The Hero’s Journey in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit, or, There and Back Again*

Using Joseph Campbell’s Narrative Structure for an Analysis of Mythopoeic Fiction

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Abstract

This essay investigates the applicability of Joseph Campbell’s notion of the Hero’s Journey from his theoretical work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* on J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit, or, There and Back Again*. This has been done by outlining the essential aspects of Campbell’s theory and then performing a reading and analysis of Tolkien’s work. Furthermore, this essay focuses on the narrative structure proposed by Campbell, but also the heroic character’s development—in this instance, Bilbo Baggins’ development. As such, a brief examination of Campbell’s attitude and use of Freudian psychoanalysis has been performed as well as a presentation of Bilbo Baggins’ character and dual nature before the adventure. As a possible line of argument Tolkien’s knowledge of myth is also briefly expounded on. This essay does not research or make any definitive statements on the universal applicability of Campbell’s theory, but merely finds that Tolkien’s *The Hobbit, or, There and Back Again* appears to conform well to Campbell’s proposed narrative structure and that the development of Bilbo’s heroic character, or his character arc, is in concurrence with this as well.

Keywords: Campbell, Hero’s Journey, Hobbit, Mythology, Narrative Structure, Tolkien
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Introduction

In 1949 Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* was first published. In it Campbell argued that time and time again a regular and reoccurring pattern could be seen within heroic fiction, dating back to the earliest recorded legends and myths; he referred to this as the monomyth, proposing a cyclical narrative structure that could be seen in whole or in parts in stories both old and new. Since the release of this book—and with the further popularisation of the concept through his serialised documentary on PBS, *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth* (1988)—many authors, movie, and TV writers have adopted this narrative structure for their own works, often proving to be commercially successful—perhaps most famously in the case of George Lucas’ *Star Wars IV-VI* movies (Campbell, 2003, p. 186-7). However, it becomes pointless to discuss and investigate the merits of such a theory if one were to only focus on works following its publication and thereby risking them being influenced by the theory itself (unless that was the purpose of the essay, of course). Therefore, this essay will turn to a work published twelve years prior to that, in 1937, when J.R.R. Tolkien had his first major success with *The Hobbit, or, There and Back Again* (hereinafter, *The Hobbit* or *Hobbit*). Tolkien’s work—fantastical, mythological, and heroic in structure and narrative—suits the purposes for this analysis well, as Tolkien himself was deeply immersed and well-versed both privately and professionally in mythology through his work as a professor of the English language and literature, Anglo-Saxon, and as a part of his philological interests which led him to search out stories in languages from far and wide from a young age (Carpenter, 2000).

It is important to state clearly what this essay is and is not. The aim of this essay is not to prove or disprove the universal applicability of Campbell’s theory of the monomyth; its mere aim is to explore this theory of mythological narrative structure within the framework of a ‘modern’ (as stated, Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* was first released in 1937) mythological telling of a heroic journey. That is to say, this essay does not set out to investigate the Appropriateness of the monomyth as a universal standard, but to use it as a tool in the investigation of but one narrative. Furthermore, due to limitations in time and, to a certain extent, space this will only be a cursory overview of the salient aspects which conform most clearly to the elected narrative structure. There are deeper analytical possibilities which could be performed on the nature of Bilbo’s psyche and psychological development throughout the novel as part of the monomythical narrative structure but which have to be abandoned in the present essay for the sake of clarity as regards the narrative.
This essay will begin by investigating and arguing with some of the critique raised against Campbell’s theory, followed by an outline and definitions of the relevant stages for the narrative structure and then an examination of some important notions that influenced Campbell himself—a brief overview of Tolkien’s knowledge of myth will also be presented. This will then be followed by a reading and analysis of Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* based on Campbell’s theory. Finally, a conclusion of the findings will be presented.

2 Theory, Hypothesis, and Definitions

2.1 Theory

2.1.1 Campbell’s Hero

The general idea of Campbell’s notion of the hero’s journey centres on a few concepts, themes, and so forth that occur again and again in storytelling worldwide across cultures. Campbell asks “[w]hy is mythology everywhere the same, beneath its varieties of costume?” (2008, p. 2), or, as Christopher Vogler, a movie writer that has produced his own theoretical work adopting Campbell’s theory from mythological literature to the stories that movies tell, writes: “All stories consist of a few common structural elements found universally in myths, fairy tales, dreams, and movies. They are known collectively as The Hero’s Journey” (1998, p. 1). According to Campbell these elements can be viewed as a cycle of three encompassing stages with several subordinated stages; this cyclical nature of the hero’s journey is represented by the initial stage, Departure (with five sub-stages), followed by Initiation (six sub-stages), and lastly Return (again six sub-stages); in essence these stages represent the hero setting out on an adventure to an unknown world willingly or less so, traversing some trials and meeting friends and foes, and ultimately returning to their normal world after having completed their quest (for a fuller overview of how this cycle can be summarised see Campbell, 2008, p. 211). Another important aspect to keep in mind according to Campbell is that not all stories touch upon each and every of these stages of the hero’s journey; some stories merely focus on one or a few of the stages, perhaps lingering on the entire Initiation stage, or merely focusing on the first stage of the Departure, The Call to Adventure, and so forth (ibid. 212).

Some critique has been levelled against Campbell’s theory. A point of contention amongst religious scholars is that Campbell was too broad and generalised too heavily, something which contemporary scholars have moved away from nowadays, which Lesley Northup (2006) showcases in her review of religious studies; Robert Ellwood, in *The Politics*
of Myth (1999), raises similar concerns when he writes that “[a] tendency to think in generic terms of peoples, races, religions, or parties, which as we shall see is undoubtedly the profoundest flaw in mythological thinking” (p. x); and Donald J. Cosentino depicts this as a “soup of myths that loses all local flavour” if one does not focus on the differences as well as the similarities (1998, p. 174-88). However, that is not relevant here, as what is of interest for this paper is the proposed narrative structure of myth and how this structure can be relevant for an analysis of a modern story, not what religious and political scholars propose to derive from their studies. Furthermore, Campbell argues that with this work he wished to present a large body of evidence rather than to focus on one or a few works, and that if he had been exhaustive in his analysis each section describing a stage would have turned into book-length works themselves (2008, p. 48); his awareness of this is further evidenced in the preface to the first edition:

Perhaps it will be objected that in bringing out the correspondences I have overlooked the differences between the various Oriental and Occidental, modern, ancient, and primitive traditions. The same objection might be brought, however, against any textbook or chart of anatomy, where the physiological variations of race are disregarded in the interest of basic general understanding of the human physique. (ibid. p. xiii)

Clearly, then, what is needed to counter these arguments is an analysis of a work as a whole, rather than parts of it, which is something that Vogler (1998) provides in his work The Writer’s Journey, which explores how movies utilise this narrative structure and teaches writers how to use these elements themselves. Included in this work are analyses of, for instance, Titanic, Pulp Fiction, The Lion King, and others. Vogler’s conclusion is that the narrative structure proposed by Campbell is indeed viable and even translatable to a relatively modern medium such as films.

Others have directed some more specific critique towards Campbell’s work, such as Alan Dundes who, coming from a social science perspective, voices his concerns with Campbell’s sweeping brushstrokes and generalisations (which has already been dealt with in the previous paragraph) and his approach to naming his notions (256-7). Dundes’ concerns are largely semantic, dealing with issues such as the fact that Campbell referred to his proposed pattern as the ‘monomyth’ when clearly, as Dundes points out, many of Campbell’s examples and analytical subjects are not myths but, for instance, fairy tales, which is a legitimate criticism. Perhaps Campbell could have named this more clearly so as to avoid confusion, or he could
have been clearer in explaining his naming convention, because he is clear from the outset that he is not merely concerned with myths, but with all stories, no matter what form (Campbell, 2008, p. 1ff). Dundes then goes further and contests the image of ‘the Belly of the Whale’ (the name of a stage in the Departure phase of Campbell’s hero’s journey) which he argues is inappropriate as Campbell only gives as examples two tales where the hero is swallowed up by a whale, and that one of his other examples, Little Red Riding Hood being swallowed by the wolf, does not fit this image because firstly, Little Red Riding Hood is a girl and therefore not a hero, but a heroine (granted, in 1984 the delineation between hero and heroine was much more evident; from a contemporary perspective this delineation is seldom encountered and it is, ironically, easier to accept Campbell’s hero persona as being either male or female) and that a wolf is not a whale. However, reading closer in Campbell’s chapter on ‘The Belly of the Whale’ it becomes evident that he elected this title as a conscious metaphor (perhaps because he knew that his predominant audience would be familiar with the story of Jonah) to describe the essential and salient point of this stage of the narrative, namely that “[t]he hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died” (2008, p. 74; this is further expanded on in section 2.1.2.1.5 below), that is to say, the hero does not necessarily have to be swallowed by a whale specifically.

However, semantic issues aside, several other scholars, researchers, and authors have found worth in Campbell’s notion of the monomyth. For instance, Robert Jewett & John Shelton Lawrence (2003) have argued in their study on the rise of the American superhero that the parallels of this modern-age hero paradigm contrasts the old heroic aspects as presented in Campbell’s “classical monomyth” and that in these older stories “found in every culture, [it is told] of young people who leave their homes in search of adventure; they encounter threatening forces, undergo personal tests, and finally rescue the maiden or save the city by the use of their wit and newfound strength, often aided by magical powers” (2003, p. 29; italics in original). They then contrast this with the modern American superhero’s story, which they argue has shifted into another slightly different narrative structure, where the hero instead of reconciling and staying within the society or community which they have saved move on to new adventures and places to save (ibid. p. 29-30). They still find that Campbell’s

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1 Presented first in Jewett, Robert & Jon Shelton Lawrence. 2002. *The Myth of the Superhero* and later retold in brief in Jewett, Robert & Jon Shelton Lawrence. 2003. *Captain America and the Crusade against Evil*, the latter of which is used primarily as the source for this essay.
notion functions, but that the serialised aspect of comic books slightly altered the formula, something which is to be expected. Furthermore, they also argue that “Campbell sees these stories as the narrative counterparts of rites of passage” which instruct—through the safe medium of oral or written fiction—the younger generations in preparation for their own oncoming rites of passage (p. 29), a view that Vogler (1998) echoes as well (p. ix-x).

2.1.2 The Hero’s Journey

The following parts of the theory section will go through the stages of Campbell’s narrative structure, which he outlined for the Hero’s Journey, which are relevant for this analysis; as such, the stages ‘Refusal of the Return’ and ‘The Magic Flight,’ which are two of the three possible forms of return (‘Rescue from Without’ being the third and which will be brought up herein), are not strictly relevant for the purposes of this essay and will therefore be omitted (see Campbell, 2008, pp. 167-78 for a full account of these stages).

2.1.2.1 Departure

2.1.2.1.1 The Call to Adventure

According to Campbell this is the stage in which the heroes begin their journey. They are in a familiar setting when suddenly a crisis intervenes, which Campbell named the *call to adventure* (2008, p. 42), showcased by a sign of some kind, termed the *herald* (ibid.), which can appear as many things, amongst them “a veiled mysterious figure—the unknown” (p. 44). The crisis, call to adventure, instigated by the herald can have various purposes: life, death, historical, religious, or other connotations, which the heroes are summoned forth to meet (ibid.). In all cases the heroes are presented with the unknown and often uncanny—“a forest, a kingdom underground, beneath the waves, or above the sky, a secret island, lofty mountaintop, or profound dream state” (ibid., p. 48)—as the area to which they must travel in order to face the challenge, a challenge of transformation or transfiguration, in various *gestalts* of ritualistic spiritual passage to attain death and birth (ibid., p. 42-3).

2.1.2.1.2 Refusal of the Call

When the call comes it is often the case that the future heroes refuse it at first. This, in turn, changes the adventure into its negative and instead of taking positive action over their own future the heroes instead become trapped “in boredom, hard work, or ‘culture’” (Campbell, 2008, p. 49) and need to be rescued instead. A refusal of the call can have dire consequences for the future heroes who linger in a sort of stasis; and even if they achieve
greatness in their own present dwellings they are only anticipating death without facing it, manufacturing new problems for themselves, while awaiting their inevitable doom (ibid.).

In myths and folktales from around the world there is a clear pattern of the refusal associated with feelings of not wanting to give up what is felt to be one’s own self-interest—it might be that the future heroes have feelings of being inferior to the task put before them, or that they must serve some other purpose, perhaps to their community, first and foremost, and therefore cannot leave for an adventure. The future heroes do not perceive the future as a “series of deaths and births, but as though one’s present system of ideals, virtues, goals, and advantages were to be fixed and made secure” (Campbell, p. 49), which, from a Freudian perspective, is presented as their inability to deal with the infantile ego and they are instead bound within the walls of childhood, with the parents acting as threshold guardians hindering passage through this threshold for fear of Freud’s notion of the castration complex, that is, a punishing act from the guardians (p. 52).

If the heroes overcome their initial refusal of the call by themselves the adventure proceeds without much ado. However, if they maintain their refusal they will need assistance to move forward. As Campbell puts it the “sole problem is what the machinery of the miracle is to be,” suggesting that some outside, supernatural, force will have to intervene to push the heroes onward to adventure (p. 56).

2.1.2.1.3 Supernatural Aid

If the heroes did not refuse the call then the first person or being they will encounter on their hero-journey will be the protective figure who will come to help them on their path, often bestowing upon them some defensive items (amulets, artefacts, or talismans of any kind) that will assist them against the dangerous powers residing in the lands they are embarking upon (Campbell, 2008, p. 57). Such a personification is representative of the protective powers of the hero’s destiny (p. 59), their destiny made manifest (p. 64); a promise of peace everlasting and a reassurance that such a protective power is present in both the past and the future, and even is with the heroes during the perilous wanderings of the unknown/unconscious (p. 59). But for the heroes who have refused the call, the supernatural helper may arrive as well, aiding them onto the path of the adventure (p. 61).

Campbell also argues that this supernatural helper, the mentor, often takes the form of a “little old crone or old man” (p. 57), but most frequently appears in masculine form (p. 59), as in fairy lore where “it may be some little fellow of the wood, some wizard, hermit, shepherd, or smith” (ibid.), in high mythology appearing as “the guide, the teacher, the ferryman” (p.
60), or in classical myth such as Hermes-Mercury, Thoth, or the Holy Ghost, or as Goethe’s Mephistopheles or Dante’s Virgil (ibid.). The list goes on, but the supernatural helper always comes with the same purpose: to aid and bestow upon the heroes the necessary items and knowledge they need to brave their adventurous path.

2.1.2.1.4 The Crossing of the First Threshold

In this stage of the heroes’ journey they go forth with the aid of their mentor, their supernatural helper, towards the unknown. When they reach the borders of the known and unknown (the conscious and the unconscious) they encounter the ‘threshold guardian,’ who represents the current bounds of the heroes’ life experience. The threshold guardian often appears dangerous and threatening, characterising the fears that the heroes have concerning the crossing of the threshold (Campbell, 2008, p. 64).

What the unknown signifies is the possibilities of unconscious content (p. 65), that is, a chance for the heroes to explore subjects which are impossible to discover within the bounds of their conscious, their everyday dwellings in their parental or tribal homes (p. 64).

A successful conquering of the threshold guardian and a crossing of the threshold allow the heroes to leave their conscious, their ego, behind, and venture forth into the possibilities of the unconscious (p. 73). However, there are more thresholds to pass, as the “adventure is always and everywhere a passage beyond the veil of the known into the unknown; the powers that watch at the boundary are dangerous; to deal with them is risky; yet for anyone with competence or courage the danger fades” (p. 67-8).

2.1.2.1.5 The Belly of the Whale

This is the stage where the heroes finally show a willingness to be separated from their known world in a metaphorical image of rebirth by crossing the magical threshold but fails in overcoming the threshold guardian and appears to have been swallowed up by the unknown and is believed to be dead—the belly of the whale, then, symbolises the womb from which the heroes emerge, reborn to the new and unknown world (Campbell, 2008, p. 74).

Campbell suggests that this “popular motif gives emphasis to the lesson that that passage of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation” (p. 77), that is to say, instead of merely crossing the threshold and continuing towards the unknown world, the hero passes inward to be reborn again: a “life-centering, life-renewing act” (ibid.).
2.1.2.2 Initiation

2.1.2.2.1 The Road of Trials

Having traversed the threshold the heroes now find themselves facing a multitude of trials which they must overcome in order to be transformed. The world into which the heroes have moved is strange and unfamiliar, but to their aid they have the supernatural helper they encountered earlier, whose “advice, amulets, and secret agents” assist the heroes on their journey (Campbell, 2008, p. 81). It is also possible for the heroes to notice that there appears to be a benevolent force which helps them overcome and protects them from the dangers they are facing (ibid.). During this stage the heroes also come to know themselves more clearly: “The hero … discovers and assimilates his opposite (his own unsuspected self) either by swallowing it or by being swallowed. One by one the resistances are broken. He must put aside his pride, his virtue, beauty, and life, and bow or submit to the absolutely intolerable. Then he finds that he and his opposite are not of differing species, but one flesh” (Campbell, 2008, p. 89). Furthermore, the road of trials can continue on for a long while, often detailing many of the heroes’ lesser adventures on their path toward their goal: “Dragons have now to be slain and surprising barriers passed—again, again, and again. Meanwhile there will be a multitude of preliminary victories, unretainable [sic] ecstasies, and momentary glimpses of the wonderful land” (p. 90).

2.1.2.2.2 The Meeting with the Goddess

At some point in the narrative the hero encounters the “Queen Goddess of the World” (Campbell, 2008, p. 91), often embodied as a physical woman representing and able to give through a metaphorical or literal marriage—which unites and completes the heroes in their search for paternal love—that unconditional love which a child experiences from their mother. Metaphorically the goddess represents the hero’s female side (or the male side, if the hero is female). Thus, if the heroes are successful in this meeting (trial), they are rewarded with the boon of love, of completeness with one’s self (p. 95, 99).

2.1.2.2.3 Woman as the Temptress

Here Campbell has chosen to use ‘woman as the temptress’ in much the same way that he uses the symbolism of ‘the belly of the whale’ to represent the engulfing motif of womb and rebirth; that is to say, ‘woman’ does not necessarily need to be represented as a woman. Rather it can represent the comforts which might lead the heroes astray from their quest. This heading, woman as the temptress, was elected because it has classical connotations as a motif
where the heroes are on a spiritual quest and is in danger of attaining their goal as they are tempted by lust—for instance, as Sir Gawain is tempted by the wife of Bertilak in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Harrison, 2008). For the heroes to achieve their goal they must “surpass the temptations of her call, and soar to the immaculate ether beyond” (Campbell, 2008, p. 102); but the temptations differ from hero to hero and can be spiritual or physical.

2.1.2.2.4 Atonement with the Father

During this stage the heroes must overcome that ultimate power which preside over their lives. Campbell argues that this power in myths and stories often is the father or a father figure which the heroes are both seeking sanction from and contending with at the same time (however, it does not necessarily have to be a male figure, just something with great power; again, the symbolism of the father has been elected because it is one of the most frequent in myths and tales). The ultimate trial which the hero faces is this dual nature of forces, the mother and the father, with help from the one (mother) and resistance from the other (father), “only to find, in the end, that the father and mother reflect each other, and are in essence the same” (Campbell, 2008, p. 110). In order to initiate this trial the hero must rely entirely on faith and abandon “that self-generated double monster—the dragon thought to be God (superego) and the dragon thought to be Sin (repressed id)” (p. 107, 110) by letting go of ego itself—which is the most difficult part of the trial as it leaves the hero entirely at the mercy of the father with nothing but hope that the father is indeed merciful.

When (if) the hero overcomes the father or father figure the hero “transcends life with its peculiar blind spot and for a moment rises to a glimpse of the source. He beholds the face of the father, understands—and the two are atoned” (Campbell, 2008, p. 125). Reconciliation between the hero and the father (figure) has been achieved.

2.1.2.2.5 Apotheosis

After transcendence the hero is in a blissful state of rest, unwearyed by the troubles of the world and untroubled by the dual nature of the superego and the id, the conscious and unconscious, the mother and the father, or whatever imagery might be associated with these opposing forces within and without the hero. “Those who know, not only that the Everlasting lives in them but that what they, and all things, really are is the Everlasting, dwell in the groves of the wish-fulfilling trees, drink the brew of immortality, and listen everywhere to the unheard music of eternal concord” (Campbell, 2008, p. 142). This vaguely mysterious description can best be understood as a moment of respite for the heroes, an opportunity to regain their strength and prepare for the last trial to come, but that it can also be a moment for
the heroes to come to realisation of a greater understanding, thus attaining knowledge and strength for the challenge ahead.

2.1.2.2.6 The Ultimate Boon

At the end of the hero’s journey awaits the goal of the quest: the ultimate boon. The successful carrying out of this goal rests upon all prior trials and tribulations which have been in preparation and purification of the hero (Campbell, p. 148-65).

2.1.2.3 Return

2.1.2.3.1 Rescue from Without

When the time comes for the heroes to return to their regular world from the supernatural world, the unknown to the known world, the unconscious to the conscious, they might be in need of assistance: perhaps they prove to be so enamoured with the supernatural world that they are unwilling to return, but for the sake of their well-being they must do so; or perhaps they are too weary, from physical or spiritual wounds, to be able to return by themselves. Then they will need help from some outside, supernatural force for their return journey (Campbell, 2008, p. 178-9).

2.1.2.3.2 The Crossing of the Return Threshold

One of the biggest challenges that lay before the heroes on the return journey is the passing of the return threshold. As the heroes died a symbolic death when they passed the first threshold so are they symbolically reborn when crossing the return threshold. But now, reborn into the old familiar world, they still possess the knowledge and wisdom which they brought with them from the supernatural, unknown world, and now they must reconcile this knowledge of the two opposing worlds, which might seem difficult, for “why attempt to make plausible, or even interesting, to men and women consumed with passion, the experience of transcendental bliss” in a world where “passing joys and sorrows, banalities and noisy obscenities” are a part of everyday life (Campbell, 2008, p. 189)? Nevertheless, the heroes must overcome these notions and as they do so they cross the return threshold.

2.1.2.3.3 Master of the Two Worlds

Having surpassed the trials of the hero’s journey the hero has now become the master of both worlds, the familiar and unfamiliar, the inner and outer, and can thus pass freely over the thresholds and interact with both of them. “Freedom to pass back and forth across the world division, from the perspective of the apparitions of time to that of the causal deep and back—
not contaminating the principles of the one with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other—is the talent of the master” (Campbell, 2008, p. 196).

2.1.2.3.4 Freedom to Live

“The hero is the champion of things becoming, not of things become, because he is … [h]e does not mistake apparent changelessness in time for the permanence of Being, nor is he fearful of the next moment (or of the 'other thing'), as destroying the permanent with its change (Campbell, 2008, p. 209). The heroes, having achieved mastery over the two worlds, no longer fears death, but lives in the moment, without anxiety over the future (death) and without regrets about the past. They are content with their life and does what pleases them.

2.1.3 Psychoanalysis

Campbell relied heavily upon Freud and Jung’s work on psychoanalysis for his own theory on the monomyth, drawing many parallels between classical mythological stories, contemporary dream diaries, and recorded sessions between patient and analyst; he presented these contrasts, similarities, and interpretations in order to show how and why so many of the mythological tales follow a certain pattern (Campbell, 2008, 1-18).

However, as Peter Barry (2009) says: “there is a growing consensus today that the therapeutic value of the method is limited, and that Freud’s life-work is seriously flawed by methodological irregularities. All the same, Freud remains a major cultural force, and his impact on how we think about ourselves has been incalculable” (p. 92). Certainly, during the time which Campbell wrote and finished his first edition of his theoretical work, the 1940’s, published 1949, there was not as much resistance towards Freudian psychoanalysis and its adherents like C.G. Jung and others. However, while Campbell raves about the profundity of psychoanalysis’ role regarding mythology, he reserves some scepticism for its therapeutic conclusions:

Most remarkable of all, however, are the revelations that have emerged from the mental clinic. The bold and truly epoch-making writings of the psychoanalysts are indispensable to the student of mythology; for, whatever may be thought of the detailed and sometimes contradictory interpretations of specific cases and problems, Freud, Jung, and their followers have demonstrated irrefutably that the logic, the heroes, and the deeds of myth survive into modern time. (2008, p. 2)
Campbell focused mainly on two Freudian concepts: *dream interpretation* (in order to, as described above, showcase how mythological tales follow certain patterns, arguing that this is something inherent in our psyche) and the struggle between the *conscious* and *unconscious* (Campbell, 2008, 1-18). For the purposes of this essay the dichotomy of the conscious and unconscious will be explored briefly in Tolkien’s hero character Bilbo Baggins (as mentioned earlier restrictions in time and space will not allow for as deep an analysis).

2.1.4 Tolkien’s Knowledge of Myth

Another important aspect to consider as regards the validity of Campbell’s theory of the monomyth is how well others understood mythological narrative structures without being familiar with Campbell. J.R.R. Tolkien, as a philologist and professor of Anglo-Saxon and the English language and literature (at varying stages of his career), had a deep understanding of both the relationship between language and literature as well as an extensive knowledge of myth and legends (Carpenter, 2000)—for instance, he translated works such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Pearl*, *Sir Orfeo* (Tolkien, 1980), and *Beowulf* (Tolkien, 2014)—not to mention that he began writing *The Hobbit* nearly two decades before Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and had it published more than a decade before Campbell’s book. Furthermore, in his correspondence he referred several times to works that had either influenced him or that he liked greatly, mentioning, amongst others, *The Kalevala* (Carpenter, Tolkien & Tolkien, 2000, p. 87, 144, 214-15, 345, 434), the fiction of Atlantis (ibid., p. 151, 175), and referencing *The Hobbit* Tolkien writes “[t]he dwarf-names, and the wizard’s, are from the Elder Edda [sic]” (ibid., p. 31)—these names are specifically from the *Völuspá*, the section referred to as *Dvergatal*, wherein a list of dwarvish names are recanted. Another example of why his work has been interpreted as being influenced by, for instance, Norse myth, is the character of Beorn in *The Hobbit*, who Tom Shippey argues is influenced mainly by Böthvar Bjarki (from *Saga of Hrólfr Kraki*) and Beowulf “whose name is commonly explained as Beowulf = ‘bees’ wolf’ = honey-eater = bear” (2003, p. 80), characteristics which all apply to Beorn (he is a were-bear, keeps bees, and eats little else than honey, cream, and bread). This is further backed up by John D. Rateliff who expounds in greater detail on the topic (2011, p. 256-60) and by Douglas A. Anderson who develops on Tolkien’s personal knowledge and experience of *Saga of Hrólfr Kraki* (2002, p. 164-5).

Tolkien’s love of language and deep understanding and interest of mythology and legend certainly affected the way in which he produced his own works of fiction; for instance, even in naming his story *The Hobbit, or, There and Back Again* he echoes the proposed narrative
structure of the hero’s journey, long before Campbell suggested such a thing (which is not to say that others had not offered a similar structure before). Perhaps there is something in this understanding of mythology which can be seen in works such as The Hobbit and which led Campbell to propose his monomyth.

2.2 Hypothesis

If Campbell’s theory holds true, then a majority of the works that have a mythological narrative should conform to his proposed narrative structure. In this instance what will be investigated is if J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Hobbit, or, There and Back Again conforms to Campbell’s notion of the monomyth, or, the narrative structure of the hero’s journey.

2.3 Definitions

A hero, if following Campbell’s definition, is someone who receives the call to adventure and then follows through one, several, or all stages of the hero’s journey. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) Online a hero is in” Classical Mythol. and Ancient Greek Hist. A man (or occas. a woman) of superhuman strength, courage, or ability, favoured by the gods” or “A man (or occas. a woman) distinguished by the performance of courageous or noble actions” (“hero, n.”).

The dichotomy between the conscious and the unconscious are important notions for Campbell, as he argues that these are where the true conflict and purpose for the reconciliation lies as it manifests itself in the physical world (Campbell, 2008, p. 1-18). The unconscious, as defined by the OED Online and pertaining to psychology, is the “mental or psychological processes of which a person is not aware but which influence emotions and behaviour, esp. (in Freudian theory) those resulting from repression” (“unconscious, adj. and n.”). The conscious, then, is “Present to the mind or to consciousness; known to oneself, felt; of which the possessor is aware. Also: resulting from the possession of awareness or consciousness. In Psychol. often opposed to unconscious and subconscious” (“conscious, adj. and n.”).

3 Bilbo’s Hero Journey

Initially, Bilbo Baggins’ nature must be explained so that his current state before the call to adventure and his later development throughout the adventure is better understood. By Bilbo Baggins’ nature it is here meant to be understood as the duality which exists within him, that is to say the dual aspects of his psyche, which is clearly evident throughout the narrative. The one aspect that he presents to the outside world and wishes to be most closely associated
with himself is that of his Baggins side, represented by the ideals described around his father, Bungo Baggins and others of that family: “people considered them very respectable, not only because most of them were rich, but also because they never had any adventures or did anything unexpected” (Tolkien, 2011, p. 3). Then there is the more secretive, slumbering aspect that lies in wait within him, inherited from his mother, Belladonna Took’s side, his Tookishness, as it is described, a side that yearns for adventures, wanderlust: “there was something not hobbitlike about them, and once in a while members of the Took-clan would go and have adventures. They discreetly disappeared, and the family hushed it up; but the fact remained that the Toooks were not as respectable as the Bagginses, though they were undoubtedly richer” (ibid. p. 4); this is the aspect of Bilbo which Gandalf relies upon when setting out to recruit him for the adventure.

In essence this story is about the ritualistic passage that the hero must undergo to reconcile these two aspects within himself, metaphorically represented by the outward world of the known and unknown which mirrors the inward notions of the conscious and unconscious, where the outward world’s trials and tribulations affects the inward notions’ perception of self, or, how Bilbo perceives and comes to terms with his Baggins and Tookish sides from the outset of the adventure till its conclusion.

3.1 Bilbo’s Departure

3.1.1 Bilbo’s Call to Adventure

In the initial stage of the hero’s journey, the future hero is in a familiar setting (for them) when the crisis intervenes, that is, when the call to adventure arrives. The adventure is brought about by the sign of the herald, in this case “a veiled mysterious figure—the unknown” (Campbell, 2008, p. 44) made manifest. This is the case for Bilbo Baggins of Bag End, The Hill, Hobbiton, in The Shire, who is enjoying his wooden pipe in the morning after breakfast outside his front door. The narrator presents to the reader a description of Gandalf which is not yet privy to Bilbo, “[t]ales and adventures sprouted up all over the place wherever he went, in the most extraordinary fashion,” but all that Bilbo sees is “an old man with a staff. He [Gandalf] had a tall pointed blue hat, a long grey cloak, a silver scarf over which his long white beard hung down below his waist, and immense black boots” (Hobbit, p. 5), which very much suits the “mysterious figure” Campbell envisioned. After some minor formalities (good mornings, but no proper introduction of names) Gandalf states his business here. Being short on time, he informs Bilbo that he is “looking for someone to share in an adventure that [he is] arranging,” (p. 6). Bilbo attempts to direct him elsewhere, indicating
that there is no one of an adventurous persuasion here. But Bilbo’s interest is awoken when he comes to learn the strange old man’s name which stirs memories and emotions of Gandalf’s fireworks that Bilbo witnessed in his youth followed by recollections of stories of “young quite lads and lasses going off into the Blue for mad adventures” (p. 7). These musings bring forth his adventurous side (his Tookish side), but that is soon quenched by his Baggins side: “Bless me, life used to be quite inter—I mean, you used to upset things badly in these parts once upon a time” (p. 7). Bilbo ultimately seeks refuge in his own home, and Gandalf leaves after a while, but not before having carved a symbol on the door (which Bilbo does not notice).

By showing these emotions and expressing these opinions (and then hastily trying to cover them up) Bilbo’s Tookish side has been allowed to come to the fore of his conscious, which must have caught him unawares, but this is in essence his acceptance of the call to adventure (see section ‘Does Bilbo Refuse the Call?’ below for an explication on this). Even so, Bilbo puts up some resistance and seems reluctant to leave for an adventure, perhaps so because he has not yet been, after Campbell’s notion, presented with the unknown and uncanny that the adventure promises, which for Bilbo arrives in a truly unexpected way (but still heralded by Gandalf by proxy).

The next day dwarves begin to arrive, first one by one, then in small groups, until there are thirteen all in all in Bilbo’s home, together with Gandalf as well, who arrived with the last group of dwarves, being the one who had directed them there by way of the sign carved the day prior upon Bilbo’s front door. During this time his Baggins side is tried strenuously as he is acting the host for such a strange party, which tires his conscious, allowing his unconscious to surface and be drawn further into the possibility of adventure through various means, for instance the strangeness of a home full of dwarves and their singing of strange and mysterious lands. It is also during this time that Bilbo learns of the purpose of the quest (presented with the unknown, as outlined above in the theory section on the call to adventure): to reclaim the Lonely Mountain, Erebor, from the dragon Smaug, and so retrieve the stolen home and wealth of Thorin and the other dwarves; the lands they are to cross are described as perilous, and the journey is expected to be dangerous.

At this point his Baggins side is frightened by the prospects and he faints. But later when he has regained his senses he hears the company of dwarves and Gandalf discussing his nature, that he appears weak (Gandalf arguing that it is not so), and his Tookish side takes over, which further cements his place as a part of the adventure, in which he will play the role of a burglar and steal away the treasure from the dragon.
After having received all this knowledge the call to adventure has arrived in full, and Bilbo leaves for his journey with the dwarves and Gandalf the next day, but not before a final push from Gandalf to speed along towards the dwarves who are waiting on him. Bilbo had awoken to an empty home and believing the dwarves and the wizard to be gone for good he had settled down to being only good old Baggins again before Gandalf returned and hurried him along. Again flustered by the duality of his nature Bilbo departs for multiple purposes: his Tookish side striding towards adventure and his Baggins side unwilling to be perceived as someone who does not stay true to their word, i.e., being unrespectable.

3.1.2 Does Bilbo Refuse the Call?

If the hero refuses the call, as Campbell stated, the adventure is turned into its negative. On the surface it appears that this is exactly what Bilbo is doing when he vehemently bids Gandalf “good morning” on several occasions, each time with a different meaning, which Gandalf singles out: “‘What do you mean?’ he said. ‘Do you wish me a good morning, or mean that it is a good morning whether I want it or not; or that you feel good this morning; or that it is a morning to be good on?’” to which Bilbo replies that he means “[a]ll of them at once,” and when Bilbo later again bids him ‘good morning,’ but this time with the intention of politely asking Gandalf to leave, Gandalf comments on this too: “‘What a lot of things you do use Good morning for!’” (Hobbit, p. 6-7). Bilbo, feeling flustered by the encounter and the outlandish proposition of going on an adventure mixed with nostalgia and emotions unbecoming someone of a Baggins nature at the recollection of Gandalf’s fireworks fumbles for normality and accidentally invites Gandalf back the next day for some tea, which he, when he has fled into the safety of his hobbit-hole and closed the door on Gandalf, instantly comes to regret: “‘What on earth did I ask him to tea for!’ he said to himself” (Hobbit, p. 8).

Through the action of inviting Gandalf to tea the next day Bilbo has not refused the call to adventure, but rather accepted it, even though he did it unwittingly and without intention. Here is a first indication of the battling inner nature of Bilbo, his duality of paternity, his mother and father’s opposite heritage with the adventurous Tookishness on the one side and the respectable aspect of the Baggins on the other. In the encounter with Gandalf on the doorstep of his home, his ordinary world (Vogler’s notion), the crisis of the call to adventure shocks him so that his usually respectable and accommodating nature (Baggins) is temporarily out of balance, which leaves open an opportunity for his slumbering adventurous side (Took) to rise to the fore and accept the call. As has been outlined under the heading
above this invitation back allowed for Gandalf and the dwarves to impart the rest of the necessary knowledge of the adventure to Bilbo.

3.1.3 Bilbo Receives Supernatural Aid

Having accepted the call to adventure the future hero will then encounter the next stage of the journey during which he will receive supernatural aid from the mentor who will give them items, knowledge, and protection from the dangerous powers they are embarking towards in the strange unknown. Recall also Campbell’s description of this mentor as a “little old crone or old man” (2008, p. 57) and that the mentor often in fairy lore appears as a wizard (ibid.), therefore it is already clearly indicated that Bilbo’s mentor is in fact Gandalf, the mysterious-looking old wizened wizard.

This stage of the hero’s journey continues for quite a long while through the narrative and is interspersed with other stages (in fact most of the stages are quite fluid and there are no clear definitive borders between them), but it is always instigated after the hero has accepted the call, which in Bilbo’s case is after he has invited Gandalf back for tea and after he has heard the description of the unknown. It could be argued that Gandalf’s way of drawing Bilbo into the adventure through the unexpected party, thereby breaking down Bilbo’s mental defences, is a part of this supernatural aid from the mentor and, furthermore, that his way of giving Bilbo the final push through the door towards adventure is the crossing of the first threshold, but this is going to be given a much clearer demarcation, as seen in the next section below.

Gandalf, a seasoned traveller through the lands of Middle-earth, possesses a vast amount of knowledge which aids and protects the company (Bilbo and the dwarves) in the early stages of the journey. Gandalf saves them from the trolls in Chapter II, where Gandalf also, afterwards, leads them to the dwelling of the trolls and Bilbo finds a short-sword (later named Sting by himself), an item bestowed indirectly to him by the mentor; he leads them through the dangerous lands to the Last Homely House in Rivendell, where some of the race of elves abide, where they have a short rest in Chapter III; he leads them through the dangerous mountain pass and saves them from the goblins when they are captured there in Chapter IV; he fights against the vicious wargs and deals with the great eagles (with whom he is acquainted) in chapters VI and VII; he leads them to the lodgings of Beorn, a shapeshifter who can turn into the form of a great bear, in Chapter VII; and he ultimately leads them to the borders of Mirkwood at the end of Chapter VII where he must finally leave them to attend to other business—which is to say that the time for Bilbo to proceed without a mentor has come.
It should also be said that there are other supernatural forces at work in the strange world of the unknown, which serve to aid the hero. For Bilbo this manifests itself in the narrative as ‘luck.’ For instance, in Chapter V when he is crawling through the dark of the tunnels and seemingly at random lays his hand on the Ring (which he later find grants him invisibility; another item to aid him) and again in Chapter VIII in an even more salient passage where it is stated outright that “he was born with a great deal of it [luck]” (Hobbit, p. 144) which guides him in the right direction.

Most important of all is that through all of these wanderings Gandalf bestows upon Bilbo the knowledge he will need to face the coming challenges; he is imparted with wisdom in dealing with others and strength of will and resilience to overcome alluring aspects which seek to steer him aside from the quest; all of these characteristics are already prevalent in Bilbo, but Gandalf nurtures them and allows them to grow. Clearly he sees something more in the hobbit than others do, as he himself declares with usual vagueness: “There is a lot more to him than you guess, and a deal more than he has any idea of himself” (Hobbit, p. 19).

3.1.4 Bilbo Crosses the First Threshold

As the hero and the mentor travel from the known towards the unknown they soon come upon the border threshold that separates these two worlds. Here they encounter the threshold guardian(s). For Bilbo and company this occurs in Chapter II after a rather disastrous event where they have lost large portions of their provisions (the pony carrying this was dragged into a river and they could only save the pony), struggle to get a fire going, and realise that Gandalf is nowhere to be seen. In the gloomy distance of the night they perceive a campfire. Upon further inspection, Bilbo realises that it is maintained by trolls roasting mutton over the open flame. He is captured by the trolls. The dwarves become impatient as their scout, Bilbo, does not return and they begin to trickle in one by one, only to be captured by the trolls.

On the verge of not “conquering or conciliating the power” of the first threshold the hero is in peril of remaining within the borders of their previous life-experience (Campbell, 2008, p. 74). Fortunately for Bilbo at the last minute they are saved by Gandalf who has returned from his own scouting ahead; he tricks the trolls into lingering too long by the campsite and as the morning sun rises they are turned into stone leaving him to free the dwarves and Bilbo.

By the aid of his mentor Bilbo has managed to cross the first threshold and has also received an item (a short-sword) and some wisdom indirectly from Gandalf (trolls turn to stone in daylight, they are not very bright, and they can be fooled by wit). However, as Bilbo
did not conquer or conciliate the power of the threshold himself, he must ultimately be led towards the Belly of the Whale.

3.1.5 Bilbo Enters the Belly of the Whale

After a sojourn in the valley of Rivendell in the Last Homely House of Elrond, where the company has received new intelligence for their quest and recuperated, they once again set out towards their goal. While navigating the Mountain-path leading through the Misty Mountains the company is assailed by ravaging storms and comes under the threat of being crushed by stone-giants, forcing them to seek shelter within a cave. There, having slept but for a while, a crack in the back of the cave appears, noticed by no one in the company—no one but Bilbo that is, who has a dream of such a thing happening, which wakes him in fright only to realise that it is actually occurring, upon which he screams, Gandalf awakens and vanishes in a flash, and the dwarves and Bilbo are captured by goblins pouring out of the crack in the wall. They are forcefully led down winding paths and tunnels beyond the crack in the wall until they arrive at what the goblins call Goblin-town; Gandalf is nowhere to be seen. The company is questioned by the Great Goblin and is in danger of being killed and eaten when all of a sudden a flashing light blinds them all and the Great Goblin is cleaved through by a sword. Again Gandalf has reappeared, the rescuing mentor delivering his protégé from harm. Together the company flees from the confused and frightened goblins, led by Gandalf through the winding tunnels. Then disaster strikes again as the goblins, having regained their wits and courage, come upon them sneakily and grab them from behind. Bilbo falls and is knocked unconscious while the rest of the company fights off the goblins and continues to flee, unknowingly leaving Bilbo behind.

As he regains his senses Bilbo is frightened by the prospect of being left alone but continuous onwards. He descends through the tunnels for a long while, having lost all sense of time and perceiving little due to the pressing darkness (it is here, crawling upon all fours, that he lays his hand on the Ring, described as a turning point in his career). At the very bottom of the tunnels and at the heart of the mountain he encounters the creature Gollum, with whom he has a riddle-contest. After the contest Bilbo sneakily follows Gollum (who has murderous intent after suspecting Bilbo for taking his ‘precious’, which is what he calls the Ring Bilbo found earlier) after Bilbo has discovered the secret of the Ring (invisibility) and he is thus led through the labyrinthine tunnels towards a passage out at the other side of the mountain. Here Bilbo has a chance to kill Gollum, who is blocking the way out of the tunnel and into the chamber where the door is, as he himself is invisible and wields his short-sword, but pity
stays his hand and instead he takes a mighty leap over Gollum and speeds through the last tunnel, through a throng of goblins, and passes out of the door and into the Wild.

There is much more detail to these chapters (IV and V) in the novel, but these are the essential parts as they pertain to Bilbo’s hero journey and his absorption into the Belly of the Whale. As Bilbo did not conquer or conciliate the power of the first threshold he is inevitably heading towards the belly of the whale and this occurs as he (and the rest of the party, but henceforth only Bilbo will be referred to) is symbolically swallowed by the whale/mountain as the crack opens up at the back of the cave in which he has sought refuge. He is then led through winding tunnels, interrogated, freed, and led down further tunnels, lost to unconsciousness, and proceeds alone down more tunnels (and finds the Ring), until he arrives at the centre of the mountain, the belly of the whale, where he metaphorically conquers Gollum, who represents another threshold guardian, in a game of riddles/wits (the danger of the situation, being murdered by Gollum, is juxtaposed with something entirely familiar to Bilbo, riddles, and he can use his wit in a way that he could not when he faced the trolls). He then flees/pursues Gollum and later overcomes him in a great leap towards the exit of the belly of the whale, through the backdoor of the mountain and out to the other side.

The mountain, representing the unknown, after they have left the known/familiarity of Rivendell, is what swallows Bilbo up and causes the others of his company to believe him to be dead (in the following chapter as Bilbo finds them, still invisible, he hears them discussing whether he is dead or not), which resonates well with what Campbell proposed this stage to represent: the hero’s inability to conquer the threshold causes him/her to be swallowed up by the unknown and is believed to be dead to the rest of the world, only to emerge later, having conquered the threshold, and being reborn into the world. The symbolical nature of the belly of the whale is thus another of death and rebirth, portraying the womb-image from which the hero re-enters the world with new knowledge.

Finally, at this point, there is an event occurring after Bilbo has been carried to the abode of the great eagles which hints at what this experience has meant to him. It is the first time in many days that he has had anything to eat and the first opportunity he has had to sleep, and even though he is quite content he experiences something profound in his dream, even if he himself cannot perceive it:

Soon Bilbo’s stomach was feeling full and comfortable again, and he felt he could sleep contentedly, though really he would have liked a loaf and butter better than bits of meat toasted on sticks. He slept curled up on the hard rock
more soundly than ever he had done on his feather-bed in his own little hole at home. But all night he dreamed of his own house and wandered in his sleep into all his different rooms looking for something that he could not find nor remember what it looked like. (Hobbit, p. 103-4)

Bilbo appears to have lost a part of himself, namely his Baggins side, though it is not lost in its entirety. Later, under the heading ‘Bilbo Meets with the Goddess,’ he finds what he is looking for, a part that completes him. However, it is not entirely his Baggins side that is recovered, but his Tookish side.

3.2 Bilbo’s Initiation

3.2.1 Bilbo on the Road of Trials

Having finally conquered the threshold the hero proceeds forth towards new trials. These are numerous and would take up far too much space if recanted in too great detail, but fortunately there are but two upon which it will suffice to linger. Therefore, in chronological order, what now follows is a brief recital of these trials.

Directly after escaping from the mountain Bilbo and company find themselves trapped by the goblins’ allies the wargs, large intelligent wolf-like beasts. Later the goblins appear, but amidst the raucous battle the great eagles enter the fray and carry the company away (this can be perceived as the supernatural power mentioned earlier, ‘luck,’ which comes to Bilbo’s aid at so opportune a time). Again, if it had not been for Gandalf they would have been in a much worse state; he held off the wargs and goblins as long as he could with fire-magic and fortunately he knew the eagles (otherwise the party might as well have become a meal). Furthermore, as they leave the abode of the eagles and enter the realm where Beorn, a shapeshifter who can turn into an enormous bear, holds sway Bilbo again witnesses how Gandalf uses wit to overcome a potentially dangerous foe (Beorn being suspicious of strangers and having no great liking of dwarves). Afterwards they are granted provisions and ponies by Beorn and travel to the edge of Mirkwood, where Gandalf part ways with them. Left with some final advice Bilbo and the dwarves brave the forest only to be overcome with its enchanting and uncanny nature. This part of the hero’s journey is studied in more detail under the heading ‘Bilbo Meets with the Goddess’ below, as the events occurring here pertain to this stage. Suffice it to say for now that the dwarves are captured, first by spiders, from which Bilbo rescues them, only to walk into the hands of the elves, again to be captured. From there they are imprisoned in the halls of the Wood-elves’ King only to be rescued,
again, by Bilbo. They then arrive at Lake-town, which is situated far down the river that emanates from the Lonely Mountain, their goal. Here they are greeted as returning heroes and kings of old in hope that the old prophesies of the dragon’s downfall soon are to come true; they are provisioned and armed and then proceed towards their quest’s destination. Through luck, courage, and attempted wits (all aspects he has attained and developed over the course of the adventure) Bilbo accidentally succeeds in driving Smaug—the dragon who stole the Lonely Mountain and its treasures from the dwarves—out from the Mountain; Smaug suspects that the arrival of the dwarves and the hobbit is some mischief from Lake-town, and he therefore flies there in a rage, only to be felled by an arrow through the heart, through the only place in his armoured abdomen that was unguarded, knowledge of which’s existence had been indirectly imparted by Bilbo.

There are many thresholds for Bilbo to cross and many threshold guardians to overcome. Above nearly all of these have been listed in short and, as Campbell stated: “Dragons have now to be slain and surprising barriers passed—again, again, and again. Meanwhile there will be a multitude of preliminary victories, unretainable [sic] ecstasies, and momentary glimpses of the wonderful land” (2008, p. 90). That ‘wonderful land’ now rapidly approaches in the narrative, now that almost all trials have been overcome, the dragon lays slayed, and the dwarves have seemingly been returned to their home. However, as will be explored under the section ‘Bilbo Experiences the Woman as Temptress’ and which will find its conclusion under the three final headings the ultimate trial still lies ahead of the hero (under these three because the adventure reaches these stages nearly simultaneously; these are: ‘Atonement’, ’Apotheosis’, and ‘Ultimate Boon’).

3.2.2 Bilbo Meets with the Goddess

As mentioned above in the previous section, this stage of the journey will explore Bilbo’s meeting with the goddess during his adventures in Mirkwood. It is important to remember again that while the goddess often is represented as a physical woman it can also be embodied as something else entirely, as long as it represents that unconditional love which a child experiences with their mother, that is to say a love that completes them and makes them whole. For Bilbo this is represented in his symbolical return to his mother by way of his Tookish nature; through experiencing that reconnection he attains those aspects of her which he needs to fulfil himself.

As the dwarves and Bilbo come upon the third and final elven feast, the largest and grandest of them all, they are again lost in the dark as the elves quickly depart. This time,
however, the party lose each other and become lost in the woods. As it turns out all the dwarves (but Thorin) are captured by giant spiders and Bilbo is himself nearly caught. The ensuing struggle to free himself from the spider’s web and the battle with the spider where he finally slays it is the point when Bilbo becomes complete. As he has killed the spider he “fell down and remembered nothing more for a long while,” (Hobbit, p. 144), that is to say, dies a symbolical death, to be reborn. As he is reborn (awakes) he feels different.

Somehow the killing of the giant spider, all alone by himself in the dark without the help of the wizard or the dwarves or of anyone else, made a great difference to Mr. Baggins. He felt a different person, and much fiercer and bolder in spite of an empty stomach, as he wiped his sword on the grass and put it back into its sheath. (p. 144)

He also cements this transformation by finally giving a name to the short-sword he acquired in the trolls’ lair (Gandalf and Thorin having found two swords there themselves, which Elrond later proclaimed to be Glamdring and Orcrist, two famous swords from out of history, which Bilbo’s sword compared little to in both deed and size): “‘I will give you a name,’ he said to it, ‘and I shall call you Sting’” (p. 144).

Bilbo has become fully transformed into what he had the potential to be: a realised Took instead of a Baggins. In the quotation above his dual natures are juxtaposed and it is clear that the Tookish side has become the stronger one as his old Baggins nature, “in spite of an empty stomach” he feels “a different person, and much fiercer and bolder.”

The prospective meeting with the goddess, his mother’s Tookish side, had been in the awning from the beginning of the adventure, but it was not before here, in the pitch-black of an uncanny forest, that this goddess/aspect stepped into the sun and made itself known to Bilbo, thus completing him.

3.2.3 Bilbo Experiences the Woman as Temptress

Having evicted the dragon from the Mountain to its death the dwarves and Bilbo finally dare to enter the halls of the Mountain proper. As Bilbo is searching through the great hall were Smaug had gathered all the dwarves’ treasure into his vast dragon-horde Bilbo comes upon a particularly beautiful gem, shining bright in the darkness of the hall: the Arkenstone, of which Thorin had talked earlier as being one of the chief interests for retaking the Mountain from the dragon; it held great value for Thorin and represented both the home he had lost and the family that had been driven from there, a connection to the past and a sign of
his true heritage as King under the Mountain. Bilbo, smitten with the power of the gem and the power that had affected the treasure in general by the closeness of the dragon (usually referred to as dragon-sickness), pocketed the Arkenstone, attempting to justify his doing so to himself by arguing that he would just take that and nothing else as his fourteenth share (a share which he was promised as payment for partaking in the venture).

However, as Thorin feverishly searches for the Arkenstone over several days, and as Bilbo keeps it hidden, Thorin begins to change for the worse and becomes ill at mood. Thus, when the armies of men and elves arrive outside the front gate of the Mountain Thorin has no desire to bargain with them, which causes the Mountain to be besieged by these armies (the story is actually a bit more complex, but this will suffice for the essay’s purposes).

Woman as temptress is for Bilbo the Arkenstone. It represents that which has power to draw out the worst in the hero and which nearly comes to ruin the entire venture. At the brink of completing the quest Bilbo set out upon he nearly risks it all for one, albeit precious and important, gemstone. The only way the hero can continue on towards the goal of the quest—which in Bilbo’s case was to return to the dwarves their home, which he has yet failed to do, as it is now besieged—is to overcome the temptation, to “surpass the temptations of her calls, and soar to the immaculate ether beyond” (Campbell, 2008, p. 102).

Luckily Bilbo finally overcomes the temptation of the Arkenstone when he realises that it can be used to bargain for peace between the besieging armies of men and elves and the besieged dwarves; he steals away in the night and delivers the Arkenstone to the leaders of the two armies, Thranduil2, the King of the Wood-elves, and Bard (the archer who felled the dragon; descended from the rulers of the city of Dale, ruined by the dragon) of Lake-town, to use as leverage over Thorin. Bilbo then steals back into the besieged Mountain to await the morning and the coming negotiations, which Thorin is as of yet unaware of. Bilbo has truly surpassed the temptations and has claimed the higher moral ground. Although he has betrayed his friends, he has done so in the cause of goodness and with a wish for no more hurt to come to anyone.

3.2.4 Bilbo’s Atonement with the Father

As Bilbo delivers the Heart of the Mountain, the Arkenstone, to Thorin’s enemies, he has challenged Thorin, who represents the father figure for Bilbo—in many cases Thorin

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2 The name of the Wood-elves’ King is not introduced until The Lord of the Rings, however, where it is told that he is the father of Legolas, one of the members of the Fellowship.
embodies numerous of the same principles that Bilbo’s Baggins side represents as well: properness, a good appearance, grandeur, and so forth, but most of all Thorin personifies the longing for home which Bilbo feels at times, homesickness; but while Bilbo merely feels a homesickness with the possibility for return, if he so should like, Thorin and the other dwarves feel a homesickness for something which they cannot return to, at least not without severe risk. They are homeless. Thus, having returned to their homes for the first time in many long years to not find the Arkenstone, which epitomises so much for Thorin, his family, home, and heritage, is a severe blow. For Bilbo to turn over the Arkenstone is the largest affront imaginable to Thorin.

Campbell describes how the hero must trust in the mercy of the father by abandoning their own ego and giving themselves to this ultimate power to be judged. In Bilbo’s case he is perilously close to come to a bad end, so great is the wrath of Thorin, but he stays his anger at the last moment and in bitter and cold resentment he instead sends Bilbo away to join Gandalf and the others outside the Mountain.

Bilbo has not yet achieved atonement with the father figure however, as Thorin plays false and only pretends to accept the deals for the negotiation while he still bides his time awaiting Dain, his cousin, who is leading a great army of dwarves from the Iron Mountains to meet the besieging armies of men and elves (word had been sent by bird to Dain and he had immediately begun his march). As this army arrives it appears that a great battle between men and elves against dwarves will be fought, but at the last moment a supernatural power seems to intervene (which spares men, elves, and dwarves from spilling each other’s blood, which had been Bilbo’s hope) and the great armies of goblins and wargs descend on them (they had gathered in secret, in great anger over the slaying of their chieftain, the Great Goblin, by Gandalf and the dwarves). Now men, elves, and dwarves presented a united front against their common enemy (joined in the fray by the great eagles, who had espied the movement of the goblins and wargs, and Beorn as well, who had gathered as much intelligence himself).

After the battle Thorin lay dying and it is at this moment that he and Bilbo come to understand each other. Thorin’s link to the material world is waning and he says to Bilbo that he is coming to realise that he now is leaving “all gold and silver, and go where it is of little worth” and he wishes “to part in friendship from you, and I would take back my words and deeds at the Gate” (*Hobbit*, p. 262). Bilbo sees the values in Thorin for what they truly are, and Thorin praises the values of Bilbo: “[t]here is more in you of good than you know, child of the kindly West. Some courage and some wisdom, blended in measure. If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world” (*Hobbit*, p.
though they had been opposites they come to realise that they are very much the same—
as Campbell says: “only to find, in the end, that the father and mother reflect each other, and
are in essence the same” (2008, p. 110); as Bilbo’s Tookish side (mother) and the father
figure, metaphorically represented by his Baggins side and physically embodied by Thorin,
come to be represented as the same within Bilbo he has finally achieved atonement with the
father and reconciled that power.

3.2.5 Bilbo Achieves Apotheosis

As Bilbo has reconciled the power of the father figure he has transcended into a place of
rest, even though it is bitter for him, with many of his friends dead, he still recuperates and
regains the strength he needs for the return journey. For, though this stage of the hero’s
journey, apotheosis, often is a time to sojourn and gain strength and knowledge to be able to
brave the final trial, this is not needed for Bilbo. Even though he gains the knowledge he
needed to understand the dual nature of his own self, he attains the ultimate boon as soon as
he reconciled with the father figure: the Quest for Erebor (the Lonely Mountain) was achieved
as soon as Thorin saw the folly of his stubborn ways, brought about mainly by Bilbo’s actions
and in part by supernatural intervention (the luck of Bilbo is great). The last stage of the
initiation is now turned to.

3.2.6 Bilbo Attains the Ultimate Boon

Bilbo achieves this first when Thorin lies dying and there is peace between the good races
of men, elves, and dwarves, and the evil races of goblins and wargs have been defeated; when
the Lonely Mountain no longer stands as a bastion of defiance against the armed forces of
men and elves, but as the ground where these forces fought a battle in alliance against their
true common enemy. The goal of the quest was to defeat Smaug and reclaim the Lonely
Mountain for the dwarves, but because Thorin decided to not share in the dragon-horde with
the men and elves they lost the Mountain again nearly as soon as they had retrieved it.

Bilbo ultimately showcases the spiritual growth he has undergone over the course of the
adventure and he utilises many of the aspects of himself which he has conquered and
developed: his wit leads him to the path of a negotiation strategy which can spare the blood of
many more innocents, but he must do so at the cost of something which sorely tempted him,
the Arkenstone; he shows great courage when he stands against all that is wrong, even when it
is his own comrades who are at fault; he also shows that his worth as a burglar, for which he
was hired for this venture, was great and that he has grown into this role as well, especially so
when he steals away at night from his friends; and he conquers that greatest power which held
sway over his life, the father figure and what it represented. Having done so Bilbo has attained the ultimate boon, the completion of the quest upon which he set out: to see the home of the dwarves, the Lonely Mountain, returned to them.

3.3 Bilbo’s Return

3.3.1 Bilbo Is Rescued from Without

Bilbo’s rescue from without comes unexpectedly at the return of Gandalf after Bilbo has handed over the Arkenstone. Gandalf suddenly reveals himself after having thrown off a dark cloak and congratulates Bilbo on so fine a performance. A while afterwards, after the Battle of Five Armies, Gandalf escorts the hurt and tired Bilbo back to his native lands. They pass the first stretch of the return journey with Beorn and the Wood-elves, then part ways with the elves at their kingdom and continue on with Beorn, with whom they spend the winter at his halls. Gandalf and Bilbo then continue on alone back the way they came before, over the Mountain-pass and back into Rivendell, where they again rest. It is said that Bilbo experienced many more adventures on his return journey as well, but no specifics are recanted in this narrative, only that he is guarded well by his companions all the way.

The way in which Bilbo return fits well into the description of Campbell’s that some supernatural and unexpected power returns and guides and aids the hero back to his dwellings of old. At first accompanied by Gandalf, Beorn and the elves, then Beorn and Gandalf, and finally just Gandalf, he is at all times protected by strong and, to him, supernatural powers.

3.3.2 Bilbo Crosses the Return Threshold

The crossing of the return threshold, as has been described, is one of the most difficult passages during the hero’s return journey. Here they must retain and reconcile the knowledge they have received in the other world and bring it into their ordinary world and failing to do so would mean that they could not return successfully. As the hero died many symbolical deaths and was reborn multiple times during the journey they must now die another symbolical death to pass back over the return threshold.

Bilbo does so in a way that symbolises the change he has undergone. In the beginning of the story, when Gandalf heralded the call to adventure, Bilbo was described as acting rather ‘prosy,’ but that his recognition of Gandalf brought out some other quality in him, upon which the narrator comments “[y]ou will notice already that Mr. Baggins was not quite as prosy as he liked to believe” (*Hobbit*, p. 7). Upon the return threshold, on the borders of the known and
unknown world, Bilbo pauses and Gandalf looks upon him, then Bilbo recites on the spot a poem of his own making at that very instance:

Roads go ever ever on,
Over rock and under tree,
By caves where never sun has shone
By streams that never find the sea
Over snow by winter sown,
And through the merry flowers of June
Over grass and over stone
And under mountains in the moon

Roads go ever ever on
Under cloud and under star,
Yet feet that wandering have gone
Turn at last to home afar.
Eyes that fire and sword have seen
And horror in the halls of stone
Look at last on meadows green
And trees and hills they long have known. (Hobbit, p. 273)

To this Gandalf observes that Bilbo is “not the hobbit that you were” (p. 274). They then cross the bridge, the symbolical threshold, and Bilbo is returned home.

In this poem Bilbo has captured the entire change that he has gone through, both in words, but also in deed; for in reciting this poem of his he shows that he has transformed from his ‘prosy’ Baggins side and entered the ‘poetry’ of his Tookish side; and upon reciting this he reconciles the crossing of the return threshold, mastering the knowledge of the other world and bringing with him its wisdom and the change it has wrought in him into his known world.

3.3.3 Bilbo Becomes the Master of the Two Worlds

For the hero to become the master of the two worlds, the familiar and the unfamiliar, conscious and unconscious, he must be able to pass over the thresholds of these worlds. A quotation shows how this manifests both metaphorically and physically for Bilbo: “He took to writing poetry and visiting the elves” (Hobbit, p. 275), which is to say, as he now writes poetry, he has mastery over one of the worlds while he still abides in the other (his prose- and
poetry-worlds, the conscious and unconscious) and he is also physically able to leave the one world for the other, visiting the elves, while retaining the ability to cross over the thresholds, back and forth. Bilbo is thus truly a master of the two worlds in that he knows the virtue of them both and in that he knows how not to contaminate the knowledge from the one with the other (Campbell, 2008, p. 196).

3.3.4 Bilbo Has the Freedom to Live

Years later after having returned to his home Bilbo is at his desk writing his memoirs when he receives unexpected guests: Gandalf and Balin (one of the dwarves of the company). They take to reminiscing of their past adventures together and the talk falls to the current state of Lake-town and its new Master, of whom songs are sung because it is said that in his time the rivers are flowing with gold again, to which Bilbo replies:

“Then the prophecies of the old songs have turned out to be true, after a fashion!” said Bilbo [for there were prophecies that the rivers would flow with gold again after the dragon was dead and the true King under the Mountain reinstated].

“Of course!” said Gandalf. “And why should not they prove true? Surely you don’t disbelieve the prophecies, because you had a hand in bringing them about yourself? You don’t really suppose, do you, that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit? You are a very fine person, Mr. Baggins, and I am very fond of you; but you are only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all!”

“Thank goodness!” said Bilbo laughing, and handed him the tobacco-jar. (Hobbit, p. 276)

The fact that Bilbo is at his desk writing his memoirs shows that he has no regrets about his pasts if he is willing to put them to print for future generations to come. Furthermore, Bilbo’s response to Gandalf’s assurance that even though Bilbo attained a certain greatness in his accomplishment of the quest he also assures him that he is still just a “little fellow in a wide world after all” to which Bilbo replies “[t]hank goodness” with a laugh shows that he is not concerned overmuch with a false sense of entitlement due to his past deeds which should follow him into his future. He is perfectly content in separating his past and his future, showing no regret or anxiety for either, thus having attained the freedom to live in the present.
4 Conclusion

The progression through the stages proposed by Campbell is salient in Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*. From the initial stages of the Departure phase many of the essential narrative points are hit upon—Gandalf’s appearance as the herald of the adventure during the ‘Call to Adventure’ stage and his later emergence as Bilbo’s mentor during the ‘Supernatural Aid,’ ‘The Crossing of the First Threshold,’ and through much of ‘The Road of Trials’ (which admittedly lies within the Initiation phase) stages, to the apparent death of the hero, Bilbo, as he appears to be swallowed up by the unknown in ‘The Belly of the Whale’ stage. This pattern continues in the Initiation phase, where Bilbo meets many new challenges and adventures with his mentor (initially) and his companions during ‘The Road of Trials’ stage, on to his ‘Meeting with the Goddess’ where he comes to understand himself better and when he is later challenged by the ‘Woman as Temptress’ and struggles with his own desires, which leads to his ‘Atonement with the Father’ where he is absolved from the highest power in his life (dually represented by his own psychological aspect of his Baggins side and outwardly overlapping with the struggles of Thorin) and finally the achievement of ‘The Ultimate Boon,’ the attainment of the goal of the Quest for Erebor. The Return phase is shorter in narrative length, but hits upon the relevant stages nonetheless as he is ‘Rescue[d] from Without’ by Gandalf and a cadre of powerful companions; at ‘The Crossing of the Return Threshold’ he reconciles his knowledge of the two worlds and thus becomes ‘Master of the Two Worlds,’ attaining the ‘Freedom to Live.’ In the end it can be seen that Bilbo Baggins’ story is one of psychological growth, an essential part to the heroic narrative of Campbell’s, in that it is a story of ritualistic passage into a new phase of the hero’s life. As Bilbo passes through the threshold of the known (conscious) during the Departure phase, enters the unknown (unconscious) of the Initiation phase, and emerges as an improved person in the Return phase he showcases this psychological struggle and growth within himself as he is challenged by the physical world to undergo these changes.

Another argument for why *The Hobbit* appears to conform so well to Campbell’s outlined narrative structure arises from Tolkien’s own understanding and deep interest of mythology. Perhaps it is as Campbell suggested and that this pattern occurs worldwide, across cultures, and that others with an interest in mythology either implicitly or explicitly understood this pattern, as Tolkien seems to have done; alternatively, it might stem from the fact that both Campbell and Tolkien had a Euro- and Northern-centric viewpoint which, as has been suggested by critics, skewed Campbell’s perspective and, if true, aligned with Tolkien’s personal interests as far as mythology is concerned. However, as has been stated elsewhere in
this essay, this is merely speculation and not the purpose of this essay so solve; the narrative structure proposed by Campbell clearly functions for Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, but that does not suggest anything towards this theory’s universal applicability. The final conclusion would have to be that J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit, or, There and Back Again* does indeed conform to Joseph Campbell’s theory of the monomyth or the hero’s journey, which is in accordance with the essay’s hypothesis statement. Future research into this specific topic, the hero’s journey in *The Hobbit*, could focus more on the psychological aspects and development of Bilbo Baggins throughout the adventure.
Works Cited


