

Reconfiguring the Hero's Journey

Reconfiguring the Hero's Journey

The Monomyth in Contemporary Popular Culture

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Abstract

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Den här avhandlingen analyserar hur den så kallade hjälteresan eller monomyten gestaltas i samtida texter och media. Det övergripande syftet är att undersöka vilken giltighet och relevans strukturen som skapades av Joseph Campbell i *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) har inom engelskspråkig populärkultur. Genom att studera hur utvalda samtida texter korresponderar med viktiga stationer av den hjälteresa som Campbell utstakar visar avhandlingen på modellens fortsatta relevans för förståelsen av nutida hjältenarrativ. Projektet utforskar på vilket sätt monomyten och de undersökta texterna genomsyrar varandra, hur strukturen kan användas som ett tolkningsverktyg samt hur de undersökta populärkulturella texterna kastar nytt ljus på Campbells teori.

Avhandlingen är strukturerad i enlighet med hjälteresan: Den börjar med ”The Call to Adventure” och avslutas med ”Master of the Two Worlds.” Analyserna presenteras i fristående artiklar som genom närläsning belyser hur monomyten kan användas för att förstå berättande och vice versa. I studien undersöks olika genrer och medier inom en populärkulturell sfär; litteratur för unga vuxna, actionfilm, serietidningar om superhjältar samt självbiografiskt berättande i grafiska romaner.

Analyserna visar inte bara på en produktiv växelverkan mellan monomyten och de undersökta texterna, utan bidrar också till att se strukturen på ett delvis nytt sätt; nämligen som en framställning av den transitoriska rörelsen mellan två olika tillstånd hos berättelsens protagonist. I det att den gestaltar allt som hjälten går igenom, från uppbrottet ur den vardagliga hemmiljön till återvändandet i ny gestalt, representerar hjälteresan rörelsen genom olika stadier och över viktiga trösklar i livet. Genom att undersöka hur Campbells struktur yttrar sig i samtida

populärkulturella texter blir det således möjligt att både utforska dess samtida relevans och att belysa den ur nya perspektiv.

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1. Introduction

Revisiting and Revisioning the Hero's Journey

The Hero's Journey, or Monomyth,¹ the structure common to mythological and scriptural hero stories identified and elucidated by literary theorist, folklorist and mythologist Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*,² ought to be outmoded, entwined as it often seems to be with Jungian psychoanalysis and structural anthropology. On the other hand, a great many – perhaps even most – of the narrative literary and popular-cultural texts we enjoy today still follow Campbell's pattern very closely. Whether this is because the Monomyth is fundamentally true, or simply a result of influential disciples of Campbell such as George Lucas, the creator of *Star Wars*, is open to question. The aim of this thesis is therefore to examine the Hero's Journey in terms of the contemporary texts, text types and media which engage with this model both thematically and structurally. In order to ascertain the ways in which the pattern informs these texts, I will analyse how they, or more precisely the paths followed by their protagonists, correspond to selected key stages of Campbell's model. In doing this, I intend to explore the usefulness of the Hero's Journey as a theoretical tool in the analysis of narratives across different media, but also to demonstrate that new light can be shed on the pattern itself by exposing it to these more contemporary texts from the realms of Popular Culture.

In examining the cultural prevalence of the Monomyth, it is vital to first touch on the impact of *Star Wars*, which was first released in 1977. This film, alongside the eleven subsequent entries in the series³, represents, as Donald E. Palumbo points out, not only one of the most popular movies of all time, but also a cultural artefact that “has since had the most profound impact on American popular culture” (115). The characters and tropes of the films in the series are, arguably, immediately recognisable and relatable to most consumers

¹ A name borrowed from James Joyce's novel *Finnegan's Wake*.

² First published in 1949, though the edition with which I have worked was published in 1993.

³ These are *The Empire Strikes Back*, *The Return of the Jedi*, *The Phantom Menace*, *Attack of the Clones*, *Revenge of the Sith*, *The Force Awakens*, *Rogue One*, *The Last Jedi*, *Solo*, and *The Rise of Skywalker*.

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of popular culture, irrespective of age, background or nationality. In doing this, it brought Campbell's ideas to mainstream audiences worldwide.

The narrative structure of *Star Wars* – in common with those of its immediate sequels – follows the Hero's Journey extremely closely, and does so intentionally. In *A Fire in the Mind*, Campbell's authorised biography, the films' primary creative force, George Lucas, explains that “in reading *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* I began to realise that my first draft of *Star Wars* was following classical motifs [...] I modelled my next draft [of *Star Wars*] according to what I'd been learning about classical motifs and made it a little bit more consistent” (541)⁴. This comment seems to affirm Campbell's assertions about the ways in which mythic patterns are implicit in any hero narrative, while also highlighting the potential problems for writers in attempting to tailor their work in order to fit the pattern more closely. The extraordinary success of the *Star Wars* films led in turn to successive waves of Hollywood filmmakers using the Hero's Journey as a structural framework.⁵ This is the tail wagging the dog: Campbell's original argument is that the Monomyth occurs unconsciously and without authorial intent, as opposed to being an easy recipe for a successful blockbuster. This removes all nuance from the theory, and it is these nuances that my thesis seeks to articulate and analyse.

While this pattern may be flawed and sometimes reductive, it retains both relevance and power in the context of today's popular culture. One need only look to the current prevalence of films and television shows about superheroes, as well as hugely lucrative multimedia franchises such as *Star Wars*, and such intellectual properties as *The Lord of the Rings*⁶ and the *Harry Potter* series,⁷ as being indicative of this. Problematically, the phrase ‘hero's journey’ is in increasingly common usage in a non-academic context, with film reviewers and pop culture blogs tending in particular to use it as an easy shorthand to describe stories that are about heroic characters, with no attention paid at all to the actual

⁴ This appreciation led to a fruitful friendship between Campbell and Lucas, to the extent that *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*, the 1988 PBS documentary series that consisted of a series of interviews between Campbell and Bill Moyers, was filmed at Lucas' ranch.

⁵ In part due to the work of Christopher Vogler, whose ideas and influence I discuss later in this chapter.

⁶ First published in 1954-55, and so contemporaneous to *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

⁷ Both of which, while popular film series, first found success as literary works.

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pattern Campbell sets out⁸. This thesis seeks to re-emphasise its critical validity and specificity.

There is also an argument to suggest that the structure informs and inhabits all narrative texts that involve a central protagonist, and not simply those that concern a traditionally ‘heroic’ figure engaged in a life-and-death struggle with dark forces. Christopher Vogler extends the reach of the pattern in precisely this way, arguing that “[t]he stages of the Hero’s Journey can be traced in all kinds of stories, not just those that feature ‘heroic’ physical action and adventure. The protagonist of every story is the hero of a journey, even if the path leads only into his own mind or [...] the realm of relationships” (7). Vogler’s insistence that all stories are intrinsically Monomythical in nature has problematic implications for the act of constructing stories itself. Vogler’s suggestion that the Monomyth is some kind of blueprint for the construction of story is one that has led to a great deal of criticism of the Monomyth as a viable theory, as I discuss more fully in chapter 2.

The texts I have chosen are, for the most part, not ones in which I believe the authors or screenwriters have intended to follow Campbell’s pattern⁹ (though of course the truth of this is fundamentally unknowable), but are ones which, precisely for this reason, can be used to shed new light on the model. Rather than choose a literary theory or school of thought and apply it to my choice of primary texts, I have, to an extent, done the opposite. The Hero’s Journey is, in essence, a framework upon which, Campbell believed, all classical and biblical heroic narratives, as well as those texts that take inspiration from them, can comfortably be hung, and as such it is my argument that this qualifies it for the status of literary theory. To interrogate this claim, rather than simply use the Monomyth as a prism through which to view and appraise the literary and cultural texts I have chosen, I have also elected to use these texts and the various media in which they are presented to test the validity of key aspects of the framework itself. My choice of text and media has been wide-ranging by design: there is, I maintain, no use trying to test the modern viability and relevance of a supposedly outdated paradigm by applying it to well-thumbed

⁸ See, for example, the opening sentence of Mosi Reeves’ review of the most recent Flying Lotus album (Reeves), or Tim Molloy’s use of the term in describing the life of the *Washington Post* publisher Katherine Graham (Molloy).

⁹ The exception being *Fun Home*, in which it is clear that Alison Bechdel is extremely familiar with both the Monomyth and its literary significance, history and relevance, and actively engages with the pattern. This is discussed further both in this introduction, and in “The Return Journey in Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*.”

texts from an over-familiar canon. The chosen narratives represent diverse genres, and media, ones that were not necessarily considered part of the academic landscape during the heyday of archetypal literary criticism¹⁰, the discipline that arguably corresponds best to Campbell's ideas and concerns. I have set out with a dual purpose in mind: to investigate the Monomyth as a tool for both shaping and analysing contemporary culture, and to stake a claim for the texts and genres chosen as ones that are worthy of critical scrutiny.

The first three chapters of my doctoral dissertation represent an overview of its central thesis and arguments, delineate the theories explored, and set out the main criticisms that have been levelled at Campbell's work in the past. In order to assess the overarching contribution of this research to the canon of Campbell criticism and scholarship, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* is situated within the myth-based theories and ideas from which it emerged, the rationale behind my choice of primary texts is laid out, and I explain and reflect upon my purpose in structuring the thesis in line with the Hero's Journey itself.

The Swedish word for the introductory chapters to a compilation (or portfolio) thesis is 'kappa,' which translates as 'overcoat.' One rather wishes there were an English word which fit the concept so well, for this section is intended to be the snug outer garment that keeps the flesh and bones of my study warm and dry, while simultaneously serving as a critical overview and reflection of the project as a whole.

The Hero's Journey

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell first describes the Monomyth, or Hero's Journey, as a structural pattern common to a wide range of mythological and scriptural tales from around the world. In summary, an ordinary figure, of age yet still fundamentally an innocent, leaves the comfort of home, immerses him- or herself¹¹ in the unfamiliar and extraordinary events of an outside world of which he or she has no real experience, fights and wins a decisive victory and, once this is done, returns home with some essential boon or blessing. The pattern has seventeen stages, grouped under three overall chapter headings: *Departure*¹², *Initiation* and *Return*, which Campbell calls "the nuclear unit of the Monomyth" (*Hero* 30). The fundamental optimism of this

¹⁰ In the 1950s.

¹¹ This is a later addition: as I discuss later in this chapter, for Campbell heroes are archetypally male.

¹² Campbell also refers to this as 'separation' (*Hero* 30).

pattern can perhaps be seen as an original element in Campbell's reading of the source materials. Myth, after all, is not in itself inherently optimistic, but the Monomyth represents the protagonist's movement towards self-actualisation, and as such is perhaps indicative of the post-World War Two zeitgeist within Anglo-American popular culture: an essentially therapeutic one, reflected by the flowering of archetypal criticism, with Northrop Frye at the vanguard.¹³

In the five stages described in chapter one (*Departure*)¹⁴, the putative hero is found living in safety and peace. He or she hears what Campbell refers to as "The Call to Adventure," which is to say, the siren song of a wider world of conflict beyond the threshold of his or her quiet home. This call will initially be refused, but not for long. With the aid of a supernatural or preternaturally wise mentor figure, the young hero will at last make the decision to cross the threshold out of the safety of home, and, like Jonah before them, will find themselves in "The Belly of the Whale," which is to say "swallowed into the unknown" (*Hero* 90) and surrounded by new dangers and unpredictable situations. These five stages are examined from the point of view of heroic protagonists of YA fiction in "Transitional Identities: Crossing the Threshold in Young Adult Speculative Fiction." These initial stages deal with the hero at his or her most callow, and as such it makes sense to approach them from the point of view of protagonists who are still children, or at least not yet fully grown. In doing this, I extend Campbell's approach, with the aim of exploring the ways in which characters in transition can be interpreted by means of the Monomyth. This, in turn, reveals new aspects of, and implications for, Campbell's original model.

Chapter two (*Initiation*) represents the main body of the hero's initial quest narrative, and features six individual stages. The hero will find him- or herself on the "Road of Trials," beset by different ordeals and tests, and will subsequently be obliged to confront forces that are not only beyond his or her proper understanding, but are also far more powerful and influential than he or she is. At this juncture they will meet and be given aid by supernatural or divine allies. Campbell problematically frames this aid as "The Meeting with the Goddess," positing that this Goddess "is incarnate in every woman" (*Hero* 118), and insisting that "when the adventurer [...] is not a youth but a maid, she is

¹³ Eagleton's (2008) chapter on Structuralism and Semiotics elucidates this movement especially well, with Frye's contribution set out on pages 79-82.

¹⁴ These are, "The Call to Adventure," "The Refusal of the Call," "Supernatural Aid," "The Crossing of the First Threshold," and "The Belly of the Whale."

the one who [...] is fit to become the consort of an immortal" (*Hero* 119). I discuss the problematic gender politics of the Monomyth further in section 2.2.

Gender politics are also evident in the title of the next stage of the Journey, "The Woman as Temptress." It is here that the naive hero will be sorely tempted to stray from the heroic path, either for personal gain, as a shortcut or quick fix, or simply as a result of the hardship he or she has faced. This temptation forms the basis of my second chapter, "Mass-Surveillance and the Negation of the Monomyth." Campbell makes it plain that to give in to this temptation represents so drastic a failure of the hero's quest that the results will prove extremely grave for the individual in question (*Hero* 37), and as such, my chapter explores the ramifications of this in modern narratives informed by the great technological leaps that have been taken in the field of surveillance since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In Greek myth, for a mortal to attempt to harness or control the power of the gods constitutes an act of hubris, which invites nemesis, and what in our modern world has more aspiration to divine omniscience than the computerised surveillance systems that surround us? Narratives that deal with issues of mass-surveillance often feature protagonists who come to grief as a result of their use of such methods and technologies. Whilst it is easy to interpret this as some form of moral commentary, it is my argument that this happens because of the mythic inevitability of disaster following an act of hubris, or – in Campbellian terms – of the destruction a hero faces if he or she strays from the Monomythical path, or tries to cheat or take short cuts (*Hero* 37).

If the hero is able to resist temptation, and continue their journey, there may be a confrontation, and subsequent entente, with an authority or parental figure ("Atonement with the Father"), followed by "Apotheosis," the death and rebirth of the self into a state deserving of the Ultimate Boon. Apotheosis is discussed in my third chapter, "'Submission is Faith in the Strength of Others': Synthesising Male and Female Aspects of War in Azzarello and Chiang's *Wonder Woman*." It is only by dying and being reborn, sacrificing their younger persona on the altar of the heroic experience gained within the context of the quest ordeal, that the hero is finally ready to gain what Campbell calls "The Ultimate Boon." This boon is not just a personal victory: it also represents an elixir for the community to which the hero intends to return (see, for example, *Hero* 191-192). This stage is explored in my fourth chapter, "Original Sin as Salvation: The Apocalyptic Boon in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*."

This return trajectory is the key to Campbell’s third chapter of the Hero’s Journey (*Return*)¹⁵, which describes the hero’s progress homeward after having achieved his or her boon. The return journey functions as a mirror of the original quest, in as much as the hero will hear a call to return, which he or she will initially refuse, only to be guided to set out again by some form of mentor or authority figure. It is here that we are reminded that the boon the hero has fought for and won is not just a personal prize: it represents the betterment of the world in general – Campbell has it that “*the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man*” (*Hero* 30, italics in original). This final victory and resolution cannot be achieved if the hero is unable or unwilling to return home with the boon. It is only when the return threshold is crossed with this hard-won prize that the hero can truly be the “Master of Two Worlds” (*Hero* 229). They are at last the person they set out upon the Hero’s Journey to become. This process, and its importance to the pattern as a whole, is discussed in my final chapter, “The Return Journey in Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*.” Intertextuality is fundamental to the way in which the medium of comics approaches narrative, and *Fun Home* engages explicitly with myth and the Hero’s Journey within both its form and content. Bechdel – unlike the authors of the other texts I have chosen to study – deliberately draws on and recontextualises the Monomyth.

The crux of Campbell’s argument lies in his belief that myth, as Robert A. Segal puts it, “constitutes a Bible for all humanity. It alone contains the wisdom necessary for what amounts to salvation [...] Dreams, art, literature, ideology and science become *varieties* of myth, rather than alternatives to it” (*Theorizing* 137, italics in original). This places myth in the position of being indispensable for human society, to the point where “without myth, even myth taken literally, humans are lost” (*Theorizing* 137). Segal’s point is that Campbell sets up a dialogic relationship between mythology and society, and suggests that without the former, the latter will inevitably lose its way. This, in turn, raises issues, which I discuss in section 2.2.

Choice of Texts

When choosing media to examine in exploring the intertextual relationship between an essentially myth-based structure and more modern texts, comics

¹⁵ The stages featured in this chapter are, “Refusal of the Return,” “The Magic Flight,” “Rescue from Without,” “Crossing the Return Threshold,” “Master of the Two Worlds, and “Freedom to Live.”

and graphic novels are a useful starting point – after all, the medium is still deeply associated with modern takes on hero myths, despite the broad spectrum of subject matters it now encompasses. The medium of comics has in recent years become extremely fertile ground for academic study, representing a means by which an author and artist (sometimes one and the same person, though more often groups of two or more creators) can tell the same story using two separate yet simultaneous methods. As such, comics are inherently multimodal in nature. Hillary Chute quotes Alison Bechdel's description of comics as “a new syntax, *a new way of ordering ideas*” (23, italics in original). Karin Kukkonen elucidates this process narratologically, by explaining that as “images are better suited for the showing of a story, and words are better suited for the telling of a story” it follows that “[i]n comics, readers pick up clues from both the images and the words, and mostly, the two modes work together toward unfolding the comic's narrative” (32). This differentiates the medium from traditional literature, in that the intrinsic tension between the words and images allows the reader to construct a gestalt impression of the narrative, one that is fundamentally different to that provided by either narrative component when taken singly. As Rocco Versaci points out, “A comic does not happen in the words or the pictures, but somewhere in-between [...] reading comic books requires an active though largely subconscious participation on the part of the reader” (14).

Two of my chapters use comics as a basis for their investigations. The first of these, “Submission is Faith in the Strength of Others?: Synthesising Male and Female Aspects of War in Azzarello and Chiang's *Wonder Woman*,” represents a feminist analysis and response to a female mythic character from within the superhero genre that has always been ubiquitous in the medium, especially within the mainstream American comics industry. The primary text is also chosen for its links to classical mythology, the character of Wonder Woman being situated within a (sometimes garbled) version of the Greek pantheon. Campbell tends to limit his scope to stories of male heroes, and so it is both important and instructive to investigate how the pattern informs the narrative arc of a female hero, especially one created specifically to challenge the perceived hegemony of stereotypically masculine superheroes, albeit by a creator, William Moulton Marston, with a unique and rather irregular

interpretation of feminism¹⁶. In the chapter, I also critique claims that Azzarello and Chiang's run on the title is both intrinsically misogynistic and a betrayal of Marston's original intentions for the character.

Superheroes are, I would argue, the most obvious equivalents of the heroes of ancient myth that modern popular culture can offer. For example, when discussing Superman, arguably the *sine qua non* of the superhero genre within comics, Grant Morrison notes that “[i]n Superman some of the loftiest aspirations of our species came hurtling down from imagination’s bright heaven [...] something powerful and resonant was born [...] [h]e was Apollo, the sun god, the unbeatable supreme self, the personal greatness of which we all know we are capable” (15). Morrison has pinpointed the Monomythical dynamic of the superhero as being simultaneously archetypal and reflective of aspects of the self. This dynamic may explain the ubiquity of this type of heroic figure in popular culture. In *On the Origin of Superheroes* Chris Gavalier also focuses on this idea, specifically its ideological implications, by noting that “[s]uperheroes, like most any pop culture production reflect a lot about us. And since superheroes have been flying for decades, they document our evolution too” (2). Jeffrey J. Kripal argues that there is “a deep, often unconscious narrative that underlies and shapes much of contemporary popular culture” (5), referring to this narrative as a ‘Super-Story’ and arguing that it originates from the same urge toward the paranormal from which belief systems have traditionally sprung. As Kripal puts it, “No wonder this stuff is so popular. It’s us” (2). This formulation is suggestive of the archetypes of Jungian psychoanalysis with which Campbell, despite his protestations (*Open Life* 123), has so often been associated. I explore this more fully in sections 2.1 and 2.2, in which I look at the background to and criticisms of Campbell’s theories.

My choice of Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*, the second graphic narrative studied here, was informed not only by the desire to further explore the medium, but also by the fact that it is explicitly an autobiographical text. The Hero’s Journey is a pattern steeped in fiction, one suited to myth, folklore and tales of derring-do, and as such one expects to encounter it within the context of a superhero narrative. My analysis explores how useful it might be in the representation of real-life tragedy and trauma. How does the pattern hold when an author specifically reconstructs and represents formative events in

¹⁶ Marston believed, amongst other things, that women are the superior gender as a result of what he defined as their submissive nature, whereas men were inferior as a result of their need for dominance. This is discussed in greater detail in “Submission is Faith in the Strength of Others.”

his or her life along Monomythical lines, or tries to use the Monomyth to make sense of a dead loved one's fractured or obscured past? Unlike my other chosen texts, Bechdel is explicit in her use of Campbell's terminology and ideas on structure, consciously juxtaposing her father's tale with that of both Odysseus in *The Odyssey* and Leopold Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses*, and so it is both logical and instructive to explore her 'family tragicomic' in terms of the Monomyth. More significantly, hers is a narrative that engages wholeheartedly with the final section of the Hero's Journey, which is to say the voyage homeward after the boon has been achieved. As I discuss in the chapter itself, few texts even acknowledge the existence of these final stages, despite Campbell's assertion that they are vital to the successful completion of the Hero's Journey (*Hero* 193), and therefore I believe it is particularly important to explore them in order to ascertain why this might be, and how a lesbian autobiography utilises and repurposes the Monomyth to its own ends.

Returning to superheroes, as closely associated as the medium of comics has traditionally been with the genre, it is in film that characters such as Wonder Woman, Captain America and Batman have recently reached such huge worldwide audiences, in doing so cementing their places in the pop-cultural zeitgeist. It is, in part, for this reason that the films *The Dark Knight* and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* have been chosen for use in the chapter, "Mass-Surveillance and the Negation of the Monomyth." While it may seem that it is somewhat unorthodox to discuss cinema as part of a doctoral project that is, at least nominally, based within a literary idiom, it is my belief that to properly investigate the Monomyth in popular culture it is necessary to broaden the scope of the investigation to allow for different types of text and intertext. This is especially true when one considers the role that blockbuster films have played in popularising Monomythical narratives on a global scale. This chapter also engages with the very modern issue of mass-surveillance, and makes an argument that connects the practice of electronic snooping to the ancient concepts of hubris and nemesis, and the effects these must necessarily have on the archetypal (and contemporary) hero figure. Our age is one in which questions of privacy and governmental control are often paramount. It is easy to assume a moral argument on the part of the creators of any narrative that sees a hero coming to grief as a result of indulging in mass-surveillance, but utilising Campbell's observations about the classical consequences of succumbing to temptation helps lead us to rather different and unexpected conclusions.

INTRODUCTION

Of the two chapters that focus on texts that can more normatively be identified as works of literature, the first concerns three novels that can be described using the relatively freshly-coined umbrella term ‘Young Adult,’ or YA. This term has come to describe work that is, theoretically, aimed at a younger audience, or at least a constructed idea of what a younger readership is looking for in a literary text. The reason I have chosen this genre is, primarily, to test the boundaries of the first section of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, which concerns the periods immediately before and during the hero’s decision to embark upon his or her adventure. As Robert A. Segal points out (*Theorizing* 125), Campbell has it that the Monomythical hero must necessarily be an adult, so it is crucial to explore the validity of this for protagonists who are children or teenagers, in order to extend these models beyond Campbell’s parameters and test their validity and usefulness as a critical framework. Further tension comes from the fact that YA literature, in common with all texts written with children in mind, is created for a presumed audience of which the author is no longer a part. As Tison Pugh explains, as a result of this, “literature performs cultural work often in the service of larger ideological objectives, [thus] children do not define the genre of children’s literature as much as they are defined by it” (3).

The three texts I have used therefore feature young protagonists who are at different stages of their childhoods: the eponymous Coraline of Neil Gaiman’s novel is of primary school age, Conor O’Malley from Patrick Ness’ *A Monster Calls* is an adolescent, and Claire Wilkinson of David Almond’s *A Song for Ella Grey* is in her late teens, on the very cusp of adulthood. All three protagonists can be seen, within the contexts of their own narratives, to complete an iteration of the Hero’s Journey, and as such it is my intention to explore the implications for the Monomyth of such young people seeming to achieve their boons, and what the successful navigation of such transitional periods in their young lives actually means for both the characters in question, and the intended/constructed readers of these texts, in terms of heroic journeys yet to come.

The second literary chapter explores Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy (which can also nominally be classified as YA), in terms of biblical apocalypse and Original Sin. I argue that, within the context of this trilogy, these are interpreted as standing for the granting of the Monomythical boon, as opposed to any more negative connotations one may expect to understand. It is my argument that the Monomyth helps us to understand the radical way

in which Pullman repurposes both biblical myth and other classic literary patterns. “The Ultimate Boon” is the name given by Campbell to describe the goal of the Hero’s Journey, the elixir the hero must obtain and return home with. This chapter interrogates not only the idea of the boon, but also the ways in which apocalypse, in the original Greek sense of the word, can be seen to represent this fundamental victory, while engaging with a reading of the denouement of the trilogy that is neither pre- nor postlapsarian, existing as it does on the very cusp of a second, desirable, Fall of Man. The novels that make up the *His Dark Materials* trilogy¹⁷ are, to some extent, the most formally literary of all the texts I have chosen, because while they can be seen both as fantasy novels and YA texts, taken as a whole they also represent an updated version of *Paradise Lost*, while responding intertextually to the more traditional use of these tropes by C.S. Lewis in his Narnia novels. They enact in creative terms the critical purview of this project, as they themselves take a text that, to some, may be seen as ground that has been well-trodden, and use modern ideas and understandings to re-examine, reconsider and, at times, undermine, subvert and repurpose it using Campbellian tools.

Taken as a whole, it is worth reflecting on the fact that all the chosen texts are either American or British, and have been written or created within the past twenty-five years¹⁸. This is in order to examine work that is relatively contemporary, and that represents media and genres that are currently reflective of the popular cultural zeitgeist. Further, to include texts and storytelling from other international traditions would broaden the scope of this project beyond that of a doctoral thesis, though this is certainly fertile ground to return to at a future juncture, and this is why I have chosen to limit my focus to Anglo-American work.

Objectives and Closer Focus

As specified at the start of this chapter, the aim of this thesis is to examine the Monomyth using a range of contemporary texts and media. By holding selected stages of the pattern up against texts produced in the decades subsequent to *Star Wars* – as well as utilising a range of relevant critical frameworks – with a

¹⁷ Respectively, *The Northern Lights*, *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass*.

¹⁸ Though, of course, the character of Wonder Woman first appeared in 1941, and my examination of Azzarello and Chiang’s recent run on the character does also address the work of her creator, William Moulton Marston.

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view to filling the strange lacuna in scholarship that surrounds the significance and meaning of the Monomyth's continued appeal within popular culture, it is my aim not only to re-evaluate the Hero's Journey, but also to help to make it a viable avenue for contemporary scholarship, in the way that it so clearly remains useful to creative practitioners. This makes my research relevant not just to the field of literary criticism, but also to the study of myth- and scripture-based narratives across multiple media, as well as to the realm of cultural studies. My synthesis of disparate discourses is both an evolution and an extension of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, as well as Campbell's approach. This is not, however, a work of hagiography: I also engage critically with Campbell's work, and explore problematic aspects of his theory.

The Hero's Journey should not, of course, be presented or interpreted as a straitjacket for story: the texts I have chosen reflect crucial stages of the Monomyth, but that should not be taken to imply a presumption that all stories must necessarily follow the pattern. It is my assertion that the pattern helps to shape both narrative and our understanding of it, and does so not because Campbell is so adamant about it, but rather because there are structures to which our storytelling traditions tend naturally to conform, and to which we are therefore both accustomed and receptive. This is certainly not to say that tales from mythology, folklore, or any other type of narrative tradition or medium, must necessarily have hidden spiritual meanings or be possessed of hidden truths: stories *can* just be stories, without implying a need to discern any deeper symbolic meanings. However, the trajectory of narratives that feature one or more primary protagonists tend overwhelmingly to concern the characters' progression from one state of being or identity to another. As Syd Field explains, one of the essential qualities of a leading character in any story is that "they go through some kind of change or transformation" (63), and while Field is speaking specifically about characters written for the screen, this is true of most narrative storytelling, regardless of medium or genre. In other words, the protagonist of every story takes a metaphorical journey; whether or not this is specifically the Hero's Journey is open to debate.

With this in mind, each of my articles attempts to ascertain whether or not the trajectory of one or more of the characters within the texts upon which I have focused can be equated with one or more of the stages of the Hero's Journey, as well as attempting to analyse how it is that Campbell's pattern, or at least the part of it with which the narrative corresponds, helps both to inform and shape the text in question, as well as our reception of it. It is important to

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note that I have not attempted to analyse the Monomyth in its entirety in any of my chapters, or indeed the project as a whole, choosing instead to focus each chapter on a specific aspect of the pattern. My intention is not to attempt an overarching review of the Hero's Journey as a complete theory: to do so would represent an undertaking beyond the scope of this dissertation. Rather, I seek to examine the ways in which important stages in the pattern enable us to engage more deeply with vital events within the chosen narratives, and to identify relevant critical discourses to articulate this dialogic process. This project does not attempt to be a referendum on the Hero's Journey, as much as it aims to explore aspects of the pattern from a range of current critical perspectives in order to try to come to new understandings about the nature, efficacy and continued relevance of the Monomyth. In doing this, my aim has been to use the narrowing of focus to take steps towards the construction of a working hypothesis on how the pattern is still prevalent, relevant, effective and useful as a critical tool. I am attempting to inspect the theory's component parts in order to achieve a more nuanced and persuasive understanding of how it functions. It has therefore been necessary to delimit my study by selecting the aspects and stages of the Monomyth upon which it seemed most productive and germane to focus, while excluding those that I perceived to be less interesting and pertinent to my investigations.

The start of the journey, in other words the sequence of events that begins with the Call to Adventure and ends with the hero having crossed the threshold into the dangers of the wider world, is vital to investigate. According to Campbell's framing of the pattern, the Hero's Journey always begins, as Segal puts it, "with the adult hero ensconced at home" (*Theorizing* 125). The hero may be young, but he or she has at least reached majority, and this burgeoning adulthood signals their readiness to set out on adventure. A great deal of the most popular narrative fiction aimed at younger readers or consumers, however, is concerned with the heroic trajectory of characters who are essentially still children, and it is for this reason that I elected to examine the first five stages of the Hero's Journey from the perspective of three fantasy-based novels for younger readers, featuring juvenile protagonists of different age groups. The chapter in question aims to examine if and how the Hero's Journey impacts upon younger protagonists, and what it represents both for them and for the intended readers of these texts, given the understanding that they are younger than Campbell's idea of a hero allows them to be. This is intended not only as an interrogation of the changing views of childhood and

identity, but also of an attempt to fill a gap in Campbell's pattern, and in the research and criticism of YA literature.

Equally, the success of any iteration of the Hero's Journey is predicated on the protagonist's successful attainment of the Ultimate Boon, and thus one chapter is given over to this stage. This chapter is concerned specifically with the way Original Sin and biblical Revelation, or apocalypse, are reframed as mankind's salvation within the context of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Material* trilogy, and examines how the achievement of the boon can be seen as a liminal space of transformation, and neither pre- nor postlapsarian in nature. Pullman's intertextual approach to myth liberates the Boon from its ideological shackles, repurposing it whilst still retaining its mythic power. In effect, Pullman's novels and the other narratives I explore create modern myths through the re-evaluation and reformulation of their classical antecedents, a process that Campbell's framework makes possible, visible and available to critical scrutiny.

But there is far more to the Monomyth than just these two tent poles, and so the question of which of the other stages of the pattern seemed most useful to revisit became paramount. Key to this process was the realisation that it would be necessary, in the process of framing my field of research, to jettison at least one aspect of the Monomyth that would seem at first glance to be of the utmost importance. Perhaps the most famous of these, and thus potentially the most glaring omission, is outlined in stage four of the second chapter of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, namely "Atonement with the Father." In this stage, the hero must confront and reconcile himself with what Campbell refers to as "the ogre aspect of the father" (*Hero* 129), equating this with "the abandonment of the attachment to ego itself" (130). Here, again, the shadows of George Lucas and his most famous creation loom large: Luke Skywalker's confrontations with his father Darth Vader, in the films *The Empire Strikes Back* and *The Return of the Jedi*, are arguably the most famous examples of this section of the Monomyth in Western popular culture, and the success and pervasiveness of the original *Star Wars* trilogy has rendered them inescapable. Equally, Christopher Vogler speaks of primary antagonists in archetypal terms, as shadow representations of the hero, in other words almost literal embodiments of Freud's concept of the return of the repressed. Vogler maintains that Vader is foremost among cinematic shadow figures expressly because he is the hero's father (68), and it is clear that the effectiveness of Lucas' creation has had something of a knock-on effect on the heroic trajectories of many subsequent literary and cinematic hero narratives. My choice not to examine this stage in detail emerges from my

conviction that there are more interesting insights to be mined from some of the slightly less well-trodden terrain in chapter two of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, but also that this particularly oedipal plot element has found its way into modern narratives as a direct result of the watershed moment when Luke Skywalker discovers the truth about his parentage, as opposed to through natural evolutions of the stories being told. In simple terms, the sample pool has been tainted. Besides, my intention for this project was to approach the Monomyth from fresher, and potentially more insightful and illuminating directions.

Initiation, the second chapter of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, traces the events that befall the hero after he or she has crossed the threshold to adventure, on the way to winning their boon. It follows that a large part of the change that the hero is obliged to experience in order to become worthy of achieving the boon must occur during these stages. The third stage of this section is called “Woman as the Temptress,” and makes it clear that the hero can only reach their goal if they are able to avoid being tempted from the path they are on. For Campbell, this temptation does not need to be sexual in nature, despite the (more than a little unfortunate) chapter heading; rather it is the lure of either illusory power or knowledge¹⁹, or of the chance to obtain them unearned. “Mass-Surveillance and the Negation of the Monomyth” examines this latter temptation in terms of narratives in which nominally heroic characters attempt to use modern methods of surveillance in order to achieve their goals, arguing that to attempt to harness the vision of the gods without being possessed of godlike wisdom is to commit an act of hubris. Campbell’s argument is that any hero who attempts such a shortcut will necessarily come to grief (*Hero* 37), and the chapter explores this in terms of two cinematic narratives that, on first viewing, may seem to be passing political judgment on the commission of such acts. The two nominally heroic figures I focus on in this chapter – Batman and Nick Fury – are seen to have their heroic trajectories halted as a result of their use of methods of mass-surveillance in. It is this internal critique of the hero that I investigate, in order to ascertain the way in which Monomythical patterns, as opposed to value judgments, affect the ways in which heroism can be performed and understood.

¹⁹ For example, the song of the sirens against which Odysseus has his men lash him to the mast of his ship, or the temptation to remain with Calypso as opposed to returning home to Ithaca, in *The Odyssey*.

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Even if the hero is able to avoid temptation, they must endure “Apotheosis,” or life in death, in order to achieve their goal. This means that they must allow their old self to die, and be reborn into a new, more apt and worthy state, before the elixir can be theirs. I explore this stage through the lenses of Wonder Woman and gender, in part because apotheosis is so central to the text in question, but also because the fusing of gender identities that this particular death and rebirth entails speaks directly back through the decades to the creation of the character, to the extent that Brian Azzarello’s revisioning of this archetypal hero dovetails in a fascinating way with that of creator William Moulton Marston’s original version, as a specific result of the Monomythical nature of the narrative. It is surprisingly rare for superhero narratives within the idiom of comics to succinctly tell a story complete enough to be called Monomythical: the nature of ongoing periodical publication means that any growth a given character is seen to experience cannot be too final in nature, as there will always need to be a new issue released every month²⁰. This six-volume storyline, however, is an exception, and I seek to analyse both how and why this is the case.

Finally, *Return*, the third chapter of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, is far less visible in hero narratives than the rest of the Monomyth, despite the fact that even Vogler is at pains to point out how important it is (215-227). Once the Ultimate Boon has been won, it is only of use if the hero is able to successfully return home with it, even though this is a stage of the journey we tend not to see particularly often²¹. This scarcity can almost certainly be attributed to the need of commercial films to tell their stories within a truncated timeframe, and the subsequent tendency to end these narratives with a moment of triumph over adversity, with any homecoming coda left to the mind of the audience²². The creation of *Fun Home*, not only as a narrative, but also as a physical artefact, can be said to effectively embody this return journey, creating as it does a new reality both for the protagonist and her community²³, while also

²⁰ This is particularly true of the most popular and famous characters published by either DC or Marvel Comics.

²¹ The ending of *The Lord of the Rings* represents a notable exception to this.

²² *The Return of the Jedi* is a good example of this, as it ends on our victorious heroes celebrating the fall of the Empire, while choosing to ignore the chaos this event must simultaneously be causing throughout the galaxy.

²³ Alison Bechdel has spoken about her surprise, when returning to her hometown for the premiere of the *Fun Home* musical to find how accepting it has now become of both her sexuality and the narrative she has written (Cooke).

embodying the usefulness of this stage of the journey for creators, readers and critics alike. Bechdel's text reaffirms that, as Campbell makes explicit, it is vital that, once one has attained one's boon and become the person one is meant to be, one is able to return home with it, for it is this return that places the achievement and growth into proper context (*Hero* 193), even if that home is one that Campbell himself would not have recognised.

This last point also serves to emphasise that while the term *Hero's Journey* cannot help but to call to mind characters in the mould of mythological hero figures, it may be more apt to try to think of the Monomyth as more of a *Protagonist's Journey*, however unwieldy this may sound. Vogler's point, quoted earlier in this chapter, that the journey is not just for traditionally heroic characters is extremely germane. After all, not all stories have to be about heroes – it is more important that the characters are seen to be confronted with events, choices and experiences that resonate with the audience, and are understood by them through the framework of the Hero's Journey.

Thesis Structure

This dissertation is essentially a portfolio, made up of five journal articles or book chapters, each of which analyses a different stage or group of stages of the Monomyth, prefaced by an extended introduction in three chapters. This structure is itself informed by the Hero's Journey, with chapters representing a number of the most notable stages in Campbell's pattern presented in the order in which they appear within *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Because the Hero's Journey is a pattern which the putative hero must, according to Campbell, follow in a strict step-by-step fashion, it makes sense for this project to follow the same trajectory, starting with the soon-to-be hero hearing the "Call to Adventure" and ending, as the Monomyth does, with someone who has become the "Master of Two Worlds." While there is a danger that this structure may be interpreted as a way of reinforcing the linearity of the pattern, it makes sense in conjunction with my choice to look at key individual aspects of the Hero's Journey, as opposed to attempting an overview of the whole theory. Besides, as this represents the culmination of many years of research into the Monomyth, the symbolism of structuring the thesis in this way does hold some appeal, because it is to a large extent the trajectory I have myself followed.

There are several reasons why I have chosen to follow this structure. Firstly, the nature of my premise and the research undertaken has meant that

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the primary texts have tended towards the multi-media/multi-genre, and thus the structure of a portfolio is better suited to my purpose, with each article representing a different genre or medium. This is especially true when one considers that in order to attempt an overview of the Monomyth's seeming-omnipresence within contemporary western culture, it has been necessary to engage with a larger number of primary texts than the traditional monograph format would normally allow. By focusing on individual stages within the Hero's Journey and viewing them through the prism of specific texts, I have attempted to apply close scrutiny to important aspects of the Monomyth across diverse fields, and this approach makes most sense within the context of a compilation thesis. Secondly, by submitting articles to peer-reviewed journals, I have had the additional benefit of constructive criticism and advice from outside my home institution, and specifically from fellow academics working within the individual disciplines that I have elected to explore. This learned peer-review and advice, often from academics whose anonymity has precluded my being able to give proper thanks, has been helpful, not only in honing my prose, but also in illuminating the primary texts in ways with which, while I may not have always agreed, have always proven interesting and have enabled me to further refine my arguments.

As a part of this process of facilitating an enriching dialogue with diverse academic communities, the articles that comprise my thesis have each also been presented at least twice at international conferences or research seminars (at both my home department and elsewhere), before being submitted for publication in peer-reviewed journals or edited collections. The first chapter in the thesis, "Transitional Identities: Crossing the Threshold in Young Adult Speculative Fiction," was first presented at a specially-organised research seminar at the University of Roehampton, London, on 11th October 2016, and has been submitted to *Poetics*. "Mass-Surveillance and the Negation of the Monomyth" was first presented at the 36th annual International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts, held in Orlando, Florida on 18-22 March 2015, and was published in issue 1/2018 of *Fafnir, Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research*. "Submission is Faith in the Strength of Others': Synthesising Male and Female Aspects of War in Azzarello and Chiang's *Wonder Woman*" was first presented at the NNCORE conference held at the University of Oslo, Norway on 11-12 June 2015, and was published in volume 9 issue 3 of *ImageText* (2017-2018). "Original Sin as Salvation: The Apocalyptic Boon in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*?" was first presented at the December 2016 iteration of the

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Department of Languages and Literatures' annual Popular Culture Research Profile Symposium held at the University of Gothenburg, and was published in November 2019 by Routledge, as a part of the volume *Broken Mirrors: Representations of Apocalypses and Dystopias in Popular Culture*. "The Return Journey in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*" was first presented at the Non-Fiction Now conference, held at the University of Reykjavik, Iceland on 1-4 June 2017, and was published in volume 53 issue 1 of *The Journal of Popular Culture* (2020).

2. Background: The Hero's Journey in Context

Historic Myth Criticism and the Roots of the Monomyth

In order to appraise the significance of Campbell's contribution, it is useful to place his work within a historical critical context. This section represents an attempt to do this, in order to help contextualise the work done in subsequent sections to map out critical approaches and reactions to the Hero's Journey, discuss the theory's continued relevance, and to locate this study within the field of Campbell criticism.

In both *Theorizing About Myth* and his own introduction to *Hero Myths: A Reader*, the volume of selected hero myths he edited, Robert A. Segal estimates that literary examination of the structure of heroic stories dates back at least as far as 1871, and the work of Edward Taylor (*Theorizing* 117, *Myths* 12). These structures are subsequently important within the work of Johann Georg von Hahn and Vladimir Propp though, as Segal points out, all three of these academics concerned themselves primarily with establishing the existence of patterns to heroic myth, rather than attempting to hold them up to analytical scrutiny²⁴.

More significantly, in 1890 Sir James Frazer published *The Golden Bough*, an exhaustive exploration of comparative religions and mythologies in terms of cycles of death and rebirth. In his own preface to the 1922 abridged version of his work²⁵, Frazer states that his original aims had been relatively modest (v), but *The Golden Bough* in fact represents a herculean scholarly achievement, something Segal characterises as a “tripartite division of all culture into the stages of magic, religion, and science” (*Theorizing* 39). However, the sheer sprawl of the work tends to confound its ability to retain consistency, and as such it is

²⁴ Indeed, Propp opens *Morphology of the Folktale* – written more than five decades after Taylor's work—with a lament about the paucity of existing research into the form (3).

²⁵ The previous editions were comprised of as many as twelve volumes.

perhaps more usefully seen as a precursor to Carl Gustav Jung's archetypes and concept of the collective unconscious.

Otto Rank's influential monograph, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, first published in 1909, was the first academic work to explicitly engage with the, at the time new and revolutionary, psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud, specifically that of the oedipal complex²⁶, a theory which in part derives its name from the story of Oedipus, the protagonist of Sophocles' Theban plays. Rank's work helped to usher in the early-to-mid-twentieth century propensity for the use and interpretation of mythological and folkloric tropes in both psychoanalytic and literary criticism. Campbell's reading of these classical and biblical narratives owes more to the archetype-centred theories of Jung than it does to those of Freud, especially since the Campbellian hero (unlike that of Rank) is already an adult when they cross the threshold²⁷, and while the Monomyth does involve a confrontation with a paternal or patriarchal figure, this confrontation does not tend to be psychosexual in nature.

Jung's 1922 essay "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry" hypothesises that the fundamental genesis of a specific literary work can be found not within an individual writer's unconscious mind, but in what he coins the *collective unconscious*. Jung explains that this phrase refers to "the sum total of all those psychic processes and contents which are capable of becoming conscious and often do, but are then suppressed" (319), positing that this collective unconscious "is not to be thought of as a self-subsistent entity; it is no more than a potentiality handed down to us from primordial times [...] There are no inborn ideas, but there are inborn possibilities of ideas" (319).

Jung names these primordial images 'archetypes,' and points out that these figures recur throughout history "wherever creative fantasy is freely expressed," explicitly linking the creative process to mythology and folklore, and asserting that "[t]he moment when this mythological situation reappears is always characterized by a peculiar emotional intensity [...] we are no longer individuals, but the race; the voice of all mankind resounds in us" (320). To Jung, literary texts are the means by which these archetypes emerge from the unconscious into the light of the waking world, or, as Vincent B. Leitch puts it, literature's power and ability to transport a reader "results from its activation of mythological materials, sweeping away individual consciousness, will and

²⁶ As outlined in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, first published in 1899.

²⁷ Campbell refers to heroic acts performed by youthful figures as "The Childhood of the Human Hero" (*Hero* 318-334), in doing so relegating these acts to the status of juvenilia.

intention” (105). This potentially reductive effect is one I have attempted to undercut by seeking to return to a deeper engagement with individual characters and their agency, and by extension the spaces they open up for development in the intended reader.

Another potentially reductive approach is that of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who asserts in “The Structural Study of Myth”²⁸ that mythology is, in effect, a language, the meaning of which is not specific to individual parts or tropes but to the myth idiom itself. In other words, different myth traditions contain certain commonalities or universals, so while the myths and folklore of different cultures do differ according to the traditions and societies from which they emerge, the underlying structures tend to have a great many similarities. This assertion builds upon the concept of the Jungian archetype: as Jane Garry and Hasan El-Shamy explain²⁹, these structures are “persistent cultural symbols that are passed down through generations via folklore and literature” (*Anthropology* xvii), as opposed to being some type of brand or mark upon mankind’s collective psyche. Structuralism aims to analyse linguistic systems or patterns of meaning as opposed to individual texts, and is thus more concerned with the underlying meaning of myths on a large scale than it is with the events of individual stories or myth cycles. As I discuss in the next section, this privileging of the macro over the micro has also been a persistent criticism of Campbell’s work, one I seek to respond to in this thesis, with a focus on multimedia narratives which privilege character and identity, as opposed to linguistic or symbolic constructs.

Lévi-Strauss was also adamant that “myths get thought in man unbeknownst to him” (*Myth* 3), underlining the idea that the way in which we parse our experiences of the world around us is, as Jung suggests, unconsciously rooted in our mythological and folkloric traditions. This is not to say that Lévi-Strauss’ main concern was psychoanalytic in nature: as Laurence Coupe explains, his concern was in providing explanations for myth, whereas a Freudian or Jungian would seek to explore and expand upon its implications for the individual (149).

Despite his keen interest in the way in which archetypes appeared and recurred in folklore and mythology, Jung³⁰, was not, of course, a literary critic or researcher: his field of research was specifically psycho-analytical and

²⁸ Chapter 11 of *Structural Anthropology*, first published in 1963.

²⁹ In relation to Maud Bodkin’s 1934 book *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*.

³⁰ In common with Lévi-Strauss.

therapeutic in nature. As Coupe points out, Jung did not “identify myth with mysticism as well as with mystery” (144), instead looking to archetypes as a way of achieving mental equilibrium. However, literary critics such as Maud Bodkin and Northrop Frye applied Jung’s ideas to the study of literature, ushering in a vogue for what was to become known as archetypal criticism.

Bodkin wrote *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*, the first example of this form of criticism, with the aim of “enriching the formulated theory of the systematic psychologist through the insight of more intuitive thinkers, while at the same time the intuitive thinker’s results may receive somewhat more exact definition” (1). She believed that the Jungian psychoanalyst and the archetypal literary critic could be of value to, and complement, one another’s work. However, it was Frye’s 1947 essay “The Archetypes of Literature”³¹ that brought archetypal criticism into the academic mainstream. Frye’s position was that the study of archetypes is fundamental to understanding human needs. As he put it, imagery or “fragments of significance” in literature, which come to us in the form of “proverbs, riddles, commandments or etiological folk tales” are already possessed of crucial elements of narrative, “building up a total structure of significance, or doctrine [...] just as pure narrative would be unconscious act, so pure significance would be an incommunicable state of consciousness, for communication begins by constructing narrative” (15). Narrative and story, constructed consciously by the author, are also simultaneously influenced by the unconscious, and so cannot fail to contain archetypes and other mythological and folkloric tropes. In this way, they can be said to encode concepts that are larger than themselves. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* was first published in 1949, and so is very much contemporaneous with Frye’s work.

Criticism of Campbell and the Monomyth

In approaching the Monomyth within the context of contemporary critical discourse, it is necessary to examine the limits of a more classic approach to Campbell’s theories. A great deal of the criticism levelled at Campbell’s myth-based theories, especially the Hero’s Journey, is that they are, as Robert A. Segal puts it, overly dogmatic, with the mythologist “asserting rather than proving” his points. Segal argues that one result of Campbell’s propensity towards analysing only parts of myth cycles or individual mythological stories is that “he

³¹ Re-published in *Fables of Identity* in 1963.

rarely puts his theory to the interpretive test” (*Theorizing* 138). In other words, he often bends the myth to fit his theory, as opposed to modifying his thoughts to fit the complexity of established myth. As Brian Attebery puts it, he often “seems to start with a plan and to adjust the evidence accordingly” (*Structuralism* 85). Attebery further accuses Campbell of boiling down all mythic and folkloric texts to a single plot, pointing out that “the problem with Campbell’s Monomyth [...] is that it always works because it simplifies every story to the point where nothing but the Monomyth is left” (*Stories* 108), and as a result, the theory itself “rests on shaky folkloric and ethnographic grounds” (*Stories* 119), as it tends to leave out tropes and figures that do not fit either the pattern or Campbell’s agenda.

Segal is also useful for pointing out the dubiousness of Campbell’s insistence that mythological stories must not be taken literally, rather that they must be loaded at all times with symbolic meaning: “the meaning – the sole meaning – of all myths must be ahistorical, symbolic, psychological, metaphysical, mystical and world-affirming, Campbell, again, never explains” (*Theorizing* 138-139). Herein lies one of the biggest problems with Campbell’s theory: once he asserts something, it is so. This, as Segal argues, approaches myths as if they are both oracular and ahistorical in nature. Further to Campbell’s outright rejection of the idea that a mythological story can also be read literally, Segal explains that to do so does not imply that the hero characters of, for example, Greek myth, ever actually existed, simply that these are stories that describe the lives of these fictional figures (*Theorizing* 139). Campbell chooses to overlook this aspect of mythic narrative.

As I have touched upon, gendered aspects of the Hero’s Journey are disturbing to the modern reader. Even within the context of this chapter, I have been at pains to avoid referring to the Monomythical hero using exclusively male pronouns. Campbell had no such compunctions. As I relate in “Submission is Faith in the Strength of Others,” Maureen Murdock writes in *The Heroine’s Journey* of an especially unsatisfying interview with Campbell, in which the mythologist maintained that the structure of the Hero’s Journey is neither applicable to nor appropriate for female characters, because their natures are already “wonderful” as they are, and thus to embark upon it would represent an attempt to be “pseudo-male” (2). To further problematize this patriarchal approach to gender, Valerie Estelle Frankel points out that Campbell often identifies the quest’s goal as being a woman in need of rescue (*Girl* 3). As I have noted, Campbell frames the hero’s need to resist temptation

from the path in terms of the dangerous lure of female sexuality (*Hero* 120-126). Frankel goes so far as to devise a table of comparison, juxtaposing the journey of Campbell's classic male hero, with that of his female counterpart (*Girl* 5, *Buffy* 7) with a view to redressing Campbell's gender bias³². It is plain that Campbell's tendency towards a patriarchal view of women in general, and the prospect of a female hero in particular, serves at times to render his pattern superficial and flawed; Margery Hourihan suggests that Campbell fails completely to consider the perspective of female characters and readers alike, making them subordinate to men (199). As Jennifer K. Stuller notes, the Monomyth "is generally considered a metaphor for the discovery of male identity, and women's involvement in the hero's journey has limited them to the roles of goddess who aids, the mother, the temptress, or the lover/prize" (54). Even away from *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell frames female heroism purely in terms of motherhood and companionship, using as an example the story of the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar's journey to the underworld to rescue her husband, the god Tammuz, stating that the woman's role is not only "creator of the cosmos but rescuer within the cosmos" (*Goddesses* 82). This perspective is hugely problematic in a contemporary cultural context, especially when one takes into account the increasing cultural significance and popularity of such female heroes as Buffy Summers, Captain Marvel and, of course, Wonder Woman, over the course of the past few decades. It is my view that this does not render his Monomythic approach inherently irrelevant; indeed, I seek here to open the Monomyth up to robust feminist critique, and explore the ways in which creators whose sensibilities stand in stark contrast to those of Joseph Campbell have revised his model to give it relevance to contemporary mores and concerns.

There is also a strain of Campbell criticism that points to allegations of a more sinister basis for some of his theories. In the September 28 1989 edition of the *New York Review of Books*, the writer Brendan Gill alleged that Campbell was both an anti-Semite and a racist, a claim that led to choruses of both support and dissent from academics and writers with whom Campbell had interacted or worked (Bernstein). These claims served to form something of a critical mass in Campbell criticism in subsequent years³³, but the allegations

³² In which there are three equivalent stages to "Woman as Temptress", entitled "Facing Bluebeard," "Finding the Sensitive Man," and "Confronting the Powerless Father."

³³ Robert Ellwood's *The Politics of Myth*, for example, is an exploration of the work and philosophies of Campbell, Jung and Mircea Eliade in terms of anti-Semitism and reactionary politics.

are aimed squarely at Campbell the man, alongside certain alleged implications of his later work, and tend not to involve either *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* or the concept of the Hero's Journey. As such, I do not propose to address them further here, as they fall outside the purview of this project.

More pertinent to my discussion is Robert Ellwood's claim that Campbell longed for "an idealized early America of moral virtue and sturdy individualism" (xiv), and this is certainly a possible reading of his approach to heroism. There is clearly a propensity within Campbell's theories to view all myth cycles through an occidental lens, and as a result to favour Western values, and even modes of storytelling. Ellwood asserts that "more of a literary scholar at heart than a folklorist, much less an anthropologist, [Campbell] always preferred to deal with myths as retailed by great writers and tellers" (159), in effect privileging the Western literary and culturally-shaped versions of the original stories. This implies that the truths Campbell claimed were intrinsic to mythology and folklore might only be true when filtered through the prism of a structured narrative. This begs the question: does the Monomyth represent a true structure for narratives featuring a protagonist (heroic or otherwise) in some kind of natural and unforced way, or simply because it is a tidy pattern for authors and storytellers to adhere to? This question is particularly pertinent when taking the influence of Vogler's *The Writer's Journey* into account. Vogler presents his version of Campbell's pattern as "a welcome tool kit, stocked with sturdy instruments ideal for the craft of storytelling. With these tools you can construct a story to meet almost any situation" (3), going on to maintain that "[t]hese tools [...] are older than the Pyramids, they are older than Stonehenge, older than the earliest cave paintings" (4). The problem, of course, is that the Monomyth is expressly not a toolkit or a template, and to treat it as such would negate its usefulness as a theory. As Will Storr puts it in *The Science of Storytelling*, using the Monomyth in this way leads to the creation of "Mars Bar stories, delicious and moreish but ultimately cold, corporate and cooked up by committee" (5). This has arguably been exactly the way in which Christopher Vogler's interpretation of the Monomyth has tended to be used by the mainstream film industry, and as such any academic attempt to appraise the Hero's Journey within cinematic hero narratives must tread somewhat carefully.

In terms of cultural appropriation, it is deeply problematic to boil the mythological, folkloric and religious traditions of disparate aboriginal people down to what Donald J. Consentino refers to as "a (Joseph) Campbell soup

of myth” (183), which is to say a neutral, westernised broth full of uniform tropes, lacking all original nuance and savour. As Segal remarks, Campbell’s search for similarities in myth cycles often leads to him either ignoring or dismissing differences (*Theorizing* 140), pointing out that this represents a significant divergence from Jung. As a result, Segal describes Campbell as being “lopsidedly universalistic,” and it is hard to disagree. As Mary Lefkowitz frames it, Campbell had a tendency to “[proceed] on the basis [...] that all myths, from all cultures, conveyed the same basic messages and followed virtually the same narrative patterns” (8), the presumption being that all religious and spiritual leaders and founders have naturally followed the Monomyth step-by-step. Lefkowitz also points out that Campbell has a tendency to insert spirituality into mythological stories where it is otherwise absent (citing *The Odyssey* as a notable example), and asserts that “[b]y adapting the myths to modern ways of understanding, Campbell deprives them of their meaning” (9). This is an important criticism, because the foundation of the Monomyth is predicated upon the idea that it is in some way universally true for all stories involving a main protagonist. If Campbell has, either accidentally or on purpose, misunderstood or misrepresented the myths and scripture upon which his theory is based, then it is easy to understand how some critics could argue that the entire pattern is fatally flawed.

The Continued Relevance of the Monomyth

When asked in 2014 if he had been influenced by Joseph Campbell’s work, the author Neil Gaiman replied: “I tend to be more interested in the actual myth. I think I got about half way through *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and found myself thinking if this is true — I don’t want to know [...] I’d rather do it because it’s true and because I accidentally wind up creating something that falls into this pattern than be told what the pattern is” (Ogline). In a similar vein, Philip Pullman states³⁴ that while scholars from multiple disciplines, alongside “theorists of a Freudian, Jungian, Christian, Marxist, structuralist, post-structuralist, feminist, postmodernist, and every other kind of tendency” have used story as a basis for their study, “my interest has always been how the tales worked *as stories*” (*Daemon* 182, italics in original). It is precisely because these are the views of creative practitioners, as opposed to academic refutations of

³⁴ In relation to the fairy tales collected by the Brothers Grimm.

the idea that the Hero's Journey's pervasiveness has led to it shaping stories, that these statements are important. They suggest that both Gaiman and Pullman³⁵, in common with other authors whose work is in dialogue with the Monomyth, have come to the pattern naturally, as opposed to by calculation.

It is true that the Hero's Journey was intentionally used as a template when George Lucas and his collaborators created *Star Wars* and its sequels and prequels, but it does not follow (and would be hard to prove) that the majority of creators have subsequently followed suit. As I have discussed, *The Writer's Journey* serves as a manual for scriptwriters who wish to adhere to Vogler's version of the Monomyth, but even there the author is careful to stress that it should not be "naively interpreted, blindly copied, or unquestioningly adopted" (xix), while maintaining that the pattern is but "one of many ways to get from here to there" (7).

Donald J. Palumbo frames the structure of the Hero's Journey as being an illustration of "negotiating life's transitions through rites of passage" (13), reiterating that the pattern is meant to occur naturally within stories, and as such is "the dream of humankind, and not something invented by Campbell" (12). This is important, because it underlines the point that the pattern recurs regardless of whether or not the mainstream movie industry finds it appealing enough to base important financial decisions around. In his book, *The Storytelling Animal*, Jonathan Gottschall argues that "[s]tory is the glue of human life – defining groups and holding them together" (177), pointing to the primacy of storytelling throughout human history, and arguing that story has always been our primary means of connecting ourselves to the world and society around us. The implication is that while it is true that modern narrative media such as cinema and television represent big business and the need to recoup massive financial outlays, the tales they spin must still ring true to us in order to succeed and make money.

It is also important to note that accepting the merit of the Hero's Journey as *one* pattern in storytelling is not to suggest that it is the *only* such pattern. Equally, it is possible to criticise Campbell's tendency to privilege certain types of myth or scripture, or the way in which he frames his arguments, without dismissing his theories outright. Despite Campbell's claims to the contrary, it is undeniable that the Monomyth owes a debt to Jungian psychoanalysis, and this in turn presents something of a problem. There is an interesting tendency for

³⁵ Two of the authors whose work I have used in this dissertation.

modern discussion of psychoanalytic literary criticism either to overlook Jung entirely, or to downplay his theories' importance to the discipline³⁶, but it is my contention that it is highly reductive to dismiss all aspects of archetypal study on the basis of an unprovable psychoanalytic theory. After all, many of Freud's ideas are still of great importance to literary criticism, despite our understanding that there are aspects of certain Freudian theories and assumptions that are flawed at best, and are at worst arguably as outmoded and open to dispute as those of Jung.

Even Brian Attebery, whose criticism of Campbell's methodology and scope is trenchant, allows that "because of his direct influence on writers from George Lucas to David Zindell, he is essential to an understanding of the revival of mythic structures" (*Structuralism* 85). John Sheldon Lawrence and Robert Jewett interpret³⁷ these structures, and by implication this type of myth-based narrative, as a kind of "training for permanent social responsibility" in as much as they represent redemptive story arcs which tend to underpin the notion that it is important for a hero to serve the community, and therefore its institutions (6). The validity of this assertion is open to question, but it is justifiable to claim, as Jack Zipes does, that Western societies "place words in our mouths through all sorts of technological means" in order for us to "learn, often by rote, what our traditions are and how we can come to know ourselves through mass-mediated and manipulated stories" (231).

Outside the sphere of literary criticism, and from a more science-based perspective, Richard Dawkins writes that culture and cultural transmission are, while not exclusive to humankind, factors that nevertheless tend to set us apart from other living things³⁸, and coins the term *meme* to define units of this type of transmission. He explains that "[j]ust as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms and eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation" (192). This is not to

³⁶ For example, Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory* manages not only to devote a 38-page chapter to the subject of psychoanalytic theory (132-168), but also to discuss Northrup Frye and archetypal literary criticism (79-92), all without actually mentioning Jung, while Robert Dale Parker's *How to Interpret Literature* is explicit in its dismissal of both Jung and Campbell's contributions to literary criticism (127).

³⁷ In discussing their concept of the 'American Monomyth,' a modern and US-centric variation on Campbell's pattern that serves to explore what they present as the American self-image and its concomitant need to play hero to the world at large.

³⁸ Dawkins uses the phrase "survival machines" so as not to exclude plant life, or to allow humans to believe they are somehow separate (189).

BACKGROUND

say that the transmission of stories is easily traced – Marina Warner comments that attempts to do so “make them resemble an archaeological site that has been plundered by tomb robbers” (XIX) – but the fact remains that stories, and more pertinently story structures and tropes, fit Dawkins’ description of memes rather well. The Hero’s Journey reverberates because we both recognise it and feel comfortable with its tropes, and while it is clear that Campbell’s framing of the pattern is at times reductive, and suffers from an occasional inability simply to see a story as opposed to some kind of occult meaning, this does not necessarily make it any less valid, or less useful, both as a storytelling device, and as a critical tool for evaluating the methodologies of such storytelling

3. Article Summaries and Concluding Remarks

Crossing the Threshold

The biggest problem with the use of the Hero's Journey as a critical framework for the analysis of texts that can be defined as YA, or even those that simply feature protagonists who are children or teenagers, is Campbell's insistence that the Hero must be an adult. It is clearly problematic to claim that a child – a preschooler such as *Coraline*, for example – should achieve their boon, and therefore become some kind of optimum version of themselves, at such a tender age. In "Transitional Identities: Crossing the Threshold in Young Adult Speculative Fiction," I have been able to shed light on the ways in which the pattern can speak back to narratives about children and teenagers by showing that the boon each character wins is, in effect, a milestone or marker on their path towards greater maturity. In addition, I have been able to show that the pattern can, and in the case of these young protagonists inevitably will, be repeated, and this is reflected in the fact that the process of becoming the person one is meant to be, as opposed to who one is right now, is an ongoing one. The young protagonists of *Coraline*, *A Monster Calls* and *A Song for Ella Grey* hear the Call to Adventure but, crucially, cross the threshold only inadvertently, because, as children, they are not yet old enough to make the conscious decision to do so themselves. Their narratives closely follow the pattern of the Monomyth, and they all achieve boons of a sort, but it is my argument that these boons represent the start of new iterations of the Monomyth, which is to say that they provide the maturity needed to embark upon the next phases of their lives.

Significantly, these transitional victories look and feel different depending on the ages of the protagonists. *Coraline* puts away the toys she has outgrown and prepares to start primary school. The acceptance of his mother's death prepares Connor for a more independent adolescence. Claire is only able to enter adult life once she has been able to move beyond both her love for and

her obsession with Ella Grey. There is a clear implication that these characters will all cross further thresholds – indeed each novel effectively closes with the clear suggestion that each of them already has – it is just that we, as readers, will not be privy to these events. In other words, the Hero's Journey can be cyclical, as opposed to linear, in nature, and in such cases the achievement of the boon is a caesura as opposed to a full stop.

In this way, I establish a fruitful dialogue between YA speculative Fiction and the Hero's Journey. I argue that specific aspects of the Monomyth provide a useful critical framework for understanding the transformations of very different protagonists. These narratives highlight an aspect of Campbell's pattern as problematic: the insistence that the individual hero must be an adult, while simultaneously suggesting a solution to the problem.

Mass-Surveillance, Hubris and Temptation

This cyclical element is not exclusive to YA. Monomythical narratives that are unequivocally about heroes or superheroes, as opposed simply to protagonists to whose trajectories the pattern can be applied, often conclude with the hero battered and bloodied, but nonetheless victorious. It is therefore instructive to apply aspects of the pattern to superhero narratives in which this is expressly not the case. The Batman of *The Dark Knight* and Nick Fury of *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* are heroic figures who are seen to follow the Hero's Journey fairly closely until giving in to temptation, stepping from the path and committing acts of great hubris and, in doing so, inviting nemesis upon themselves. As I explain in "Mass-Surveillance and the Negation of the Monomyth;" this nemesis negates – or at least resets – their Hero's Journeys, placing them in a position where they are forced to choose whether or not to begin again, with a new Call to Adventure. This situation simultaneously confirms Campbell's assertion that the Monomyth cannot be cheated, and speaks back to and informs that pattern, updating it for the digital age. The accuracy of "Woman as the Temptress" as a stage is confirmed via examination of texts and characters that are the exceptions that confirm the rule, replacing the "woman" with the lure of unearned power and knowledge.

Using this stage of the Hero's Journey as a critical tool also helps to explain actions and behaviours on the part of these characters that may otherwise be hard to understand. This is particularly true of Batman's choice to take the blame for Harvey Dent's crimes, in doing so becoming a fugitive and,

to the public eye at least, the type of criminal he has devoted his life to stopping. Allowing himself to be tempted from the hero's path and as a result committing acts of great hubris, effectively negates his status as a hero, and ensures that in order to resume some form of Monomythical journey, he will be obliged to start again, with a new Call to Adventure. Here, then, is more proof of the cyclical nature of the journey, in as much as both Bruce Wayne and Nick Fury are compelled to begin again from scratch.

Once again, the texts in question simultaneously interrogate and are interrogated by the Monomyth. Heretofore heroic characters are seen to be punished after performing questionable acts in the name of the greater good – bracingly, these characters are seen to fail, and it is the failure of their personal Monomythical journeys that explains why this is the case. Equally, these actions prove that the success of an individual's Hero's Journey is not inevitable, and that the disaster that ensues from a hero's failure is proof of the Journey's importance as a narrative pattern. If the Monomyth was simply an easy-to-follow blueprint, it would no longer hold any interest.

Submission, Domination, Faith and Apotheosis

In order for the hero to be properly prepared, both physically and spiritually, to achieve the Ultimate Boon, they must undergo Apotheosis. They are obliged to allow their old selves or personas to die and be reborn in a state of greater understanding. For the iteration of Wonder Woman who features in Brian Azzarello and Cliff Chiang's six-volume story, Apotheosis is necessitated by her elevation to the status of God of War in the Greek pantheon, and is represented by the synthesis of behaviours and characteristics parsed as respectively male and female in both classical mythology and William Moulton Marston's original Wonder Woman comics. In keeping with the Hero's Journey, it is only once Diana has died and been reborn under these terms that she is ready to achieve her boon, in this case victory over a heretofore unbeatable foe, as well as a redefinition of the strictures and parameters of war itself within the context of the narrative. In this way, I demonstrate that this aspect of the Hero's Journey is an invaluable tool for interpreting the text, to elucidate the protagonist's trajectory.

“Submission is Faith in the Strength of Others’: Synthesizing Male and Female Aspects of War in Azzarello and Chiang’s *Wonder Woman*” also

interrogates the fundamentally patriarchal nature of the Monomyth. As I have discussed, Campbell's Hero's Journey is stereotypically masculine in nature. In this chapter the paradigm is reframed for our contemporary, less patriarchal, popular culture. In doing so, I discover that despite being rooted in mythology, folklore and scripture that has tended to privilege male heroes and protagonists, the pattern does not in itself need to be viewed or defined in solely patriarchal terms. Campbell's ideas can inform and be incorporated into newer, more egalitarian narrative paradigms. As previously stated, Campbell himself had problematic views and attitudes towards gender and the role of female heroes, but this does not mean that the pattern itself is rendered unviable as a result. As a theoretical framework, the Monomyth is neither monolithic nor stagnant, and as such is able to evolve alongside culture and the narratives that articulate it. It has fresh appeal when used in conjunction with more contemporary forms of text and media, with which it has had minimal critical interaction before.

Apocalypse as the Ultimate Boon

The aim of the Hero's Journey is to achieve and take home the elixir, or Ultimate Boon, and in many hero narratives this boon is externally defined. A powerful enemy must be vanquished, or a curse lifted from the land. More complicated is the effect the journey has on the hero themselves: Campbell himself describes the Boon as "life-transmuting" (*Hero* 193). The Hero's Journey is ultimately concerned with the fulfilment of potential, and as such if the hero is successful he or she will return home transformed. Crucially, as a result so will the world itself.

In Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, the boon is counterintuitively equated with both Original Sin and apocalypse (in the sense of revelation, as opposed to the end of the world). As I discuss in "Original Sin as Salvation: the Apocalyptic Boon in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*," the Hero's Journey is reframed as the process of actively seeking and moving toward these states. Lyra Belacqua, the novels' protagonist, is expressly referenced within the texts as being a new Eve, and as such her journey is framed as being toward a sexual awakening comparable to Original Sin, and thus a new Fall of Man. This, in turn, is equated with Biblical apocalypse, and a paradigm shift for the world in which Lyra lives. It is seen unequivocally to be positive, a boon for both the hero and her community. This reframes and redefines the Monomyth, positing it as neither pre- nor postlapsarian in nature. The boon is achieved during the

ellipsis between these two states, and thus exists in a liminal state between the two. As a result, we see that the text and its informing context – *His Dark Materials* and “The Ultimate Boon” – exist in ongoing conversation with each other, with Pullman’s text making clear that apocalypse, which in its original etymological sense signifies Revelation and the foundation of new paradigms for humanity, can be equated with the winning of the Boon for mankind. In consequence, the Hero’s Journey itself is revealed as the active movement towards a kind of regenerative apocalypse, for both the hero and the community to which they belong.

Constructing the Return Threshold

On the subject of the Return Journey, Campbell writes that “[w]hen the heroquest has been accomplished [...] the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy,” pointing out that by doing this, the hero ensures that “the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds” (*Hero* 193). This emphasises that the Boon is transformative not just for the individual, nor simply for the smaller community that surrounds them, but that the positive change it engenders has the potential to be universal. Despite this utopian possibility, the final chapter of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* tends to be underrepresented in modern narrative media. Bearing in mind Campbell’s own emphasis on the significance of this stage of the Monomyth, it is important to explore the ways in which it can elucidate aspects of texts that can often be forgotten or elided.

My investigation of the homeward trajectory of the final stages of the Hero’s Journey has been made through the prism of Bechdel’s *Fun Home*, and shows that for the graphic novel’s protagonist and author, the Return Journey – so necessary in order for the hero to share their boon with the community at large and in doing so become the Master of Two Worlds – is represented by the successful creation of *Fun Home* as a physical artefact. The creation of art becomes the means by which the protagonist is granted the wisdom and strength to rise above the tragedy, and come to terms not only with the memories of her father and her own childhood, but also with the underlying truth and meaning behind the boon she has achieved; in this case the realisation and acceptance of her own sexuality. This, in turn, represents the completion of her Monomythical journey, and the Boon she brings home – *Fun Home* itself – is seen to positively change not only the author/protagonist’s own life, but

also benefits the wider community in a palpable way. This chapter also situates the Hero's Journey within the idiom of autobiography, showing how the pattern can both inform the narrative of the author's life and that of her immediate family

Conclusion: a Productive Liminality

Campbell succinctly summarises the Hero's Journey in this way: “[a] hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are then encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (Hero 30, italics in original). The Monomyth represents everything that happens between the time the hero is tempted to leave the mundane world in which he has lived, and the time he returns to it transformed. The whole journey represents the liminal space between the hero's two established modes of existence. This liminality can be seen as productive, because in order to facilitate the transition between modes, it unsettles the world of common day so that the hero no longer feels comfortable there. If successful, the hero's presence within this liminal space allows them to view their ordinary world differently when they elect to return there.

I would argue that, based upon the chapters of this thesis, it is productive to view the individual stages of the Monomyth in a similar way. Apotheosis is the most obvious example of this, meaning as it does the death and rebirth of the hero, or at least aspects of them. This is an inherently transitional state. It may therefore seem that this is the most obvious example of liminality, signifying as it does the transition between two states. However, there is strong evidence to suggest that all the stages I have focused on represent significantly liminal states as well. This is an inherently new way of approaching Campbell's model. It may be helpful at this stage to trace this mode of thinking through the other chapters of the dissertation.

The events that befall the young hero between hearing the Call to Adventure and actually venturing out into the world can also be described as liminal in that they occur in the time in which they have not yet accepted that they have the potential to be other than what they are now. This clearly resonates with the field of Young Adult fiction. The three texts I have analysed embody a liminal mode of thinking about the Hero's Journey as a whole, suggesting that rather than bringing closure, the pattern can be cyclical.

Campbell is clear that “destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown” (*Hero* 43), but the fact remains that a successfully completed journey does not preclude a second or third call, which undercuts the sense of closure that the original structure suggests. Interpreting the Monomyth in this way allows us to see the potentially unsettling early phase of the Journey as ripe with liminal potential. The process of temporarily refusing the call, accepting guidance from without and eventually choosing to cross the threshold into the Belly of the Whale represents the liminal period wherein the young person is no longer just ordinary, but is perhaps not yet a hero.

In facing temptation, the hero finds themselves in the liminal space between the ability to continue on towards the Apotheosis needed to gain their boon and the sudden failure of their quest. This opens up the potential for multiple non-linear pathways within their Hero’s Journey, some of which lead to disaster. The act of either giving in to or resisting temptation occurs in a space where the individual hero’s Monomythical journey is simultaneously ongoing and over: it is this very liminality that is the stage’s strongest underlying characteristic. Batman and Nick Fury both ‘die’ because they give in to temptation. In contrast to what occurs when a hero undergoes Apotheosis – as Wonder Woman does in Azzarello and Chiang’s narrative – they are not reborn in a form that allows for the granting of the boon. The effect of this annihilation – Campbell frames it as being “blasted from within and without” (*Hero* 37) – is to force them to accept their new reality as marginal figures. This understanding obliges them either to abandon the idea of the heroic quest or to wait for a fresh Call to Adventure.

The events that befall Lyra in the denouement of *The Amber Spyglass* see the granting of the Boon in the liminal ellipsis between pre- and postlapsarian states of being. In this case, the Boon is literally liminal, because the act of winning it functions as a caesura between the state of questing and the necessity of return. More specifically, in Lyra’s case the Boon simultaneously represents new, unequivocally positive iterations of Original Sin and the Fall of Man, and as such is explicitly on the cusp of pre- and postlapsarian states of being, and so by definition liminal in nature. The world has changed; however it is not yet the one it will be when the elixir is brought home to the community.

This final transformation is dealt with in the third chapter of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, and concerns the liminal time between the understanding of what has been achieved, and the fulfilment of potential (for both the hero

RECONFIGURING THE HERO'S JOURNEY

and their community) that is represented by the act of crossing the return threshold, and the Hero's subsequent transformation into the "Master of the Two Worlds." Bechdel's narrative concretises this transformation, not only for the protagonist and the reader, but also for the community from which the protagonist first set out. Taken as a whole, we can see that each stage of the Hero's Journey can be read as fundamentally liminal in nature, as each stage represents an ellipsis between one state of being and the next. This reinforces my argument that the Monomyth remains a useful tool with which to analyse narratives in contemporary popular culture. The fragmentary nature of modern society and the multiple ways in which we receive information and entertainment in fact make this more relevant than ever.

Through my chapters, I have tried to bring something new to the field of both Campbell criticism and the study of popular culture, to view the pattern from the perspective of contemporary media narratives, and to illuminate these through fresh and nuanced consideration of key stages of the Hero's Journey. Focusing on specific stages and their effect on the ways we tell and understand stories, has enabled me to investigate the pattern in a way that an overview approach could not. I intend the individual articles that make up this dissertation to have a cumulative power and mutually reinforcing effect. In addition, the chapters take the form of close readings of both the chosen texts and the aspects of the Hero's Journey to which they correspond. In each article, the aspect of the Monomyth that I have elected to evaluate has proven to be extremely useful in unpacking heretofore unremarked-upon elements of the texts through which I have chosen to view it.

Taken collectively, these close examinations of aspects of the Hero's Journey serve as an argument for the pattern's continued validity as a tool for understanding story, as well as its surprising versatility, teasing out ways in which it continues to evolve. There is, of course, still plenty of scope for this to be expanded, for a larger and more ambitious overview of the Monomyth to be attempted. There is surely far more to be uncovered and understood in this pattern, both by practitioners and critical scholarship, domains I seek to bring closer together through this thesis.

The five articles in this dissertation each take differing theoretical approaches to focus on key aspects of the Hero's Journey, but in doing so point towards a unified conclusion: that while the Monomyth as initially conceived is flawed, outmoded and open to criticism, it remains ripe for re-evaluation as a useful tool for understanding the ways in which, and reasons why, stories, both

SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSION

from antiquity and more modern traditions, resonate with readers and viewers in the way they do. While it is undeniably true that Campbell's ideas are interlaced with psychoanalytical and structuralist theories that have fallen out of favour, and the occidental bias and racial ideas within which they were formed are now (rightly) regarded with disdain, it is beyond doubt that the venerable old mythologist was on to *something*. As appreciators of story, the tropes, structures and outlined paths of the Hero's Journey still speak to us, and it has been my intention throughout this project to attempt to work out how and why this is. After all, the Hero's Journey has simultaneously been taken as a given and viewed with suspicion for the best part of the past four decades, and this is why it has been both appropriate and necessary to revisit it with a modern critical sensibility. This enables it to constructively inform our readings of the narratives that continue to shape and reflect us, both as individuals and collectively.

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