Frodo from injury. Worse still, it is Gollum, whom Frodo trusts, who detains Sam and does not allow him to save his master.



Sam is about to call out a warning to Frodo when “suddenly his cry was stifled. A long clammy hand went over his mouth and another caught him by the neck” (709). Gollum is technically keeping his promise to not harm Frodo by allowing Shelob to do so instead, but it is still a clear betrayal and shows that the Ring has destroyed Sméagol beyond all hope. Frodo’s failure to defeat his underworld is a step in the same direction, though he fortunately will not bear the Ring as long as Sméagol did, which likely is the only thing that saves him from becoming a Gollum himself.

Frodo’s inner darkness manifests psychologically in Gollum and physically in Shelob, and Frodo must defeat them both to overcome his underworld. Gollum is his double, representative of Frodo’s internal battle with the Ring. Jane Chance describes Gollum as “the hero as the monster” and the “divided self of Gollum-Sméagol” (Chance 200). Flieger discusses the dichotomy seen in Sméagol-Gollum and Frodo-Gollum. She writes, “Frodo and Gollum can fit the same pattern, Frodo as the self, Gollum as the other. Frodo is the overt, recognized character. Gollum is his dark side, the embodiment of his growing, overpowering desire for the Ring” (Flieger 143). Because the two characters are so deeply intertwined, Gollum’s betrayal at Shelob’s lair foreshadows Frodo’s betrayal of Middle-earth when he cannot destroy the Ring at Mt. Doom. Flieger states, “Gollum is what Frodo must fight within himself as the Ring increases hold” (Flieger 143). Frodo’s pity for Gollum is in some ways a selfish pity, for it is a pity of what Frodo knows he himself could easily become.

Instead of facing his inner darkness and defeating its physical representation in Shelob, Frodo is stung by her—he is literally paralyzed by darkness and evil. Sam, bearer of the light, defeats Shelob instead, which allows Frodo to move on from the underworld

phase of his journey, but he is not transformed by it in a way that would allow him to compete the quest. He has not overcome the Gollum within him, for the Ring still has Frodo in its grasp. Frodo is not able to fully deny his desire for the Ring, and so that desire continues to grow. Shelob's sting saps the last of Frodo's strength and instills yet more darkness inside him. Frodo appears to have died, which is common in underworld phases of hero's journeys, but according to Campbell, this is only a positive thing if it occurs after the hero has overcome the monster of the underworld. Then it can be a period of growth and rebirth, like the House of Holiness for the Redcrosse Knight, but for Frodo, this symbolic death is only dark and draining. After Sam rescues him from the orcs at the Tower of Cirith Ungol, the two hobbits continue their trek through Mordor, and Frodo tells Sam, "Lead me! As long as you've got any hope left. Mine is gone. But I can't dash, Sam. I'll just plod along after you" (907). It is Sam who leads the way, and Sam who finds the water and takes the first watch while his master sleeps. It is Sam who maintains hope and faith in their quest because it is Sam who overcame Shelob and the underworld, even though it was not his task to complete. And then, at the very end of the road, Sam carries Frodo and the Ring:

I can't carry [the Ring] for you, but I can carry you and it as well [...] He feared he would have barely strength to lift his master alone, and beyond that he has expected to share in the dreadful dragging weight of the accursed Ring. But it was not so. Whether because Frodo was so worn by his long pains, wound of knife, and venomous sting, and sorrow, fear, and homeless wandering, or because some gift of final strength was given to

him, Sam lifted Frodo with no more difficulty than if he were carrying a hobbit-child. (919-920)

Both hobbits have endured every pain the journey has had to offer, but Frodo has allowed the Ring to consume him in a way that dimmed all light he might have had within. Further, he has been wounded twice—by Morgul blade and spider’s sting—dark injuries that never leave him and sap his strength away. When they finally reach the fires of Mount Doom, Frodo has given in to the darkness: “I have come. But I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!” (924). Had he succeeded in his underworld and defeated the darkness of Gollum and Shelob, Frodo might have the light of Eärendil to help him face his darkness. He would have been a successful hero that could overcome journey’s end and do what he set out to do in the way that Aragorn is able to muster the armies of the dead because he has defeated his own inner darkness. But because Frodo physically and symbolically gives up his light in Shelob’s lair, he is doomed to failure. In the end, the Ring ultimately destroys itself, as Gollum’s lust for the Ring is a product of the Ring, and he bites off Frodo’s finger to get it, falling into the fires of Mount Doom in happy accident.

Though the Ring is destroyed, the journey is not yet over; Frodo and the others must return and reintegrate into the Shire. However, Frodo is unable to do so. He does return, but because he still has darkness within him, he “dropped quietly out of all the doings of the Shire, and Sam was pained to notice how little honour he had in his own country. Few people knew or wanted to know about his deeds and adventures” (1002). Merry, Pippin, and Sam are the ones who gain honor and recognition, because they do not bring darkness back inside them. Frodo fades, and he tells Sam, “I am wounded,

wounded; it will never really heal” (1002). Sam believes that he is referring to the injury from Weathertop, but the sting of Shelob is still with him too—an ever-present reminder of his failure to fend off his own inner demons. Therefore, Frodo must go into the Undying Lands. He cannot reintegrate into the society of the Shire, and must instead seek a new path with Gandalf, whose time in Middle-earth has also come to an end.

Frodo plays the part of the medieval Christian knight in Tolkien’s epic. He is the character that readers can relate to. Flieger writes, “[Frodo] is utterly ordinary, and this is his great value [...] He has doubt, feels fear, falters, makes mistakes; he experiences, in short, the same emotions we experience” (Flieger 124). He is easier to understand than Gandalf or Aragorn, because he makes choices that a real man would make when put through the same trials. Tolkien uses Frodo in this way, perhaps, to show the fallibility of man, especially in times of war and hardship. Further still, the Christian undertones of *The Lord of the Rings* are revealed when Frodo travels with Gandalf, the Christ figure, into the Undying Lands, showing that ultimately, man cannot stay on this earth with the darkness of sin, but instead must follow Christ to heaven. Flieger writes that “by exalting and refining the figure of the common man, Tolkien succeeds in giving new values to a medieval story,” but Tolkien truly shows that it is only through acceptance of the darkness inside and a trust in Christ to lead the way to heaven that the common man is “exalted” and “refined” and therefore actually returns to the Christian roots of the medieval story.

## THE PATHS OF THE DEAD: ARAGORN

Compared to the descents that come before it, Aragorn's journey seems almost easy, because he has already faced his inner darkness and accepted who he is. Aragorn begins the narrative as Strider—one of the Dúnedain, the Rangers of the North. He is hiding from his destiny as the king of Gondor and allowing a steward to rule in his stead. Even upon assuming the name of Aragorn when joining the Fellowship, Aragorn is unsure of himself and defers to Gandalf's leadership until Gandalf is taken in the Mines of Moria. It is not until Éomer of Rohan asks him to identify himself that Aragorn begins to take on a kingly persona:

Aragorn threw back his cloak. The elven-sheath glittered as he grasped it, and the bright blade of Andúril shone like a sudden flame as he swept it out. 'Elendil!' he cried. 'I am Aragorn son of Arathorn and am called Elessar, the Elfstone, Dúnadan, the heir of Isildur Elendil's son of Gondor. Here is the Sword that was Broken and is forged again! Will you aid me or thwart me? Choose swiftly!' (423)

It is in this moment that he is desperately searching for Merry and Pippin, who have been captured by Uruk-hai, that Aragorn is willing to show his true identity. It is not for himself, but for the hobbits who will surely die if Aragorn is unable to save them. This moment foreshadows Aragorn's choice to take the Paths of the Dead and seek out the Dead Men of Dunharrow to come to the aid of Gondor. Merry and Pippin, in this first instance, represent Gondor, Aragorn's ultimate responsibility.

The tale of the Dead Men of Dunharrow is one of betrayal: When Gondor was first built, the Men of the Mountains swore an oath to Isildur, the High King, to work

with Isildur and Gondor to jointly defend their lands should Sauron attack. However, by the time the Second Age was drawing to a close and the great battle with Sauron was approaching, the Men of the Mountain had fallen under Sauron's influence and would not fight for Gondor. Because of this, Isildur cursed them so they would not rest in peace until they fulfilled their oath. Aragorn, as Isildur's heir, could hold them to this oath and give them peace in death (Robertson 332).

More than just assuming his identity as Isildur's heir, Aragorn takes action to lay claim to his rights as king. He looks into one of the seeing stones, the Stone of Orthanc, which had been corrupted and taken over by Sauron. Aragorn tells Legolas and Gimli: "I am the lawful master of the Stone, and I had both the right and the strength to use it, or so I judged. The right cannot be doubted. The strength was enough—barely" (763). By recognizing his rights as the heir of Isildur, Aragorn is fully stepping into his new identity, but he has not given up Strider, as will be clear when the other Rangers are willing to follow him to the Paths of the Dead, and clearer still in the Houses of Healing when he states that his heirs shall carry the name Strider in Elvish. Further still, Aragorn does not only look into the Stone, but his will is strong enough to take it back from Sauron: "in the end I wrenched the Stone to my own will. That alone [Sauron] will find hard to endure" (763). The Sword that was Broken has been reforged, and Aragorn has taken it up and intends to wield it against Sauron. He is no longer merely a Ranger of the North, but a threat to all the evils of Mordor. Aragorn has faced his demons—he has long feared that he might fail in the same way Isildur did, but in the end Aragorn decides to test his own strength, and emerges victorious in the instance with the stone, proving to

himself that he is capable of taking up the throne of Gondor and defending Middle-earth from the darkness.

Upon making his choice to take the Paths of the Dead, Aragorn says, “We must ride our own road, and no longer in secret. For me the time of stealth has passed” (762). He now accepts that he can no longer live as a humble Ranger, helping the world but never truly being a part of it. He must take up the mantle of king, wield the Sword that was Broken, and bear the banner of the king of Gondor, all of which he does by taking the Paths of the Dead. Dúnedain go with him, showing that while Aragorn has decided to take his rightful place, he has not given up the Ranger within. The other Rangers still recognize him as a leader, and in this way Aragorn is able to unify Men under his banner.

Like Moria and Shelob’s lair, the Paths of the Dead are impenetrably dark, but Aragorn is undaunted: “such was the strength of his will in that hour that all the Dúnedain and their horses followed him” (769). Gimli even asks, “Does [Aragorn] feel no fear?” after seeing his nonchalance (769). The others, though, are terrified: “there was not a heart among them that did not quail” (769). Aragorn is ready, he has nothing to fear here for he knows who he is and knows that the Dead must suffer him to pass. This is the only hope he has of saving Gondor, and he faces it with all the courage of a king. The moment of victory over his underworld comes before Aragorn ever enters it, when he accepts his legacy in spite of all his doubts. The Dead see the line of Isildur in him, and know that he alone can hold their oath fulfilled. They fight for Aragorn as they would not fight for Isildur and are a physical representation of the changes that have occurred within Aragorn. Like Aragorn, they have been in hiding, but when it comes time to fulfill their

oath (the dead men to Aragorn and Aragorn's unspoken oath as heir to the throne of Gondor) they do so willingly, as they have never done in the past.

Rather than journeying to the Undying Lands with Gandalf and Frodo, Aragorn remains in Middle-earth as king of the newly reunited kingdoms of Gondor and Arnor. He is able to prosper in Middle-earth because he has overcome his demons and defeated his underworld. He does not fade, as Frodo does, for Frodo never overcame Shelob and ultimately could not destroy the Ring without the betrayal of Gollum. Aragorn has no need of eternal life in the land of the elves, because he remains fully present in life on earth until the end of his days.

As Frodo represents a fairytale hero and Christian knight, Aragorn is the typical Germanic warrior king. Flieger writes, "[Aragorn] is in truth the traditional disguised hero, the rightful king, in medieval romance terms the 'fair unknown' who steps from the shadows into the limelight when his moment comes" (126). His hidden identity as Strider and his eventual acceptance of his true identity as king are indeed reflective of the medieval Germanic tradition, and therefore foreshadow his success in the underworld.

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Through Gandalf, Frodo, and Aragorn, Tolkien shows the importance of the underworld adventure to the overall success of the hero's journey, particularly the ability of the hero to return home and reintegrate into the world. Gandalf returned from his underworld as Gandalf the White; he is much more obviously one of the Maiar at this point, as he is wiser and all-seeing. He cannot return to the world that he knew as Gandalf the Grey because his underworld journey made him into something more than human and more than what can exist in this world. Frodo too is unable to reintegrate into his home at



Bag End in the Shire because he has too much darkness within. His old wounds still trouble him and the Ring and his failure to destroy it willingly have left holes inside him that even the Shire cannot heal. He has the dark ending seen in Germanic epic, rather than the fairytale ending that comes to Aragorn. Both Gandalf and Frodo must venture to the Undying Lands where they can live out their days in peace, away from the societies that they sacrificed so much to save. Perhaps like Christ and his followers eventually giving up the physical world to move on to one of spiritual reward.

## CONCLUSION

Not all stories include every element of Campbell's monomyth; it is simply too detailed and too specific for that to be possible. However, quest stories *must* contain a Belly of the Whale adventure into the underworld. This phase is essential to the ultimate success or failure of the journey because, if this step is successful, it transforms the hero in a way that allows completion of the rest of the quest, while failure in this stage leads to failure of the hero and possibly failure of the quest as a whole. This is also the stage that molds the hero in a way that allows reintegration into society after the journey is complete and the hero has returned with the elixir.

Spenser is a clear advocate of allegory, while Tolkien denounces the medium and claims that *The Lord of the Rings* is not written to have any allegorical implications. In a letter to Milton Walman, Tolkien writes, "an equally basic passion of mine *ab initio* was for myth (not allegory!) and for fairy-story" (Tolkien 144). Tolkien dislikes allegory because allegory tends to freeze things in time; myth, contrastingly, creates the universal and lasting themes that Tolkien seeks to weave into *The Lord of the Rings*. Spenser uses allegory to help expand the minds of his readers, while Tolkien felt that to use it would be to put things in too specific a box. In spite of this difference, the two authors use underworld descents to explore their characters, and these descents then determine the outcome of the hero's journey. Spenser uses an extended and repeated descent for a single character, while Tolkien puts many of his characters through underworlds to test them and prepare them for the endings he has in store for them.

Redcrosse's underworld journey is the longest, but perhaps also the most fruitful. He begins as a boy proud of borrowed armor, but with no knightly skill of his own. It

takes three initial descents—the House of Pride, the Dungeon of Orgoglio, and the Cave of Despaire—to understand his vice and see that Una is the Truth and he must listen to her instead of striking out on his own. The final part of his descent comes in the House of Holinesse, where he learns the virtues of the holy—humility in particular—and also discovers his true identity as Saint George of England. He is able to reintegrate primarily because he has become humble, so he is able to ascend from his underworld and uses his gifts to defeat the dragon waiting at Una's home. Furthermore, it is hinted that he will reintegrate into the society of men after serving the Faerie Queene Gloriana for his six promised years, and therefore fulfill his destiny to become a saint.

Aragorn's underworld is about accepting the identity that he has hidden from for many years: he is the blood of Isildur and heir to the throne of Gondor. By traveling the Paths of the Dead and calling the oath breakers to his service, he shows that he has fully accepted the name of Aragorn. He is able to reintegrate because he overcomes his underworld and the fear within himself. He takes up the throne of Gondor and reigns in peace for many years.

Gandalf is not so successful. Through his fight with the Balrog, he sheds his identity as Gandalf the Grey and becomes Gandalf the White: he is more ethereal and all-seeing in this new identity, and closer to his original race of the Maiar than to the races of Middle-earth. Because of this change, he does defeat the Balrog and is able to return, but only long enough to set the affairs of the world in order. Then he must depart, for he cannot reintegrate into the society of men. He has changed beyond recognition and as such failed in his underworld journey, even though he defeated the monster. His apparent death while fighting the Balrog, though, is essential for the growth of other characters in

the novel. Because of Gandalf's disappearance, Aragorn must step in as leader of the Fellowship, which helps him come to accept his larger role as leader of Gondor. Pippin and Merry are captured by orcs, but this leads to their own adventure in Fangorn Forest and the two hobbits are able to rally the Ents to their cause—a critical victory for the forces fighting against Sauron and Saruman. Even Legolas and Gimli begin to come into their own without Gandalf's guiding presence. Gandalf, then, is to the Fellowship what Una is to Redcrosse in some ways—a guide that must be taken away so that the questers can find their own heroism within.

Finally, Frodo's underworld journey shows the greatest failure of all. While in Shelob's lair, he chooses to physically turn away from Shelob and cut away her webs blocking the exit and gives the Light of Eärendil to Sam, who stands against Shelob while his master works. Shelob is Frodo's monster to face (and he does face her at first), but in the end he does not do so, and by giving up the light he loses his ability to see her and fight her, ultimately leading to his sting and later capture by the orcs. This failure causes a weakness in Frodo that lasts through the rest of his journey. Having failed to defeat the darkness within himself, he cannot give up the Ring when he and Sam reach the fires of Mount Doom, and it is only destroyed by the lust and greed of Gollum. Then, when they return to the Shire he is unable to reintegrate into society. Frodo is too wounded and the darkness within him runs too deep. He knows that even though the Ring was destroyed, he has failed. Because of this failure, he fades, and must go into the Undying Lands with Gandalf and the Elves because he can no longer be a part of Middle-earth, where light and joy have returned.

The “Belly of the Whale” is deeply connected to ultimate success of a hero, shown by his ability to reintegrate into the society that he has worked so hard to save. If a hero overcomes the challenges of his underworld—whether a physical monster or a darkness within himself—then he is able to return to life as it was before, even though he is irrevocably changed. If a hero fails to defeat his underworld, he cannot return, because the underworld phase changes the hero in a way that allows that return. Failing to go through this transformation means that the darkness of the journey remains within the hero and builds a wall between the hero and life as he knew it.

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