

The Ego and the Shadow: A Psychoanalytic Study of Frodo Baggins in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*

¹ Judah Smith J. M



² Dr. D. J. B. Esther Rajathi

¹ II MA English, Sathyabama Institution of Science and Technology, Chennai, India.

² Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sathyabama Institution of Science and Technology, Chennai, India.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.57067/ir.v3.i1.489>

This research paper explores *The Fellowship of the Ring* from a psychological point of view. It focuses on Frodo Baggins and the psychological weight he bears from the beginning of the novel. Though absent in body Gollum emerges through Gandalf's words. Gollum is less a person and more of a reflection shaped by past decay. Taken from the concept of Freud of repression and unconscious desire along with Jung's idea of the shadow. All these are tied to the One Ring, which is interpreted as an unconscious threat that disrupts the identity and morality of Frodo. The moment the Ring is placed in Frodo's hand, it brings unrest and fear even before he can fully understand the danger he carries. Smeagol's transformation from a normal Hobbit to Gollum through the corruption of the Ring shows Frodo to the possibility of psychological collapse caused by being exposed to power and desire for a long time. This knowledge shapes Frodo's unconscious fear of becoming a corrupted creature like Gollum. This makes Gollum a symbolic mirror rather than a physical companion. Focusing only on the events and the words found in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, this study shows Tolkien's exploration of trauma, repression and inner conflict revealing that Frodo's true journey begins within the mind long before it takes physical form.

Keywords: The Fellowship of the Ring, Frodo Baggins, Psychoanalysis, Unconscious desires, Psychological desires, Shadow self.

Introduction

With a sense of unease Frodo Baggins begins a journey where his inner chaos matters more than any external threat. This struggle begins even before any real danger comes to light. While some view *The Fellowship of the Ring* as a setup for bigger battles that happen later in the trilogy, it slowly lays the groundwork for deep emotional pain. As Frodo holds the Ring it slowly changes and alters him in a way that is barely noticeable in the beginning. Frodo's journey does not begin with dreams of fame and victory. It unfolds with an uncertain burden put upon him. A twist of fate sets this journey in motion, but the weight of the journey becomes clear when the hidden burden and fear emerge within him. This inheritance of the Ring symbolizes the sudden intrusion of unconscious force into an ordinary life making the Ring a psychological weight that changes Frodo's sense of himself from the beginning. The chapters from the

beginning of *The Fellowship of the Ring* establish the trauma through fear, secrecy and the anticipation of unavoidable corruption.

From a psychological point of view Frodo's experience can be understood as the Ego's confrontation with a powerful unconscious threat. The Ring represents controlled desire and destructive potential that forces Frodo to carry while maintaining moral responsibility. Frodo's increasing anxiety, reluctance to share his burden and emotional withdrawal reflect the early stage of prevention where fear is managed through silence and denial than finding a solution. Frodo's psychological loneliness increases as he realizes knowledge itself is a danger. Frodo knowing more about the power the Ring holds means knowing what the Ring can do to him. This awareness puts him in a constant state of anticipation in which Frodo fears not only external threats like the Black Riders but also the possibility of his morality and inner self

collapsing. The first book of The Lord of the Rings trilogy thus becomes the site where fear is internal, and heroism is defined by psychological endurance than physical action. Gandalf introduces Gollum into the novel not as a physical form but as a future possibility through Gandalf's narration. Gollum was once known as Smeagol who became twisted and consumed by his desire for the Ring. Gollum's story of corruption and greed embeds into Frodo's mind without him knowing it. Holding the power of the Ring does not just cause harm, it splits a person's identity and shatters their mentality. Though the physical appearance of Gollum is not seen that much in the novel his shadow lingers and haunts Frodo's thoughts. Gollum is like a noise that's felt before seen in the mind of Frodo. Frodo's fear is not just about the journey they are going through but the anticipation of what might unfold in the future. A flicker in Frodo's mind reveals Gollum as not just someone who fell for the enchantment and power of the Ring but as a reflection of his one fear of becoming like Gollum. Frodo looking at Gollum is equivalent to looking at himself in the mirror. This image of reflection hints at the possible paths if Frodo loses his will and succumbs to the temptations of the Ring. This fear of possible psychological collapse deepens Frodo's trauma, as he is forced to imagine his own future through the sufferings of Gollum.

By showing *The Fellowship of the Ring* as the beginning of psychological trauma than as a novel that kick starts an adventure. This study shows Tolkien's indirect engagement with fear, repression and unconscious conflict. Frodo begins his journey

with uneasiness and fear of what he might come across in the path in front of him. His path is shaped more by his duty to destroy the Ring than with the desire to go for an adventure like His uncle Bilbo Baggins. The company knows the lonely and dangerous path they have embarked on even though they are in this together. Through the inheritance of the Ring and the introduction of Gollum not as a physical form but as a tragic story of someone who fell for the power and temptations of the Ring is a psychological warning to Frodo of what might happen to him if his will might falter in the future of the journey. Tolkien establishes the psychological foundation of the entire narrative of how the struggle against corruption starts in the mind long before it appears in action.

Literature Review

Scholars' discussion of Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring* focuses on the mythological foundation, linguistic richness and the concept of good vs evil. But the psychological study of characters is not that popular discussion and to top if all the comparison of Frodo with Gollum is not well known. Scholars like Tom Shippey examines how Tolkien's use of Northern legends shapes the story and how duty and power can influence choices. The Ring is seen as both a tool for control and a test of a person's will. While the scholars recognize that Frodo carries a heavy burden many consider the book as a setup and beginning for the events that take place later rather than the moment when Frodo's mindset begins to change. Frodo's

quite moments of dread, hesitation and emotional conflict do not get more attention.

Psychological interpretation of Tolkien's work has largely focused on Gollum's physical presence in the next two novels, *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King* where Gollum's divided identity and obsessive behavior is far more visible. Scholars use Freudian theory to show Gollum as an example of addiction and the dominance of instant desire. While Jungian readings show and identify Gollum as a shadow figure who embodies suppressed desires. However, these analyses often look away from the presence of Gollum in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, where Gollum is introduced by Gandalf. This narration focuses on shaping Frodo's psychological understanding of the dangers the Ring holds yet it has received little critical attention.

Scholars through their studies of trauma and moral responsibility have shown how Tolkien's fiction have revealed Frodo's growing isolation and emotional strain, but they rarely focus on how the corruption of Frodo's mind in the future is due to the psychological trauma he faced from the very beginning of the quest. By focusing only on *The Fellowship of the Ring*, this study discusses the gap in Tolkien's scholarship. This research argues that Gollum functions as a symbolic warning rather than an active character and Frodo's fear, repression and anticipation of his will are central to understanding the psychological foundation of the trilogy. This research shows *The Fellowship of the Ring* as a text that starts the

psychological conflict than as the novel that begins the quest.

Frodo And the Ego Under Early Ring Influence

In *The Fellowship of the Ring* Frodo's psychological struggle starts even before he can fully comprehend the power the Ring holds and the burden placed on his shoulders. While later books show clear damage and the visible effects of the Ring here it can be seen how the earliest form of Frodo's ego is under pressure. The Ring is given to Frodo as an inheritance than as a choice and this creates a sense of responsibility that appears before he can understand the power of the Ring. This early burden creates his emotional responses, fear and isolation at the beginning of his journey.

In the beginning of the novel *Bilbo Baggins* distress and the desire to keep the Ring for himself plays an important psychological role in Frodo's development. Bilbo's possessiveness and inner conflict to the Ring's corrupted power exposes Frodo to the Ring's hidden dark and evil influence. Frodo witnesses his uncle's inability to peacefully part away from the Ring and this leads Frodo's path to anxiety and fear. From the psychological point of view Bilbo's behaviour acts as an early warning to Frodo that the Ring that he inherited carries a dangerous weight that will collapse his mind and the true power of the Ring is still unknown to him.

Frodo's unwillingness to leave the Shire further shows the ego's resistance to unbearable responsibility. His preference and

desire to stay within the safe and familiar Shire is a psychological defence mechanism against the threats that he might face while being the ring bearer and owner of the Ring. Frodo's unwillingness to begin the journey is not because he's a coward but a natural attempt to keep his emotions in a state of stability. Gandalf delays his return to the Shire for many years and during these years Frodo is left alone with the Ring as it forces him to live a secret and silent life. Frodo also begins to hide the Ring and his fear that grows day by day from others.

The appearance of Sauron's *Black Riders* increases Frodo's fear and anxiety as it increases his psychological isolation. All these figures act as an external appearance of unseen threats that put Frodo in a constant sense of fear, surveillance and danger. Frodo's fear does not have a clear way of showing out because his psychological fear cannot be understood by the company of people he's traveling with and the constant danger they face on their journey overshadows the psychological fear Frodo expresses. From the psychological point of view this continuous anxiety leads to the ego's defensive increase and producing emotional withdrawal and increasing alertness.

Throughout *The Fellowship of the Ring* Frodo bears the Ring without fully understanding the emotional and psychological burden it'll put upon his shoulders, this makes the trauma he faces into something uniquely internal. Frodo's ego is forced to adapt under pressure which results in his containing fear while maintaining a calm outward appearance towards others. This early

psychological formation lays the foundation for Frodo's later emotional breakdown, sets *The Fellowship of the Ring* not just as a novel that begins the epic adventure but as the beginning of Frodo's inner conflict.

Gollum As Narrative Shadow and Psychological Warning

In *The Fellowship of the Ring* Gollum does not appear as a physical presence to Frodo but his psychological presence deeply influences Frodo. Gollum is introduced by Gandalf as a narrated shadow that haunts Frodo's mind as an imagined future of himself. This indirect introduction of Gollum is important because it allows Gollum to act not as a physical character that Frodo encounters but as a psychological warning of what might happen to him if he succumbs to the Ring's power and the consequences, he will face for it.

Gandalf's story of Smeagol's transformation into Gollum shows a clear psychological case of what the greed for the Ring's power leads to addiction and fragmentation of one's identity. From the Freudian point of view the Ring acts as an object of driven desire that slowly engulfs the ego and enslaves its victims to instinctual desires. Smeagol's inability to give up the Ring and the power that it holds shows an addiction and desire that consumes moral reasoning and social bonds. Eventually Smeagol's submission and obsession with the Ring leads to the split identity of Smeagol and Gollum. This shows a broken psyche that's unable to resolve desire with morality.

Jung's concept of the shadow is equally important in understanding Gollum's symbolic role. Gollum is the embodiment of the rejected self, the part of mind that is completely corrupted by his unchecked desires and denied morality. After Gandalf tells the story of Gollum's past and his corruption the shadow of Gollum is externalized and shown to Frodo of what could happen to someone if they give in to the powers of the Ring. Frodo does not need to physically meet Gollum to know this just the story of Gollum's corruption plants fears and self-recognition within him.

Frodo's reaction to Gollum's tragic past is marked with complex mixture of pity and fear. His pity for Gollum shows an early moral awareness and empathy and his fear shows unconscious self-recognition. In the psychoanalytical point of view this moment of Frodo's pity, fear and self-awareness shows the ego's conflict with its possible collapse in the future. Frodo begins to realize that the corrupting power of the Ring does not end with it merely threatening the external world, but it also corrodes the bearer of the Ring from within. In the end Gollum's corrupted image is engraved inside Frodo's mind as it functions as both an Image of warning and a mirror of what might happen to Frodo if he succumbs to the powers of the Ring.

In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Gollum physical presence is significantly lower compared to his psychological presence. He is the future narration into a being that changes and shapes Frodo's internal struggle even before both have a face-to-face encounter. Through Gandalf's storytelling Tolkien transforms Gollum into a symbolic warning

rooted in Freudian addiction and Jungian shadow theory further strengthening the idea that Frodo's most dangerous battle begins within his own mind.

Conclusion

The Fellowship of the Ring sets up the psychological basis for Frodo Baggins' journey even before his quest faces any physical danger. From the very moment Frodo inherits the Ring he's filled with fear, secrecy and responsibility even before he can fully understand the power of the Ring. This shows how the Ring impacts Frodo internally by shaping his emotions and isolating him even when he's surrounded by familiar faces at the very beginning of the novel.

Gandalf's narration of Smeagol's transformation to Gollum deepens Frodo's inner struggle and emotional instability. Even though Gollum's physical appearance is shown at the end of the novel his tale serves as a psychological warning. Frodo reacts with pity and fear showing his awareness of the Ring's destructive force and how delicate one's mind is under the forbidden power of the Ring.

Through these elements J. R. R. Tolkien shows that the real journey begins within the mind. *The Fellowship of the Ring* shows how Frodo's psychological conflicts are the main foundation for the challenges that lie ahead.

References:

- Freud, Sigmund. *The Ego and the Id*. Translated by Joan Riviere, W. W. Norton & Company, 1960. www.sigmundfreud.net/ebooks/the-ego-and-the-id.pdf.
- Jung, C. G. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Translated by R. F. C. Hull, Princeton University Press, 1981. www.jungiananalysts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/C.-G.-Jung-Collected-Works-Volume-9i_-The-Archetypes-of-the-Collective-Unconscious.pdf.
- Shippey, Tom. *The Road to Middle-earth*. Houghton Mifflin, 1983. <https://archive.org/details/roadtomiddleearth0000ship>.
- Skogemann, Pia. "A Jungian Interpretation of Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings." n.d. www.jungpage.org/learn/articles/literature/541-a-jungian-interpretation-of-tolkiens-the-lord-of-the-rings.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Fellowship of the Ring*. HarperCollins, 2004.