

University of South Dakota

USD RED

Faculty Publications

University Libraries

2006

Quest Narrative

Carol A. Leibiger

University of South Dakota, C.Leibiger@usd.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://red.library.usd.edu/ul-fp>



Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Leibiger, Carol A. "Quest Narrative." *The J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment* edited by Michael D.C. Drout, Routledge, 2006, 552-553.

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the University Libraries at USD RED. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of USD RED. For more information, please contact dloftus@usd.edu.

J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia

Scholarship and Critical Assessment

Michael D.C. Drout
EDITOR

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
New York London

Routledge is an imprint of the
Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
270 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10016

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
2 Park Square
Milton Park, Abingdon
Oxon OX14 4RN

© 2007 by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC
Routledge is an imprint of Taylor & Francis Group, an Informa business

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

International Standard Book Number-10: 0-415-96942-5 (Hardcover)
International Standard Book Number-13: 978-0-415-96942-0 (Hardcover)

No part of this book may be reprinted, reproduced, transmitted, or utilized in any form by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying, microfilming, and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the publishers.

Trademark Notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

J.R.R. Tolkien encyclopedia : scholarship and critical assessment / [edited by] Michael D.C. Drout.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-415-96942-0 (acid-free paper)

ISBN-10: 0-415-96942-5 (acid-free paper)

1. Tolkien, J. R. R. (John Ronald Reuel), 1892-1973--Encyclopedias. 2. Tolkien, J. R. R. (John Ronald Reuel), 1892-1973--Criticism and interpretation. 3. Middle Earth (Imaginary place)--Encyclopedias. 4. Fantasy fiction, English--Encyclopedias. I. Drout, Michael D. C., 1968- .

PR6039.O32Z664 2006

828'.91209--dc22

2006026700

Visit the Taylor & Francis Web site at
<http://www.taylorandfrancis.com>

and the Routledge Web site at
<http://www.routledge-ny.com>

element of both the “Qenya” and the “Gnomish Lexicon” in *Tolkien and the Great War*, 125–27.) Indeed, in this respect, this earliest lexicon, together with its later companion, “Gnomish Lexicon” (see *I-Lam na-Ngoldathon*), is a far more elaborate and wide-ranging source, not only of the languages but also of the elements of the subcreation, than any of Tolkien’s subsequent lexicons. And it is to precisely this gestational nature and aspect of the “Qenya Lexicon” in particular that Tolkien referred many decades later, in the foreword to *The Lord of the Rings*, when he described his mythology as “primarily linguistic in inspiration” and “begun in order to provide the necessary background of ‘history’ for Elvish tongues.”

The composition of the *Qenyaqetsa* would prove characteristic of much of Tolkien’s subsequent work on his languages (and to a lesser extent even of his narrative writing). The initial composition was in pencil, often clearly done rapidly with the flow of initial conception. Subsequently, the work was recapitulated in ink, overlaying the original pencil, which was itself erased (sometimes incompletely) as the ink layer progressed, both refining and incorporating revisions and additions to the pencil composition in the process. As reconsiderations or elaborations to the ink layer arose in the course of its writing, it was supplemented with additional pages inserted at the appropriate places in the original manuscript. And of course all of this was itself later subject to still further revisions and additions, as yet another layer of writing on the manuscript (sometimes in a different color of ink or pencil), before the work was eventually abandoned as the linguistic conception continued shifting and the whole process of description was begun anew in a new manuscript. The result is that the *Qenyaqetsa* (as with most of Tolkien’s subsequent work on the languages and the legendarium both) is, in the state in which it was left to stand when Tolkien ceased work on it, neither among its parts nor even within individual sections always or entirely self-consistent in its details or systematics; instead, it is a set of (usually) closely related but nonetheless differing strata spanning several years of conceptual invention and change.

CARL F. HOSTETTER

See also *I-Lam Na-Ngoldathon; Languages Invented by Tolkien; Quenya*

QUEST NARRATIVE

Campbell has identified the “standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero” as consisting of separation, initiation, and return (30), a pattern echoed in fairy tales, albeit on the level of Frye’s low mimesis (34). While *The Hobbit* relates the story of Bilbo and the Dwarves’ single quest for the gold of the Lonely Mountain, *The Lord of the Rings* comprises two quests, that of Aragorn and that of Frodo (Flieger, 125).

Aragorn is a high mimetic hero, and his quest is a mythic one paralleling that of medieval romance. He follows the trajectory of the quest hero as described by Propp, Lord Raglan, and Campbell (Noel, 70–71; Flieger, 43–49; Potts, 5–6, 10–11) and fulfills Auden’s six essential elements of a typical quest (83). Seeking the kingship of Gondor and Arwen as his bride, Aragorn, heir of the Númenórean kings, already possesses the heroic qualities of breeding and character necessary to achieve his quest (Webb, 163–64). He is of immortal ancestry, owns a weapon with a pedigree, and has the ability to heal and renew (“The hands of the king are the hands of a healer” [*RK*, V, viii, 139]). He arises out of obscurity to lead the Fellowship and then Gondor, and as he nears his goal, he becomes increasingly youthful and kingly in his appearance and bearing. With the help of a magical helper (Gandalf), he overcomes a figure of evil to achieve his crown and wed an immortal woman. His journey moves from darkness to light (Flieger, 125), and his victory over evil ushers in peace and prosperity for Middle-earth.

Bilbo’s and Frodo’s stories seem to be fairy tales because of their low mimetic heroes, with whom the audience can identify (Frye, 34). Like the typical fairy tale hero, they seem unexceptional, but they possess the necessary characteristics to succeed in their quests (their Tookish blood and Hobbitish resilience). Upon leaving home, both participate in adventures that reveal their exceptional characters, with aid from magical helpers (e.g., Gandalf and Galadriel). However, Bilbo engages in a true quest, since his goal is to overcome the dragon Smaug and gain his treasure; additionally, he obtains the One Ring.

Frodo’s story is, however, a mythic antiquest or negative quest, since he engages in an adventure of cosmic, even apocalyptic significance, traveling a great distance not to gain, but to lose, the One Ring (Rosebury, Shippey, 324). Frodo struggles less against

Further Reading

Garth, John. *Tolkien and the Great War*. London: Harper-Collins, 2003.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *Qenyaqetsa: The Qenya Phonology and Lexicon*. Edited by Christopher Gilson, Carl F. Hostetter, Patrick Wynne, and Arden R. Smith. *Parma Eldalamberon* (Cupertino, Calif.) 12 (1998).

enemies than against the evil influence of the Ring itself (Webb, 170), which in the end defeats him. He is saved by grace, the reward for his endurance throughout the journey to Mount Doom and especially for his repeated acts of mercy toward Gollum (*Letters*, 326–27). When Frodo succumbs to the Ring, Gollum intervenes to steal it and thus completes the quest for him, providing the eucatastrophe in Frodo's tale. He emerges from his adventure wounded in both body and spirit, and his story ends when he leaves Middle-earth to be healed before he dies (*Letters*, 328).

CAROL A. LEIBIGER

Further Reading

- Auden, W.H. "The Quest Hero." *Texas Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (1961): 81–93.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Bollingen Series, 17. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949.
- Davenport, John J. "Happy Endings and Religious Hope: *The Lord of the Rings* as an Epic Fairy Tale." In *The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy: One Book to Rule Them All*, edited by Gregory Bassham and Eric Bronson, 204–18. Chicago: Open Court, 2003.
- Flieger, Verlyn. "Frodo and Aragorn: The Concept of the Hero." In *Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism*, edited by Rose A. Zimbardo and Neil D. Isaacs, 122–46. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2004.
- Frye, Northrup. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957.
- Noel, Ruth. *The Mythology of Middle-earth*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1978.
- Persoleo, Paula M. "Frodo: The Modern Medieval Hero." In *The Image of the Hero: Selected Papers of the Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery*, 464–68. Pueblo, CO: Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery, 2004.
- Potts, Stephen. "The Many Faces of the Hero in *the Lord of the Rings*." *Mythlore* 17, no. 4 (66) (1991): 4–11.
- Reilly, R.J. "Tolkien and the Fairy Story." *Thought* 38, no. 148 (1963): 89–106.
- Rosebury, Brian. *Tolkien: A Cultural Phenomenon*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Ryan, J.S. "Folktale, Fairy Tale, and the Creation of a Story." In *Tolkien: New Critical Perspectives*, edited by Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo, 19–39. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1981.
- Shippey, T.A. *The Road to Middle-earth*. Rev. ed. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. "On Fairy-Stories." In *The Tolkien Reader*, 3–84. New York: Ballantine Books, 1966.
- Webb, Janeen. "The Quests for Middle-earth." *Inklings-Jahrbuch* 10 (1992): 161–74.
- Wright, J. Lenore. "Sam and Frodo's Excellent Adventure: Tolkien's Journey Motif." In *The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy: One Book to Rule Them All*, edited by Gregory Bassham and Eric Bronson, 192–203. Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2003.

See also Aragorn; Arthurian Literature; Arwen; Bilbo; Eucatastrophe; Frodo; Galadriel; Gandalf; German Folktale; Jungian Theory; Mythology, Germanic; "On Fairy-Stories"; Romances: Middle English and French