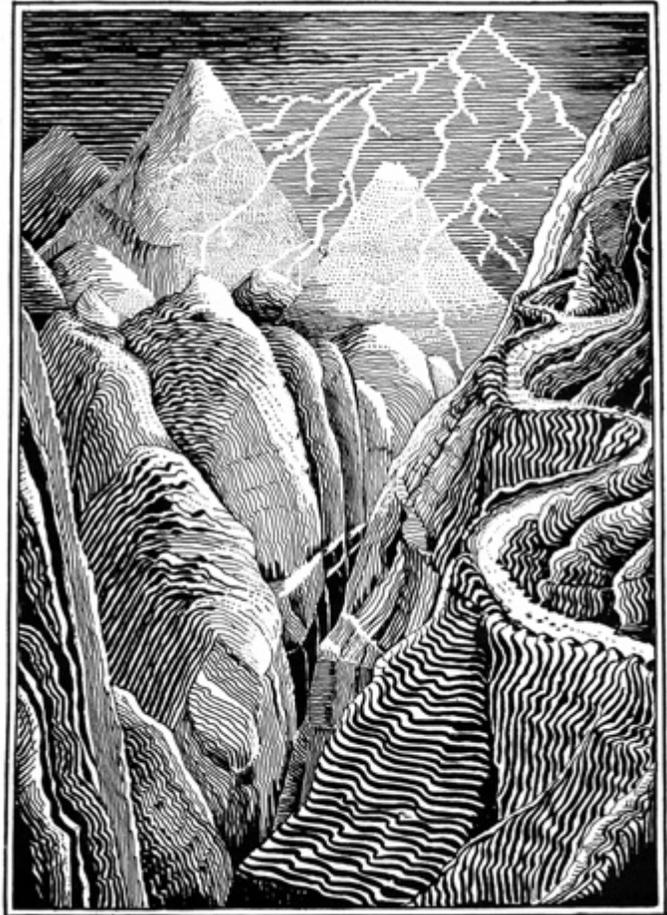


The Journey

Susan Olson

I have just returned from a journey -- a trip to Maine which included time with family, exploration of coastal villages, visits to museums and galleries, consumption of far too much delicious seafood, panoramic vistas of lakes and harbors, and (lo and behold!) glimpses of three humpback whales cavorting in the waters of the Atlantic on a gray and foggy day. Of course there was a down side too, as there usually is on vacation. Some roads were bumpy, some beds lumpy, some restaurants mediocre, and some weather.... well, Maine fog does not creep in on little cat feet. It rolls in like the tide and inundates everything in its path, blurring the boundaries between earth and sky and sea, obscuring even sun and moon behind a soft gray curtain of dampness. Nevertheless the trip was well worth the taking and satisfied those longings which prompt us to go on journeys in the first place: the desire to see other places, to explore unfamiliar territory, to meet new people and to stretch ourselves beyond the limits of ordinary everyday experience.

This summer also included two journeys of another kind, excursions into the world of imagination and dream. Both were return trips to inner realms which I first visited many years ago. I knew when I left them that one day I would be called to return, and this year the summons came like a loud knock on the door, too commanding to ignore. The first journey led me back to Middle-earth, the world which J. R. R. Tolkien created in his three books *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*. I found myself compelled to reread them, and once I had started I could not put them down. All are structured around the motif of the heroic quest: the call to adventure, the perilous journey, the accomplishment of an impossible task, and the return home. In the process the hero battles monsters, encounters and overcomes evil forces, wrestles with his own fears, and discovers unknown inner resources. He sustains grave wounds and even descends into the realm of death. Transcending the boundaries of the known world, he finds within himself the strength and wisdom to accomplish his tasks. At the end of his quest he receives a gift or boon which he takes home to enrich not only himself but his larger community. But when he returns to his native land, deserving a hero's welcome, he discovers that people now regard him as an oddity. Like Odysseus, he must battle his way back into the world he left behind and create a new place for himself in it. The community benefits from his quest and receives his boon, but most people do not understand the extent of his ordeal. Some-



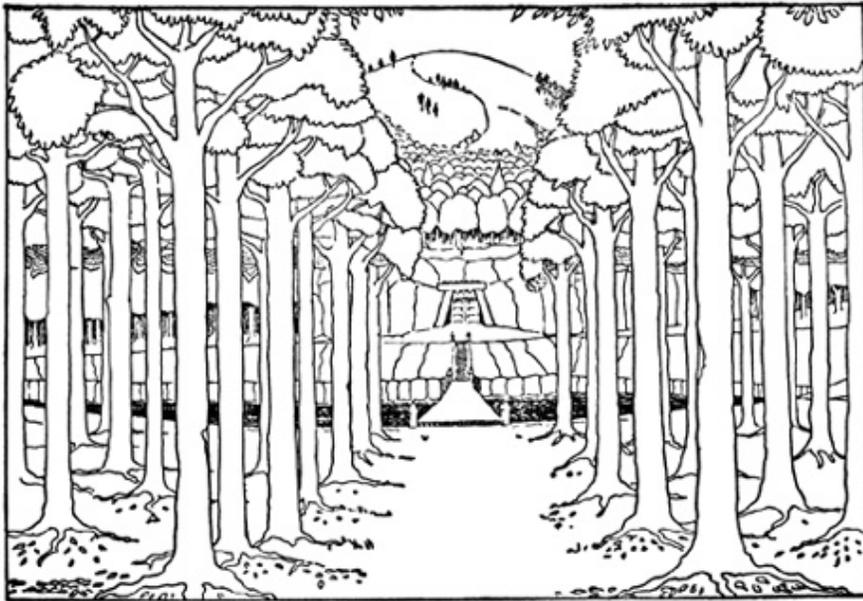
The Mountain-path

J.R.R. Tolkien—The Mountain Path, *The Hobbit*, 1937

times, like Sam in *The Lord of the Rings*, he is able to reenter the world, but sometimes, like Frodo, he is so deeply wounded that he can no longer be a part of it. Whatever his destiny, he is utterly changed and can no longer be the self he was before. He cannot regain the innocence he has lost or unlearn the hard lessons he has been taught.

My second inner journey began when "Journey Into Wholeness" invited me to participate in its recent presentation of the documentary film, "The Way of the Dream". In this 10-hour series, Jungian analyst and filmmaker Fraser Boa interviews noted Jungian analyst Marie-Louise von Franz about the dreams of actual men and women from all walks of life. (Both von Franz and Boa have died since the films were made in the early 1980's, and so watching them gives one an uncanny feeling of being addressed by spirits from beyond the grave.) The first film is aptly entitled "Descent Into Dreamland," and a descent it is. The documentary itself is a journey into the rich and strange realm of Psyche. Like a traveler to Middle-earth, one encounters images, creatures and tales from the world of dreams, ranging from the ridiculous to the sublime. There are flying Edsels and sacred pyramids, vampires and tyrants, piles of excrement and wells brimming with the water of life. As I watched the films and listened to the voices of the participants, I imagined that we were being addressed by the voice of the Unconscious itself, telling us its own story and inviting us to enter into it. By the end of the last film I felt weary but exalted, just as though I had been on a long, exciting and challenging journey and was on my way home, ready to unpack my bags,

Susan Olson will be our November presenter. See Program Announcements for more details.



The Elvenking's Gate.

J.R.R. Tolkien—*The Elvenking's Gate, The Hobbit, 1937*

wonders (even Elves and elephants!), followed Frodo to the Cracks of Doom, approached the gates of death, and lived to hear his tale celebrated in song and story. Outwardly he is his same old self, an ordinary unlearned Hobbit, but inwardly he is transformed by all that he has seen and heard and done. He is very glad to be home, but he would not have missed the Journey for the world. With characteristic simplicity he speaks the words which all of us utter at the end of a long and grueling trip: "Well, I'm back," he says.

The individuation Journey never really ends: we are always works in progress and we never know when another summons will come. When it does, though, perhaps we will open the door with less anxiety and more curiosity than we did the first time. And perhaps we will set forth on the next stage of the Journey feeling that we can trust the path, even if we don't know where it is going.

Maybe by then we will have learned that others have walked the road before us, and still others will walk it after we are gone. Bilbo, who in his later years became an inveterate traveler, learned that lesson well. Near the end of his life on Middle-earth, comfortable and drowsy and safe at last, he receives a visit from Frodo and Sam and gifts them with the final verse of his ongoing poem about the Journey:

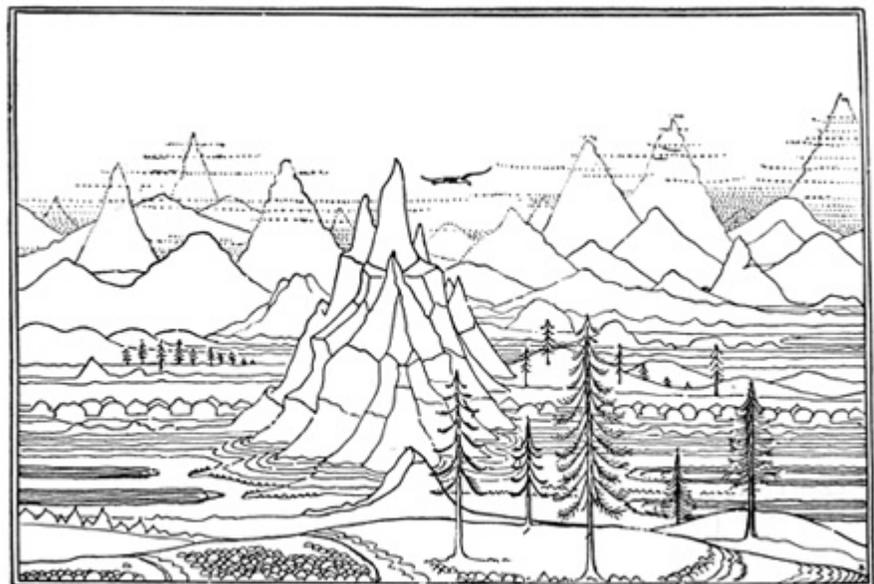
The Road goes ever on and on
 Out from the door where it began.
 Now far ahead the Road has gone,
 Let others follow it who can!
 Let them a journey new begin,
 But I at last with weary feet
 Will turn towards the lighted inn,
 My evening rest and sleep to meet.

sleep for twelve hours, and settle down to "ordinary" life again.

At the beginning of *The Hobbit*, Bilbo Baggins meets the wizard Gandalf, who invites him to go on an adventure. At first he refuses, but before he knows it he is off, "without a hat, walking-stick or any money, or anything that he usually took when he went out, ... running as fast as his furry feet could carry him down the lane." Years later his nephew Frodo, pursued by nine Black Riders, departs down the same road on a far more perilous journey, followed by his loyal servant Sam. All three Hobbits set forth in haste, reluctantly, before they have time to stop themselves. They have no idea what they are getting themselves into; if they did, they would probably be too scared to set one furry foot in front of the other. The real meaning of their Journey, with all its danger and all its promise, unfolds gradually along the way, as they grow in confidence and strength.

Like Hobbits, we are reluctant to answer the summons to undertake the individuation Journey. Often the call comes in the form of an unwelcome event: a serious illness, trouble in a relationship, the death of a loved one. Or it can appear as a dream that jolts us awake and leaves us gasping for breath, heart pounding and limbs trembling. Of course we are afraid to begin: we sense that the journey involves suffering and will bring about unalterable changes. Like Bilbo and Frodo, we would rather stay safe in our snug Hobbit-holes. But we also sense that the summons is a gift which we are invited to open, and before long we are on our way, not knowing what lies ahead or where we are going. It really doesn't matter whether we set out suddenly, like Bilbo, in fear and trembling, like Frodo, or out of loyalty, like Sam. The important thing is that we heed the call and go. When we deeply plumb our hearts, we know that we can do no other.

At the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, after many adventures, Sam returns to his fireside, where his wife and baby daughter and dinner await him. He has seen



The Misty Mountains looking West from the Eyrie towards Goblin Gate

J.R.R. Tolkien—*The Misty Mountains, The Hobbit, 1937*