

Transformational Fairy Monsters

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Transformational Fairy Monsters: Yoda, Gollum, Dobby

Take a look at Dobby, Yoda, and Gollum. Large, round eyes, alien yet realistic appearances, hairless skin covering their fragile bodies, and high-pitched, throaty voices. Their similarities extend beyond the physical, but into their story roles and the ways in which they meet their end.

In both modern and past fantasy works that follow the hero's journey (Campbell, 2008: 23), certain characters exist who aid the hero on his or her journey. The stories of *Harry Potter*, *The Hobbit*, and *Star Wars* share many similarities. These works all share the common theme of conquering evil along with an unlikely helper/donor/dispatcher character in the hero's journey (Propp, 2003: 19). In each example, the character is a small, ugly creature that plays an enormous role. Without this character, the hero would not have been able to accomplish their defining heroic moment.

Dobby from *Harry Potter*, Yoda from *Star Wars*, and Gollum from *The Hobbit* are all creatures synonymous of one another. Authors utilise these characters to emphasise their roles in the hero's journey, their archetypes identify well with audiences, and their relationship suggests an influence from Tolkien and older fairy stories. In the tradition of these, such creatures are often deformed villains, allowing the stories to reinforce the dominant hegemony of society, by providing victories for handsome princes, knights and kings. (Zipes, 2006).

Dobby makes his first appearance in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002). He is a "little creature with large, bat-like ears and bulging green eyes the size of tennis balls" (Rowling, 1998: 12).

Dobby was a house-elf and he served many masters. Harry Potter is startled upon his first encounter with Dobby. The ornate speech patterns employed by the house elf set him apart from other characters. The cultural differences between the two characters quickly become apparent as their conversation continues and whilst Dobby's demeanour is deferent, his actions interfere with the direction of the narrative. He has actively tried to stop Harry's return to Hogwarts and by admitting this, generates conflict between himself and Harry.

The pudding fell to the floor with a heart-stopping crash. Cream spattered the windows and walls as the dish shattered. With a crack like a whip. Dobby vanished.

(Rowling, 1998: 20).

This demonstrates the complex plot function of Dobby's role within the text. At times, his agenda draws him into conflict with Harry Potter, the functional hero of Rowling's work, but at other times, he is both supportive and empowering. The conflict between them is mostly resolved in the story when Harry Potter manages to free Dobby from his enslavement to the Malfoy family.

'Come Dobby. I said, *Come!*'

But Dobby didn't move. He was holding up Harry's disgusting slimy sock, and looking at it as though it were a priceless treasure.

'Master has given Dobby a sock,' said the Elf in wonderment. 'Master gave it to Dobby.'

'Dobby has got a sock,' said Dobby in disbelief. 'Master threw it, and Dobby caught it, and Dobby – is *free.*'

(Rowling, 1998: 248).

Much later, in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007), Dobby relinquishes his life to protect Harry, rescuing him from the clutches of the Malfoy family and the snatchers. This demonstrates Rowling's

construction of his character as a functional arc, beginning with one role that is adversarial, but gradually becoming an ally and helper, before finally being sacrificed, which in itself is another function of the journey – its cost.

He looked around. The little elf stood feet from him.

'DOBBY!'

The elf swayed slightly, stars reflected in his wide, shining eyes. Together he and Harry looked down at the silver hilt of the knife protruding from the elf's heaving chest.

(Rowling, 2007: 385).

Without Dobby's heroic actions, there would surely be no more Harry Potter. Dobby makes it possible for Harry's further experiences in the books that follow.

Yoda, introduced in *Empire Strikes back* (1980) is a green, little, wrinkly creature. Yoda fulfils a multi-facted role, before registering opposition to Luke's decision to abandon his training and help his friends.

Luke's first encounter with Yoda is similar to that of Harry's with Dobby. Once again, speech patterns are used to differentiate the character. Yoda's speech pattern is backwards. He speaks in object-subject-verb order; for instance, when speaking to Luke, he says, "help you, I will" (Kershner, 1980). Again, there is some initial conflict between the two characters, mostly in this case, owing to Yoda's mischievous and testing nature.

...before he could answer, Luke saw the tiny hominid hobble over to the top of the salvaged supply cases. Shocked, he watched as the creature began to rummage through the articles Luke has brought with him from Hoth.

'Get away from there,' he said, surprised at this strange behavior.

(Glut, 2002: 267).

After Yoda's deception is revealed, the relationship between Yoda is carefully developed. He is the one to teach Luke Skywalker about the force, improve his Jedi abilities, aid him to try to overcome his weaknesses, help him mature and develop a new perspective and ready him for further training. Here, he first fulfils Vogler's role of *Mentor*.

An archetype found frequently in dreams, myths and stories is the Mentor, usually a positive figure who aids or trains the hero. Campbell's name for this force is the **Wise Old Man** or **Wise Old Woman**. This archetype is expressed in all those characters who teach and protect heroes and give them gifts.

(Vogler, 2007: 39)

However, Yoda does not simply fulfil this function in the text. He is also a *Threshold Guardian* (Vogler, 2007: 49), acting as an obstacle to Luke's journey by needing to be convinced to train him and ultimately counselling him not to leave when his friends are in danger.

At each gateway to a new world there are powerful guardians at the threshold, placed to keep the unworthy from entering. They present a menacing fate for the hero, but if properly understood they can be overcome, bypassed, or even turned into allies.

(Vogler, 2007: 49)

Yoda's function in this role is less well developed, but he remains an obstacle with consequences. By rejecting his further instruction in favour of saving his friends, Luke's action is given meaning and weight.

When Yoda dies in *The Return of the Jedi* (1983) that meaning is confirmed, as we will never know how skilled Luke might have become if he had remained.

Tolkien's Gollum is also a peculiar character, operating initially as an adversary and perhaps, more clearly a Threshold Guardian in his initial encounter with Bilbo Baggins.

Deep down here by the dark water lived old Gollum, a small slimy creature. I don't know where he came from, nor who or what he was. He was Gollum – as dark as darkness, except for two big round pale eyes in his thin face.

(Tolkien, 1987: 77).

Gollum also has an unusual speech pattern. He speaks as if he is really speaking to himself, further emphasising his split personality. He calls others "it," adds extra 'es' to plural words, and emphasises his s's. Right before Bilbo escapes from his presence, he says,

"Did we say so, precious? Show the nasty little Baggins the way out, yes, yes. But what has it got in its pocketses, eh?"

(Tolkien, 1987: 84)

Gollum's pivotal role in the text is that it is he from whom Bilbo gets the notorious ring. In this sense, he is a Donor, as defined by Propp.

Now a new character enters the tale: this personage might be termed the donor, or more precisely, the provider. Usually he is encountered accidentally—in the forest, along the roadway, etc.

(Propp, 2003: 39).

Whilst there is no intention in Gollum giving the ring to Bilbo and we later learn it may well have been the ring itself making the decision, his coincidental presence provides the opportunity and his participation in the game of riddles is reminiscent of older mythology, such as Oedipus and the Sphinx (Sophocles, 2003). This is a clear threshold and Gollum is the guardian personified.

The ring connects the stories of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Gollum's role in the latter is not so clear cut. Despite being defeated, he is not vanquished and his return to aid Frodo Baggins in his quest to Mount Doom reveals a duality in his nature (the personality of Smeagol) and a duality in his function. His purpose and presence following and accompanying Frodo and Sam is clear, he wants the ring back, but he also recognises its hold on him. The reader and the characters are aware of this and the role he performs switches continuously as he seeks to resolve this dilemma, resulting finally, in his intervention at a crucial moment of the quest's resolution.

Suddenly Sam saw Gollum's long hands draw upwards to his mouth; his white fangs gleamed, and then snapped as they bit. Frodo gave a cry, and there he was, fallen upon his knees at the chasm's edge. But Gollum, dancing like a mad thing, held aloft the ring, a finger still thrust within its circle. It shone now as if verily it was wrought of living fire.

'Precious, precious, precious!' Gollum cried. 'My Precious! O my Precious!' And with that, even as his eyes were lifted up to gloat on his prize, he stepped too far, toppled, wavered for a moment on the brink, and then with a shriek, he fell. Out of the depths came his last wail *Precious*, and he was gone.

(Tolkien, 1993: 982)

Frodo acknowledges he would have failed in his quest, having already been seduced by the ring (Tolkien, 1993: 982), so without Gollum's intervention, Sauron could have reclaimed his power.

In this moment, the functions of characters within the text can be drawn into sharp focus and questioned. Is Frodo truly the hero of the story? Ultimately, he failed his quest. Is Gollum truly an adversary, or by finally ridding himself of the object that cursed him, is he the story's real hero?

What is clear, is the parallel that can be drawn between Gollum and our previous examples in his sacrifice as a consequence of the hero's journey, whomsoever is defined as the hero.

Dobby, Yoda, and Gollum provide immense meaning to the hero's journey in which they contribute. Without them, there would be no consequence or price to the eventual success of each story. These synonymous characters share more common traits than their appearance, demeanour and patterns of speech. When comparing them, it is evident Yoda, Gollum, and Dobby are indeed synonymous of one another, by being transformational characters in each respective narrative.

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