



One Ring to Bind Them All: Tolkien's Mythology

Anne Petty

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Fascination with J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is at an all-time high following the release of Peter Jackson's widely acclaimed film adaptation of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. A new generation of devotees is immersing itself in the fictive world of Middle-earth to find fantasy, wonder, and enchantment. And hobbits, elves, dwarves, and wizards once again people the imaginations of readers revisiting this classic story of sacrifice, loss, and redemption.

In *One Ring to Bind Them All*, Anne Petty shows that when viewed through the combined methodologies of Joseph Campbell, Vladimir Propp, and Claude Lévi-Strauss a folkloristic/mythic structure is seen to underlie Tolkien's epic work. *The Lord of the Rings* is 20th-century mythology manifested in the familiar pattern of the three-stage hero quest made popular by Campbell—departure, initiation, and return—and in the elemental motifs of folktales, as discovered by Propp and expanded upon by Lévi-Strauss.

This cross-disciplinary analysis shows that Tolkien presented to modern readers and other writers a rich array of reinvented mythic archetypes and icons: the desperate quest (good vs. evil); a magical object that embodies or initiates the quest (the ring); the wise wizard who oversees or aids the quest (Gandalf); the reluctant hero, an ordinary person with untapped abilities (Frodo); the hero's loyal friend and supporter (Sam); the warrior king whose true identity is hidden (Strider/Aragorn); the goddess figure (Galadriel); and so on.

Petty asserts that through *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien created a fully realized world that evokes a sense of authentic history and is imbued with clarity and a beauty of linguistic expression, a world that continues to draw new audiences to the myth of Middle-earth.

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