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### The Good Guys & the Bad Guys

#### Abstract

Considers the popularity of *The Lord of the Rings*, with its unfashionably clear division of good and evil, as in part due to its appeal to the deep human need for stories embodying archetypes. Applies Jungian analysis and the theories of Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliade to the story.

#### Additional Keywords

Archetypes in J.R.R. Tolkien; Good and evil in J.R.R. Tolkien; Jungian analysis of *The Lord of the Rings*; Monomyth in J.R.R. Tolkien; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*—Religious aspects

# The Good Guys & the Bad Guys

≈ Gracia Fay Ellwood

One of the most thoroughly satisfying things about *The Lord of the Rings* is the fact that, with few exceptions, the good guys are very very good and the bad guys are horrid.

That this is a virtue has not however been universally appreciated. One still encounters a lot of carping about lack of character development, and protests that the "real world" is not a place of blacks and whites but of many shades of gray. As Matthew Hodgart writes in *The New York Review of Books*, "This extreme polarization of good and evil, which is so striking in the works of all three [Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams], is not only reminiscent of rigid medieval Christianity but is also, surely, rather infantile....by posing the problems of life in terms of absolute good and evil, he gives a pseudo-explanation....Alas, in this world there are no goblins or orcs..."<sup>1</sup>

Mr Hodgart is of course drawing upon some of the most basic principles of good fiction: that the chief events should be brought about by chance (certainly not by magic) but by the characters, working within ordinary human limits; and that the characters should be complex with motivations both conscious and unconscious, both good and evil. But the three heroes of the *Rings* are not notable for profound inner conflict or irrational behavior, nor are Sauron, the Nazgul or the Orcs. Gandalf even wears a white garment and rides a white horse, and fights the black Balrog and Nazgul.

This is clearly not the sort of thing the *New York Review* is looking for in twentieth-century fiction. Anything that is obvious or simple just won't do. Even the Lone Ranger at least wore a misleading black mask! But one looks in vain for subtleties in most of the characters here.

To defend the *Rings* against this charge may seem like belaboring the obvious to many of its admirers, but it may be valuable to get clearly in mind why it is good although it is good in opposite ways from, say, Dostoevsky. The most basic point in its defense is given in the statement that it is not really a novel but a fantasy; and here we might get some help from elementary Jungian psychology. The term fantasy is widely used to refer to images and ideas arising into consciousness from the unconscious mind. This is not exactly what Professor Tolkien means by fantasy, since conscious control is important to his use, but the kinds of characters and events in both are similar. They fall into patterns and appear as commanding figures; they must be capitalized, and they move and speak chiefly in the Grand Style. Jung says of the recording of his own stream of fantasy and visions of 1913-1914, "First I formulated the things as I had observed them, usually in 'high-flown language,' for that corresponds to the style of the archetypes. Archetypes speak the language of high rhetoric, even of bombast. It is a style I find embarrassing...But since I did not know what was going on, I had no choice but to write everything down in the style selected by the unconscious itself."<sup>2</sup> He goes on to describe his visions with their dwarfs, heroes, caves with underground streams, seas of blood, ghosts and the like.

He found the basic figures of his visions--the conflict between the Hero and the Dragon, the Wise Old Man, the Good Mother, the Temptress, the Shadow, etc--recurring in myths of primitive people throughout the world, in the major religions, and most surprisingly, in the dreams and fantasies of secularized people of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He defined these Archetypes as inherited instinctive ways of responding, patterns of behavior based in the unconscious, each rather

like the axial system of a crystal. Avoiding the common conception of Platonic ideas, he makes clear that we do not inherit the very image (the crystal itself) but a tendency to form it. Thus the Good Mother may take the form of Isis the Queen of Heaven, Our Lady Mary, or the Lady Galadriel, each of whom has some distinctive characteristics; but it is the basic common center of creative and nourishing Maternity that we inherit, not Isis or Mary herself.

Although Jung's explicit definition is rather reductionistic, it seems clear from his use of the term that he often sees the Archetypes as self-sustaining realities. They Exist. Our precarious little consciousnesses come from Them and eventually (perhaps) return to Them. Anyone who takes the Archetypes seriously can decide for himself how real they are compared with our separate selves. It has long been the fashion in the West to consider the Manyness of things more real and significant than the Oneness, and it is on this presumption that criticisms such as Mr. Hodgart's rest. When manyness is taken to its ultimate extreme we have left only a multiverse of fragments, and all myth seems to lie dead. But in fact the Archetypes are only driven underground, and remain within the unconscious, pressing for an opportunity to take new shape.

If we grant any reality at all to the Archetypes it becomes clear that a fantasy such as the *Rings* differs from an ordinary novel in that it takes place on a different level of consciousness. Character development would be largely inappropriate in the *Rings* because the main characters (except the hobbits) do not represent the flesh-and-blood people we know, each participating in a complex constellation of Archetypes. Rather the characters are themselves images of the Archetypes. It is a serious mistake to confuse the two levels in this manner, although eventually, somehow, they must be united.\*

The Shirefolk are exception. Not because they are developed to any great extent, but because they so obviously do not live or speak in the Grand Style. They live in the common-day conscious world; they are down-to-earth in more ways than one, and their keen pleasure in small things is for the most part bought at the price of ignorance of great things. The provinciality of Ted Sandyman or Gaffer Gamgee has a comical resemblance to that of certain critics of the *Rings*. They can speak patronizingly of Elves or Orcs and the like as merely-subjective, but that only indicates that they have never ventured out into the Blue, and found out how frightening it can be to be merely objective!

One could go on to develop the thesis that the characters are archetypal by describing Galadriel and Shelob as contrasting images of the Mother, Saruman and Gandalf as images of the Wise Old Man, Sauron and the Nine as the Shadow. But for my purposes now the most important universal pattern is that of the Hero and his Adventure. A discussion of this will serve both to defend the type-hero and to assert the universality and religious character of the epic.

Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* describes a 'Monomyth' of the adventure of the hero--the pattern that appears, with varying emphases, in most hero tales. He divides the action into Separation--Initiation--Return. "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder; fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man."<sup>3</sup> (Compare Frodo and his friends--comfortable life in the Shire, movement into the splendid and dangerous outer world, and "Well, I'm back.") Mircea Eliade shows that this pattern of the hero-myth is reenacted in the initiation rites of numerous primitive societies, and has echoes in the symbols of more

\* Confusing them in literary criticism is a minor ill compared to the evils that can result from confusing them in life. When the pressure of archetypal war erupts into primary consciousness and the physical world, we have an instance of "inflation," possession by an Archetype. When this happens to a group the moral complexity of every phenomenal human being is ignored, and he becomes either one of the Good Guys or one of the Bad Guys. Some of the results have been the Crusades, the Final Solution, the Ku Klux Klan and Black Power extremism. (The increasing use of the word Black is extremely unfortunate in view of the fact that archetypally Black means Bad.) In the individual, of course, it may be no more dangerous than the crank who, possessed by the Wise Old Man, thinks he knows all wisdom.

Intellect rightly insists that the two worlds be distinguished, that we approach every man as a complex, unique being and repress the myth-making tendencies that would sweep him into one camp or another. But the enormous energies behind myth will out: and every person in inner conflict hungers for unity within himself and also between his interior springs and the objective world around him. If the conflicts between the archetypal and the phenomenal are ever to be resolved, perhaps by some kind of incarnation, the hero (and the dragon) must be acknowledged as such by the critical mind as well as by feelings.

3. J Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (Cleveland, 1956) p. 30.

1. M Hodgart, "Kicking the Hobbit," *New York Review of Books*, V III, 8 (May 4, 1967) p. 11.  
2. C G Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, New York, 1963) pp 177-8

developed societies that lack such rites. Always, he asserts, the initiatory ordeals mark a confrontation with the Sacred, and it is the deity who gives the initiate the renewed life he now has.

Mr. Campbell describes the typical hero myth (with many widely chosen examples) as beginning with a Call to Adventure in an apparently trivial or even chance event. He gives the example of the little princess who lost her golden ball into the well, and thus brought about the appearance of the frog who changed her life. We would think at once of Frodo's inheritance of a plain gold ring after a birthday party, and the later coming of Gandalf with the Shadow of the Past, or perhaps of the casual visit of Gandalf to Bilbo eighty years earlier. Some heroes refuse the call, like Jonah who fled from the command of Jahweh to preach to Nineveh. (Actually he fled right into another adventure) But to the one who accepts, an unsuspected world is revealed; the herald who called him is only a "preliminary manifestation of the powers that are breaking into play."<sup>4</sup> The hero is called from ordinary intercourse with others; his spiritual center of gravity is changed to an unknown zone of fantastic tortures, impossible delights.<sup>5</sup> Taken psychologically, the journey means that he must get away from the secondary and derived, the merely phenomenal, and break through to "those causal zones of the psyche where the difficulties really reside."<sup>6</sup> In terms of our story, he must leave the secure world, which was all his society knew, and go to the heart of horror, Mordor, and its center Mount Doom.

As he sets out the hero often receives unexpected help, frequently supernatural, from a Wise Old Man or a mother-figure. This sage may give crucial advice, as does Gandalf, and/or a talisman or weapon for defense against the terrors of the adventure, like the glass of Galadriel. "He is the one who appears and points to the magic shining sword that will kill the dragon-terror. . . and finally dismisses the conqueror back into the world of normal life, following the great adventure into the enchanted night."<sup>7</sup>

The whole adventure, from the viewpoint of the ordinary folks at home, is death; passing the boundaries, the thresholds of the known is equivalent to being swallowed up by darkness or by darkness or by a monster. Or perhaps the image of darkness (night, cave, the sea, or a monster) may appear later in the narrative. These are expressions of a return to the womb--but not for security. The experience necessitates self-annihilation with all its terrors for the purpose of rebirth. Thus Jonah, thrown up from the sea and the great fish, is (somewhat) more submissive to Jahweh; Osiris, after being killed and thrown into the Nile in a sarcophagus, is brought back to life by Isis. Examples of dying-rising gods and heroes could be multiplied. For our purposes we can notice that all three of our heroes have terrifying underground experiences; Gandalf under Moria, Frodo in Shelob's Lair, Aragorn in the Paths of the Dead. All three of them are pitted against ogres, if we take Aragorn's struggle with Sauron as part of his ordeal.

When the deepest horror has been faced, there is no longer anything to fear. Sometimes the hero will even defy death. This is incomprehensible to the common folk, for the Dragon [Sauron=Reptile] is great and firmly entrenched. He has the conspicuous seat of power, while the hero has an obscure background. "The tyrant is proud, and therein resides his doom. He . . . thinks of his strength as his own; thus he is in the clown role, as a mistaker of shadow for substance; it is his destiny to be tricked." The hero has come from the very source of life in the womb-darkness, and with a simple gesture "he annihilates the impressive configuration."<sup>8</sup> This is easy to see. This is easy to see in Sauron's inability to imagine a self-denying desire to destroy the Ring, and expectation that the present owner of the Ring was only waiting to take over; with the result that he was fooled by Aragorn's distinction, and defeated by Frodo's folly. Pride not only goes before des-

4. *Ibid.* p. 51.

5. *Ibid.* p. 58.

6. *Ibid.* p. 17.

7. *Ibid.* p. 9-10.

8. *Ibid.* p. 337. Mr Campbell considers that the Dragon, the force of evil is essentially the Status Quo, Form grown rigid and thus stifling to the possibilities of new life in the world's Dynamis. "He is Holdfast (traditional example, Herod) not because he keeps the part but because he keeps." The hero prevails because he denies himself as individual and allows formless generative life to move through him, as the tyrant cannot do. Mr Campbell regards the Judaeo-Christian instance on a certain finite heroic event and person--on the historic--as an aberration, a kind of disease.

truction, but makes destruction possible; and the hero's self-sacrifice makes his victory possible.\*

The hero's victory, his rebirth, is an occasion of splendor; glory for himself, new life for the rest of the world. "Life no longer suffers hopelessly under the terrible mutilations of ubiquitous disaster. . . but with its horror visible still, it becomes penetrated by an all-suffusing, all-sustaining love."<sup>9</sup> Great glory may break out at once, as in the victory of the Buddha, in which banners streamed across the world, deep hells were flooded with radiance, and the blind and deaf were healed. Or the boon of new life may only be slowly accepted by a suspicious populace, who cannot see how death can be a source of life; who are too preoccupied with the present and the finite to be really interested in the impossible tale of the adventurer. In *The Lord of the Rings* we see both; immediate celebrations in Cormallen and Minas Tirith, slow realization in the Shire.

The banquet and the wedding as manifestations of the new age both appear in mythology. Examples could be found from Siegfried's awakening of Brunhilde to the expected messianic feast of the Qumran Community described in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The wedding motif is particularly conspicuous in fairy stories, where after the ordeals and difficult tasks are all over, the prince and princess marry and live happily ever after. And the marriage serves not merely to express joy but means new beginnings. In the *Rings* this image appears of course as the marriage of Aragorn and Arwen.

To make concrete some of these broad descriptions, here is a condensed version of a typical hero myth, taken from the stories of Okuninushi, a popular Japanese deity. In several early incidents Okuninushi dies and is brought back to life chiefly by the efforts of his mother. In this particular tale his mother advised him to go to the underworld where his father Susano-oh ruled. Here he met and married Susano-oh's daughter (his own half-sister.) But he did not immediately leave with her. His father (-in-law) put him into a cave full of snakes to pass the night; but he was saved by a charm his wife had given him, a scarf which waved three times would drive back the snakes. Similarly, she gave him a charm against centipedes and wasps for the following day's ordeals.

After this Susano-oh shot an arrow into the forest, ordered Okuninushi to fetch it, and when the latter went in after the arrow, the father treacherously set fire to the forest. This time the hero was saved at the suggestion of a rat who said, "There is room enough under your feet, although the hole may look small." Okuninushi stamped on the ground; a hold appeared into which he dropped, hidden while the fire burned above his head. After awhile, the rat brought him the arrow.

Eventually Okuninushi escaped from his father-in-law's realm; he tied Susano-oh's hair to all the rafters of his hall and stole away with his wife on his back and his father-in-law's treasures in his hand.<sup>10</sup>

This story has in common with *The Lord of the Rings* several of the motifs we have discussed: various representations of the Depths, the advice, the talismans, the marriage, the treasure gained from the ordeals, the showing up of the ogre as a fool. Any number of other hero stories could have served our purpose; without doubt adventures of the hero like those in the *Rings* recur in myths everywhere.

Just as important, if not quite as evident, is that the function of these myths in their pre-modern societies is religious. They are not merely tales devised to explain seasonal changes, movement of sun and moon, etc., as was once thought:<sup>11</sup> in describing how the great heroic, creative acts took place in the beginning, they show the transcendent source of Reality, the origin of ordered Cosmos. For primitive societies, as Mircea Eliade has shown, the world is sacred, because it was made in the beginning by Supernatural Beings, civilized by the Hero or mythical Ancestor. These primordial actions set the pattern for both nature and human culture; the group's most

\* Wagner's Siegfried, although he succeeds in slaying Fafner the dragon ultimately fails to save his world from the curse of the Ring; even though his fall is the result of betrayal, his pride is partly responsible for the failure. If he had given it to the Rhine Maidens when they asked for it, the final catastrophe would probably not have taken place.

9. *Ibid.* p. 29.

10. S. Inoue, tr., Koji-Ki, (Tokyo, 1966) pp 49-50.

11. O. Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, (New York, 1959) pp1-12.



important acts are imitations. This is especially true of initiation of adolescents; they and the whole community thus participate in the death and return to life of the deity in mythic times, and are renewed.<sup>12</sup> Ritual as imitation of myth thus serves to show that the hero-myths shaped ordinary human life.

The underlying principle is that every man is the hero, potentially; by sharing in his ordeal in initiation man shares in his new life. And although we moderns live lives apparently very far removed from the primitive, we ought to consider the principle seriously; human nature may not have changed that much. The passion to inflict pain and to destroy is still with us, and so is the drive to find meaningfulness in suffering.

Professor Eliade summarizes the relation between myth and ritual for primitives thus: "a Supernatural Being had attempted to renew men by killing them in order to bring them to life again 'changed'; for one reason or another, men slew this Supernatural Being but they later celebrated secret rites inspired by this drama. . . . Initiatory death is thus the repetition of the death of the Supreme Being, the founder of the mystery."<sup>13</sup> In the initiation process the god remakes the novice. True man, man mature, cultural, religious, is not born but made; he dies to the merely natural state in order to be remade after the divine models.

He supports these assertions by giving many examples of archaic initiations. The death-process is often symbolized "by darkness, by cosmic night, by the telluric womb, the hut, the belly of a monster. All these images express regression to a proformed state, to a latent mode of being (complementary to the pre-cosmogonic Chaos), rather than total annihilation" as modern man sees death to be.<sup>14</sup> Some primitive Australian societies, for example, cover the frightened novices with branches or skins, or partially or wholly bury them, to represent the darkness.<sup>15</sup> The mutilations undergone in some groups, circumcision or the knocking out of a tooth, or any other of various ordeals, express the spiritual destruction at the hands of the god, who perhaps is said to have swallowed and then disgorged the initiates, or dismembered them and made them with one tooth missing.<sup>16</sup>

The initiation is important especially as the time of entrance into the tribe's religious life. The novice hears the stories of the gods and heroes for the first time. It is actually they, the gods, who carry out the initiation ordeals; the older tribesmen are mere instruments. The novice's fear is essentially religious fear of these destroying and creating Presences. Now he leaves profane life, life on the margins; the mysteries of initiation reveal to him the true dimensions of Reality.<sup>17</sup>

It is difficult for members of an increasingly secularized society to see religion as an understanding of and participation in the source of reality. As myths disintegrate now the human subject and "external" reality are no longer considered to be united or even analogous; in fact the passions and valuational tendencies of the subject are misleading, and only in detachment--objectivity--can reality be known and mastered.

But the unconscious remains a factory of values and symbols continuous with those that represented the meaningful shape of reality to religious societies. Already in the Middle Ages, when initiation rites had largely died out, the popularity of

the Arthurian cycle of legends showed that the human preoccupation with struggle, death and renewal had not died: "a long and eventful quest for marvelous objects, a quest which, among other things, implied the Heroes' entering the other world. . . . The ordeals that the Heroes undergo are innumerable--they have to cross a bridge that sinks under water or is made of a sharp sword or is guarded by lions and monsters. . . . All these scenarios suggest passage to the beyond, the perilous descent to Hell. . . . At the end of their quest, the Heroes cure the king's mysterious malady and thereby regenerate the 'Waste Land'. . . ."<sup>18</sup> And of course medieval man also expressed these urges by his participation every spring in the death and rebirth of the Hero Christ.

Even today man "retains a large stock of camouflaged myths and degenerated rituals. . . . the festivities that go with the New Year or with taking up residence in a new house, although laicized, still exhibit the structure of a ritual of renewal."<sup>19</sup> In movies, television and detective fiction--from the Hardy Boys to James Bond--many find a vicarious hero-initiation; ghetto street-gang members undergo it in literal and primitive forms; the student may effectively experience it in his PhD exam and "big blast" afterwards, or any person "in the spiritual crises, the solitude and despair through which every human being must pass in order to attain to a responsible, genuine, and creative life."<sup>20</sup> The alternative is to remain, somewhat like the characters in *Brave New World*, all one's life "bottled," meeting the "proper standard of infantile behavior." Mr Eliade mentions many other instances: political movements and social utopianism, such as orthodox Marxism with its class struggle and eschaton; (compare the "Great Cultural Revolution"); war, especially individual combats between aviators; psychoanalysis as descent into the unconscious to confront monsters of the past; the wide appeal of works such as Eliot's "The Waste Land" and Joyce's *Ulysses*.<sup>21</sup> Not to mention that of *The Lord of the Rings*.

But the many isolated expressions of religious urges in Western society are not integrated in a corresponding world view, and hence for secularized man do not serve the purpose of bringing about a unified personality with a definite place in the Cosmos--that is in the created and re-created, centered and thus meaningful world. The mythological hero-adventure symbols which his unconscious sends up in dreams or fantasies he usually fails to recognize or cannot use in a desacralized world-view split off from unconscious.

No doubt then one reason *The Lord of the Rings* is so gratifying is because it amply expresses not only the need for the heroic struggle, death and renewal, but because of all the other immovable furniture of an absolute world. There is no god visible beyond a hazy reference in an appendix to "the One," but the drawing power of the Uttermost West, the suggestion that Bilbo was "meant" to find the Ring, the preservation of Gollum, all show providential planning at work.<sup>22</sup> Here, at last, is white versus black. One can wholeheartedly love the heroes and hate most of the villains without having to be checked always by the awareness that all values are conditioned and relative because created by one's own culture. Excellent and valid as it often is to create one's own selfhood and values, it cannot compare with the splendor of being called to a Quest greater than oneself.

12. M. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, (New York, 1958) pp3-4.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

14. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

17. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, (New York, 1957) p. 191.

18. Eliade, *Initiation*, p. 125.

19. Eliade, *Sacred*, p. 205.

20. Eliade, *Initiation*, p. 128.

21. Eliade, *Sacred*, pp. 206-8.

22. P Spacks, "Ethical Patterns in *The Lord of the Rings*," *Critique*, III, (spring-Fall 1959) pp. 30-41.

