

Merlin's Beard and Odin's Eye

An Analysis of the Wizard Archetype in Literature, Opera, and Cinema

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Preface

I hope my audience will find this work as exciting to read as it was to write. This is simultaneously the hardest, most enjoyable, and most insightful thing I have ever written. It was born out of my love for the stories it draws from, so I hope that it will inspire a similar appreciation for these monumental works of fantasy in my readers.

Devising this analysis was not a simple process. It began with a paper I wrote for my sophomore high school English class in 2003 which laid out the similarities between Merlin, Gandalf, and Dumbledore. In the process of doing research for that paper, I was shocked to discover how little had been written about the wizard figure which, to me, seemed like one of the most prevalent and important ones in all of story telling. The similarities that I wrote about quickly evolved into the Wizard Cycle, though at that time it lacked steps 5.5 (the sacrifice) and 6 (the gathering of strength before the final battle). In 2004 I rewrote and expanded the paper for my college freshmen course in Classical Epic. By that time I had added Obi-Wan Kenobi to the list of wizards and had begun to explore a Jungian explanation for what makes wizards such appealing characters. After reading and watching Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* operas in the next year's Modern Epic course, I recognized that Wotan also fit the Wizard Cycle. This prompted me to include him on the list of wizards and, more importantly, to consider the Teutonic god Odin as a second primeval source for the wizard archetype (the first being Merlin). By that point, I was so excited about the topic that I proposed a further expanded version as my undergraduate thesis, despite the fact that it was unrelated to either of my other two fields of study. This final manuscript, finished in 2008, contains detailed character biographies, more psychological insight, an in-depth analysis of each step in the cycle, and a more thorough Jungian analysis of the archetype as a whole. In the process of writing it, I discovered steps 5.5

and 6. Step six, specifically, was born out of the Jungian analysis. Because the wise old man represents a harnessing of all one's mental powers, it seemed fitting to include a step specifically correlated to that, which is the hero's gathering of strength before his final battle. So the choosing of wizards and the crafting of the cycle was neither wholly inductive nor deductive. It was both, and it was guided by a large measure of intuition. At last, I feel that this work provides an explanation of wizards which is both coherent and complete.

I hope that it will prove useful for both readers and writers alike. Wizards tend to be my favorite characters when they show up in stories; something about them strikes a chord deep in the human psyche. They contribute so much to their respective stories, both literarily and psychologically, so I hope that my observations will help fellow curious readers to understand how they can accomplish this so effectively. Similarly, story tellers who find that their wise old men characters are missing something just might find the answers they are looking for here in these pages. Perhaps it will even lend successful authors additional insight into their own wizard characters.

In order to make this work more accessible to anyone not familiar with all five wizards, I decided to include summaries of the five stories and a very brief summary of Jung's psychology. These are meant to save the casual reader the considerable amount of time it would take to research these things separately, but are by no means exhaustive. Readers with a strong literary background are welcome to skip those parts if they wish.

I must offer my most sincere gratitude to Dr. William T. Cotton of Loyola University, New Orleans, who acted as my wizard during the many-year process of composing this work. He taught the aforementioned Classical and Modern Epic courses, and also acted as my thesis advisor, so he has been the primary witness to this project's development. It would not have

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“And now, Harry, let us step out into the night and pursue that flighty temptress, adventure.”

— Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore

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Introduction

And Merlion was so disgysed that Kyng Arthur knew hym nat, for he was all befurred in blacke shepis skynnes, and a grete payre of bootis, [...] Than Ulphuns and Brascias knew hym well inowghe and smyled. “Sir,” seyde thes two knyghtes, “hit ys Merlion that so spekith unto you!”

(From Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur*)

King Arthur knew him not. Merlin was a shape-shifter, and this power allowed him to disguise himself even from the people who knew him best. But little did Malory know just how much of a shape-shifter Merlin would become. He lives on to this day, periodically reappearing in literature and cinema as The Wizard, the character who represents wisdom and who drives the action of the stories in which you find him.

The Wizard has shifted his shape over and over again, especially in western fiction. You will find him roaming the plains of J. R. R. Tolkien’s fantasy landscape as Gandalf, and traversing George Lucas’s *Star Wars* galaxy as Obi-Wan Kenobi. He extends as far into the past as the Norse pantheon, which inspired Richard Wagner’s Wotan, and even into modern works where we see him resurface yet again as Dumbledore in J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series. A number of authors have made passing remarks about the similarities that these character share, but a thorough analysis of the Wizard archetype is long overdue. This work will attempt to provide both a literary and psychological account of what makes the Wizard such an intriguing character.

There are hundreds (or probably thousands) of magic-users to be found in the history of story telling, but for the sake of this book I have chosen to focus on five: Merlin, Wotan, Gandalf, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and Dumbledore. These sorcerers are instantiations of what I consider to be the true archetypal Wizard in all his glory. Since some readers may not be familiar with all five, the chapters in the first part of this book provide background material and a brief

character study for each one. I have tried to reserve the insightful comments for the character studies so that the story summaries can be read selectively as needed. The second part deals with the common attributes of magic-users in general, and it occasionally considers a broader scope of characters. It also introduces what I have dubbed the Wizard Cycle, a series of eight steps that each of these five primal wizards follows. The cycle is key to the effectiveness of these characters, and the five I have singled out were chosen because of their adherence to it. Lastly, I explore the wizard character as the Jungian archetype of the Wise Old Man, who represents the human spirit and the united psyche.

In this paper, I will only use the term “wizard” to refer to one of the five aforementioned characters. Other labels like “magician,” “mage,” “sorcerer,” and “enchanter” are applied to the other magic-users. Exceptions to this rule occur occasionally in my discussion of the *Harry Potter* series, in which every male magic-user is dubbed a wizard by J. K. Rowling, but the meaning in these cases should be sufficiently clear.

Part I

Merlin

Merlin, while probably the oldest and best recognized Wizard in western literary history, is also the most difficult to examine. The problem with Merlin is the problem with Arthurian legend in general: there are so many sources spanning such a long period of time that it is hard to establish any canonical story. That problem persists today. Because Merlin is so popular and so well recognized, he continues to reappear in modern works. What, then, constitutes the real Merlin?

In this brief biography, I will try to present a unified account of Merlin as a character.¹ Thankfully, there are not as many Merlins as there are sources. Considering the number of influencing works, there is actually quite a lot of agreement over who Merlin was and what role he played, at least between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries. Different parts of Merlin's life come from different sources, but direct contradictions are rare enough that I feel comfortable in presenting a single character.

I have divided this biography into three sections that correspond with the chronology of the sources: early, classical, and modern. The "Classical Merlin" section is the longest and most important, and it encompasses all the most influential Arthurian sources. There you will find a brief account of a composite Merlin character. The early sources deal with Merlin before he became associated with Arthur's tale, and the modern sources are recent adaptations of the famous wizard which some may not consider authoritative.

Early Merlin

¹ My primary reference for Merlin's background is John Matthew's excellent book, *Merlin: Shaman, Prophet, and Magician*, which presents an excellent study of Merlin from many different angles along with valuable historical information. I also made use of Nikolai Tolstoy's *The Quest for Merlin*.

All theories about an historical Merlin are highly speculative, and if one did exist he was probably nothing like the character we imagine today. Several early Celtic poems recorded around the ninth and tenth centuries (though the material they contain is much older) mention a man who went mad after witnessing the horrors of war and fled to the woods of western England to live among the animals. This early Merlin, who may have been a bard, a warrior, a druid, or some combination thereof, is most notable for his prophecies. The *Armes Prydein*, a tenth century Welsh poem, has several stanzas that begin “Myrdin foretells.” This casual use of his name suggests that he was already well known and needed no introduction. In later centuries, Merlin would acquire a host of other magical powers, but his role as a prophet would always remain important.

It is doubtful that all of the early references one can find to “Merlin” refer to the same person. Not until the writings of Geoffrey of Monmouth between 1130 and 1151 do we get a single, unified Merlin character. Geoffrey wrote three works: *Prophetiae Merlini* (Prophecies of Merlin,), *Historia Regum Britanniae* (History of the Kings of Britain), and *Vita Merlini* (Life of Merlin). The first is fitting with the ancient Welsh figure of Merlin as a prophet, though it doesn’t say much about him as a character.

The *Historia* and *Vita* tell us a lot more about Merlin and his relationship to King Arthur, but the Merlin of these works is almost certainly an amalgamation of several different characters from Geoffrey’s sources. The two chief influences seem to be the “original” wild prophet of the woods and possibly historical Aurelius Ambrosius from the ninth century work *Historia Brittonum*. Perhaps there were two people named Ambrosius in Geoffrey’s sources, so for convenience, he condensed one of them into the familiar character of Merlin, and this is how Merlin became associated with Vortigern’s tower (mentioned in the next section). Geoffrey was

probably not the first to associate Merlin with King Arthur, but he was the first to do so in any significant detail, as far as we know. Geoffrey tended to embellish his sources, mixing things together and adding material of his own. This makes his history rather useless, but from a literary point of view, he deserves credit for creating the Merlin that we know today.

Classical Merlin

The *Historia* marks the start of the classical Merlin, the Wizard of King Arthur's court, though it is not until after Geoffrey that Merlin is associated with Arthur himself. In the *Historia* and the *Vita*, Merlin is associated with King Vortigern and King Uther Pendragon, Arthur's predecessors.

Geoffrey invents a birth for Merlin by explaining that he is the son of a princess and an incubus, a devil capable of taking human form and prone to sleeping with human women. This supernatural parentage gives Merlin his power. It also marks the transition of Merlin from a druidic shaman, inspired by nature, to a magician who derives his magic from a Judaeo-Christian mythos. King Vortigern becomes interested in Merlin because of his parentage. The king is attempting to build a tower, but each night the work of his builders is undone and the tower is shaken to the ground. His advisors tell him to pour the blood of a man with no human father on the stones, so he sends his knights in search of such a man. They bring back Merlin, but he will not have his blood spilled so easily. He puts Vortigern's advisors to shame by revealing the true cause of the earthquakes: a red and a white dragon battling beneath the foundations. He interprets these dragons as standing for the Britons and the Saxons respectively, and then offers a very lengthy prophecy about the future of the people of England.

This earns Merlin a reputation. When Vortigern is overthrown by Ambrosius, the new king wishes to build a monument to his fallen warriors. He seeks out Merlin for advice, and the

wizard suggests the building of Stonehenge. When Ambrosius agrees, Merlin helps out by using his magic to move the giant stones. But Ambrosius' reign is short, and he is soon succeeded by his brother, Uther Pendragon. Uther wages a successful battle against the Saxons with the help of the Duke of Cornwall, but in the festivities that follow, he becomes enamored with Cornwall's wife, Igraine. Uther besieges Cornwall's castles, but cannot take them by force. In his desperation, he seeks out Merlin, who uses magic to transform Uther into the likeness of the Duke of Cornwall. Thus disguised, Uther is able to sneak into Cornwall's castle and make love to Igraine, who conceives Arthur. Later that night, the duke is killed, and Uther is free to marry the woman he desired so greatly.

This is the last we hear of Merlin from Geoffrey. Robert Wace rewrote and adapted the *Historia* into Old French as the *Roman de Brut* some time around 1155, but he did not add significantly to the story where Merlin is concerned (though he did introduce the Round Table). The next author to significantly develop the legend is Robert de Boron, who composed a trilogy (or possibly a tetralogy) of Arthurian stories in verse some time during the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. Much of those poems, titled *Joseph d'Arimathe*, *Merlin*, *Percival*, and possibly *Mort Artu* (Death of Arthur), has been lost, but prose versions of them which were written later have allowed scholars to make informed guesses about just how much material De Boron contributed.

De Boron's poems add quite a lot to Wace's work, most notably a focus on the Holy Grail and the characters of Lancelot and Guinevere. He also embellishes Merlin's character. The story of his birth is expanded and Christianized. According to de Boron, Merlin was conceived by the devils in an effort to create an antichrist, but his chaste mother foiled the plan by having her son baptized by Blaise, who later became Merlin's mentor. Merlin is said to have his knowledge of

the past from his demonic father and his knowledge of the future from God. De Boron gives his wizard the power to shapeshift and develops his personality by adding an impish sense of humor and an exaggerated confidence that sometimes comes off as arrogance. Merlin is also made the creator of the Round Table, and his magical knowledge of the Holy Grail prompts the great quest undertaken by Arthur's knights.

The contributions do not stop there. Robert de Boron is the first to associate Arthur and Merlin, a vitally important step in the development of both characters. After the episode with Uther, Arthur is born and Merlin takes the young boy to the estate of Sir Ector to be raised as a foster child. When Uther dies, Merlin engineers an elaborate scene to establish Arthur as the rightful king, a story we know today as "The Sword in the Stone." The knights of Uther's kingdom are shown a sword protruding from an anvil and stone, and on the sword is written the famous inscription: "Whoso pulleth this sword from this stone / Is rightwise king born of all England." Arthur, of course, succeeds in pulling out the sword after the other knights fail, thus cementing his position as the successor of Uther.

De Boron's stories were adapted into many different English and French stories during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, most notably the Vulgate Cycle and the Prose Post-Vulgate Cycle. This diverse body of stories, which also drew from other sources, is sometimes contradictory concerning Merlin, but it did not add very much of interest about his life. It did, however, invent his death. The stories differ on the details of who the lady was, but they all agree that Merlin fell in love with a woman who wanted to steal the secrets of his magic. Merlin teaches her, but the treacherous lady turns on Merlin and uses her new found power to imprison him. Her name is different depending on the source, but it is usually some derivative of Viviane or Ninianne.

The next person that any thorough investigation of Merlin must mention is Sir Thomas Malory, who composed *Le Morte Darthur* (The Death of Arthur) around 1485. This work is widely considered to be the greatest and most authoritative piece of Arthurian legend ever written because it combined the growing collection of French and English stories into a single book that would become the basis for most future development of the legend. Malory does not really contribute a lot of his own material where Merlin is concerned, but he serves a similar role to Geoffrey of Monmouth by uniting a diverse body of source material into a single story. At this point in his development, Merlin is no longer just an engineer of Arthur's kingship. Now, he is a prominent advisor and companion to Arthur in his own right. He gives Arthur advice on numerous occasions, sometimes while in disguise, and occasionally he even rides into battle with Arthur and uses his magical power to win the day.

Malory's work marks the culmination of the classical Merlin, and all subsequent additions to the wizard are part of a modern tradition. His Merlin is a good survey of all the aforementioned works, so it should be helpful at this point to lay it all out in one succinct paragraph. Since Malory ignores Merlin's origins, the one from Geoffrey of Monmouth will serve.

Merlin in a Nutshell

Merlin was begotten on a mortal woman by an incubus, and this supernatural parentage gave him diverse magical powers. These powers were first noticed when he made several prophecies to King Vortigern, and later to Vortigern's successor, Uther. Merlin helped Uther deceive Igraine and father Arthur. When the boy was born, Merlin placed him in the care of Sir Ector until Uther's passing. To establish Arthur as the rightful king, Merlin had him pull the sword from the stone, a feat that no other knight could accomplish. Once Arthur was king,

Merlin advised and assisted him in many matters, including the obtaining of Excalibur, the creation of the Round Table, and the Grail Quest, but the magician was drawn away from the royal court by his unrequited love for Nimue. Despite his knowledge of the future and his impending death, he taught her the secrets of his magic. She used it to imprison him beneath a giant rock, forever cutting him off from the land of England.

Modern Merlin

Since the early Celtic poems attributed to him, not a single century has passed without producing some work involving Merlin. That means his character has been almost 1,500 years in the making. He has made brief appearances in quite a range of works, including *The Faerie Queene* and *Don Quixote*. Even as late as the seventeenth century, writers like Thomas Heywood were reading and shamelessly expanding Merlin's prophecies to include their own material.

Interest in Arthur and Merlin has not died out; if anything it has flourished. *Camelot* ran for 873 performances on Broadway. Walt Disney's animated feature *The Sword in the Stone* is still watched by children and adults alike. There have even been retellings of the story that focus on Merlin as the main character, along with video games that bear his name.

But the most important reworking of Arthurian legend since Malory is literary. Originally published as the first part of *The Once and Future King* tetralogy in 1939, T. H. White's *The Sword in the Stone* is responsible for many of our modern images of Merlin, and to a lesser extent Arthur. It is the book on which Walt Disney based his animated movie by the same name. White's Merlin is a wise but absent-minded old man who serves as both teacher and comic relief. He also has the curious affliction of living backwards through time—as the years pass, he is getting younger—and this accounts for his detailed knowledge of the future.

These changes are entertaining, but White's most important contribution to Merlin came as a fifth book, which was released after his death. In *The Book of Merlyn*, the old wizard comes to visit Arthur on the eve of the climactic battle with Mordred, Arthur's incestuously-begotten son. Just as he did in the first book of the original tetralogy, Merlin transforms Arthur into various animals to teach him about human nature, ethics, politics, and war. The book is short and really more of a philosophical treatise than a story, but it serves the vitally important role of bringing Merlin back at the end of the story. Without Merlin's return, the cycle of Arthur as a hero would be incomplete.

Merlin: The First Wizard

Aside from Arthur himself, Merlin is the most constant element of the evolving body of Arthurian literature. He lends his magical ethos to the story, elevating it from fabled history to national legend. Without Merlin, the Arthur story would never have become as famous as it is today. Without his magic to make the story stand out, Arthur and his knights might never have escaped the annals of the other legendary British kings. The wizard is *that* important.

Merlin has been steadily shaped into the character we know today by the successive additions of many skillful authors. Ancient and medieval writers were usually content to relate a simple series of events, and did not give us much to go on when it comes to personality, so we are left to infer what Merlin might have been like in these early works. In all cases he seems very sure of himself, probably due to his knowledge of the future and magical prowess. Merlin speaks directly and fearlessly, and is shown respect even by kings. Nonetheless, he is always willing to help those who seek him. As he evolves, he is increasingly portrayed as having a deep concern for the future of England and the establishment of a righteous king. Even before Geoffrey of Monmouth, most of the prophecies attributed to Merlin concerned only his

community of people (the Britons), rather than the world at large. Unlike the mythologies of other countries, which usually have at least a handful of magic users, Merlin is recycled over and over again by the British. He has become a sort of patron saint for them, representing the magic of their myths and their desire for a noble and just government.

Merlin has been portrayed in dozens of pictures, both ancient and modern, that run the gamut from sprightly boy to withered old man. The recently-produced stories featuring him as the protagonist show him as younger, but in general he is portrayed as the aged, cloak-sporting, white-haired Merlin, an image that no doubt influenced future wizard characters. John Matthews, author of *Merlin: Shaman, Prophet, Magician*, offers some insight as to why this particular avatar has been so enduring:

On one occasion, when Arthur catches sight of the mysterious Questing Beast, a creature made up of several animals, Merlin appears first as a youth who offers to explain to Arthur the meaning of the creature. When Arthur rejects this information on the grounds that the boy is too young to know of such matters, Merlin reappears as an old man, to whose words Arthur is far more willing to listen. In the future, we are given to understand, Merlin will take this form at all times—for in this way he is more certain of being listened to. It may well be to this moment that we owe the characteristic image of Merlin as a white-bearded elder, although he remained a young man beneath his disguise.

(Merlin: Shaman, Prophet, and Magician, 74-75)

This is the perfect mixture of themes for a wizard. His appearance is that of age, which denotes his wisdom, but he nevertheless retains a certain youthful vigor. Future wizard figures will share this characteristic. They all appear as old men, but none of them are weak. Quite the opposite really: Merlin was confident and active in the politics of his people, and he passed that on to his successors.

While Merlin may be considered the first wizard, he is not necessarily the greatest archetypal wizard. Historically, he is the oldest character who fulfills all the steps of the Wizard Cycle, but he did not go from being a druid prophet to a wizard overnight. Similarly, the concept

of the wizard cannot be said to have started with any specific character. Like Merlin, the archetype evolved over many centuries. It has been expressed in several different characters, which may have been based on Merlin, but nonetheless added important features of their own or at least served to cement the essential characteristics into something canonical. There are other important sources that contributed valuable material, like the figure of the Teutonic god Odin, examined next.

Wotan

Richard Wagner's opera tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (simply, *The Ring of the Nibelung*) is similar in some ways to Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* in the sense that it is an imaginative, coherent collection of one people's national epic material into a single work. In this case, it is the German people, and Wagner's wizard is Wotan: the king of the gods. Wagner's work is truly impressive in scope, and it combines several of the oldest Germanic legends with ancient religious mythology to produce a really excellent story.

King of the Gods

Wotan (pronounced "Vo-tahn," and also known as Odin or Woden) is the chief god of the Norse pantheon, though the distinction between god and mortal is not so clear-cut in Germanic mythology. The gods were just one group of supernatural beings who shared the world with earth spirits, giants, monsters, dwarves, and elves, and they did not always enjoy supremacy. They depended on one another and on the other supernaturals for much of their power: for example, the goddess Freya provided them with golden apples to keep them immortal.

Wotan seems to have played many different roles, since he is the patron of battle, wisdom, magic, oaths, death, and poetry among other things. He is usually portrayed as having only one eye, since he sacrificed the other in order to drink from the Well of Wisdom. He also carried a powerful spear on which laws were carved and commanded two ravens who kept him informed of events in the rest of the world. It is said that Wotan often wandered the world as a cloaked traveler with a wide-brimmed hat and a staff, a clear parallel with the modern image of the wizard. During his wanderings, he took a page out of Zeus's book and became the philandering king. He fathered several important characters in Norse mythology, including the god Thor, the mortal Siegmund, and the Valkyrie Brünnhilde. The Valkyries are the female

demigods of war who assist Wotan in one of his many jobs: collecting the souls of fallen warriors into his castle of Valhalla in anticipation of Ragnarök, the all-engulfing war at the end of the world.

Wagner's Wotan is an extremely complex character who plays several different roles in the operas, often simultaneously. Aside from being a wizard, he is also a hero and a redeemer in his own right. He is introspective and his motivations are complex. Despite being noble and wise, he remains fallible. In my opinion he is much more interesting (and ironically much more human) than Siegfried, the hero of the operas.

Wotan in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*

The curtain opens for the first opera, *Das Rheingold*, on the dwarf Alberich as he lustily chases the beautiful Rheinmaidens through the waters of the river Rhein. As they are teasing him, he spots a chunk of gold in the river. The maidens inform him that whoever takes the Rheingold and forges it into a ring will have the power to rule the world, but only if he first renounces love. Their hope that the infatuated dwarf is unwilling to pay so high a price is in vain: Alberich steals the gold and returns to his subterranean lair where his brother Mime forges the ring.

Meanwhile, Wotan is admiring his magnificent new castle of Valhalla, which was built for him by two giants, Fasolt and Fafner. But the moment is bittersweet. The giants are now demanding that Wotan keep his end of the deal, which means giving them the goddess Freya herself. Wotan made this deal following the advice of his trickster friend Loge, who (for Wagner) is the god of fire, and unfortunately nowhere to be found now that he is needed again. Having notched the contract into his spear, Wotan cannot go back on his oath. He knows that without Freya's golden apples the immortality of the gods will wane, but he is forced to hand her

over nonetheless. Just in the nick of time, Loge makes his entrance. He rescues the situation by offering the giants a different deal: the treasure of Alberich the dwarf king in exchange for Freya. The giants accept, but now to Wotan's dismay, he and Loge have to steal from the dwarves to keep up their end of the bargain. He tries to justify the quest on the grounds that Alberich's new power represents a threat to the gods and that the ring was forged out of stolen gold, but already Wotan seems to be enmeshing himself in the sort of double-dealing that he, as a god of law, forbids.

The two gods descend into Nibelheim and confront Alberich, who (surprise!) proves unwilling to give up his treasure. He boasts of his new power and, to demonstrate, transforms into a dragon. Loge, feigning amazement, tricks the dwarf into transforming into a toad also. Wotan captures the dwarf and forces him to pay his entire treasure as a ransom. Alberich grudgingly complies, but only after placing a terrible curse on the ring. The gods return to Valhalla and the giants accept the treasure as payment. The ring's curse is fast to take effect: in a fit of jealousy, Fafner kills Fasolt. As the curtain falls, the gods enter Valhalla to enjoy a brief and uneasy time of peace.

The second opera, *Die Walkure*, opens on a stormy night as a wounded and weaponless hero named Siegmund seeks refuge in a secluded woodland house. There he meets Sieglinde, who offers him water and shelter, but is soon revealed to be the wife of Hunding, the man hunting Siegmund. When Hunding arrives, he allows Siegmund to stay overnight in accordance with the laws of hospitality, but only on the condition that they will fight to the death the next day. Siegmund agrees and Hunding, drugged with a sleeping potion from Sieglinde, goes to bed.

Sieglinde finds the stranger that night and relates to him a troubling story from her wedding night. At the ceremony, a grim, cloaked wanderer with a wide brimmed hat (Wotan)

had arrived and thrust a sword into the tree that grows up through the center of Hunding's house. He announced that the blade should belong to anyone capable of pulling it out, but all of the area's greatest warriors had tried and failed. Siegmund, remembering that his father has promised him a sword in his time of greatest need, succeeds in drawing the sword from the tree. Now Sieglinde knows beyond any doubt that Siegmund is her long-lost twin brother; the two embrace passionately and declare their love for one another.

Meanwhile at Valhalla, Wotan is preparing to protect his son in the coming battle against Hunding. He orders one of his Valkyries—Brünnhilde—to protect Siegmund, but is interrupted by his wife, Fricka, the goddess of marriage. She is furious that Wotan intends to support Siegmund and Sieglinde's union, which is both incestuous and adulterous. Wotan, seeing that the honor of the gods is at stake, finally agrees to withdraw his protection and his magic sword from Siegmund, and he grudgingly orders Brünnhilde to protect Hunding instead. Brünnhilde, sensing her father Wotan's anxiety, refuses, but Wotan orders her to do it, and she is left with no other choice.

As Siegmund and Sieglinde flee for their lives, Brünnhilde appears to them. She tells Siegmund that he is doomed to die and that he should follow her to the halls of Valhalla where the souls of other noble warriors await. When Siegmund realizes that he will not be able to see his sister and lover in Valhalla, he refuses to go and decides to kill himself and Sieglinde before Hunding can catch them. Inspired by this amazing display of courage, Brünnhilde decides to rebel against Wotan and protect Siegmund after all. But during the duel, Wotan appears and shatters Siegmund's magical sword with his spear. Hunding bests and kills Siegmund, and Brünnhilde, sensing Wotan's anger, tries to flee with Sieglinde. She obtains a horse and tells the pregnant Sieglinde to flee to the East, where Wotan rarely goes. She also prophesies that the

child—who will be named Siegfried—will be the mightiest of all warriors. As the woman rides off, Wotan arrives to deal with Brünnhilde. He does not wish to punish her, since she only did what he originally wanted, but he must. She is stripped of her godly powers and put into a deep slumber on a slab of stone. Wotan gives his daughter a long goodbye and encircles her in fire impenetrable to all but the greatest warriors.

Siegfried, the third opera, follows the exploits of the legendary warrior of the same name. The curtain opens in Mime's cave, where we learn that the dwarf discovered the dying Sieglinde in the woods and has since raised Siegfried by himself. The young man is brash and strong, and Mime has plans to use the hero to slay Fafner (who has taken the form of a dragon) so as to regain Alberich's old treasure and the ring of power. But Siegfried has begun to suspect that Mime is not his real father, and since he breaks every sword that the dwarf can forge, he cannot face any monsters yet. Only Siegmund's magical sword, Nothung, the shards of which Mime got from Sieglinde, will make a strong enough sword.

While Mime is plotting, Wotan arrives disguised as a cloaked wanderer. He challenges Mime to a riddle contest and wins, which means that the dwarf's life is forfeit, but as Mime panics, Wotan leaves, prophesying that the one who knows no fear will collect the debt. When Siegfried returns, Mime informs him that he has one lesson left to learn—fear—and he is to learn it by facing the ferocious Fafner. Siegfried agrees and decides to reforge the magical sword himself.

The hero effortlessly confronts and slays the dragon, learning nothing about fear in the process. He takes the ring and a magical helm from the treasure hoard. When he meets Mime, the dwarf tries to poison him and take the ring, but Siegfried sees through the plan and slays his

foster father with one swift stroke of his sword. Now alone in the world, he decides to seek out a wife, and a songbird of the forest tells him of the beautiful Brünnhilde.

He sets off to find her, but at the base of the mountain he is confronted by Wotan, still disguised as a wanderer. The king of the gods interviews his grandson about his heroism, but Siegfried responds rudely and shows no interest in talking. Wotan becomes angry and threatens to break the magical sword once again. Now Siegfried identifies the wanderer as the man responsible for his father's death; he strikes Wotan's spear and shatters it. Wotan, shamed and broken, retreats to Valhalla as Siegfried climbs the mountain, crosses the ring of fire, and awakens his new bride.

By the last opera, *Götterdämmerung* (Twilight of the Gods), the reputation of Siegfried and Brünnhilde has spread. After the preludes, we meet King Gunther and his clever half-brother Hagen, as they discuss ways to increase their fame and power. Hagen suggests that Gunther should marry the most beautiful woman in the world, Brünnhilde, and that Gunther's sister Gutrune should marry the greatest hero, Siegfried. When Gunther doubts that he and his sister are capable of such amazing feats, Hagen reminds him of a magical potion that will make a man forget his past and fall madly in love with the first woman he sees. Gunther agrees to use this potion on Siegfried who, fortunately for them, is traveling the Rhineland looking for adventures. Before long, the hero shows up at Gunther's manor and inadvertently drinks the potion during the welcome toast. Now infatuated with Gutrune, the hero will do anything to win her hand. He offers to find the woman that Gunther speaks of—Brünnhilde—and bring her back for the king to marry.

Meanwhile, Brünnhilde receives a visit from one of her Valkyrie sisters. She learns that her father Wotan is depressed and weary, and that he wishes the ring of power (which Siegfried

gave to Brünnhilde) to be returned to the Rheinmaidens so that the world can be free of its deadly curse. Just as Brünnhilde refuses and sends her sister away, Siegfried returns disguised as Gunther. He announces that she is now his (Gunther's) bride, and takes the ring from her finger.

The scene shifts now to Hagen as he is visited by his father, who is none other than the dwarf Alberich (the original owner of the ring). At his father's insistence, Hagen agrees to take vengeance on the hero, who is Wotan's kin, and regain the ring.

When Brünnhilde is brought to the real Gunther for the wedding, she is shocked and angry to see Siegfried with Gutrune and the ring. She suspects some kind of awful treachery, and when she denounces Siegfried publicly, he swears on pain of death from Hagen's spear that he has been true (not realizing, of course, that he is swearing falsely). After the wedding, Hagen suggests to Gunther and Brünnhilde that Siegfried should be killed because his outburst at the wedding has damaged their honor. They agree to the plot, and organize a hunting trip.

Once on the trip, Hagen gives the hero a potion to reawaken his memories. Siegfried finally comes to understand the terrible thing he has done to Brünnhilde. Wotan's ravens are spotted overhead, and suddenly Hagen plunges his spear into Siegfried's back, claiming his vengeance. The body of the fallen hero is brought back to the house, but as Gunther tries to claim the ring, Hagen murders him too. As the treacherous villain moves in to take the ring for himself, Siegfried's corpse miraculously raises its hand in the air, warding him off. Just then, Brünnhilde enters. She has heard everything, and all too late she understands Hagen's plot.

Brünnhilde orders a funeral pyre built for Siegfried. She forgives him for what he has done, since he too was a victim of treachery, and instructs Wotan's ravens to fly home and tell Loge, god of fire, that the end of the gods is near. Taking the cursed ring, she lights the pyre, mounts her horse, and rides into the flames. After the fire has consumed them, the banks of the

Rhine swell up and cover the embers of the fire. Hagen, in a last desperate attempt to get the ring, jumps into the water where he is drowned by the Rheinmaidens, who finally retake their lost treasure. As the curtain falls, we see Valhalla catching fire and burning to the ground with the gods and Wotan's heroes inside.

Wotan: The God, Damned

Wagner's Wotan is a complex and dynamic character. He is constantly conflicted over his desire to aid his children and his duty to rule justly over the earth. He is introspective and thoughtful, and he laments the evil that sometimes comes of his choices. Over the course of the four operas, we see him as a noble warrior, an angry father, a conflicted king, a despairing observer of a doomed world, and, of course, a wizard.

This brief excerpt from *Das Rheingold* (with stage directions included) provides an example of Wotan's tendency to reflect before taking action, a trait all too rare amongst the characters in the *Ring*. In this scene, Fasolt and Fafner have just carried off Freia as payment for the building of Valhalla:

Loge: [...] How darkly Wotan doth brood?

Alack, what aileth the gods?

(A pale mist fills the stage, gradually growing denser. In it the gods' appearance becomes increasingly wan and aged. All stand in dismay and expectation looking at Wotan, who fixes his eyes on the ground in thought.)

[...]

Loge: I see now! hear what ye lack!

Of Freia's fruit not yet have ye eaten today.

The golden apples that grow in her garden,
have made you all doughty and young,

[...]

Fricka: (anxiously) Wotan, my lord! unhappy man!

See how thy laughing lightness has brought us

All disgrace and shame!

Wotan: (starting up with sudden resolve)

Up, Loge! descend with me!

To Nibelheim go we together:

for I will win me the gold.

(*Das Rheingold*, Act I, Scene 2)

His thinking sets him apart from most of the other characters, who tend to be either brash or utterly consumed by their own agendas, though he is not reflective to the point of impotency. At least until the end of *Siegfried*, he is always willing to take action. This is what sets him apart from Erda, the earth goddess who is the primary source of Wotan's wisdom. Some may find it tempting to consider her the wizard of the operas because Wotan is constantly seeking her out for advice or knowledge of some kind, but she plays the part of the wise mountain hermit. She is never involved in the action of the story, and she does not take steps to influence her own fate or the fates of others. Wotan's willingness to get his hands dirty is what sets his magic apart and makes him a true wizard.

Wotan's overarching objective as a god is to impose order and law on the world and make it a more excellent place in which to live. He is also the god of war, so it may be helpful to cast him as a sort of Julius Caesar figure: one bent on conquering the world for the purposes of uniting it under one just rule. He is adamant that laws be followed and contracts be kept, and he is not afraid to use force to maintain his regime, as is evident when he and Loge take the ring from Alberich (who represents a growing threat to the power of the gods and is also a convenient means of settling the debt with the giants). He is not, however, overly headstrong or unreflective, as such conquering kings tend to be. The scene where his wife insists that he withdraw his protection from Siegmund demonstrates his willingness to give in when he is wrong. Ultimately, though, his plans fail. The world's lawlessness proves insurmountable, and Wotan is destroyed. He actually dies twice: not only does he burn with Valhalla, but his spear is shattered by Siegfried during a vain attempt to restrain the unstoppable hero. Wotan collects the remnants of his power symbol and slumps off stage, a symbol of age giving way to youth. From then on, he remains in Valhalla awaiting the inevitable end of the gods.

There is debate over whether or not Wotan is the author of his own demise. Despite his insistence that laws be followed, he breaks them himself in his many extramarital affairs and would have broken them again by supporting an incestuous union had his wife not stepped in to prevent it. He also finds himself caught up in the paradox of trying to control a free will.² He desperately wants to create a “free hero” in both Siegmund and Siegfried so that one of them can take back the ring which he gave up and cannot, of his own accord, take back due to his contract with the giants. It is debatable whether or not this is even possible: if the hero is created free, how can he also have been created for a purpose? Perhaps these hypocrisies bring about his death, or perhaps in trying to make the world a lawful place he was fighting a losing battle from the very beginning.

Because Wotan plays many parts, including that of a hero and a redeemer, his role as a wizard is somewhat less noticeable. Of the five wizards that I have chosen to discuss, he was the last one to be recognized and fits the cycle less perfectly than the others; this may become apparent when I lay out the Wizard Cycle, since I find myself constantly making excuses for Wotan. He is included because the image of Odin has been an influential one on the development of the wizard archetype, and the fact that we see him concretized in a single character that more or less embodies that archetype is a pleasant coincidence. Wagner’s sources for Wotan were collections of old Germanic poems and stories that represented a handful of fragmented, unrelated episodes. By reworking them into one unified story with many of his own creative additions, Wagner gave them (and thus, Wotan) continuity. He took a hodgepodge of mythic anecdotes and sculpted them into a single character. The fact that he chose (perhaps inadvertently) to portray Wotan, the god of wisdom, as a wizard lends credence to the association

² *Finding an Ending*, 40

of wizards with wisdom. It also makes *The Ring* a much richer story. Wizard characters have a distinct tendency to do that.

J. R. R. Tolkien firmly denied being influenced by Wagner, and claimed that the many similarities between *The Lord of the Rings* and *Der Ring des Nibelungen* came about because they both relied on the same source material, which indeed they did. Because he was a highly regarded scholar of language and literature, I trust Tolkien (more than his critics) to identify correctly his influencing works. In fact, I think it is rather presumptuous to claim that he drew from Wagner without good evidence, especially in the face of Tolkien's explicit statements to the contrary. The similarities between the two works that cannot be traced back to their common sources are often overblown: while both rings were powerful and much sought after, they have different origins, different purposes, and lend their users different powers. Therefore, it is my opinion that Wagner's Wotan did not heavily influence Gandalf (though the god Odin certainly did). If this is true, it strengthens the case for a wizard archetype by demonstrating that two masterful authors both worked the same material into the same type of character.

It is possible that, at some point in Merlin's development, his character was influenced by Odinic images, and perhaps vice-versa. Such influences would be difficult or impossible to trace, but either way, the two are excellently mixed in the next wizard to be examined.

Gandalf

“A wizard is never late, Frodo Baggins; nor is he early. He arrives precisely when he means to.” This is Gandalf’s first line in Peter Jackson’s recent film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*, and I think it evidences great understanding of the wizard’s character. Gandalf can be quite gruff, even rude at times, when dealing with his allies, and altogether terrifying when dealing with his enemies. This line in the movie is followed by a brief pause and a hearty laugh. Behind the rough exterior, Gandalf can also be very kindly. He is a wizard, and in Middle Earth, that is something quite remarkable.

J. R. R. Tolkien’s masterpiece (along with its predecessor, *The Hobbit*) has been the single most influential work of fantasy literature in recent history. *The Silmarillion*, which provides background to the events of *The Lord of the Rings*, tells us that Gandalf is one of the Maiar—a demigod in Tolkien’s mythology—that would have preexisted the earth and learned about magic from the gods themselves. He and the other handful of wizards were sent to Middle Earth to counsel and assist the men, elves, and dwarves in their continuing battle against Sauron, an evil Maia, who had recently been defeated but not destroyed before the beginning of *The Hobbit*.

A Brief Summary of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*

Gandalf was the only wizard to show any interest in the hobbits, a pleasant race of short-statured people who tended to keep to themselves in their own little corner of the world. It is said of Gandalf that “Tales and adventures sprouted up all over the place wherever he went,” something that most hobbits found distasteful, though they enjoyed telling and retelling the stories. When Gandalf meets Bilbo Baggins in the first chapter of *The Hobbit*, Bilbo is one of the respectable, well-to-do sort who would never go in for such dreadful things as adventures.

Less than two days from that meeting, Bilbo is riding off into the sunset with a rabble of thirteen dwarves on a quest to retake a mountain of treasure from a dangerous dragon.

Gandalf travels with the party on and off during the adventure. At times he is called away on “other business” (later it is revealed that he is investigating the resurgence of Sauron), but he always returns at just the right moment. In the third and fifth chapters, he saves the whole party from trolls and goblins respectively. Later, during one of the periods when Gandalf is away, Bilbo himself saves the dwarves by fighting off some monstrous spiders and rescuing them from an elvish prison. During the journey, Bilbo finds a magic golden ring that renders the wearer invisible, and he uses this to his advantage several times.

In the end, the dragon is slain and the treasure recovered. After an epic battle involving six different armies, the treasure is doled out to the rightful recipients and Bilbo returns home quite a different hobbit and quite a bit richer. Tolkien’s epic work *The Lord of the Rings* picks the story back up roughly sixty years later, when Gandalf once again pays a visit to his old friend Bilbo Baggins.

To the hobbits, Gandalf is known better for his stupendous fireworks than for his actual business of resisting Sauron, something much darker and more serious. He doesn’t seem to mind this, though, and he provides a truly spectacular display for Bilbo’s eleventy-first (111) birthday. This is quite an old age, even for a hobbit, and eventually Gandalf becomes suspicious that magical forces may be at work. Bilbo makes one final use of the magic ring that he found on his previous adventure by disappearing at his own birthday party and setting out on a journey to visit the elves. Gandalf urges him to leave the ring in the hands of his heir, nephew Frodo Baggins. Bilbo is strangely reluctant to let go of the ring, seeming for brief moments to be possessed by it.

Eventually, though, he lets it go and leaves on his journey. Over the next seventeen years, Gandalf is hardly seen at all.

When he finally returns, he brings ominous news to Frodo: the ring is much more powerful than originally suspected. Gandalf correctly guessed that it was one of twenty magic rings that had been distributed long ago to the different peoples of Middle Earth. What he had not guessed was that this ring was the master ring—the ring of the dark lord Sauron himself which holds great sway over the other nineteen. Much of Sauron’s own soul had been poured into this ring, and if he were ever to regain it nothing would be able to stop him from overrunning all of Middle Earth with his dark powers.

Gandalf sends Frodo and his eavesdropping gardener Sam on a journey to Rivendell, a great elvish city, where he says he will eventually rejoin them. While the hobbits travel, Gandalf consults the head of the order of wizards, Saruman the White, about the ring. Unfortunately, Saruman has fallen under the dark lord’s sway, and when Gandalf refuses to join him in an evil plot to obtain the ring, he is imprisoned in Saruman’s tower, where he witnesses the building of Saruman’s hideous army.

Frodo and Sam, now joined by two of their hobbit friends Merry and Pippin, have several adventures on their journey and eventually undergo their first encounter with the Black Riders, servants of Sauron who are looking for the ring. At the town of Bree, a waypoint on the way to Rivendell, they meet a mysterious woodsman named Aragorn who helps them escape the Black Riders several more times and guides them over the rough terrain to Rivendell.

Finally, the five reach their destination and are rejoined by Gandalf, who relates his confrontation with Saruman and his rescue by the Giant Eagles. A council is held at Rivendell, where the elves, dwarves, men, hobbits, and wizard debate what should be done with the ring.

Eventually, they agree that it must be destroyed, which unfortunately involves journeying to Mount Doom, a volcano at the heart of Sauron's dominion. The Fellowship of the Ring is formed, which will be led by Gandalf and will include the four hobbits, Aragorn, Gimli the dwarf, Legolas the elf, and Boromir, a human from the area of Gondor whose armies are currently holding Sauron's forces at bay. At the council, Aragorn reveals that he is actually the descendant of the old kings of Gondor, who have been missing for some time now.

The first major obstacle the nine encounter is the Misty Mountains. They opt to follow the tunnels of an old dwarvish mining colony which will lead to the other side, but on the way they run into goblins and eventually something much worse: a Balrog. This terrible fire creature is on par with Gandalf himself, and as the others run for the exit to the mines, Gandalf stays behind to fight it off. He tricks the monster into falling into a pit, but the beast's fiery whip lassos Gandalf and drags him down as well.

The Fellowship makes it out of the mountains, but is deeply troubled by the loss of their wizard and guide. They make haste to some woods where they meet friendly elves who resupply them and give them magical gifts which will eventually save their lives. From there, they travel down a long river and at last reach a crucial point in the journey at which they must decide where to go next. Boromir tries to convince them to go to his home of Gondor, and when Frodo refuses, he tries to take the ring by force. Frodo slips it on, becomes invisible, and escapes, only to discover that a group of orcs is on its way to attack the party. In the ensuing battle, Frodo and Sam split off from the Fellowship and make for Mordor by themselves.

The rest of the party battles the orcs, which have been sent by the wizard Saruman to retrieve the ring. Boromir redeems himself as he dies defending the two remaining hobbits, Merry and Pippin, who are mistaken for Frodo and Sam and carried off. With the ring bearer

gone and Boromir dead, Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas decide to follow the orks in the hopes of rescuing the two captured hobbits, though they have a difficult time with the pursuit. Merry and Pippin eventually escape on their own and flee into a nearby forest which is inhabited by the large, tree-like ents. The ents are also displeased with the wizard Saruman because he no longer has respect for the living things of the forest. Bearing Merry and Pippin on their branches, the ents attack Saruman's tower and destroy it.

Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas track the hobbits to the forest, but there they find someone much more surprising than the ents: Gandalf. Gandalf tells them of his fierce, ten-day battle with the fiery Balrog, whom he eventually slew, though the ordeal left him so drained that he also died. Instead of passing to the afterlife, Gandalf was sent back to earth to finish his mission of opposing Sauron, and was reborn with even greater power as Gandalf the White. He is still recognizable as the wizard he once was, but several characters remark that he seems different after his return from the dead. The wizard reassumes leadership of the group, and they make for the kingdom of Rohan, another realm of men, to recruit allies.

Much to their dismay, Théoden, king of Rohan, has been corrupted and warped by the evil words of one of Saruman's spies. Gandalf, for the first time exercising his new power, frees Théoden from the spell by reminding Théoden of his true identity, and the armies of Rohan agree to aid Gandalf and his party. Saruman, aware that his hold over Théoden is broken, sends his armies to destroy Rohan. As Théoden prepares for war, Gandalf leaves in haste. A great battle follows, and just when it seems that Rohan will be overrun, Gandalf arrives with the rising sun, bringing with him reinforcements from the west. With Saruman's forces defeated, Gandalf confronts the corrupted wizard and breaks his staff, assuming his position as head of the order of

wizards. From there, Gandalf, Aragorn, Théoden and the other heroes turn east where the much larger armies of Mordor still await them.

Meanwhile, Frodo and Sam have been slowly making their way toward Mordor. In the process, they capture the creature Gollum, who has been following them at a distance almost since the start of their journey. Gollum was the previous owner of the ring, whom Bilbo had encountered many years before, and he is a wretched example of how twisted its bearers become. Now Gollum is emaciated and insane and has become totally obsessed with retrieving his precious ring, and Frodo has already felt the evil power of the ring weighing him down. Now a prisoner, Gollum agrees to guide the hobbits to Mordor. He does, but betrays them to a giant spider monster in the hopes of retrieving the ring. Much to Gollum's dismay, Frodo and Sam survive, and he is forced to follow them secretly at a distance once more as they make their way stealthily to Mount Doom.

Luckily for them, the dark lord is focused on the fortress city of Minas Tirith, the capital of Gondor and the last great stronghold of men. Sauron has built up a great army and at last he sends it to wipe out the forces that oppose him. The Steward of Gondor has gone mad with despair, so Gandalf is forced to take command of the army, several times giving orders to its soldiers and fighting off the Black Riders with his magic. When the armies of Mordor breach the walls of the city, Gandalf comes face to face with the captain of the Riders, a being of dark magic who would presumably prove an even greater challenge than the Balrog. But this conflict is never settled. Reinforcements lead by Théoden and Aragorn arrive from Rohan and from the South just in time. The armies of Mordor retreat and Gondor is given a chance to regroup.

Aragorn, the long lost descendant of the kings of Gondor, finally returns to Minas Tirith, though he knows that his unexpected return may cause strife rather than relief. He says, "But for

the present I am but the Captain of the Dúnedain of Arnor; and the Lord of Dol Amroth shall rule the City until Faramir awakes. But it is my counsel that Gandalf should rule us all in the days that follow and in our dealings with the Enemy.” Gandalf guesses that Sauron, who is evil embodied, would never even consider a plan to destroy the ring, since it can provide such immense magical power to its bearer. He therefore suggests a direct attack on Mordor as a diversion to allow Frodo and Sam time to destroy the ring, which is now right under Sauron’s nose. The armies agree, and meet the forces of Mordor head on, despite being greatly outnumbered.

The plan works. Frodo and Sam are utterly spent, but they finally crawl to the summit of Mount Doom. For one last moment, it seems that all may be lost: Frodo, finally overcome by the ring’s dark magic, puts it on and declares that he will never destroy it. But Gollum, who has followed them all the way there, emerges and fights Frodo for “his precious.” He wins and takes Frodo’s finger off with the ring, but as he celebrates this victory, he topples over the edge into the fiery abyss below.

The ring is at last destroyed and Sauron’s power is extinguished like a candle. Gandalf, recognizing that the quest has been completed, rides into Mordor on the back of a giant eagle to save the two hobbits from the eruption of Mount Doom. They awake several days later to find Gandalf caring for them. They are reunited with their companions and witness Aragorn’s coronation as king of Gondor. On the way back to their homeland, they themselves vanquish the broken wizard Saruman and a gang of petty thieves that have been causing trouble for the hobbits. After several more years, everything has been put right again and Frodo, Gandalf (also secretly a bearer of one of the twenty magic rings), and Bilbo are reunited once again. The three ring bearers board an elvish ship set sail for the Undying Lands of the West.

Gandalf Uncloaked

I will admit that, of the five wizards I have chosen to focus on, Gandalf is my favorite. He is immensely powerful, yet does not become a *deus ex machina*. He drives all of the action in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, yet he does not supplant the heroes. He goes by several names, all of which have meanings in Tolkien's invented languages. "Gandalf" means "Staff Elf," emphasizing that he is something not quite human and that his power is linked to his staff. "Mithrandir," as he is called in Rohan, means "Grey Pilgrim," and refers to his portrayal as an Odinic wanderer. He is also referred to as "The White Rider," the foil of Sauron's Black Riders.

Tolkien does a truly masterful job of making Gandalf mysterious, which is an important characteristic of any successful wizard. One always gets the feeling that Gandalf knows more than he reveals, and as far as these two stories are concerned, his origins are never explained. Tolkien does give an account of Gandalf's origins in *The Silmarillion*, but I cannot help wondering if this does the character more harm than good. Perhaps there are some things about wizards that should be left unexplained.

One other remarkable thing about Gandalf, which adds to his mysteriousness, is the fact that his magic is extremely subtle. Gandalf does not hurl giant fireballs at his enemies by reciting spells from a book and waving his magic wand. In many ways, his magic seems more like resourcefulness than occult intervention. Gandalf's powers are other-worldly and they are linked to his staff, but they are not massively powerful in and of themselves. For example, he has the power to illuminate the tip of his staff. This is far from earth-shaking power, but without it, the Fellowship would have been lost in the dark mines of the Misty Mountains. Indeed much of his "power" is not really magical at all, but immersive knowledge in lore, language, and

psychology. His much-reputed mastery of fire comes not from inborn ability, but possession of the magic ring of fire, a powerful artifact which he has learned to manipulate skillfully. Gandalf seems to occupy a grey space somewhere between “talented scientist” and “conduit of godly power,” which makes his magic truly tantalizing. His spells always leave the reader wondering, “Maybe... just maybe, it could really happen that way.” This can be illustrated in a brief conversation that he has with the captains of Rohan after he arrives with reinforcements to save the day:

“Once more you come in the hour of need, unlooked-for,” he [Éomer] said.

“Unlooked-for?” said Gandalf. “I said that I would return and meet you here.”

“But you did not name the hour, nor foretell the manner of your coming. Strange help you bring. You are mighty in wizardry, Gandalf the White!”

“That may be. But if so, I have not shown it yet. I have but given good counsel in peril, and made use of the speed of Shadowfax. Your own valor has done more, and the stout legs of the Westfoldmen marching through the night.” Then they all gazed at Gandalf with still greater wonder.

(The Two Towers, 148)

By not making magic something wholly illusive and beyond us, Tolkien, ironically, makes his mythology even more enchanting.

Gandalf is very important in literature as the first (or at least best) combination of Merlin and Odin. Like Odin, he carries a magical staff, wears a wide-brimmed hat and cloak, and represents wisdom and victory in battle. His role as an advisor for kings and heroes rings of Merlin. Gandalf was, no doubt, also influenced by the Finnish wizard Väinämöinen, the central character of the *Kalevala*, who may be the source of Gandalf’s gruff temperament. All three of these influencing characters were magic users and wanderers. In Gandalf, Tolkien solidified what we now think of as *the wizard*.

Obi-Wan Kenobi

The *Star Wars* universe is one of the best known and most widely developed science fiction settings in the history of the genre. It is set in the future rather than the past, and this seems to have prevented many readers from identifying its instantiation of the wizard archetype, Obi-Wan Kenobi, though he fits the role perfectly. The brilliance of the *Star Wars* universe comes from its liberal borrowing of the most exciting characters from a dozen different worlds: where else would a knight, a cowboy pirate, a princess, a Buddhist monk, some robots, and Bigfoot team up to battle an evil sorcerer and his army of Nazis?

The six *Star Wars* movies that have been made to date were released in two trilogies, though not in order. The original trilogy, in which Obi-Wan is already an old man, is constituted by episodes four, five, and six. The second, or prequel trilogy, is made up of the first three episodes, and it tells the backstory of the original trilogy. I will present Obi-Wan's story chronologically, starting in episode one and ending in episode six.

A Brief Summary of the *Star Wars* Saga

In *Star Wars*, magic has been replaced with the Force, a mystical energy generated by living things which affords great power to anyone trained in manipulating it. Its power is wielded by the Jedi Knights, a clever amalgamation of Buddhist monks and Arthurian knights who keep peace in the galaxy and battle the Sith, an order of evil force-wielders. The first scene of Episode I introduces us to Qui-Gon Jinn, a Jedi knight, and his apprentice, Obi-Wan Kenobi, as they attempt to settle a trade dispute which eventually culminates in galactic war. Negotiations fail, and in the process of escaping from the evil droid army the two run into Anakin Skywalker, a talented slave boy who helps them rescue a captured queen and return home. When Qui-Gon is killed by a Sith operative, he makes Obi-Wan swear to teach Anakin

the ways of the Force. Obi-Wan is promoted from an apprentice to a full Jedi Knight, and the Jedi Council reluctantly agrees to make Anakin his apprentice.

During the war that follows, Anakin grows and trains under Obi-Wan (episode II). Anakin's unparalleled talent leads him to become arrogant, and he also begins a secret love affair with the queen he helped to rescue years before, something forbidden to the Jedi. These faults combined with Obi-Wan's harsh tutelage and Anakin's frustration with the Jedi Council leave Anakin vulnerable to the seductive words of Senator Palpatine, the present Chancellor of the Galactic Senate and secretly a Sith Lord (episode III). Unbeknownst to anyone, Palpatine is running both sides of the war. He convinces Anakin to abandon his Jedi ways and join the Sith. In a matter of hours, Palpatine has all of the Jedi assassinated. Only two survive: Yoda and Obi-Wan Kenobi, who only now become aware of Palpatine's evil plan. Palpatine swiftly ends the war and reforms the Galactic Republic into an empire.

At the end of episode III, Obi-Wan is sent to kill his former apprentice, a mission he finds himself almost unable to accept due to his fondness for Anakin. Nevertheless, he finds him, defeats him, and leaves him for dead. Obi-Wan and Yoda, the only remaining Jedi, agree to go into hiding after placing Anakin's newly born twins with foster parents. The existence of the children is unknown to anyone else, so they grow up unaware of their origins.

One of those twins, Luke Skywalker, becomes the protagonist of the second *Star Wars* trilogy (usually referred to as the original trilogy). In the time it has taken Luke to grow into a young man, Anakin has been rebuilt, using machine parts, into the famous villain Darth Vader. Vader and Palpatine have built an oppressive galactic empire which is opposed by a dwindling band of rebel fighters. When Princess Leah (Luke's twin sister, though neither one knows it) and her starship are captured by the Empire during an espionage mission, she gives the secret plans

she has stolen to her robot servants and jettisons them onto a remote planet with instructions to find Obi-Wan Kenobi.

The droids are picked up by junk dealers and sold to Luke's family, and within a day the one carrying the message runs away in search of Obi-Wan. In the process of tracking down the little droid, Luke is attacked by the Sand People and nearly killed. He is saved just in the nick of time by a hooded and cloaked figure who waves his arms in the air and imitates the roar of a dangerous desert creature to frighten off the Sand People. Here, some dialog from the movie will server to illustrate Obi-Wan's character and his role in the story.

OBI-WAN: Rest easy son. You've had a busy day. You're fortunate to be all in one piece.

LUKE: Ben? Ben Kenobi? Boy am I glad to see you!

OBI-WAN: The Jundland Wastes are not to be traveled lightly. Tell me young Luke: what brings you out this far?

LUKE: This little droid. I think he's searching for his former master, but I've never seen such devotion in a droid before. He claims to be the property of an Obi-Wan Kenobi. Is he a relative of yours? Do you know what he's talking about?

OBI-WAN: Obi-Wan Kenobi? Obi-Wan. Now that's a name I've not heard in a long time... a long time.

LUKE: I think my uncle knows him. He said he was dead.

OBI-WAN: Oh, he's not dead. Not yet.

LUKE: You know him?

OBI-WAN: Well of course I know him. He's me. I haven't gone by the name of Obi-Wan since, oh, before you were born.

LUKE: Well, then the droid does belong to you.

OBI-WAN: I don't seem to remember ever owning a droid. Very interesting. I think we better get indoors. The Sand People are easily startled, but they'll soon be back and in greater numbers.

(The scene changes to the inside of Obi-Wan's desert villa.)

LUKE: No, my father didn't fight in the wars. He was a navigator on a spice freighter.

OBI-WAN: That's what your uncle told you. He didn't hold with your father's ideals. Thought he should have stayed here and not gotten involved.

LUKE: You fought in the Clone Wars?

OBI-WAN: Yes. I was once a Jedi Knight the same as your father.

LUKE: I wish I'd known him.

OBI-WAN: He was the best starpilot in the galaxy... and a cunning warrior. I understand you've become quite a good pilot yourself. And he was a good friend. Which reminds me... I have something here for you.

(Obi-Wan fetches a cylindrical metal object about the size of a flashlight from a chest.)

OBI-WAN: Your father wanted you to have this when you were old enough, but your uncle wouldn't allow it. He feared you might follow old Obi-Wan on some damn-fool idealistic crusade like your father did.

(Obi-Wan hands the object to Luke.)

LUKE: What is it?

OBI-WAN: It's your father's lightsaber. This is the weapon of a Jedi Knight. Not as clumsy or random as a blaster.

(Luke fire up the lightsaber and a blue beam of light extends from it to make a sword.)

OBI-WAN: An elegant weapon from a more civilized age.

(Luke swings the lightsaber around a bit to test it out.)

OBI-WAN: For over a thousand generations the Jedi Knights were the guardians of peace and justice in the Old Republic. Before the dark times... before the Empire.

(Luke powers down the lightsaber and sits down next to Obi-Wan.)

LUKE: How did my father die?

OBI-WAN: A young Jedi named Darth Vader, who was a pupil of mine until he turned to evil, helped the Empire hunt down and destroy the Jedi Knights. He betrayed and murdered your father.³ Now the Jedi are all but extinct. Vader was seduced by the dark side of the Force.

LUKE: The Force?

OBI-WAN: The Force is what gives a Jedi his power. It's an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us, penetrates us... it binds the galaxy together.

(The little droid beeps to remind them of the message it is carrying.)

OBI-WAN: Now, let's see if we can't figure out what you are, my little friend... and where you come from.

(The droid displays the holographic message.)

LUKE: I saw part of a message he was—

OBI-WAN: I seem to have found it.

PRINCESS LEAH: General Kenobi, years ago you served my father in the Clone Wars. Now he begs you to help him in his struggle against the Empire. I regret that I am unable to present my father's request to you in person, but my ship has fallen under attack, and I am afraid my mission to bring you to Alderaan has failed. I have placed information vital to the survival of the rebellion into the memory systems of this R2 unit. My father will know how to retrieve it. You must see this droid safely delivered to him on Alderaan. This is our most desperate hour. Help me Obi-Wan Kenobi; you're my only hope.

³ This is not the entire truth: Luke's father *is* Darth Vader, though this is not revealed to Luke until later.

(They pause for a moment to consider the message.)

OBI-WAN: You must learn the ways of the Force if you're to come with me to Alderaan.

LUKE: Alderaan? I'm not going to Alderaan. I've got to get home. It's late. I'm in for it as it is.

OBI-WAN: I need your help, Luke. She needs your help. I'm getting too old for this sort of thing.

LUKE: I can't get involved. I've got work to do. It's not that I like the Empire; I hate it, but there's nothing I can do about it right now. It's all such a long way from here.

OBI-WAN: That's your uncle talking.

LUKE: My uncle. How am I ever gonna explain this?

OBI-WAN: Learn about the Force, Luke.

(Luke considers for a moment.)

LUKE: Look, I can take you as far as Anchorhead. You can get a transport there to Mos Eisley or where you're going.

OBI-WAN: You must do what you feel is right, or course.

(Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope)

Sadly, Luke's mind is quickly changed when he returns home only to discover that the Empire has tracked the droids to his planet and killed his foster parents. He returns to Obi-Wan and agrees to learn the ways of the Force. They hire a freelance pilot named Han Solo to fly them to Alderaan, the rebel-friendly planet where the stolen plans are to be delivered. During their journey, Kenobi teaches Luke the basic principles of the Force.

But the Empire has wasted no time testing its dreadful secret weapon: a battlestation called the Death Star, which has enough firepower to destroy an entire planet. When the heroes arrive, they find Alderaan destroyed. They are captured and brought aboard the dreadful battlestation. Thanks to some of Han's old smuggling tricks, the crew manages to hide and trick the Empire into thinking their starship is deserted. Obi-Wan volunteers to disable the mechanism holding their ship while the others rescue Princess Leah, also a captive aboard the Death Star.

Han and Luke succeed in rescuing Princess Leah and return to the ship in time for a narrow escape. Obi-Wan is not so lucky. After disabling the device he set out to find, he is confronted by his former pupil, Darth Vader. The two have a lightsaber duel close to the hangar

holding the captured starship, and as Luke is getting aboard, he witnesses Obi-Wan's death at the hands of Vader. Awestruck and angry, Luke tries to attack, but Obi-Wan's disembodied voice calls to him: "Run Luke, Run!" The newly released starship takes off and flies away from the Death Star.

At long last, the secret plans are delivered to the Rebel Alliance by Luke, Han, and Leah. Analysis of the plans reveals a small weakness, and the rebel fleet (which now includes Luke) sends fighter jets to attack the massive spacestation. Most of the rebel pilots are killed as they attempt to fire missiles into the tiny hole which leads to the Death Star's only weakness, and at last it all comes down to Luke. Just as he is about to take his shot, he again hears Obi-Wan's echoing voice: "Use the Force, Luke." He makes the shot without the help of his targeting computer, the Death Star is destroyed, and hope is restored to the galaxy.

Episodes V and VI chronicle Luke's journey to become a Jedi Knight. At the beginning of episode V, he finds himself stranded on a frozen wasteland. Before Luke passes out, Obi-Wan appears to him as a ghost and tells him to seek the tutelage of Master Yoda, now the only surviving Jedi. Luke does, and his knowledge of the Force grows by leaps and bounds. But his faith is shaken during his first encounter with Darth Vader, who delivers the famous line, "Luke, I am your father." On his deathbed, Master Yoda reveals to Luke that this is true. Soon afterwards, Obi-Wan's ghost appears again. Obi-Wan explains that his earlier story about Darth Vader's betraying and murdering Luke's father was true, from a certain perspective, since Luke's father is now so twisted that he no longer resembles his former self. Obi-Wan confirms Luke's fear that he must face his father, and also reveals that Leah is his twin sister. Finally determined, Luke tracks down his father and in front of Emperor Palpatine (still Vader's master), they duel.

In the end, Luke bests Darth Vader, but finds himself no match for the Emperor's dark power. In a final redeeming act of love, the dying Vader summons his remaining strength to surprise Palpatine and throw him over a ledge. With Palpatine gone, the Empire is toppled, and the heroes rejoice. During the festivities, Luke sees the smiling ghosts of the three Jedi Knights whom it is his destiny to succeed: Obi-Wan Kenobi, Yoda, and his father, Anakin.

Obi-Wan Kenobi: The Wizard of Science Fiction

Of all the wizards to be examined, Obi-Wan Kenobi is the one for whom there is the most background. In the original Star Wars trilogy (episodes IV – VI), Sir Alec Guinness does a superb job of portraying Obi-Wan as a mysterious but friendly old hermit who, despite his grandfather-like gentleness, still manages to thrust Luke rather violently into a whole new world. After his death, he plays a very small part in the trilogy when measured by screen time, yet he is nevertheless considered one of the most central and intriguing characters. The prequel trilogy (episode I – III) was primarily conceived to tell Anakin's story, but many fans were equally eager to know about Obi-Wan's past and the strange Jedi Knights that he embodied. They were not disappointed.

The prequel trilogy does more than just provide background to Obi-Wan's character; it gives a very rare depiction of a wizard before he was a wizard. Usually when a wizard enters a story, he is already old and wise enough to fill the role he needs to fill. We might pick up pieces of his background as the story unfolds, but these are usually just simple facts, anecdotes, or flashbacks. Only in Obi-Wan's case do we have a significant chunk of the story in which we see the young wizard as a pivotal, non-wizard character.

The young Obi-Wan adheres strictly to the Jedi code, though both his master and his apprentice are notable for not doing so. In the former case, the consequences are minimal, but

Anakin's unconventional Jedi career is largely responsible for his fall into darkness. The master/apprentice relationship that Obi-Wan and Anakin share is frustrating for both parties. Anakin is impatient and reckless; he feels that his enormous talent goes unrecognized, and that he should not have to endure the long, slow process of becoming a Jedi Knight. Obi-Wan is not a very gifted teacher. He is portrayed as overly harsh, especially in episode II, and this no doubt helps to send Anakin down the dark path. For the rest of his life, Obi-Wan is haunted by the fact that he contributed to the making of the Darth Vader, who brought about the fall of the Jedi Order. But if he had not learned from his mistakes, he might not have been ready to teach Luke. As an old man, Obi-Wan is finally able to train the hero who will restore balance to the Force, and he passes peacefully into the afterlife.

Dumbledore

With the last book released just earlier this year, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series is the most recent popular work to feature a true wizard. Professor Dumbledore is introduced at the beginning of the first chapter of the first book, and he continues to exert his magical sway on the events of Harry's life until the end of the last book when he and Harry have a final conversation via Dumbledore's talking portrait. The wizard's life story was revealed in reverse order as the series was released.⁴ We get the details of his recent accomplishments in the first book and slowly track back to his early childhood by the last book, but his story is presented here in roughly chronological order for the sake of painting a more coherent picture. Sadly, space will not allow for a summary of the entire *Harry Potter* series, so the bits and pieces of the story that affect Dumbledore and his influence on Harry will have to suffice.

A Brief Biography of Albus Dumbledore

Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore was born a wizard to wizarding parents. The magician community of the *Harry Potter* world is quite large compared to most fantasy settings—at least several hundred families and perhaps several thousand. It is spread all over the globe and carefully hidden from muggles (non-magical people). Most of *Harry Potter* takes place in modern day England.

When Dumbledore was still a child, his younger sister Ariana was spotted using magic and attacked by muggle children, which left her mentally scarred and bedridden for the rest of her life. Albus' father took revenge on the muggle children and was consequently sent off to a wizard prison, where he remained for the rest of his life. To protect her daughter, Dumbledore's mother moved the family to a new town where uninformed neighbors generated the rumor that

⁴ Perhaps he is living backwards like T. H. White's Merlin?

Ariana was being kept indoors on account of being a non-wizard (something that would reflect poorly on the Dumbledore family).

When he came of age, Albus attended Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, the preeminent wizarding school in all of Rowling's world. He made friends, excelled at his studies, won a myriad of awards, and was considered by some to be the most brilliant student the school has ever seen. After graduation, he had intended to travel Europe with a friend, but was instead forced to return home by the death of his mother, who had died at the hands of his sister during a psychotic episode.

Albus was now left to care for his younger siblings: an ill sister and a less talented brother, also at Hogwarts. Dumbledore could not help but feel held back by them, though he did not abandon them. He did, however, begin a dangerous friendship with Gellert Grindelwald, a similarly talented young wizard with big plans. Old letters written between them revealed that they wanted to bring the wizarding world out of hiding so that wizards could take their rightful places as the rulers of humanity. Dumbledore seemed to espouse a less extreme plan than Grindelwald, repeating the mantra "For the greater good," but his ideas seemed dangerously militant nonetheless, and he would later come to regret them.

Albus and Gellert made plans to travel Europe and gain followers, but Albus' brother would not allow him to take the bedridden Ariana traveling. A fight broke out between Grindelwald, Dumbledore, and his brother, which resulted in the tragic and accidental death of his sister. Dumbledore's relationship with his brother was never the same. After the funeral, Albus parted ways with Gellert and took up a teaching position at Hogwarts.

At some point during the next several years, Dumbledore became headmaster of Hogwarts and received an award called The Order of Merlin, First Class. He also dueled and

defeated his childhood friend Grindelwald, who had since become one of the world's most feared dark wizards. After winning the battle, Dumbledore became the master of Grindelwald's magic wand, a power artifact known as the Elder Wand which supposedly rendered the bearer unbeatable. Dumbledore's academic career was illustrious, and he eventually came to be regarded as the world's greatest living wizard. He was offered the position of Minister of Magic (equivalent to Prime Minister in the wizarding world) several times, but always turned it down.

While still only a teacher at Hogwarts, Dumbledore recruited and helped teach the young Tom Riddle. From the start, Dumbledore noticed several disturbing things about Tom, and always remained suspicious of him. His suspicions were well grounded. Riddle showed remarkable prowess as a wizard, but he soon turned his talents to evil and became Lord Voldemort, the antagonist of the *Harry Potter* series and the most fearsome dark wizard in the history of magic. It was common knowledge that the only wizard Voldemort ever feared after his rise to power was Dumbledore himself.

To combat Lord Voldemort and his followers, Albus secretly formed the Order of the Phoenix, which included his most trusted friends, colleagues, and former students. The Order suffered several devastating losses during the war with Voldemort, the most significant of which were Lilly and James Potter, the parents of an infant boy named Harry Potter. Voldemort killed them himself and had intended to kill their son as well, but the Killing Curse backfired on him, and he was instantly reduced to some kind of retched, half-living monster. The overnight downfall of Lord Voldemort reinvigorated the wizarding world, which had been living in fear, and Harry Potter's name was permanently etched into history as "the boy who lived." Unfortunately, Harry was now an orphan. The first chapter of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's*

Stone opens the famous book series with Dumbledore leaving the baby Harry on the doorstep of the only living relatives of the Potters, Harry's aunt and uncle Dursley.

Harry grows up unaware that he is in any way remarkable. The Dursleys treat him like a slave and he has no knowledge of his family's history until his eleventh birthday (his coming of age in the wizarding world). Needless to say, Harry is ecstatic to discover that he is a wizard and that he will be allowed to attend the mysterious boarding school called Hogwarts. He is also quite amazed and a little embarrassed to discover that he is extraordinarily famous for bringing down Lord Voldemort. On the way to Hogwarts, he meets two fellow students, Roy Weasley and Hermione Granger, who soon become his best and most trusted friends. He also learns about Headmaster Dumbledore, the greatest wizard of the age and the person responsible for his invitation to Hogwarts.

While at Hogwarts, Harry continues to draw unwanted attention for all the strange things in which he gets mixed up. The other students don't seem to know what to make of him; one moment he is treated like a hero and the next like a villain. He finds solace in his two best friends and also in the very wise and approachable Dumbledore, with whom he has several conversations and adventures throughout the series.

In the first novel, Harry, Ron, and Hermione discover a plot to steal the Sorcerer's Stone (Philosopher's Stone in the British version). They try to take their findings to Dumbledore only to discover that he is away, leaving them no choice but to foil the plot themselves. They succeed but discover that the person trying to steal the stone is not harsh Potions teacher Severus Snape (whom they initially suspected), but the half-living spirit of Lord Voldemort himself. Voldemort tries to kill Harry only to discover that he cannot physically touch him. The dark lord is again narrowly defeated, and Harry regains consciousness in the infirmary to see Professor

Dumbledore standing over him. The two have their first end-of-novel talk—something that will become a tradition in later books—during which Dumbledore reveals that Harry’s mother’s love is what protected him from the dark lord.

As the series develops, Harry becomes increasingly close to Dumbledore. He admires him for his wisdom and also because he represents a connection to his dead parents, whom Harry misses terribly (Lilly and James were students and later friends of Dumbledore before their deaths). Because Harry is constantly getting himself mixed up in dangerous affairs, he gets quite a lot of chances to meet with the Headmaster, someone with whom the average student probably would not have had much contact. With the exception of book three, each *Harry Potter* story sees Harry and his friends foiling a plot by Voldemort or his henchmen. As Harry comes into adulthood, his skills and courage are tested more and more.

Book four, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, ends with Voldemort finally returning to a real body. Harry escapes death, but Voldemort returns to power and begins to regather his scattered followers. The Ministry of Magic, fearing mass panic, refuses to acknowledge Voldemort’s return until he is already so powerful that it is hardly able to resist him. Dumbledore is one of the only people who initially believes Harry about the dark lord’s return, and he tries, unsuccessfully, to convince the wizarding world of this, earning a lot of enemies at the Ministry in the process. He takes matters into his own hands and re-forms the Order of the Phoenix, into which Harry is speedily inducted (book five, fittingly named *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*).

Hogwarts is taken over by the Ministry and Dumbledore is removed as headmaster. The new curriculum, designed to stifle rumors of Voldemort’s return, forces the students to teach themselves defensive fighting magic in secret. Dumbledore’s Army, as the student group comes

to call itself (though Albus is not involved), in conjunction with The Order of the Phoenix, foils yet another sinister plot and succeeds in proving to the rest of the wizarding world that the dark lord is back. During the action, Voldemort and Dumbledore come face to face and have a momentous duel which Voldemort only narrowly escapes by forcing Dumbledore to protect Harry. Albus regains the respect of the community and is reinstated as headmaster.

By book six, *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*, Harry and Dumbledore have become even closer. Their meetings become more frequent and the headmaster keeps a close eye on Harry, who is being targeted by virtually every dark wizard in the world. He also reveals to Harry the results of his extensive research into the life of Tom Riddle (now Voldemort). The chilling conclusion is that the dark lord has created seven Horcruxes, or soul pieces, that render him immortal until they are all destroyed. Dumbledore explains that one was inadvertently destroyed in book two, and that he has destroyed one himself over the course of the last year, leaving five, about which he makes educated guesses concerning their whereabouts and appearances. He and Harry set off on a quest to retrieve and destroy a third one, only to discover that it has already been found by some other of Voldemort's enemies. In the process, Dumbledore has to drink a poisonous potion that creates terrible illusions (imagined, or perhaps historical). He cries, "Don't hurt them, don't hurt them, please, please, it's my fault, hurt me instead," perhaps reliving one of the painful experiences from his earlier life with his sister.

The two return to Hogwarts only to discover that it is under attack by Voldemort's henchmen. The badly weakened Dumbledore is unable to defend himself against Draco Malfoy, a Hogwarts student who is working for Voldemort. He has time to cast only one spell, a spell that keeps Harry invisible and immobilized, before he is disarmed by Draco and later killed by Potions teacher Severus Snape. Harry watches in horror as his mentor dies, and by the last book

he has replaced his childhood innocence with a darker, more brooding personality, and a desire for revenge.

In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Voldemort is finally vanquished once and for all. Despite being dead, like Obi-Wan Kenobi, Dumbledore plays a very large role in the story. Harry, Ron, and Hermione drop out of school to continue Dumbledore's search for the Horcruxes. In the wizarding community, a controversial and unflattering biography of Dumbledore is published which leads Harry to investigate and discover a lot of his mentor's past. Meanwhile, Voldemort is on a search of his own. Having learned that Dumbledore was the possessor of the undefeatable Elder Wand, Voldemort desecrates the headmaster's grave to steal it. Just before the climax of the story, Voldemort successfully casts the killing curse at Harry, but rather than die, Harry finds himself in a strange sort of limbo where Dumbledore is waiting for him. The two have a long conversation that finally clears up a lot of the questions concerning Dumbledore's past. At last, Harry's former mentor informs him that—for reasons I will not reveal in the interest of not spoiling a great plot twist—Harry has the choice to return to the world of the living. He does, and finally defeats Voldemort. The Elder Wand passes to Harry.

Harry and Dumbledore are allowed one final encounter. In the wizarding world, portraits are not static, but contain moving, talking images of their subjects. After his death, a portrait of Dumbledore is placed in the headmaster's office at Hogwarts, and at the end of the seventh book, Harry has a final conversation with him. He tells Dumbledore of his plan to return the undefeatable wand to Dumbledore's tomb where it will hopefully be forgotten. Dumbledore agrees, acknowledging the wisdom Harry has developed.

Dumbledore: Order of Merlin, First Class

Dumbledore has quite a strange and lengthy name. “Albus,” obviously derived from the Latin word for white, marks him as the ultimate good guy. At the start of the series, Harry Potter is far too young to oppose the dark lord, so Dumbledore serves as a foil to Voldemort until Harry comes into his own. Harry slowly transitions into Dumbledore’s role as head good guy, and the aged professor gracefully bows out. His role in the series is a very serious and important one, but his character is often quite whimsical. “Dumbledore” means Bumblebee. Rowling claims to have picked this name because she imagined him wandering the halls of Hogwarts humming to himself. His three middle names, Percival, Wulfric, and Brian, are probably more for comic effect than anything else.⁵ We first hear them in book five, when Dumbledore makes an unwanted appearance at Harry’s trial to defend the boy against unfair Ministry accusations. The trial is a sham, and the way in which Dumbledore announces his lengthy full name seems to say “I can be just as pretentious as you can, and I will beat you at your own game,” which indeed he does. Dumbledore is not arrogant, but he is fully aware of his considerable power and intelligence, and is not afraid to use them when the situation calls for it.

Dumbledore is the most lovable of the wizards. He is a grandfatherly figure of immense wisdom with many charming eccentricities. He plays a lot of different roles in the *Harry Potter* series: one part mentor, one part warrior, one part friend, and one part comic relief. His keen powers of discernment are perhaps his single greatest feature. Dumbledore believes Harry when no one else will. He trusts Severus Snape (who turns out to be a talented spy rather than one of Voldemort’s henchmen) when no one else does. He has great confidence in Hagrid, whom everyone else regards as a blundering oaf. He is also the only character able to see through

⁵ They may have literary significance. Percival, for example, was a prominent knight of the Round Table who was instrumental in the quest for the Holy Grail.

Harry's invisibility cloak. In short, you have to get up pretty early in the morning to deceive Albus Dumbledore. What's more, he usually believes what he does based on intuition. Countless times in the series, he admits that he followed some course of action because of an educated guess, but he is right almost all of the time—certainly much more often than any other character. On top of wisdom, he has insight, and this makes him the greatest wizard of the age. His spell-casting abilities are truly formidable, but his guidance proves more useful in defeating Voldemort.

He is, however, not without faults, which is all that prevents him from assuming the position of demigod. His primary weakness is, ironically, ambition. His quest to unite the Deathly Hallows and become immortal leads him astray time and time again. In his young life, he nearly becomes a dark wizard himself in the process of searching out the Hallows. This preoccupation is partially the cause of his sister's death. The quest still consumes him, even as an old man. Had he not been so keen to keep and study James Potter's invisibility cloak (one of the Hallows), Harry's parents might have stood more of a chance against Voldemort's attack. Even as late as book six, he is so tempted by the Resurrection Stone that he tries to use it and activates a powerful curse. The curse is terminal, and this knowledge of his impending death prompts him to engineer his premature demise at the hands of Snape.

His tragic flaw is hubris, but in some sense, this accentuates his greatness: if he cannot be perfect, at least his imperfection is that of trying to be too great. Hubris is a hero's flaw. It does not go unpunished—he suffers and ultimately dies for his mistakes—but he does manage to redeem himself before it is all over. He learns from his mistakes and has enough self-knowledge to avoid disaster. He uses his wisdom to help Harry attain the power he cannot trust himself with—the power which ultimately leads to Voldemort's destruction. Once this is accomplished, he

confesses his mistakes to Harry (post mortem) and is finally allowed to pass blissfully into the afterlife. Indeed, his meeting with Harry in the strange limbo that appears to be King's Cross train station might have been just as much for Dumbledore's sake as it was for Harry's. Also, it is evident that he carries the remorse for his sister's death with him for his entire adult life. Dumbledore knows himself, and perhaps this is the greatest of all wisdom.

Part II

Magic in the Making

The similarities between the wizards just described are striking. These five are highlighted because they fully represent the archetypal wizard, but one would be remiss to ignore the host of other enchanters from story telling history. From Homer's Circe to Shakespeare's Prospero, most characters who wield magic share some common attributes.

Appearance

The most obvious similarities are physical. The five wizards are old, usually bearded men. Many magicians are described this way too, and witches tend to be portrayed as old women. There is an obvious connection between age and sorcery. Magical powers are usually linked to great wisdom, or at least extensive worldly experience. This comes only with age.

The aged grandfather image evoked by the wizard is a more fitting model than the father image. In Freudian terms, the father is an antagonist, but if our parents handle the task of discipline, our grandparents are free to interact with us more amicably. Thus, helpful magicians fit nicely into the grandparent mold. This might explain why the quest for eternal youth is more often sought by evil mages: they fit better into a younger, parental mold.

It seems there is also a dress code for wizards. Even in the *Star Wars* universe, where clothing is more modern, the wizard still wears a long, flowing cloak. This is linked to the common magical power of shape-shifting. Cloaks can help you mask your identity, and can also be used in a blowfish-like way to exaggerate your size. Likewise, they can conceal weapons and spell components. When you see a cloaked figure approaching, you never know what he might be hiding.

Another common ingredient in the mage's appearance is a staff or wand. This object usually serves as a conduit for magical power, and like the hero's sword, it is the wizard's phallic

symbol. Sometimes the object is the same thing that the hero carries: wands are standard fare for all magicians in the *Harry Potter* series, and all Jedi use lightsabers. For Tolkien, the wizard's staff is a unique artifact. Gandalf's staff, an aged and twisted wooden walking stick, may represent a withered hero sword.

Source of Power

Magic comes in many shapes and sizes, and it is usually defined by its source. Some magicians derive their power from a collection of magical items and potions. Trophies like these are common in *The Lord of the Rings*. Gandalf possesses a staff, a sword, and a ring that all have magical qualities, and these seem to be responsible for a great deal of his power. Another example would be the classical alchemist, such as Doctor Faust, who derives his power from pseudo-scientific experimentation. In section four of this paper, I will argue that wisdom rather than magical power is the defining characteristic of the wizard. Therefore, the knowledge and use of magical artifacts (which would require wisdom) is a valid form of magic.

Other magicians wield occult powers. Merlin's abilities come from his demon father and from the grace of God received at baptism. In some cases, magicians may actually be angels or other fey creatures who are masquerading as humans. They might even be gods themselves, like Wotan. The divine power held by shamans was regarded as magical and mysterious by the people of their cultures. Priests and monks in the Middle Ages wore robes, owned books (which were rare), and held special authority from God to administer the sacraments, so it is easy to imagine that their image contributed to our image of magician. In fact, the wielders of divine power are the most likely candidates for historical wizards.

I should note that the notion of inheriting magical power from some third party (in this case, the gods) is an obstacle to my assertion that magic is a result of one's own wisdom.

Wisdom comes from within, so when magical powers come from without, the symbolism is harder to justify. Sometimes this discrepancy is accounted for by a magician's merit. Greek heroes often gain magical power from the gods, but only after earning it. Priests who are not wise will presumably lose the favor of God. Even when magic comes from above, the earthly user still needs some degree of wisdom.

Other enchanters, like Shakespeare's Prospero, learned their magical powers. Most magicians appear in medieval-style settings where books are rare and valuable. Thus, spell books make a fitting symbol for the gnostic knowledge that a mage possesses. Even sorcerers with natural magical talents often need to hone their skills through learning. In the *Harry Potter* world, those capable of using magic are sent to special schools like Hogwarts. This connection between magic and learning is a natural extension of the association between magic and wisdom. Merlin presents something of a problem, since his magical power is divine *and* inherited though no merit of his own. Where is his wisdom? Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* addresses this problem by stating that Merlin was tutored by Blaise.

Magic may come from other sources as well. Prometheus, for example, steals the secret of fire from the gods rather than learning it. In some cases, magic power is inborn and only available to those lucky enough to have it within themselves. Several cultures attribute special powers to the seventh son of a seventh son. In *Star Wars*, a fittingly scientific phenomenon explains one's ability to manipulate the Force: midi-chlorians, microorganisms residing in living tissue that can presumably be passed on genetically. The concept of inborn magical power also runs counter to the association of magic with wisdom. In most cases, this is also remedied by the need for training to refine one's power (at, for example, the Jedi Academy). A mage born with

magical power and an inherent knowledge of how to use it cannot be a true wizard, because he has no need of any wisdom.

Types of Power

Magic and wisdom are not simply associated; they are actually one and the same thing. Magic, at least white magic, can be seen as *wisdom in action*. Without action, the wizard is just a mountain hermit whom the hero might occasionally seek out for bits of advice. When the magician casts a spell or mixes a potion, he is drawing upon his knowledge and experience to influence events in the world. The power that springs from the hand of the mage is his insight incarnate.

Not all magicians are good. In fact, evil sorcerers might outnumber their benevolent counterparts. This type of magic is wholly different, because it is power without wisdom. Evil sorcerers have a tendency to be outsmarted. They always make one crucial miscalculation when plotting their evil schemes. In the *Star Wars* series, evil Emperor Palpatine orchestrates almost every important event from episode I all the way to his death in episode VI. His master plan is virtually flawless, but when the pivotal moment arrives, he underestimates how much humanity Darth Vader still possesses. For the first time in the entire series, the Emperor gets taken by surprise as his own apprentice picks him up and hurls him over the railing into the Death Star's core. It is only a tiny glitch in his plan—one very brief loss of control—but it proves fatal. He was a powerful Sith Lord and a master politician who could manipulate people with the utmost ease, but was he wise? I would argue not. For the white mage, magical power comes as a *result* of wisdom. Dark mages, on the other hand, always have some ulterior motive. For them, magic is a means to an end. They do not obtain their powers as a result of enlightenment; they greedily accumulate bits of knowledge in an effort to gain power. Just as Faust sold his soul to the Devil

to gain immortality, the evil magician inherits his abilities illegitimately and unnaturally. Emperor Palpatine was a champion of the Dark Side of the Force, the easy path to power that does not require the years of disciplined training that Jedi Knights must endure. Such a debasement of the forces of nature cannot go unpunished. Eventually, it will come back to haunt anyone who tries to exploit it. Thus, the evil magician lacks wisdom and is doomed to failure.

Aside from the broad categories of black and white, magic has a tendency to manifest itself as certain distinct powers. Gandalf, master of a magical fire-controlling ring, is very partial to spells that use flames and is known far and wide for his magnificent fireworks. Dumbledore seems partial to fire as well, as evidenced by his pet phoenix and his choice of spells during his duel with Voldemort. Wotan is always in close partnership with Loge, god of fire, and invokes him both to protect Brünnhilde and to consume Valhalla. This is not surprising. Fire has always occupied a very important place in the human psyche as the tool that helped us to master our own destinies. The people in ancient hunter-gatherer societies who tended the fire or who kept the secret of making it were probably regarded very highly by their peers. Perhaps these fire keepers were the very first wizards.

The other common power is shape shifting. Merlin had this power, and it comes through subtly in other wizards as well. When Obi-Wan Kenobi is frightening off the Sand People to save Luke's life, he imitates the cries of a dangerous desert creature and waves his arms menacingly in the air. His long, baggy cloak makes him swell somewhat in size, and the trick frightens the marauders off. This power can be used for good, as when Merlin transforms Arthur into various different animals to teach him lessons in T. H. White's *The Sword in the Stone*, but it is not just the white mages who have this power. Archimago, the antagonist of the first part of *The Faerie Queene*, is primarily a shapeshifter, and the evil witch from Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*

transforms into a dragon when threatened by Prince Charming. Shapeshifting is, like the other attributes of magic, associated with wisdom. After a lifetime of experience, the sorcerer has acquired extensive knowledge of how different people and animals act. The ability to shapeshift represents one person's internalization of many different cultures and creatures, or perhaps the various roles that an elder has played out during the span of his life.

Birds seem to be the favored pets of wizards.⁶ T. H. White's Merlin owns a talking owl named Archimedes who teaches Arthur a few lessons on his own. Wotan's magical ravens appear in *Götterdämmerung*, and elsewhere in Scandinavian legends as the creatures that bring him news from other parts of the world. Gandalf is closely allied with the Great Eagles in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and seems to be one of the only characters who can speak to them. They save his life and the lives of his companions more than once. Dumbledore is quite fond of Fawcett, his pet phoenix, and uses this magical bird to save Harry's life in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. These avian consorts are a means of omniscience. They give the wizard an extra, highly mobile set of eyes. They represent the soaring freedom associated with wisdom and power. They are also a symbol of knowledge. If a wizard can decipher the secret language of birds, then he must be very closely in tune with the natural world.

Range of Emotion

Wizards are dynamic characters. As their respective stories unfold, they run the gamut of emotion, usually more so than the other characters. One moment the wizard is frighteningly stern, and then the next he is kindly and nostalgic:

“Now, now, my dear hobbit!” said Gandalf. “All your long life we have been friends, and you owe me something. Come! Do as you promised: give it up!”

⁶ *The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairytales*, 221

“Well, if you want my ring for yourself, say so!” cried Bilbo. “But you won’t get it. I won’t give my precious away, I tell you.” His hand strayed to the hilt of his small sword.

Gandalf’s eyes flashed. “It will be my turn to get angry soon,” he said. “If you say that again, I shall. Then you will see Gandalf the Grey uncloaked.” He took a step towards the hobbit, and he seemed to grow tall and menacing; his shadow filled the little room.

[...] “I am not trying to rob you, but to help you. I wish you would trust me as you used.” He turned away, and the shadow passed. He seemed to dwindle again to an old grey man, bent and troubled.

[Bilbo agrees to give up the ring and sets off on his journey.]

Gandalf remained for a while staring after him into the darkness. “Good-bye, my dear Bilbo—until our next meeting!” he said softly and went back indoors.

(The Fellowship of the Ring, 42-43)

This may come as a bit of a surprise. One might expect the wielders of such awesome occult power to be stoic and aloof, but instead they exhibit a very wide range of feelings and moods. Again, the wizard is not a mountain hermit. He is not an unmoving sage who looks down on the world from above. He is a part of the world, and he experiences the same things that his non-magical colleagues experience. He even makes mistakes! Yes, even the great and powerful magician, the symbol of wisdom, makes mistakes, and they are usually very dire. Sometimes they are personal, as when Merlin allows himself to be seduced and imprisoned by Nimue despite knowing what she will do to him. More often, though, they have a direct influence on the lives of others. Dumbledore, despite his amazing knack for foresight, does not see Voldemort’s attack on Hogwarts coming in *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*. He and Harry leave the school to retrieve a Horcrux and return to find the students of the school in mortal danger, victims of a surprise attack.

A lot of this dynamism comes from age. A sorcerer will still get angry when something goes wrong, but he has lived long enough to know that holding a grudge is futile. He has the insight of a long life to tell him that prolonged rage solves nothing, and so he moves quickly to a

more productive mindset. Age also provides perspective. Freedom from the ambitions and naivety of youth allows him to appreciate a warm summer night and a pipe with an old friend, as Gandalf does in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. A long life also means experiencing the death of loved ones. Happiness is not beyond the reach of the wizard, but the carefree days of boyhood are no more. A wizard lives with death, just as Wotan sat gloomily on his throne awaiting the end of the world in *Götterdämmerung*. So while mages are known for their superhuman abilities, they nevertheless display deeply human sentiments.

Wizards as Protagonists and Antagonists

In 1998, Steve Barron directed and released a television miniseries called *Merlin*, which retold the story of Arthur from the perspective of the famous court wizard. The entertaining film provides an interesting new take on an old story, but watchers might have been surprised to learn that as early as the twelfth century Geoffrey of Monmouth had published the *Vita Merlini*, which recounted the life of the wizard who had made his previous works so successful. The *Vita* is not a retelling of Arthur's story—which is not surprising considering that the legend was still in its infancy—but it is notable for featuring a wizard as its protagonist. Even before this, the Finnish people may have been developing the mythic oral tradition that would later be compiled into the *Kalevala*, a epic that recounts the exploits of several sorcerers, most notably Väinämöinen.

Magicians are intriguing characters. They fascinate us to the point that we tend to recast their legends with them at the forefront, and while these stories may be entertaining in their own right, they require us to remove the wizard from his traditional role. It is no mistake that magicians often play the part of the tutor or the advisor. They accompany heroes on quests and teach in magical schools. They exert considerable influence over the fates of others, but

traditionally, they are not heroes. Wizards do not slay dragons. They tell brave knights where to find dragons and how to fight them, but they leave the sword swinging to someone else.

In many cases, this is because the hero has some quality that even a powerful sorcerer cannot duplicate. Wotan cannot break his own contract with the giant Fafner and retake the ring. He needs a free hero who can do this in his place, so despite having the combat prowess to do a hero's work, he must stand aside and let Siegfried do the job. Merlin was wise enough to rule Britain, but he was not in line to be the rightful king. There is, however, a deeper reason why wizards are not initially the heroes of their stories: they are not meant to be. A wizard is not here to solve the world's problems; he is here to assist others. The Wizard Cycle laid out in the next chapter is hero-centric. Everything the wizard does he does for the hero. Perhaps this is why stories with magic-users at the forefront always depict them as young (take, for example, the young Obi-Wan Kenobi in the prequel *Star Wars* trilogy). The white-haired old man has had his adventures; it is time for him to pass on his wisdom to the next generation lest it be lost with him. I do not mean to criticize stories with mage protagonists, since they can be very entertaining in their own right by making the magician into a hero, but I do want to emphasize that the role of a true wizard *as such* is not played out in the spotlight.

Then what about the token evil sorcerer? While magicians sometimes make awkward heroes, they seem to make excellent archvillains. Obviously magical talents make carrying out an evil plot easier, so perhaps evil sorcerers (or witches) assume their antagonistic positions simply because they have the means. But are they simply one of a host of evil characters who were lucky enough to have magic powers? In many cases, the temptations of power lead enchanters astray. This can be as simple as Faust's debt to the Devil, or as twisted as Anakin Skywalker's slow descent into darkness. At the turning point of that descent, Emperor Palpatine

kills a Jedi Knight in front of Anakin and exclaims “Unlimited power!”—something known to corrupt absolutely. The evil sorcerer, who lacks true wisdom, represents someone who will stop at nothing to obtain his goals. Single-minded, ambitious, cut-throat people always seem able to accomplish more than the average person, and this ability has a sort of magical feeling to it. But this overachievement requires them to ignore the rules of fair play and morality, so it feels like dark magic, and like dark magic, it will eventually culminate in disaster.

In some ways, the temptation of power adds a frightening facet to even the kindest of wizards. There is always that slight fear that your friendly neighborhood wizard might turn. Just as the Ministry of Magic feared Dumbledore for no other reason than his exceptional magical ability, other characters in the story (and perhaps the readers) are always a little on edge around magicians.

Romance, Sexuality, and Gender

On a recent book tour through the United States, J. K. Rowling, author of the *Harry Potter* series, revealed that Professor Dumbledore is gay. This met with some approval, some disapproval, and quite a bit of surprise. It is never made clear in the books because, like most wizards, Dumbledore’s romantic life and sexuality are simply never discussed. What, then, is the role of love in a wizard’s life? Rowling was right to leave it out. The trappings of romance, with its fleeting feelings and foolish behavior, are associated with youth. In some sense, finding a mate is part of finding one’s self. A wizard is old and wise: he has already found himself and has left the frivolities of youth behind. Thus the sexual orientation of a wizard has little effect on his character, since it is something of a moot point. It should not hold much sway on how he fulfills his role as the wise man. This theory is supported by the fact that Merlin meets his downfall

shortly after falling in love and foolishly teaching his magic to Nimue. He has regressed back to his youth and can no longer serve his role as the wise man.

Related to the question of sexuality is that of gender: why is it that all five of the archetypal wizards are men? One explanation for this may lie in the fact that all five of their heroes are boys. The wizard represents what the hero will become, so for a boy, the character playing the wizard role must be a man. Also, in times past, men were much more likely to be warriors or politicians than women. Perhaps wizards were portrayed as men since they often found themselves on dangerous adventures or offering strategic advice to heroes and kings. On a psychological level, perhaps these mages are men because they are associated with teaching the hard lessons of life, often a harsh and antagonistic process associated with fatherhood, rather than nurturing, which is more often associated with motherhood. It is true that most of these stories were written by men, and this might help to explain the absence of female wizards, but J. K. Rowling has demonstrated that women authors are both willing and able to create male wizard figures.

Despite the tradition, at least one female wizard has been dreamt up. She comes from a fairly obscure computer adventure game called *Loom*, which was developed by Brian Moriarty and published by Lucasfilm in 1990. Unfortunately, this work has not made enough impact on the world to be counted amongst the other stories chosen for discussion, and hence its wizard is not included on the list. Nevertheless, Mother Hetchel fits the role just as well as her male counterparts. *Loom* offers an extremely creative story set in a rich pseudo-medieval landscape and set to the music of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. Bobbin Threadbare, an outcast adolescent member of the mysterious Guild of Weavers, wanders the land in search of the other members of his guild, who have mysteriously turned to swans and flown away.⁷ His foster mother, a serving

⁷ Again, we see the association with birds.

woman named Hetchel, teaches him the basics of magic, sends him on his quest, and assists him several times during the adventure. The game is a true masterpiece, an amalgamation of music, graphic art, and drama on par with an excellent opera. Perhaps when video games are more readily accepted as works of cultural expression, Hetchel will find her way into the history of the wizards as a pioneer for women in that role.

The Wizard with a Thousand Faces

Readers interested in the theory of archetypes should be familiar with the work of Joseph Campbell, an important professor and writer in the field of comparative mythology (among others). One of his more famous works, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, lays out a series of events that most famous mythical heroes tend to follow. It starts in the real world when the hero receives a call to adventure and then follows the protagonist into the underworld where he or she must endure a series of trials (often with help—perhaps from a wizard) before returning with the magical boon to redeem the world. Not every hero's journey is the same, but since the traditional path involves both descent and ascent, it can be viewed as a cycle.

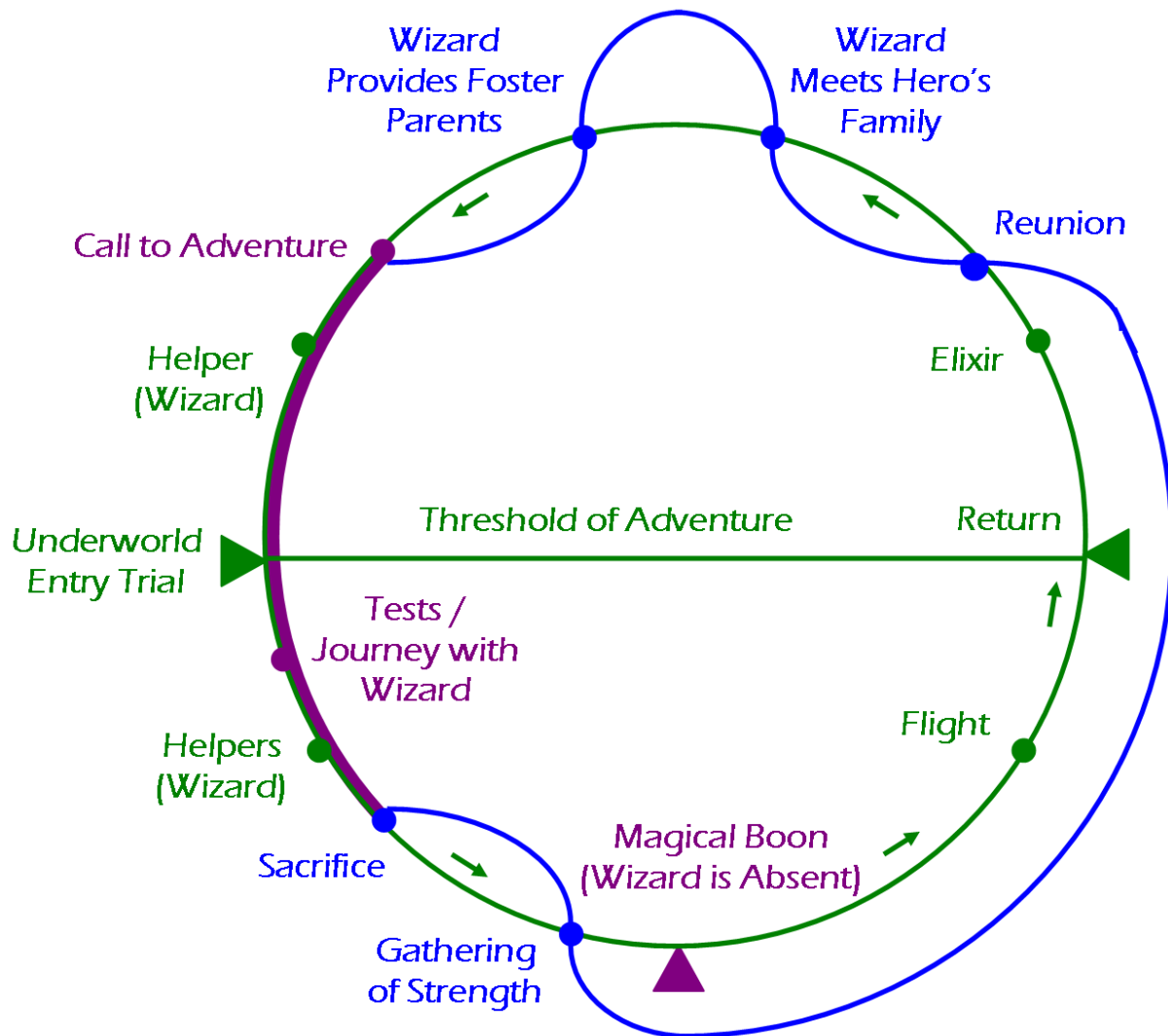
I have developed a cycle of my own, which, in this case, applies to wizards. Because the purpose of a wizard is to foster the hero, this cycle runs in parallel to Campbell's cycle, and at some points intersects with it. As with Campbell's monomythic hero, not every magic user ever dreamt up will fit my cycle. Still, the steps of my cycle occur frequently enough for enough important wizards that I feel justified in putting it forth as a noteworthy pattern. The five wizards for whom I provided biographies will serve to illustrate my cycle as I describe it, step by step.

Stories implementing this cycle tend to introduce their wizards very early on to establish a mythical setting. The wizard, who has some prior relationship to the hero's family, provides the orphan hero with foster parents, but otherwise does not interfere with the boy's growing up. Once the boy has reached maturity, the wizard returns to send him on his quest and then accompanies the budding young hero on that quest so as to teach and protect him. The wizard's sacrifice might be required to save the hero, but he will always return in one form or another to help the hero gather his strength for the final trial. However, when the story comes to a climax,

the wizard is nowhere to be found. The hero completes the quest on his own, with no help from the wizard, but before the story closes, the two are reunited.

The Wizard Cycle as it Relates to the Monomythic Hero Cycle

Key	
•	Hero Cycle
•	Wizard Cycle
•	Intersection of Both



1. **Wizard Introduced Early**
2. Wizard Meets Hero's Family
3. Wizard Provides Foster Parents
4. Wizard Returns
5. Journey with Wizard
- 5.5. Sacrifice of Wizard
6. Hero Gathers Strength
7. Hero Completes Quest Alone
8. Wizard and Hero Reunited

Step One: Fantastical Beginnings

Early in the first chapter of *The Hobbit*, Gandalf pays an unexpected visit to the little town of Hobbiton. Before depicting him physically, Tolkien gives him a grand introduction:

Gandalf! If you had heard only a quarter of what I have heard about him, and I have only heard very little of all there is to hear, you would be prepared for any sort of remarkable tale. Tales and adventures sprouted up all over the place wherever he went, in the most extraordinary fashion.

(*The Hobbit*, 11)

This is a blatant, but nonetheless effective, plot device. The story you are about to read is an adventure story, and the author tells you that plainly. There is no beating around the bush. The magic of the impending story is not subtle; it is not carefully hinted at. This story wears its magic on its sleeves, and it lets you know that by parading in a wizard before you've read even three pages. If, like poor Bilbo Baggins, you suddenly met on your doorstep a tall cloaked man with a long beard and pointed hat who invited you on an adventure, you would think to yourself, "So much for business as usual." That is what the first step of the cycle it all about: setting and atmosphere.

The other stories follow suit. Virtually every version of the King Arthur story opens with some account of Merlin, often even before introducing Arthur himself. Wotan makes his entrance in the second scene of *Das Rheingold*, the first opera in Wagner's *Ring*. The last line of Princess Leah's distress call, "Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi. You're my only hope!" is heard only

minutes into the first movie of the original *Star Wars* trilogy. Dumbledore, like Gandalf, is introduced early in the first chapter of the *Harry Potter* series.

The wizard sets the scene, both the literary scene and psychological scene. He anchors the story firmly in the realm of fantasy and lets the reader know what sort of things are in store. Even below the surface, he is a glimpse of what is to come. It bears repeating that the wizard represents wisdom. The hero is the character in the story with whom we can identify most, because his quest represents our perpetual search for meaning. The hero represents us, the audience, and his overarching goal, on the symbolic level, is to achieve wisdom for himself. Like Arthur seeking the training he needs to be a just king, we search for meaning and purpose in the world around us, the meaning and purpose that our older, wiser role models seem to have achieved already. So, at the opening of the story, the wizard gives us a taste of the mysterious arcane knowledge he possesses. He sets up that knowledge as a focal point toward which the hero will move. The boon of wisdom is now in place, and like a comet being attracted by a planet, the hero gravitates toward it as he follows the Campbellian cycle. Thus, even before the hero's entrance, the story is picking up momentum thanks to the wizard.

The early introduction of the wizard proves an effective plot device because of its double purpose. He may not be the first hint of fantastical goings on—hobbits are introduced first in *The Hobbit* and the Rheinmaidens open *Das Rheingold*—but only he can simultaneously give the story setting on the surface and direction below the surface. He points the imagination to the stars and the subconscious toward the achievement of wisdom.

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Step Two: Family Ties

Wizards do not simply stumble upon their heroes. In every case, the wizard of the story has some prior relationship with the hero's family, and this encounter makes up the second step in the cycle. The second step is something of an anachronism because in most cases it has already occurred before the start of the story, and so it can, in some sense, be thought of as occurring before the first step. Still, it is obviously not revealed until the wizard character has been introduced, so logistically speaking, it is the second part of the cycle that one encounters as the story unfolds; hence it is the second step.

When Obi-Wan Kenobi dies at the hands of Darth Vader, Luke Skywalker is mortified. Kenobi was his teacher and companion, but the two had spent no more than a few busy days together, so they could hardly have become fast friends. Obi-Wan was more than a teacher: he was Luke's only connection to Anakin Skywalker, his mysterious father. This becomes clear early in the movie when Luke first meets his future teacher:

LUKE: No, my father didn't fight in the wars. He was a navigator on a spice freighter.

OBI-WAN: That's what your uncle told you. He didn't hold with your father's ideals. Thought he should have stayed here and not gotten involved.

LUKE: You fought in the Clone Wars?

OBI-WAN: Yes. I was once a Jedi Knight the same as your father.

LUKE: I wish I'd known him.

OBI-WAN: He was the best starpilot in the galaxy... and a cunning warrior. I understand you've become quite a good pilot yourself. And he was a good friend. Which reminds me... I have something here for you. Your father wanted you to have this when you were old enough, but your uncle

wouldn't allow it. He feared you might follow old Obi-Wan on some damn-fool idealistic crusade like your father did.

(Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope)

So despite having never met before, Luke and Obi-Wan are not complete strangers. They already have a history, even before the story begins. The second step in the cycle is all about setting up a connection between hero and wizard so that, when the hero is ready, he can follow the wizard down the path of adventure.

Finding this step in the other four stories is easy work. Before Arthur's birth, Merlin helped Uther to seduce Igraine and requested the child as payment. Wotan fathered Siegmund and Sieglinde, the parents of Siegfried, and before he was thwarted by Fricka, he assisted them in the battle against Hunding.⁸ Before Frodo set off with the One Ring around his neck, Gandalf took his uncle Bilbo on an adventure to the Lonely Mountain. Even before Bilbo himself was swept off his feet, Gandalf's name was known in the Shire thanks to his prior dealings with the Tooks, Bilbo's maternal relatives. Before Dumbledore taught Harry Potter he taught Lilly and James Potter, Harry's parents, not to mention his godfather, Sirius, and several of the other adult friends Harry makes. So when each respective wizard shows up unannounced into the hero's life—which, coincidentally, is step four—he is not actually entirely unannounced at all. Even before the start of the tale, there exists a link between hero and sorcerer.

One of the obvious benefits of this step is that it allows the story to develop smoothly. If the two characters have some kind of history, it makes it easier for them to establish a rapport once they finally meet. Otherwise, the hero might just regard the wizard as a crazy old man and walk away from his adventure. Family history gives the protagonist cause to be drawn to the wizard, which in turn gives him cause to be drawn to adventure. Remember that wizards

⁸Here the second step actually occurs after the first step, because Wotan does not father Siegmund and Sieglinde until after *Das Rheingold*.

represent wisdom. In the first step, that knowledge is brought into view and set up as a boon to be sought. With this step, that wisdom acquires some gravitational pull that draws the hero toward it.

This step serves a second function as well. By associating himself with the hero's family, the wizard had marked the boy with a mark of destiny. When wizards are involved with one's parents, one does not grow up to be a normal kid. As the purveyor of wisdom for the story, the wizard sets the boy apart from his peers. In some sense, the magician has started the quest for him before he is even born. The hero's childhood is not the time before the quest starts: it is simply a lull in the action that allows him to come of age. When the boy starts out down the long path of adventure, he is not actually starting out at all, but picking up where the wizard left off. He is already on the road by the start of the story; he just needs to start walking.

1. Wizard Introduced Early
2. Wizard Meets Hero's Family
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Step Three: Fostering a Hero

“And I don’t suppose you’re going to tell me *why* you’re here, of all places?”

“I’ve come to bring Harry to his aunt and uncle. They’re the only family he has left now.”

“You don’t mean—you *can’t* mean the people who live *here*?” cried Professor McGonagall, jumping to her feet and pointing at number four. “Dumbledore—you can’t. I’ve been watching them all day. You couldn’t find two people who are less like us. And they’ve got this son—I saw him kicking his mother all the way up the street, screaming for sweets. Harry Potter come and live here!”

“It’s the best place for him,” said Dumbledore firmly. “His aunt and uncle will be able to explain everything to him when he’s older. I’ve written them a letter.”

“A letter?” repeated Professor McGonagall faintly, sitting back down on the wall. “Really, Dumbledore, you think you can explain all this in a letter?” These people will never understand him! He’ll be famous—a legend—I wouldn’t be surprised if today was known as Harry Potter day in the future—there will be books written about Harry—every child in our world will know his name!”

“Exactly,” said Dumbledore, looking very seriously over the top of his half-moon glasses. “It would be enough to turn any boy’s head. Famous before he can walk and talk! Famous for something he won’t even remember! Can’t you see how much better off he’ll be, growing up away from all that until he’s ready to take it?”

Professor McGonagall opened her mouth, changed her mind, swallowed, and then said, “Yes—yes, you’re right, of course.”

(Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone, 13)

An orphaned hero has to grow up somewhere, and wizards do not seem to be fond of adoption. The aged magicians are simply not cut out for parenthood, but they always make sure that the hero finds a good home before setting out on other errands. In all five stories, the hero is raised by foster parents, usually of the wizard’s choosing. Merlin gives the infant Arthur to Sir

Ector, who raises the boy as a squire. Siegfried is reared into a young man by Mime the dwarf. The latter three heroes are all raised by their aunts and uncles: Frodo by his uncle Bilbo, Luke by his Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru at the bequest of Obi-Wan Kenobi, and Harry by his aunt and uncle Dursley, who find the boy left on their doorstep by Dumbledore. This step in the cycle, while it may seem simple, accomplishes much more than simply putting a roof over the boy hero's head.

These are lowly beginnings for the heroes who are destined to change their worlds. Who would have thought that a squire, a blacksmith, an average hobbit, a farmer, and a scrawny young schoolboy could have such potential? Wizards would, of course. In the above excerpt, Dumbledore is wise to point out that a humble beginning is essential. Arthur would not have been the great king he was had he been raised in a castle by his father, Uther. Growing up in the spotlight is counter-productive for fostering the right sort of hero, and the wizard knows this.

Why, we might ask, does the wizard not simply take the hero under his wing from an early age? Isn't the wizard wise enough to raise a child well? Wouldn't the hero be better prepared if he had received the tutelage of a sorcerer from the first moments of his life? To put it simply: no. For one thing, the wizard is too old to raise a child. With the exception of Wotan, none of the five wizards is married or has any offspring, and even in Wotan's case, he is hardly a nurturing father. So wizards have no experience raising children. Secondly, they are too busy. If your father's job is to protect all of Middle Earth from the dark powers of Morgoth or rule the world as a god, you can expect to spend a lot of time in day care. Experience and wisdom aside, mages just do not have time to be parents.

But these excuses are not the crux of the matter. One vitally important thing that a true wizard knows is when not to interfere. Just as the hero has to complete the quest on his own in

step sever, he needs to grow up on his own in step three. A wizard's absence can be just as important as his presence, so the important function of this step is to establish the hero as a member of some non-wizarding community. This helps the reader identify with the hero, and it also gives the boy a home to save. Gandalf is a wanderer, Obi-Wan is a hermit, and Dumbledore is a school teacher who may not even own a home of his own. When Frodo's quest seems hopeless, he draws inspiration and strength by remembering his beloved home, the Shire; had he grown up wandering with Gandalf, he never would have had those invigorating memories of home to draw upon. Even those who did not enjoy their upbringing, as in Harry's case, still have some sort of vested interest in saving their world from the forces of evil—a world they could not have called their own had they not grown up in it. One of the most prominent steps in Campbell's hero cycle is the return of the hero to his world with the magical boon that can redeem it. If the hero is nothing more than a wizard's apprentice, to what home will he return, and, more to the point, why would a wizard need a magical balm in the first place?

It is important to note that, while the wizard does not adopt the hero, he does not totally disappear either. He becomes a guardian while the hero comes of age. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Harry discovers that his neighbor, Mrs. Figg, has been keeping an eye on him for Dumbledore, along with a few others. Obi-Wan comes quickly to Luke's rescue in the desert, and Gandalf has rangers watching the Shire while Frodo grows up. Wizards know they cannot be parents, but their presence can still be felt thanks to the protection that they provide.

On a psychological level, it is important that the wizard be a distant guardian rather than a father figure. According to Freud, the mother is nurturing, but the father takes the child away from the comfort of the mother's arms and is thus a source of conflict. Such conflict is healthy and necessary for growth into maturity, but it tends to get associated with the story's antagonist,

and the wizard is not this. Perhaps the wizard can be likened to a grandfather figure: sometimes harsh, sometimes comforting, always wise, but not as integral to the process of growing up as the father, and thus not well-suited to be a foster parent. Additionally, because the wizard represents wisdom not yet attained, there is something essentially foreign about him. Even the father figure is, in some way, familiar. The wizard needs to remain apart. If the hero grows up with the wisdom that it is the wizard's job to impart, the story's reader cannot identify with its protagonist and the magician's part in the unfolding events has been rendered null and void.

Step three is vital in the character development of the hero, and it demonstrates the supreme wisdom of the enchanter. By providing foster parents and allowing the boy to grow up on his own as part of some community, the wizard keeps the hero true to his literary and psychological purpose and provides him with a world to save. A wise magician knows when to leave, but he also knows when to return. When the hero has finally come of age, he is in for a startling reunion.

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Step Four: The Wizard Returns

The tranquil time that the hero spends growing up can be likened to the coals of a fire. Though he doesn't know it, the boy has already been marked for some special destiny in step two. His fire has already been lit. When the wizard returns to the scene, he throws new wood on it and stokes the coals, making it flare up. The peaceful warmth of the hero's childhood is disturbed, but the action releases a new burst of energy that, when fueled with new purpose, causes the fire to burn brighter than ever.

In the previous step, Merlin gave the infant Arthur to Sir Ector to be raised. The usual interpretation suggests that Merlin wished for Arthur to grow up humble, away from his adulterous father, so as to develop into a wise and just ruler. But after Arthur has come of age, Merlin is faced with the problem of establishing Arthur's right to the throne. He orchestrates an elaborate scheme known to modern readers as "the sword in the stone":

So the Archbishop, by the advise of Merlin, sent for all the lords and gentlemen of arms that they should come by Christmas even unto London; [...] And when matins and the first Mass was done, there was seen in the churchyard against the high altar a great stone four square, like unto a marble stone; and in midst thereof was like an anvil of steel a foot on high, and therein stuck a fair sword naked by the point—and letters there were written in gold about the sword that said thus:

Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and
anvil is rightways king borne of all England.

[...] "Now shall ye assay," said Sir Ector to Arthur. "I will well," said Arthur—and pulled it out easily. And therewithall Sir Ector kneeled down to the earth, and Sir Kay. "Alas!" said Arthur, "mine own dear father and brother, why kneel ye to me?" "Nay, nay, my lord Arthur, it is not so; I was never your father

nor of your blood, but I know well ye are of an higher blood than I wondered ye were.” And then Sir Ector told him all how he was betaken him for to nourish him, and by whose commandment, and by Merlin’s deliverance.

(*Le Morte Darthur*, 7-9, adapted to modern spelling)

The introduction of the wizard in the first step of the cycle establishes a magical ambiance for the narrative. Step four, the return of the wizard, plays a similar role. This is probably the most obvious intersection between Campbell’s hero cycle and my wizard cycle. One of the essential moments for a Campbellian protagonist is the call to adventure; in the case of these five stories, that call is issued by the wizard. After being conspicuously absent from the hero’s childhood, the wizard returns as a teacher just as the young man comes of age. He returns to send the young man on the great quest that is his destiny as a hero.

In Wagner’s *Ring* (always the anomaly) this step occurs when Wotan challenges Mime to the riddle contest at the beginning of *Siegfried*. The riddles are more than just a way to recap the action of the past operas: they represent Wotan imparting the knowledge of Siegfried’s destiny. When Wotan wins the contest, he sets Siegfried free from Mime’s parentage and launches his career as a champion. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf returns to Hobbiton for Bilbo’s 111st birthday party, which is also Frodo’s 33rd birthday and his coming of age in hobbit society. At the end of the party, Frodo inherits Bilbo’s considerable estate, and after several years of research, Gandalf returns a second time to inform Frodo of the danger the One Ring carries. After telling Frodo what he has discovered, the quest to destroy it gets underway. In the books, this period of time that I consider step four spans nearly twenty years. Peter Jackson’s recent film adaptation of the story condenses this step into a much shorter time frame and adds an increased sense of urgency, which adds emphasis and clarity to this important phase. In *Star Wars*, Luke and Obi-Wan Kenobi are reunited by what seems like a chance meeting. Luke finally learns about his mysterious father and the Jedi Knights, and before the day is over he and

Kenobi have set out on a dangerous mission to another planet. For Harry Potter, this step comes in the form of Dumbledore's relentless barrage of magical letters on his eleventh birthday. The letters invite Harry to attend Hogwarts school, and they are also his first taste of the wizarding world in which he will play so great a role in the coming years. Prompted by the letters, Harry learns about his wizard heritage and begins the adventure of a lifetime.

From a literary perspective, the wizard's return is the cause of the quest. Its primary purpose is to inform the hero of the quest's objective and then start him down the path. This is why the wizard always returns as a teacher, even if he will adopt other roles later on. But psychologically speaking, the start of the quest is the *cause*, and the return of the wizard is the *effect*. This may seem backwards initially, but really the hero is the one calling the wizard to him rather than the other way around. In all five stories, the quest begins on some significant day—usually the hero's birthday—because it represents a transition into manhood. The quest represents the protagonist's journey to understand himself and his place in the world—in other words, to gain the wisdom that the wizard possesses. When the boy comes of age, he is filled with a natural longing to begin his transition, and this force (call it destiny) draws the wizard to him. This reunion with the wizard offers a brief taste of the wisdom that lies at the end of the journey. Like a bloodhound catching a scent, the hero calls the wizard to him so that he can catch a glimpse of what wisdom is like before setting off to achieve it.

There is another important aspect to this step, and that is the gifting of the magical talisman. Soon after drawing the sword from the stone, Arthur is taken by Merlin to the Lady of the Lake, who gives him Excalibur. Siegfried gets the shards of Nothung from Mime and reforges the magical sword. Frodo receives the ring from Bilbo, Luke receives his father's lightsaber from Obi-Wan, and Harry buys his first wand with Hagrid's help while preparing for

his trip to Hogwarts. In all cases, the talisman is a weapon. Usually it is a sword, and even in the case of Frodo and Harry there are magical swords involved. Frodo later receives Bilbo's old sword, Sting, at Rivendell. In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Harry draws from the sorting hat the sword of Godric Gryffindor, a powerful artifact belonging to the house of Gryffindor, of which James Potter was also a member. So the paternal sword is a uniform element. In Freudian terms, it is the phallic symbol and represents sexual maturity.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the magical talisman (sword or otherwise) is that it comes to the hero via the wizard, but it is not from the wizard. The wizard leads the hero *to* the talisman, but ultimately it is a gift *from* someone else. Merlin leads Arthur to the lake, but the Lady of the Lake presents Excalibur. The wizard does not make a gift of his own talisman; Dumbledore keeps his wand, and Obi-Wan passes down Anakin's lightsaber, not his own. This is important for two reasons: firstly, it does not rob the wizard of his power. Without a talisman of his own, the wizard would no longer be a wizard. More importantly, the passing of the artifact is not so much a gift as an inheritance. The wizard, as purveyor of wisdom, facilitates this inheritance, but he is merely a medium. The hero is coming into *his own*—something that is due him because of his lineage. As a side note, this demonstrates yet another reason why wizards, strictly speaking, cannot be heroes: the magical artifact necessary to complete the quest belongs not to them but to their heroes. When offered the ring by Frodo, Gandalf refuses by saying that its awesome power would corrupt him. It is Frodo's destiny alone to carry the ring; Gandalf can only assist him on that journey. The sorcerer is a companion, as we will see in step five, but thanks to fate, he cannot just take over for the protagonist and do the quest for him. The journey of becoming a man belongs only to the boy, and the re-entrance of the wizard as teacher allows that trip to begin.

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Step Five: Travels with Wizards

“The Company of the Ring shall be Nine; and the Nine Walkers shall be set against the Nine Riders that are evil. With you and your faithful servant, Gandalf will go; for this shall be his great task, and maybe the end of his labours.”

(The Fellowship of the Ring, 288-289)

The enchanter's role in the story does not end once the boy has set off on his quest. Fledgling heroes need a variety of companions, and the most important of all is the wizard himself. Merlin does not disappear from the scene after Arthur is crowned; he continues to teach Arthur life lessons and offers his advice as a court advisor along with considerable advantage in battle. Wotan never actually travels with Siegfried, but his influence in Siegfried's heroic career can be inferred. He is one of the chief gods of war, the grandfather of Siegfried, and the father of Brünnhilde, so surely, as Siegfried's and Brünnhilde's patron thrice over, he has used his godly powers to intervene on their behalf. The great deeds that the couple becomes famous for between the third and fourth operas were almost certainly made possible in part by Wotan's supernatural influence. Gandalf is chosen as the leader of the Fellowship of the Ring, the nine companions for whom the first book in Tolkien's trilogy is named. He guides, protects, and teaches Frodo during their travels together, just like he did for Bilbo in *The Hobbit*. Obi-Wan travels with Luke to the Death Star and uses the time they spend traveling to pass on to Luke the basic principles of the Force. Without Kenobi's Jedi skills, Luke and his friends never would have escaped the clutches of the Empire. Dumbledore does actually travel with Harry on several

occasions, such as their mutual quest for the locket Horcrux, but in a more general sense his presence is felt as the headmaster of Hogwarts. He protects Harry during his formative years and even gives him a few private lessons. After appearing as teacher in step four, the wizard becomes a companion and accompanies the hero on the long journey that will eventually culminate in a grand climax in step six.

Literarily, this fifth step gives writers a lot of opportunity for character development. Some of the most memorable moments of each story occur during this phase, when the hero and wizard are roving the countryside together. The meeting of Harry and Dumbledore in front of the Mirror of Erised is one of most fondly-remembered scenes from the book that opened the series. With the climax still far away, there is no need for urgency and a perfect opportunity for comfortable, even comical fantasy anecdotes that add flavor to the story and give it depth. This is also a time of transition and maturation as the boy becomes a man thanks in part to the guidance he receives from his mentor.

Psychologically, this step signifies the hero slowly coming into his own wisdom. He travels with a knowledgeable sorcerer, and he grows wiser as they encounter and overcome trials together. Now that the quest has begun, the young hero needs to keep his goal of achieving wisdom in mind at all times. By traveling with the very symbol of that wisdom he is sure to stay on the straight and narrow. Slowly, he is becoming what he follows.

There are, roughly, three stages of learning that the boy must pass through before he can claim to have achieved the enlightenment that he admires in his mentor. The first is learning directly from a teacher, which occurred in the previous step when the wizard returned as a tutor. This present step represents the second phase, a sort of hero internship, during which the boy accomplishes small tasks under the supervision of the wizard. He is out on his own and learning

by the school of hard knocks, but with a trusty wizard by his side, he is not in any real danger. Also, the wizard helps him understand his trials. To the young Harry Potter, the small battles against Voldemort that happen before the final one in the last book might seem like a series of wholly unfair and useless near-death experiences. But Dumbledore is constantly illuminating for Harry the lessons learned from these encounters. In *The Lord of the Rings* films, Gandalf's revelation to Frodo that Gollum may still have an important role to play in the story of the ring takes place during their travels. This was an excellent decision on the part of the screenwriters, because it provides an example of a still-naive hero receiving insights from his wizard companion during the journey. With a wise man nearby to interpret, the hero can begin to understand his trials and what they are leading toward. The world provides trials, and the wizard provides context. This all leads into the third phase of learning, which will occur in step seven. The final exam is for the hero to strike out on his own. For the first time, he will be facing real danger. There is no safety net in place should he fail, and if he succeeds, it will be up to him to understand the meaning of it all.

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Step Five-and-a-Half: The Ultimate Sacrifice

VADER: I've been waiting for you Obi-Wan. We meet again, at last. The circle is now complete. When I left you, I was but the learner. Now, I am the master.

OBI-WAN: Only a master of evil, Darth.

(The two begin to duel with their lightsabers.)

VADER: Your powers are weak, old man.

OBI-WAN: You can't win, Darth. If you strike me down, I shall become more powerful than you can possibly imagine.

VADER: You should not have come back.

(The duel begins to attract the attention of the Storm Troopers who are guarding the Millennium Falcon. As the troops leave their posts, the Han, Chewbacca, Luke, Leia, C-3PO, and R2-D2 all rush on board.)

[...]

LUKE: Ben?

(Seeing Luke and the others about to make an escape, Obi-Wan raises his lightsaber to signal that he will no longer defend himself. Darth Vader slashes and kills him, but Obi-Wan's body vanishes, leaving only his cloak.)

LUKE: No!

(The distracted Storm Troopers now see the prisoners escaping and turn to fire.)

HAN: Come on!

LEIA: Come on! Luke, it's too late!

OBI-WAN: *(As a disembodied voice)* Run, Luke, run!

(Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope)

Traveling with a wizard gives you a certain degree of comfort. You trust him to lead you down the safest path, and should obstacles arise, you trust to his powerful protection. But what happens when you run into something so formidable that it overpowers even a wizard? This is a moment of true, exquisite fear—a moment when, perhaps for the first time, you wonder if the

forces of darkness really are too powerful. Added to that fear is the frightening prospect that you might be on your own. When your wizard cannot help you, to whom else can you turn? Will you be left to walk the path alone?

Step five-and-a-half is the wizard's self sacrifice to save the still pre-mature hero. It is labeled "five-and-a-half," because it does not occur in all five stories. There is no clear self sacrifice of Wotan in Wagner's operas. The closest approximation would be the breaking of his spear during his confrontation with Siegfried, but this is more of a defeat at the hands of the hero rather than a sacrifice. Wotan did not go willingly, unless perhaps he knew what the outcome of the confrontation would be and chose to face it anyway. More importantly, there is no instance of this step for Merlin in Arthurian legend. England's great wizard comes and goes in the story, but all canonical accounts of his death have him dying at the hands of a Nimue character thanks to his own infatuation and foolishness. Even modern retellings of the story, such as T. H. White's *The Once and Future King*, do not include a self sacrifice for Merlin. Without including Merlin, this step cannot be part of the proper Wizard Cycle, but its uniformity in the other three stories seems enough to merit some discussion.

Gandalf's sacrifice is called for when the fellowship is trying to escape the Mines of Moria. He knows that the fiery Balrog is his equal in magical power, and must stay behind to fend it off while his companions escape. Obi-Wan willingly engages himself in what he knows will be a fatal duel with Darth Vader. He distracts the powerful dark Jedi long enough for Luke and his friends to escape the Death Star. When Dumbledore and Harry return to Hogwarts after searching for the locket Horcrux, they find the school under attack by Voldemort's henchmen. When they themselves are ambushed, rather than attack, Dumbledore casts a spell to prevent Harry from moving. Thanks to the invisibility cloak, Harry is both hidden and frozen solid. In

doing this, Dumbledore loses his split-second advantage. Malfoy disarms the old wizard and Snape kills him, yet Harry remains undiscovered.

One of the similarities between these three events is that, in all cases, the hero feels that he has lost his mentor too soon. There was still so much left to learn. But losing the wizard is a lesson all to itself. The boy, who is now finally transitioning into a man, needs to learn that he cannot rely on his companions to finish the quest for him. At some point he will need to step up and become the master of his own destiny. Like a baby bird being pushed out of the nest, he has to learn to fly on his own, probably before he feels ready. Psychologically, this step corresponds with adolescence. We start to distrust the wisdom of the previous generation and go off in search of our own way in the world. There is a corresponding sense of loneliness when we can no longer rely on other people for help. At the same time, this tumultuous stage is vital to our development.

Another important aspect of this step is the wizard's acceptance of his own death. Everyone dies, so true wisdom eventually involves coming to terms with mortality. When confronted with death, we want to know that our lives have had meaning. Sacrifice in the service of some great cause, such as the hero's epic quest, is an acceptable way to die, and the wizard realizes this. Learning about death is one of the most traumatizing lessons, and it prompts us to scrutinize our lives and search for meaning. Perhaps coming to terms with death and, in response, living a meaningful life is the ultimate form of wisdom. The sorcerer proves that he has achieved this level of inner peace when he gives his life. He reaches a catharsis—the climax of his wisdom—and then goes down in a blaze of wizardly glory. We can almost hear Gandalf's screaming, "I am a wizard!" as his foe drags him into a bottomless pit. This ultimate sacrifice is the final and greatest lesson to be taught to the boy hero: the lesson of death and

purpose. It is both a violent shove into the world of adulthood and a wake up call. There is no turning back after this point.

This moment is one of sheer terror. It brings to the surface the reality of death and presents to the audience an evil force so strong that it overpowers even the mightiest good guys. Apart from its psychological importance, this step adds quite a bit of flavor and drama to the story by providing an instant of intense fear followed by deep grief. It is also very convenient. Before step six, the wizard has to be gone, so self sacrifice provides an opportunity to accomplish this in a dramatic way.

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Step Six: Gathering Strength

In the final installment of the *Harry Potter* series, the young hero suffers what seems like defeat at the hands of his nemesis, Voldemort. Dumbledore, the only wizard that Voldemort ever feared, has sacrificed himself to save Harry in the previous novel, so Harry is alone and unprotected. His quest has come to a high point in the great climactic Battle of Hogwarts. Just when it seems that Harry is finished for good, he finds himself in the midst of a strange, other-worldly vision and once again face to face with his mentor:

“I’ve got to go back, haven’t I?”

“That is up to you.”

“I’ve got a choice?”

“Oh yes.” Dumbledore smiled at him. “We are in King’s Cross [Train Station], you say? I think that if you decide not to go back, you would be able to... let’s say... board a train.”

“And where would it take me?”

“On,” said Dumbledore simply.

Silence again.

“Voldemort’s got the Elder Wand.”

“True. Voldemort has the Elder Wand.”

“But you want me to go back?”

“I think,” said Dumbledore, “that if you choose to return, there is a chance that he may be finished for good. I cannot promise it. But I know this, Harry, that you have less to fear from returning here than he does.”

[...]

He stood up, and Dumbledore did the same, and they looked for a long moment into each other’s faces.

“Tell me one last thing,” said Harry. “Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?”

Dumbledore beamed at him, and his voice sounded loud and strong in Harry’s ears even though the bright mist was descending again, obscuring his figure.

“Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?”

(Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, 722-723)

By now the quest is nearing its end. The hero is no longer the young, innocent boy that he was when he set off. He has passed through trials and tribulations and is a stronger, wiser person for them. By now the wizard is gone. Gandalf, Obi-Wan, and Dumbledore have sacrificed themselves; Merlin has been imprisoned by Nimue; Siegfried has defeated and rejected Wotan. The hero finds himself alone, and at a most critical moment no less, because the final trial is fast approaching in step seven. Before trudging up the slopes of Mount Doom or walking into the Forbidden Forest, the hero will need to gather all his strength and wits. In step six, the wizard makes a brief return to help the hero prepare for his great climax.

In the fifth book of *The Once and Future King*, Merlin returns after a very long absence to teach Arthur one final lesson before the war with Mordred. Arthur is again transformed into various kinds of animals so as to better understand mankind and its place in the world. These lessons recall Merlin's earlier tutelage in *The Sword in the Stone*, and reinvigorate the exhausted king for the coming battle. Since *Götterdämmerung* is a tragedy, it does not have a great final battle for the hero to win, but when Wotan tries to resist Siegfried at the base of Brunnhilde's mountain, he is trying to teach his brash grandson some final lessons before parting ways. He interviews Siegfried about his youthful heroism, causing the hero to remember his past accomplishments in such a way that they well up inside him and empower him for the still greater task of ascending the fire-ringed mountain which can only be penetrated by the greatest of heroes. Gandalf does not return to Frodo at all before the ring is destroyed, but after rising from the dead, he does allow Frodo safe passage to Mount Doom by creating a diversion for Sauron's armies. There is no face to face meeting between hobbit and enchanter, but Frodo and

Sam do notice the gesture as the hoards of orcs that stand between them and Mount Doom march away to face Gandalf's army. This inspires the two hobbits to press on, and the gathering of an army is also symbolic of the hero's gathering strength. As Luke is nearing the critical weakness of the Death Star in his fighter jet, he hears Obi-Wan's disembodied voice saying "Use the Force, Luke." This prompts him to calm down, turn off his targeting computer, and guide the path of his torpedo with the power that he possesses as a Jedi. Again, as he is preparing for the ultimate showdown with Darth Vader in *Return of the Jedi*, he meets Obi-Wan in spirit form on the planet Dagobah and the two have a much overdue heart to heart conversation which ends with Luke's resolve to face his father once and for all. The passage that opened this section recounts Harry's brief reunion with Dumbledore before his final battle against Voldemort. He is given a brief moment of relaxation to consider his next move and some reassuring words from his mentor that inspire him to face his greatest trial with confidence.

So the wizard, after being gone from the hero's life, provides one final moment of assistance right before the climax. This is not actually teaching so much as encouragement. By this time, the boy already has the power within him to win the day; he needs only to trust himself and make that final, bold leap into his own maturity. The wizard prompts the boy to consider his position and gather his strength, which has been growing slowly since the start of the adventure. When you lost something as a child, your mother, in an attempt to be helpful, probably asked "Where was the last place you left it?" or encouraged you to retrace your steps. Rather than provide an answer to the problem at hand, she encouraged you to gather your thoughts and set out with renewed resolve and clarity of mind. This is exactly what the wizard does: he prompts an anamnesis that leaves the hero thoroughly convinced of who he is and what power he possesses. The reader, as well as the hero, is preparing for the climax. This vital moment in the

story alerts the audience that all the events up to this point are about to come to a head. Strength is needed to press on, but untold rewards will follow. The hero realizes that he is ready. This is the wizard saying, "Your training is complete!" From here, the boy is ready to be a man, and he is on his own.

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Step Seven: Completing the Quest, Alone

Frodo raised his head, and then stood up. Despair had not left him, but the weakness had passed. He even smiled grimly, feeling now as clearly as a moment before he had felt the opposite, that what he had to do, he had to do, if he could, and that whether Faramir or Aragorn or Elrond or Galadriel or Gandalf or anyone else ever knew about it was beside the purpose. He took his staff in one hand and the phial in his other. When he saw that the clear light was already welling through his fingers, he thrust it into his bosom and held it against his heart. Then turning from the city of Morgul, now no more than a grey glimmer across a dark gulf, he prepared to take the upward road.

(The Two Towers, 317)

The seventh step of the cycle is an interesting one because it has nothing to do with where the wizard is, and everything to do with where the wizard *is not*. In all five stories, the hero's great task is completed when the enchanter is absent. Arthur fights Mordred without Merlin at his side. Siegfried fights the dragon and wins Brünnhilde without Wotan's help. Frodo is miles away from Gandalf when he (thanks to Gollum's intervention) casts the ring into the fires of Mount Doom. Luke is still mourning Obi-Wan's death when he destroys the Death Star, and Harry returns to face Voldemort without Albus Dumbledore's intervention. What a strange time for the wizard to disappear!

This conspicuous absence parallels the absence in step three, when the wizard needed to step back and let the hero grow up as part of some community. Again, at the end of the journey, the wizard needs to let the hero think and act for himself; otherwise, there can be no victory. If such a powerful mentor were present during the climax, it would look like the hero simply had

success handed to him. Take, for example, Harry's earlier quest with Dumbledore to retrieve the locket horcrux. Even though Harry is essential to the mission and acts valiantly, Dumbledore eclipses him. It is Dumbledore who solves the riddles and drinks the poisonous potion. In order to really become a hero, Harry needs to win on his own, and that means being on his own.

This step reveals the mastery of the authors who use it. If the wizard is present during the final battle, either he will supplant the hero and win the day himself, or he will suffer a debilitating moment of impotence. Imagine if Wotan had followed Siegfried to the dragon's lair. When the beast came out to fight, Wotan, in his godly power, would have easily defeated it and demoted his grandson from champion to spectator. This would feel like the kind of babysitting that should have ended after step five. If he had stood back and let the less powerful youth fight the battle, it would make Wotan look like a weakling or a coward. So when faced with this difficult fork in the road, the author takes the third path: remove the wizard altogether. Aside from avoiding the aforementioned problem, this has the added benefit of making the wizard seem even wiser. While none of the wizards have chosen to be absent of their own free will (with the possible exception of Merlin in T. H. White's *The Once and Future King*), symbolically, this represents a knowledge that the hero must be left to stand on his own two feet. The wizard does not (or is not allowed to) cling to his pupil once the training is complete. As a result, the hero legitimately accomplishes something great by his own power.

The psychological value of this step parallels the literary value: it is an essential letting go. It represents the moment of maturity, when we truly become our own persons. Once we no longer have anyone to fall back on—once we are wholly capable of acting on our own and fully responsible for our own actions—we make the decisions that truly define who we are. It is frightening, yet harrowing. Finally, as the masters of our own fate, we step out into the world

and take on the challenges that lie ahead. However, the wizard has not faded totally away just yet. He will make one final appearance in the story before the last page is turned.

1. Wizard Introduced Early
2. Wizard Meets Hero's Family
3. Wizard Provides Foster Parents
4. Wizard Returns
5. Journey with Wizard
- 5.5. Sacrifice of Wizard
6. Hero Gathers Strength
7. Hero Completes Quest Alone
- 8. Wizard and Hero Reunited**

Step Eight: Reunion

The old magician swept his notes away with a trembling hand. He had been deeply wounded by the hedgehog's earlier criticisms, because, in the secrecy of his heart, he loved his student dearly. He knew now, since the royal hero had returned victorious in his choice, that his own wisdom was not the end. He knew that he had finished his tutorship. Once he had told the king that he would never be the Wart again: but it had been an encouraging thing to say: he had not meant it. Now he did mean it, now knew that he himself had yielded place, had stepped down from the authority to lead or to direct. The abdication had cost him his gaiety. He would not be able to rant any more, or to twinkle and mystify with the flashing folds of his magic cloak.

(The Book of Merlyn, 125)

The eighth and final step in the Wizard Cycle is a reunion of the boy, who has now become a man, with his mentor. There is something nostalgic about it. The boy hero has grown up and the wizard has grown old. The wizard was, of course, already old, but now for the first time his vitality is waning. At last master and pupil stand as equals, simultaneously looking back on what has happened and forward to what is yet to come.

The above passage is taken from *The Book of Merlyn*, the conclusion to T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* series. Despite being published separately from the other books and posthumously, there is no doubt that White intended this book as the final chapter of his story. In a letter to a former tutor at Cambridge, he wrote:

I think I can really make a comment on all these futile isms (communism, fascism, conservatism, etc.) by stepping back—right back into the real world, in which man is only one of the innumerable other animals. So to put my 'moral' across (but I shan't state it), I shall have the marvelous opportunity of bringing the wheel full circle, and ending on an animal note like the one I began on. This

will turn my completed epic into a perfect fruit, 'rounded off and bright and done.'

(*The Book of Merlyn*, xvi-xvii)

White's intuition that the story should end where it began is an important one. It completes the cycle and provides some insight into why this final step is so important. It is the much needed completion to Merlin's character, since, unfortunately, this step is nowhere to be found in Malory or his sources.

For the other wizards, this step can be easily recognized. Gandalf is waiting for Frodo and Sam when they wake up in soft beds after being rescued from their perilous ordeal on Mount Doom. After Frodo's brief return to the Shire, Gandalf is waiting at the harbor for both him and Bilbo who, as ring bearers, are destined to sail away with the wizard to the undying lands. While the Rebel Alliance celebrates the destruction of the second Death Star on Endor at the end of *Return of the Jedi*, Luke has a vision of the three great Jedi he met during his quest: his trainer, Yoda, his father, Anakin, and his mentor, Obi-Wan Kenobi. After successfully defeating Voldemort, Harry meets Dumbledore in the magical moving, talking portrait that is now installed in the headmaster's office at Hogwarts.

Even in a story with a tragic ending, such as Wagner's *Ring*, we see a form of reunion between Wotan and his grandson. Just before Siegfried is stabbed by Hagen, Wotan's ravens are spotted flying overhead. They are scouts which bring Wotan news of the mortal world, so through them, the king of the gods witnesses the hero's demise. In this context (and in Malory's tragic ending to *Le Morte Darthur*), the reunion is not a happy thing since the story has no happy ending. For T. H. White's Merlin and the other wizards, the seventh step is characterized by a mutual recognition of success between the hero and the wizard. In those cases, the hero has come into his own wisdom after completing his quest. But in the case of a tragedy, the hero

either does not complete the quest or does so too late. He never gains the sort of wisdom he was seeking, so there can be no happy reunion with his mentor. In Wagner's operas, the reunion represented by the ravens is a sad one. Wotan realizes that Siegfried is dead and abandons all hope. It seems fitting that this final meeting is done through an intermediary. Siegfried never realized who Wotan was, even after meeting him. He rejected the god of wisdom who would have been his mentor, so Wotan is left to watch the hero from afar. They cannot meet face to face unless Siegfried realizes who Wotan is, and this never occurs. The all important reunion must take place symbolically.

Ending the story where it began—with an account of the wizard—provides a pleasing symmetry to the cycle and also to the story as a whole. Just as the enchanter is one of the first characters to be introduced, he is one of the last to be mentioned in the final chapters. He lends a certain mysticality to the entire story by being present throughout. He represents the wisdom for which the hero strives, so he serves as a constant symbolic reminder of that goal even after it has been achieved.

This final meeting has a new feeling of equality to it. Rather than a tutor looking down to his pupil, for the first time, man and mentor stand on the same level. There is no more instruction—only discussion as peers. At long last, the hero has achieved the wisdom that once belonged solely to the enchanter. Some of it was learned, but the most important parts were discovered during the quest. The mature protagonist now fully appreciates his own power. What's more, he is now a wizard in his own right.⁹ In some cases, this happens literally: Luke Skywalker and Harry Potter actually learn to wield the same powers that their teachers wielded. In the other cases, the ascension to wizardhood is symbolic and can be recognized by the

⁹ Campbell's cycle ends in *Apotheosis*. In other words, the hero becomes a god. This is marked by an expansion of consciousness after the quest is over in which the hero learns to transcend the opposites of light and dark, male and female, etc. This harmonic union of opposites is key to god-like wisdom, so this final step in the Wizard Cycle is somewhat parallel to the end of Campbell's cycle.

equality evident in the reunion. Remember that the ability to cast magic spells is only of secondary importance to the wizard; it is his insight and knowledge that make him truly powerful. Gandalf is not arrogant, but he is haughty. When he beckons Frodo to sail away with him at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, he elevates the hobbit to the highest possible level by recognizing in him the wisdom that makes a wizard. Even in the case of Siegfried's tragic demise, he unknowingly shares with Wotan a crushing despair that could only have been born of true understanding. Right before his death, Hagen gives him a potion to restore his memory. All too late, he comes to realize exactly what has happened to him and his wife. Simultaneously, Wotan realizes that the world is doomed, and so the two share a morose insight that makes the ending all the more poignant.

The quest is complete. The hero has grown wise. At last the cycle has come full circle.

Notes on the Wizard Cycle

After that rather exhaustive description, it would seem prudent to provide here a summary of the entire process. There are also a few important aspects of the cycle as a whole that need to be considered.

The Cycle Revisited

The wizard is introduced early (1), sometimes even before the protagonist, to establish the fantastical nature of the story. He sets the mystical tone and gives the audience a brief glimpse of the quest's goal. He symbolizes the wisdom that the hero must eventually obtain, so even before the quest begins he has given the tale direction. From there, the cycle is a delicate balance of wizard presence and wizard absence that facilitates the fostering of the hero. There is always some prior connection between the wizard and the boy's family (2). This connection marks the child as having a special destiny. When the hero is orphaned, the wizard provides him with foster parents (3), but then steps out of the story until the boy has come of age. This allows the child to identify with some mundane community rather than be labeled a wizard's apprentice. The enchanter reenters to issue the call to adventure (4) and to give the boy a magical talisman, usually a paternal sword. He returns as a teacher, but soon becomes a traveling companion and protector (5). The young man gets progressively more independent during the journey, and may even be forced to go on alone when the wizard sacrifices himself (5.5). This sacrifice brings the hero face to face with the reality of death, which is perhaps the greatest and final lesson to be taught. Once the hero can stand alone, he prepares to face the end of the quest. The wizard reappears briefly to help him gather his strength (6), and then the hero completes the adventure by himself (7). Independence is key here, since true wisdom cannot be entirely taught; some of it must be learned on one's own. After the climax, the magician and the mature protagonist are

reunited as peers (8). The tutor recognizes in his pupil the same wisdom that he himself possesses, and, with the cycle complete, the story ends on the same magical note with which it began.

Cycles within Cycles

The *Harry Potter* series is exciting to read as a whole, but to reach the level of popularity it has enjoyed, each story must stand on its own as a complete adventure. The same is true for the *Star Wars* trilogies and any other work that is published in parts. The Wizard Cycle can be and has been adapted accordingly.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, the first of seven books, can be said to contain a complete cycle. The first five steps are clearly present, but the second half of the cycle is also present, albeit in a diminished form. Before going after the stone, Harry and his friends go looking for Dumbledore. They do not find him, since he is away from school on business, but this only serves to heighten the urgency of the situation. With Dumbledore gone, whoever is after the stone will be more likely to bypass the school's defenses. Here we see the gathering of strength right before the final trial (step six). The three companions do succeed in protecting the stone, even while Dumbledore is away (step seven), and after the ordeal, Harry wakes up to find Dumbledore at his bedside (step eight).

This is a complete *micro cycle*, but the overall *macro cycle* that runs throughout the entire series still will not be concluded until book seven. Many of the steps are repeated or revisited in the intermediary books. Harry is constantly trying to learn as much about his parents as he can, and Dumbledore appears quite often in his family history (step two). Harry's whole stay at Hogwarts can be viewed as one giant journey with Dumbledore as a companion, teacher, and protector (step five).

The same can be said for *Star Wars*. The first movie in the trilogy begins the macro cycle, but also has a complete micro cycle within it. As Luke is nearing the Death Star's critical weakness in his fighter jet, he hears Obi-Wan's disembodied voice say "Use the force, Luke." This prompts him to calm down, turn off his targeting computer, and guide his torpedo with the new powers he has discovered as a Jedi. This is the gathering of strength, and it is followed by the completion of the quest to destroy the first Death Star. As he is flying away from the exploding wreckage, he once again hears Obi-Wan's voice saying "Luke, the force will be with you, always." This is the symbolic reunion that completes a full cycle. Early in *The Empire Strikes Back*, Luke has a vision of Obi-Wan telling him to seek out the Jedi master Yoda. This is a second call to adventure (step four), and it begins the cycle anew.

There are no micro cycles to be found in the individual books of *The Lord of the Rings*, but that is because they were originally envisioned as one great book. For the sake of publishing convenience, it was made into a trilogy, but there is no doubt that each book ends in a cliff hanger. The fact that the wizard cycle is dangling uncompleted makes the endings of the first two books even more enticing. On a conscious level as well as a subconscious level, the reader is begging to see the cycle through to its end. So *The Lord of the Rings* has only one complete cycle, but it should be noted that *The Hobbit* also has a complete cycle of its own. These are side-by-side cycles rather than the concentric cycles found in *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars*. So the Wizard Cycle is pronounced but not overly rigid. Steps and groups of steps, or even the entire cycle, can be repeated without sacrificing the effectiveness of the process as a whole.

Immortal Wizards

What becomes of the hero once he has achieved the wisdom that he is seeking? Without a spiritual deficit to drive him, he can no longer play the same role in this story or future stories. The intuitive conclusion is to imagine that he becomes a wizard himself and then begins the cycle anew as the wizard rather than the hero. This is exactly what happens for Luke Skywalker and Harry Potter. In the *Star Wars* novels that chronicle the events after the end of the sixth movie, Luke becomes a powerful Jedi master who rebuilds the Academy and trains many new Jedi Knights. Harry Potter is already a famous wizard by the end of the seventh book, and, according to the epilogue, he still turns the heads of strangers nineteen years later. Statements from J. K. Rowling suggest that he joins the Ministry of Magic and perhaps becomes an Auror (a battler of dark wizards) as he has always dreamed. This continuation of the cycle makes sense. As one generation replaces the previous, new wizards must step up. This also provides some insight into why the wizard does not simply solve all the hero's problems for him during the quest: as an old man, the enchanter knows he will not live forever, so he must prepare the next generation to carry on the good fight once he is gone.

But this wizardification of the hero does not occur in the other three stories. Arthur and Siegfried both die, and Frodo sails away from Middle Earth forever on a magical elven ship with Gandalf. In Wagner's operas, Wotan dies with the hero, leaving the world bereft of all wisdom. This adds to the crushing despair of the tragic ending. At least in *The Lord of the Rings*, the other (lesser) wizards who arrived centuries ago with Gandalf are presumably still dwelling in Middle Earth to look after its inhabitants. In *Le Morte Darthur*, Merlin is gone before Arthur's death and never returns.

However, Merlin has achieved a curious sort of immortality at the hands of other authors. He is a constantly recurring character in western literature, and not a century has gone by since Malory that has not seen the publication of some important work involving Merlin. One might argue, with good evidence, that Gandalf, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and Dumbledore are also Merlin in a different guise. It seems that, rather than die, Merlin simply disappears until he is needed again. He has become England's national wizard or patron saint, repeating the cycle over and over again for new heroes. Does this somehow invalidate the cycle? If the hero does not step up to take his mentor's place, has he really come all the way around?

Actually, the wizard does not need to step down for the cycle to be complete, because wisdom is not something entirely personal. In the real world, we do not learn everything from one person and then replace him. Wisdom is inherited from many sources, some of whom are only still present through their writing or legacy—take Socrates, for example. There is a social and historical aspect to human wisdom that we must absorb from the world around us. There is also a primitive wisdom built into our evolutionary subconscious from our prehistoric ancestors. Schools of thought may come and go, but always there remains in the collective human psyche a set of important, ageless truths that must be passed on to every generation. So if the wizard represents wisdom, he represents something immortal, and he becomes immortal by proxy. This is how Merlin can live on from story to story without wearing out his welcome. The body of knowledge that he represents is part of the very fabric of human development, so we are not surprised to see him reappear so often.

The Wizard Cycle as a Parallel to Human Psychological Development

There is deep and lasting symbolism to be found in these five stories. As the boy goes on adventures in the narrative, our minds embark on a subconscious quest for the wisdom that we

too seek. Stories are like screens on which the subconscious elements of our minds project their shadow puppet symbols, and the connection works both ways. These stories move us. They inspire our minds to go on adventures with wizards, but a close examination will reveal that life itself can be seen as just such an adventure. Most of the steps in the Wizard Cycle have a direct corollary to some major event in human development.

The first step does not, since its value is purely literary, but the second step (the wizard's prior connection to the hero's family) represents either our parents' marriage or our conception. The third step (when the Wizard provides foster parents for the orphaned hero) represents birth. From there, we, the heroes, will grow up in the care of our guardians and slowly discover our own minds while our parents act as our wizards. Then, after we have truly begun to mature psychologically, we begin puberty (which is step four: the wizard's return and the call to adventure). This is marked by the maturation of our sexual faculties—our reception of the magical talisman that endows us with power and longing. Now begins the tumultuous period of adolescence in which we try to make sense of the confusing world we find ourselves thrust into. This is step five: the journey with the wizard. Step five-and-a-half, the wizard's sacrifice, might occur as the death of our parents, when we learn the cruel truths of death and feel alone in the world. Step six, the gathering of strength, correlates to falling in love. We begin to ask the big questions that will affect the rest of our lives. Once we find answers, we proceed to marriage, represented by step seven (the completion of the quest with the wizard absent). Before long, we have become parents ourselves just as the hero has become a wizard. The final step, the reunion, is adulthood and our autumn years. We come to appreciate what our parents did for us in a way that we never could before. The wisdom of old age is eventually passed on to our children and grandchildren, and the cycle begins again.

In the Wizard Cycle, we see a rough parallel to human growth and development. This makes the symbolism even more potent, and helps to explain the appeal and inherent familiarity of the whole process. But we have not yet fully explored the process. For that, we will turn to Analytical Psychology.

A Basic Model of Jungian Psychology

To understand why the wizard character is so appealing, one must first understand why myths in general are so appealing. Is it the strange new world of knights in armor and tall towers? Is it the new languages and mystical landscapes? Actually, it is just the opposite. Myths are not enchanting because of how strange they are, but rather, they are enchanting because of how *familiar* they are. All the major elements of a myth—characters, settings, events—are symbolic of psychological elements that reside deep in our innermost minds. Villains, caves, weapons, armies, animals... all of these have their counterparts in the human psyche.

There are essentially two levels to the mind: the conscious and the subconscious, and there exists a dialogue between them. They are inextricably interwoven and are constantly influencing one another. The narrative of a myth comes to life in our consciousness; there we imagine the Knights of the Round Table jousting or see Harry Potter battling Voldemort as we read the words on the page. The subconscious holds items of a much more intimate nature. There dwell our desires and our fears and the other forces of the world as we understand them. On that level, we deal with deeper issues such as the desire to be an individual or the fear of death. Mediating between these two halves are symbols: things that have meaning both consciously and subconsciously. An ebony clock, like the one in Edgar Allen Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death," is simultaneously a prop in our conscious minds as we imagine the ball taking place and the solidification of our deeper mental notions of time and mortality. The conscious mind is what we "see." We think in our conscious minds. We do not think in our subconscious minds. We can never *directly* experience that part of our brains, yet it still exerts a powerful influence over what we do and think. This can be very frustrating when we are trying to understand ourselves, but symbols can help. Symbols connect a tangible thing in

consciousness to something ineffable that dwells somewhere past the reach of the mind's eye. These symbols are not one way connections. We can observe the movements of the subconscious by watching the choreography of symbols in the conscious mind, but we can also affect subtle movements in the deepest regions of the mind by manipulating those symbols intentionally.

Those parts of our mind that are consciously available do not require much psychological analysis, because we experience them directly. The subconscious, on the other hand, has intrigued scientists, therapists, and artists for ages. Carl Jung, the founder of Analytical Psychology, proposed a model of the subconscious that has been widely accepted, especially in literary circles. He theorized that all human beings share discrete subconscious elements called archetypes which make up the building blocks of the inner mind. Archetypes are a sort of mental DNA: they are common, idealized, inherent psychological predispositions that help us make sense of the world. The hero, for example, is a common archetype. In literary terms, he is a stock character. He appears over and over again in myth, always with certain similarities, and he is part of our subconscious furniture. He represents something specific (in the case of our stories, the hero is the reader).

Of particular interest to the study of wizards are the archetypes of the Self and the Shadow.¹⁰ The Shadow is made up of things that our ego represses. The things that we do not wish to be or do not think we are get pushed into the Shadow, a sort of opposite dark self. Someone who sees herself as kind and beautiful will have a cruel and ugly Shadow. The Shadow does not disappear. Even though we repress certain qualities, we always have a bit of the yin in the yang. The Shadow is a psychic force to be reckoned with. To achieve psychological health,

¹⁰ For an excellent discussion of Jungian psychology, especially as applied to *The Lord of the Rings*, see Timothy O'Neill's *The Individuated Hobbit*.

one does not need to stop repressing the Shadow, but one must come to terms with its existence and learn to cope with its presence. The ego and the Shadow must live in harmony, and this is where the Self comes in. The Self (capital “s”) is a regulating force in the psyche. It represents the unified whole: ego, Shadow, Anima, Persona, and even our conscious mind all in one. The Self is what stays the same even as our minds change; it is unity and continuity among parts that are in flux. It is also regulative. One of the jobs of the Self is to unite the ego and the Shadow, not by collapsing them into each other, but by helping them coexist peacefully. The united, harmonious psyche is extremely powerful, so much so that it displays the trappings of magic. Just as the wizard helps the hero to achieve wisdom, the psychological element represented by the wizard helps our Self to unite the forces of the mind into a powerful, concentrated whole.

The Wise Old Man as the Archetype of the Spirit

Jung wrote extensively about the archetypes. He chronicled their appearances in dreams and myths and attempted to trace their origins back into the ancient history of mankind. In *The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairytales*, he expounds on a very common story element: the wise old man. The wizard is an instantiation of this important archetype, so Jung's analysis can provide valuable insight when it comes to understanding, psychologically, just why the wizard is such an appealing character.

For Jung, the wise old man represents the spirit. The spirit, which he admits is notoriously hard to define, can be envisioned as “the sum-total of all the phenomena of rational thought, or of the intellect, including the will, memory, imagination, creative power, and aspirations motivated by ideals” (208). The spirit is a person's ego in the sense that it is subjectiveness, but it also includes the mental elements at the ego's disposal. It is all the psychic facilities that make up a human person. It might be helpful to think of it as all the things that would need to be preserved if *your* soul was transferred to another body: your sense of self, but also your memories, your desires, etc.

For Jung, the spirit is not just all of these things, but all of these things gathered together. It is more than the sum of its parts. It is the power that comes from uniting all these things into a single human, *spiritual* entity. It is spirit in the sense that we say “That party had real spirit!” It is all the psychic faculties united by *concentration* and *determination*—a great working-together of the whole body that generates a special sort of energy. So the wise old man represents not just the spirit, but the fully charged spirit, and he does so when this mighty force is most needed. Jung tells us:

The wise old man appears in dreams in the guise of a magician, doctor, priest, teacher, professor, grandfather, or any other person possessing authority. The

archetype of the spirit in the shape of a man, hobgoblin, or animal always appears in a situation where insight, understanding, good advice, determination, planning, etc., are needed but cannot be mustered on one's own resources. The archetype compensates this state of spiritual deficiency by contents designed to fill the gap.

(The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairytales, 216)

So the wise old man appears as a symbol of the spirit when our psychic forces are not unified and thus weak. The hero of the story represents the audience (the individual reader or viewer), and suffers from several occasions of spiritual deficiency just as any human being would. Think of how impetuous and eager Siegfried is to leave Mime's cave and adventure on his own. His psychic forces have begun to mature, and he realizes this, but he cannot fully live out his spirituality while he is still restrained in a juvenile environment. He longs to strike out on his own and test his own powers against the forces of the world. We experience the same thing as teenagers.

When this kind of spiritual lacking crops up, the wise old man appears to alleviate the problem. But he doesn't simply wave his magic wand to make everything all better; indeed he *cannot*, since he is actually a symbol born of our own subconscious minds and thus does not have any power greater than that which we ourselves already possess. Rather, he relieves the situation by prompting the hero to step back and gather his own forces together, just like in step six of the Wizard Cycle. Jung writes:

An anamnesis of this kind is a purposeful process whose aim is to gather the assets of the whole personality together at the critical moment, when all one's spiritual and physical forces are challenged, and with this united strength to fling open the door of the future. No one can help the boy to do this; he has to rely entirely on himself. There is no going back. This realization will give the necessary resolution to his actions. [...] The concentration and tension of psychic forces have something about them that always looks like magic: they develop an unexpected power of endurance which is often superior to the conscious effort or will.

(The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairytales, 218-19)

Thus, the wizard's powers are not didactic; he is not a gifted teacher because he dictates the truths of the universe to the hero, but because he drives the hero to discover them for himself. Of course, some dictation is needed, since the hero (like us) is not born with an innate knowledge of everything that needs to be known. This is why the wizard's first appearance to the hero is in the form of a teacher. Eventually, though, the wizard evolves into a guide who directs and protects the fledgling hero as he begins to come into his own. The hero is slowly becoming his own person—slowly discovering his own spirit. Then, abruptly, the wizard is taken away altogether, usually because of his own self-sacrifice, which coincidentally serves as the final lesson about the most fearsome subject: death. Before the boy feels ready, he finds himself alone and forced to fend for himself. He grows into a man, but before he can tackle the great trial at the end of the quest, he will need once again to gather all his strength and wits about him. The wizard returns, helps the boy prepare, and then leaves again so that the hero's victory belongs solely to the hero. It seems fitting that, when the wizard and his pupil are finally reunited in the last step of the cycle, the wizard is usually appearing from beyond the grave as a *spiritual* entity. When Frodo wakes up after his ordeal, he sees Gandalf as Gandalf the White for the first time. Luke sees Obi-Wan as a luminous ghost, and Harry speaks to the deceased Dumbledore through the medium of a portrait. Once the boy has united his psyche, he sees the wizard as he truly is: a symbol of the spirit.

This wizard, as an instantiation of the wise old man, is active rather than passive. He is not a hermit, far removed from the world and sought after for periodic moments of advice. If anything he is a meddler. He comes to the hero rather than the other way around. Or rather, he is summoned by the hero. The mind carries with it some unconscious notion of how a person's mental and physical capacities should be united, so, in moments of spiritual emptiness, when

they are not united, that deeply rooted notion within us calls out for the wise old man to step in with his magical gifts. What is more intriguing is that the mind *answers its own call*. This is what Jung is referring to when he says:

Often the old man in fairytales asks questions like who? why? whence? and whither? for the purpose of inducing self-recognition and mobilizing the moral forces, and more often still he gives the necessary magical talisman, the unexpected and improbable power to succeed, which is one of the peculiarities of the unified personality in good or bad alike. But the intervention of the old man—the spontaneous objectivation of the archetype—would seem to be equally indispensable, since the conscious will by itself is hardly ever capable of uniting the personality to the point where it acquires this extraordinary power to succeed.

(The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairytales, 220)

That deeply rooted intuition of the human spirit recognizes our spiritual poverty and calls forth a means of filling the void: itself. It makes itself into an object—in this case, the character of the wise old man—for us to gaze upon. It calls us beyond ourselves. It puts the great boon of *wisdom* on a pedestal at the end of the quest and pushes us down the road of adventure until we have nurtured our own spirit into its full strength. There is something fundamentally schizophrenic about this whole process. The mind helps us to do accomplish something that we cannot accomplish on our own by creating for us an other. But this other comes from within ourselves! The power to succeed was within us the whole time, calling to us, waiting to be unlocked. When we are incapable of doing something on our own and need the wise intervention of a wizard figure, the mind spontaneously creates that figure for us. But how can this figure possibly have the necessary power to help us, if it comes from us and derives its power solely from us? This is where Jung's concept of the collective unconscious comes into play. The collective unconscious is a set of mental notions inherited from mankind's evolutionary past—a sort of knowledge that was permanently engrained into the human psyche over thousands of years of development. In it lies the wisdom of generations past. It is ours, but it was made by

others, and so it is capable of generating an other for us. The collective unconscious, which was formed over thousands of years by our ancestors (our wise old men), comes to our aid by solidifying the human spirit right before our eyes, even before we have realized that spirit in ourselves. So our ancestors are, quite literally, reaching out to us through our own minds in the form of the wizard. The wizard is more than just an endearing stock character; he is our link to all of humanity's past.

Now that the psychological underpinnings behind the wise old man archetype have been fleshed out, the wizard's qualities become clear. His magic begins to make sense. The chapter on Gandalf praised Tolkien for giving his wizard a magic that is extremely subtle. Gandalf's powers just seem to make sense. There is something believable about them. This is because the human spirit, when totally united (as it is for a wizard), is extremely powerful—more powerful than we can imagine if our own spirits are not yet fully empowered. Jung gives an example:

One can observe this experimentally in the artificial concentration induced by hypnosis: in my demonstrations I used regularly to put an hysteric, of weak bodily build, into a deep hypnotic sleep and then get her to lie with the back of her head on one chair and her heels resting on another, stiff as a board, and leave her there for about a minute. Her pulse would gradually go up to 90. A husky young athlete among the students tried in vain to imitate this feat with a conscious effort of will. He collapsed in the middle with his pulse racing at 120.

(The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairytales, 219)

In our deepest subconscious, we know how powerful the spirit can be. This is how we can believe in a wizard's magic, even though we ourselves cannot produce it. We see magic in the form of the empowered spirit, either in our role models or in our own collective unconscious. So even though we do not understand it, we know it exists, and allow for its existence in legends and fairytales as if it were simply natural. Indeed, it *is* natural. A wizard's magic is *real magic*.

However, it is not all white magic. Jung tells us that, “indeed the old man has a wicked aspect too, just as the primitive medicine-man is a healer and helper and also the dreaded

concocter of poisons” (227). Wizards, even benevolent ones, are still somewhat frightening. Just as the mind united can do great things, so can it do terrible things. The collective unconscious is filled with more than just wisdom; it has a dark side, or shadow, made up of all the primitive urges of primeval man. War, lust, and destruction lurk in the past as well. From this comes the evil sorcerer, the practitioner of black magic. But just as a kind wizard is never fully white, a black mage is never fully black. There is a little bit of yin in the yang and vice versa. This is what Jung observed when he wrote, “It is thus possible that the old man is his own opposite, a life-bringer as well as a death-dealer” (227). This makes the wizard figure even more incredible. Not only does he represent a union of psychic forces, but also a union of good and evil. Understanding this unholy nexus is part of the process of individuation. The union of opposites is part of our psychological furniture, because to be truly healthy, the mind must come to terms with both its Ego and its Shadow. The wise old man is truly the supreme symbol of the human spirit, empowered.

Conclusion

The wizard, with his long beard, flowing cloak, and pointed hat, has shifted his shape time and time again in western fiction. He first appeared on the British Isles as the prophet Merlin and to the Scandinavians as the wandering god Odin. Tolkien synthesized these two into Gandalf. George Lucas sent the wizard into space as Obi-Wan Kenobi, and J. K. Rowling placed him in the headmaster's office as Professor Dumbledore. And this is just to name a few. Magicians abound in fairytales and legends, and with each generation new wizards are born in literature, opera, and cinema.

This imposing figure leaves a lasting impression, both literarily and psychologically. The wizard is an animated, active figure who, at one time or other, displays every human emotion. When he appears, he drive the action of his story forward. Occasionally he vanishes when his presence would impede progress, but always his magical essence can be felt.

The wizard symbolizes what gives him his greatest power: wisdom—wisdom not in the sense of extensive knowledge, but in the sense of a deep, insightful understanding of the world and man's place in it. On the literary level, he exemplifies the wisdom that the hero quests for and eventually achieves of his own right. In the minds of the audience, he represents an ancestral power welling up from the depths of the collective unconscious: all the parts of the human mind, united. The wizard is the mind's way of rescuing itself from ignorance and confusion. He is the archetype of the spirit: the sum-total of all our psychic forces drawn together in concentration and determination. His magic is the magic of harmony—harmony of mind and harmony with the world.

It is no coincidence that the wizard is found so often in the masterpieces of storytelling. He is a rich, dynamic character with a certain primeval appeal. While he works his magic in the

narrative, he stirs up within us the powers of the human mind. And we have not seen the last of him. In a flash of light and a whirl of cloak he can morph into someone new, yet essentially the same. He will continue to reveal himself, coming and going as he sees necessary, as long as we remains fascinated with the magic he has to offer.

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I would also like to credit *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia* (www.wikipedia.org). Though it is not generally accepted as an authoritative source, it has proven an excellent tool for the discovery and exploration of works involving wizards.