



*Il mondo - Autore - Butta fuori -
chi è? M. siete voi?
Il nostro giovane autore
Il mondo voi vedete in me
più di là che di qua -
che? -
nulla. Il repleto che avete
preoccupamene così -
autori novellini; non fanno
dell'arte né dell'arte
che?*

Modern Mythology

and the hero's journey

by Joseph Campbell



Modern Mythology and the hero's journey

by Joseph Campbell

The importance of myths



Why have we always created and exchanged myths?

Throughout history, humans have told each other stories to share their experiences of the world, to explore ways of dealing with life's problems and adventures, and to try to fathom the deeper meanings that underlie daily life. Some of these stories have become myths, with the potential to guide and inspire generation after generation of those who see and hear them. But what is a myth? What is magical about it? And how have Star Wars and The Lord of the Rings come to represent some of the great myths of our time?

Many of us had our first contact with mythological stories in school; we studied, with more or less enthusiasm, the Greek, Roman, Norse, African, or Asian myths about the creation of the world, the workings of nature, and the jealousies, wars, loves, and misadventures of a wide range of gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines. These stories arose as ancient peoples struggled to answer the most fundamental questions about their humanity, such as why are we here? How can we live up to our highest potential? Is there a force that exists within and beyond us that we may call God? What is our relationship to this God, and how can this relationship guide us on life's journey?

In attempting to address these larger issues, certain archetypal stories, in which some elements of plot, character types, and locale all remain basically the same, have described the human experience with such universality that they have become lasting myths. The sense of a deep and abiding truth that such myths offer is part of their magic. But a myth does not exist in a vacuum; rather, it captures the spirit and concerns of the particular time and place out of which it has sprung, yet it manages to do so in a timeless fashion.

Perhaps this apparent contradiction is possible because at heart, we are all asking the same questions. Certainly this mixture of elements - the universal in conjunction with the

specific, the story rooted within a particular culture combined with the timeless tale for all humankind-is another magical aspect of myth.

"It has always been the prime function of mythology," wrote Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, "to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those other constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back."

A myth shows us what we're up against; it identifies the "bad guys" who often turn out to be within us, the part of ourselves that would hold us back-and it helps us find a way to defeat them. And that, finally, is part of the myth's magic too: it offers hope.

Mary Henderson, *Star Wars The Magic Of Myth*, 1997

1. Introduce the document
2. What is a myth? Use elements from the text to define it.
 - What is the use of it?
 - Explain what kind of answers it provides for people around the world.
3. What makes a myth universal or popular?
 - Why do some become « lasting myths »?

« Throughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, the myths of man have flourished and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind ».

Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*

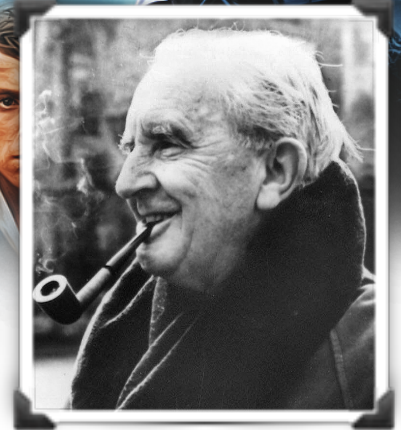
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Modern Mythology and the hero's journey

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J.R.R. Tolkien and power



J.R.R. Tolkien

The Lord of The Rings and the notion of power as Tolkien used to see it.

A 1997 readers' poll conducted by Britain's Channel 4 and the Waterstone's bookstore chain voted J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings the "greatest book of the century." A 1999 poll of Amazon.com customers went even further, choosing it as the "greatest book of the millenium." And now, Peter Jackson's dramatization of The Fellowship of the Ring confirms itself a widely announced blockbuster. Some consider The Lord of Rings a childish fable, but millions of people all over the world have found it an enjoyable and inspiring read.

Hardcore environmentalists have tried to enlist Mr. Tolkien among them, focusing on Tolkien's candid love for nature, for example. His point wasn't to bash industry or capitalism; it was to illustrate that evil is expansionist and projects itself even on the landscape. Hence bad environmental aesthetics are a reflection of bad rulers, which is to say, the use of power.

And here we have the correct understanding of the theme of the novel: it is about the evils of power. More precisely, the book aligns itself against power; not "economic power" or "social power", but specifically political power. This is also the central theme of the classical liberal political tradition.

This is an allegory for what actually happens in our world every day: rulers, even well intentioned and idealistic ones,

are ruled themselves at the same time. They are ruled by consensus and by the spasmodic hunger to acquire yet more power than they already have. This is why the state has never been limited, as the classical liberal thinkers had hoped it would be - because the people in charge of keeping the power of the state limited never do so. Politicians and rulers generally, always want to become more important and more respected - more powerful, in short.

In Tolkien's vision, the power is always evil - a good power cannot even exist. Since the very beginning, the good guys own the Ring. Since it is the most powerful weapon in the world, many of them ask why it can't be used against Sauron, the Dark Lord. Even though the Ring was forged by him and undoubtedly it is evil, yet it could help to pursue a good end, they suspect. This is an extraordinary way to ask the question: could the means be subordinated to the ends? Can a good end be pursued by evil means? Tolkien answers that no, evil means can only bring to an evil end - no matter if the original intentions are good.

Alberto Mingardi, Mises institute, February 21, 2002

« We cannot use the Ruling Ring. That we now know too well. It belongs to Sauron and was made by him alone, and is altogether evil. Its strength is too great for anyone to wield at will, save only those who have already a great power of their own. But for them it holds an even deadlier peril. The very desire of it corrupts the heart. If any of the Wise should with this Ring overthrow the Lord of Mordor, using his own arts, he would then set himself on Sauron's throne, and yet another Dark Lord would appear. And that is another reason why the Ring should be destroyed: as long as it is in the world it will be a danger even to the Wise. For nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so. I fear to take the Ring to hide it. I will not take the Ring to wield it ».

J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord Of The Rings

1. Introduce the documents
2. Who is J.R.R. Tolkien?
3. Why is « The Lord of the Rings » a special book?
 - What reward did it get?
4. What are Tolkien's favorite themes he developed in his books?
 - Which one is the central theme?
5. Explain Tolkien's vision of Power.
 - What is an allegory?
 - Why is it important in a myth such as this one?
 - Do you agree with his vision?

Answer the online quiz

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places
and
forms of
power

spaces
and
exchanges

Sméagol's tale

Sméagol facing the ultimate power

5 'Long after, but still very long ago, there lived by the banks of the Great River on the edge of Wilderland a clever-handed and quiet-footed little people. I guess they were of hobbit-kind; akin to the fathers of the fathers of the Stoors, for they loved the River, and often swam in it, or made little boats of reeds.¹ There was among them a family of high repute, for it was large and wealthier than most, and it was ruled by a grandmother of the folk, stern² and wise in old lore³, such as they had. The most inquisitive⁴ and curious-minded of that family was called Sméagol. He was interested in roots and beginnings; he dived into deep pools; he burrowed⁵ under trees and growing plants; he tunneled into green mounds; and he ceased to look up at the hill-tops, or the leaves on trees, or the flowers opening in the air: his head and his eyes were downward.

20 'He had a friend called Déagol, of similar sort, sharper-eyed but not so quick and strong. On a time they took a boat and went down to the Gladden Fields, where there were great beds of iris and flowering reeds. There Sméagol got out and went nosing about the banks but Deal sat in the boat and fished. Suddenly a great fish took his hook, and before he knew where he was, he was dragged out and down into the water, to the bottom. Then he let go of his line, for he thought he saw something shining in the river-bed; and holding his breath he grabbed at it.

30 'Then up he came spluttering, with weeds in his hair and a handful of mud⁶; and he swam to the bank⁷. And behold! when he washed the mud away, there in his hand lay a beautiful golden ring; and it shone and glittered in the sun, so that his heart was glad. But Sméagol had been watching him from behind a tree, and as Deal gloated⁸ over the ring, Sméagol came softly up behind.

35 "'Give us that, Deal, my love," said Sméagol, over his friend's shoulder.

40 "'Why?" said Deal.
' "Because it's my birthday, my love, and I wants it," said Sméagol.

45 "'I don't care," said Deal. "I have given you a present already, more than I could afford. I found this, and I'm going to keep it."

50 ' "Oh, are you indeed, my love," said Sméagol; and he caught Deal by the throat and strangled⁹ him, because the gold looked so bright and beautiful. Then he put the ring on his finger.

55 'No one ever found out what had become of Deal; he was murdered far from home, and his body was cunningly hidden. But Sméagol returned alone; and he found that none of his family could see him, when he was wearing the ring. He was very pleased with his discovery and he concealed¹⁰ it; and he used it to find out secrets, and he put his knowledge to crooked¹¹ and malicious uses. He became sharp-eyed¹² and keen-eared¹³ for all that was hurtful. The ring had given him power according to his stature. It is not to be wondered at that he became very unpopular and was

shunned¹⁴ (when visible) by all his relations. They kicked him, and he bit their feet. He took to thieving, and going about muttering to himself, and gurgling in his throat. So they called him Gollum, and cursed him, and told him to go far away; and his grandmother, desiring peace, expelled¹⁵ him from the family and turned him out of her hole.

60 'He wandered in loneliness, weeping a little for the hardness of the world, and he journeyed up the River, till he came to a stream that flowed down from the mountains, and he went that way. He caught fish in deep pools with invisible fingers and ate them raw.

65 One day it was very hot, and as he was bending over a pool, he felt a burning on the back of his head and a dazzling light from the water pained his wet eyes. He wondered at it, for he had almost forgotten about the Sun. Then for the last time he looked up and shook his fist at her.

70 'But as he lowered his eyes, he saw far above the tops of the Misty Mountains, out of which the stream came. And he thought suddenly: "It would be cool and shady under those mountains. The Sun could not watch me there. The roots of those mountains must be roots indeed; there must be great secrets buried there which have not been discovered since the beginning. »

80 'So he journeyed by night up into the highlands, and he found a little cave out of which the dark stream ran; and he wormed his way like a maggot into the heart of the hills, and vanished out of all knowledge. The Ring went into the shadows with him, and even the maker, when his power had begun to grow again, could learn nothing of it.'

J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of The Rings, 1954

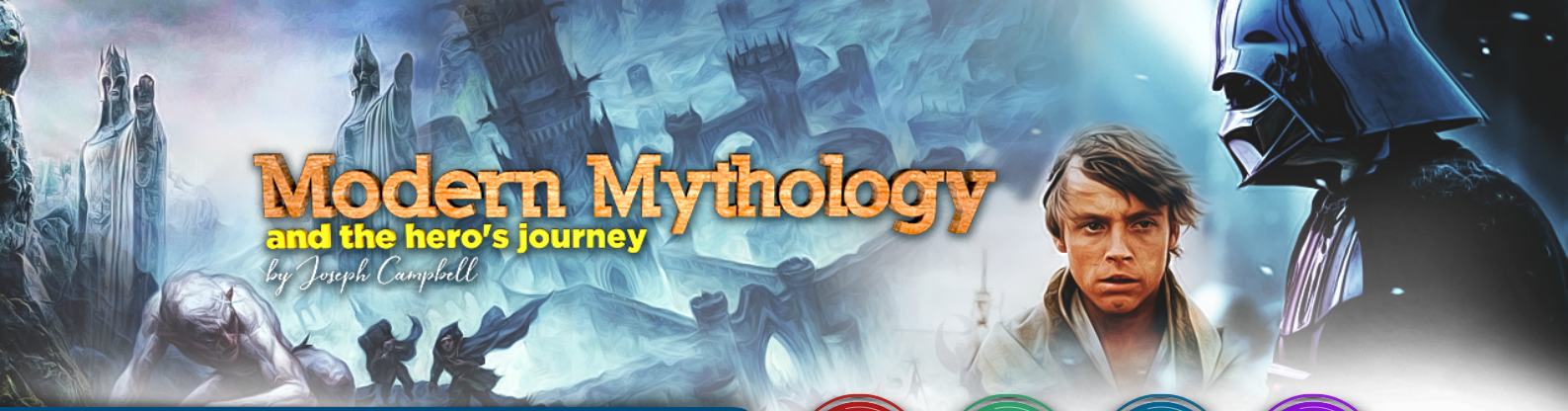
1. Introduce the document.
2. Who are the characters.
 - What is special about them?
 - Give all information you can about Sméagol.
3. What does Déagol find in the river?
4. Describe Sméagol's reaction and evolution.
 - Why does he change this way?
 - How can you link this tale with Tolkien's vision of power?

Answer the online quiz

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- 1 reed: roseau
- 2 stern: sévère, strict.
- 3 lore: tradition, coutumes, connaissances
- 4 inquisitive: curieux
- 5 to burrow: creuser
- 6 mud: boue
- 7 bank: rive
- 8 to gloat: jubiler, exulter

- 9 to strangle: étrangler
- 10 to conceal: cacher
- 11 crooked: malhonnête, corrompu
- 12 sharp-eyed: au regard perçant, à l'oeil vif
- 13 keen-eared: à l'ouïe fine
- 14 shunned: rejeté
- 15 to expel: renvoyer

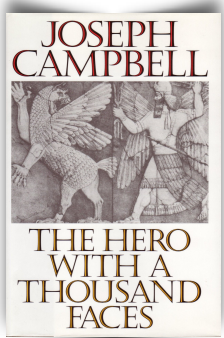


The hero's journey



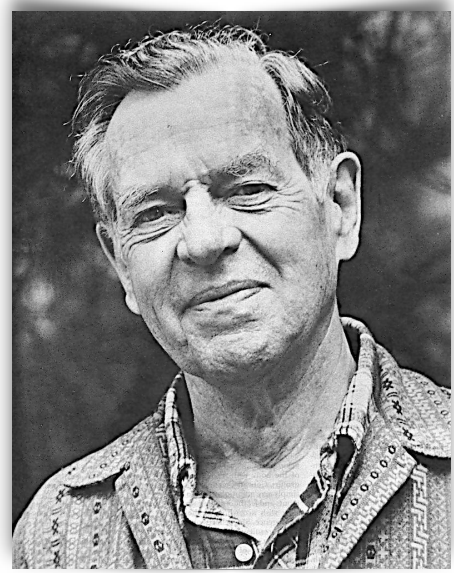
The theory of the monomyth developed by Joseph Campbell

Treasure, love, reward, approval, honor, status, freedom, survival ... these are some of the many things we associate with the hero's journey. We don't find the meaning of the hero's journey in slaying the dragon or saving the princess—these are colorful metaphors and symbols for a more significant purpose. Battling inner and outer demons, confronting bullies, and courting your ultimate mate symbolize a passage through the often-treacherous tunnel of self-discovery and individuation to mature adulthood. At the end of each journey (if there is such an end), you're different—sometimes visually, but always internally.



What is the Hero's journey?

Joseph Campbell was a curious mythologist. In the field of comparative mythology, most scholars invested their time exploring how one culture's myths were different than another. Campbell, however, saw things differently. Instead of focusing on the many differences between cultural myths and religious stories, he looked for the similarities. And his studies resulted in what's called the monomyth .

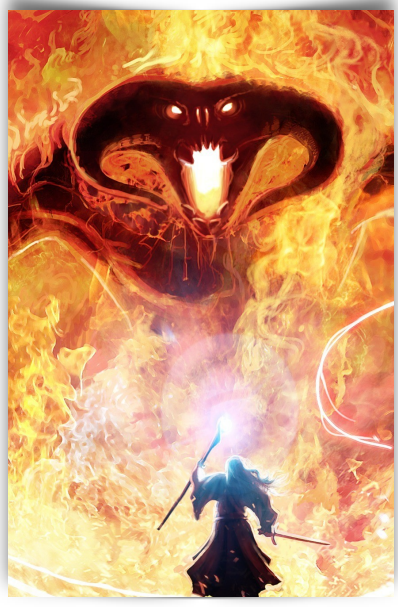


Joseph Campbell

The monomyth is a universal story structure. It's a kind of story template that takes a character through a sequence of stages.

The main character in the monomyth is the hero . The hero isn't a person, but an archetype, a set of universal images combined with specific patterns of behavior. Think of a protagonist from your favorite film. He or she was the hero. The film represented the hero's journey. The hero archetype resides in the psyche of every individual, which is one of the primary reasons we love hearing and watching stories.

Campbell began identifying the patterns of this monomyth. Over and over again, he was amazed to find this structure in the cultures he studied. He saw the same sequence in many religions including the stories of Gautama Buddha, Moses, and Jesus Christ. Campbell outlined the stages of the monomyth in his classic « The Hero with a Thousand Faces ».



Why is the Hero's Journey relevant to us?

We might ask, why explore the Hero's Journey? Sure, Hollywood uses it as their dominant story structure for its films, but what relevance does it have for us as individuals?

Today, when we speak of "myth," we refer to something that's commonly believed, but untrue. Myth, for people like Campbell and Jung however, had a much higher meaning. Myths, for them, represent dreams of the collective psyche. That is, in understanding the symbolic meaning of a myth, you come to know the psychological undercurrent, including hidden motivations, tensions, and desires, of the people. And because the hero's journey represents a monomyth that we can observe in most, if not all, cultures, it represents a process that is relevant to the entire human family.

What is this process? It's the process of personal transformation from an innocent child into a mature adult. The child is born into a set of rules and beliefs of a group of people, and through the child's heroic efforts he must break free of these conventions (transcend them), and discover him or herself. And in the process, the individual returns to his or her soul.



The three main stages of the Hero's Journey

Stage 1: Separation (thesis)

Campbell called the initial stage Departure. The hero departs from the world he knows. In the Departure stage, you leave the safety of the world you know and enter the unknown .

Stage 2: Initiation (antithesis)

Now the hero must face a series of trials and tribulations. The hero's journey isn't safe. The hero is tested in battle, skill, and conflict. The hero may not succeed in each action, but the hero must press on regardless. The hero will meet allies, enemies, and mentors with supernatural aid throughout the initiation stage.

Stage 3: Return (synthesis)

Having endured the trials and hardships of the adventure, the hero returns home. But the hero is no longer the same. An internal transformation has taken place through the maturation process of the experience.

Campbell's legacy to the film industry

The ideas expressed in Campbell's book are having a major impact on storytelling. Writers are becoming more aware of the ageless patterns which Campbell identifies, and are enriching their work with them. Inevitably Hollywood has caught on to the usefulness of Campbell's work. Filmmakers like George Lucas and George Miller acknowledge their debt to Campbell and his influence can be seen in the films of Steven Spielberg, John Boorman, Francis Coppola, and others.

These tools have stood the test of time. They are older than the Pyramids, older than Stonehenge, older than the earliest cave paintings.

Joseph Campbell's contribution to the tool kit was to gather the ideas together, recognize them, articulate them, name them, organize them. He exposed for the first time the pattern that lies behind every story ever told.

The Hero with a Thousand Faces is his statement of the most persistent theme in oral tradition and recorded literature: the myth of the hero. In his study of world hero myths Campbell discovered that they are all basically the same story, retold endlessly in infinite variation.

Stories built on the model of the Hero's Journey have an appeal that can be felt by everyone, because they well up from a universal source in the shared unconscious and reflect universal concerns.

They deal with the childlike universal questions: Who am I? Where did I come from? Where will I go when I die? What is good and what is evil? What must I do about it? What will tomorrow be like? Where did yesterday go? Is there anybody else out there?

Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*

Christopher Vogler's adaptation of the Hero's Journey

- Stage 1
 1. ORDINARY WORLD
 2. CALL TO ADVENTURE
 3. REFUSAL OF THE CALL
 4. MEETING WITH THE MENTOR
 5. CROSSING THE FIRST THRESHOLD
- Stage 2
 6. TESTS; ALLIES, ENEMIES
 7. APPROACH TO THE INMOST CAVE
 8. SUPREME ORDEAL
 9. REWARD (SEIZING THE SWORD)
- Stage 3
 10. THE ROAD BACK
 11. RESURRECTION
 12. RETURN (WITH THE ELIXIR)



Screenwriting consultant **Christopher Vogler** discovered Joseph Campbell's work while studying cinema at USC. He wrote a paper exploring the mythological patterns that made the original *Star Wars* film such a great success.

In 1985, as a story analyst for Disney, Vogler organized his research into a seven-page memo called "A Practical Guide to Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*." In the memo's introduction, he calls Campbell's ideas "an excellent set of analytical tools" with which writers and editors can "almost always determine what's wrong with a story that's floundering." He used Campbell's summary of the hero's journey in Chapter IV of *Hero* as his model.



Answer the online quiz

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Modern Mythology

and the hero's journey

by Joseph Campbell

What is the Hero's Journey?

1. Introduce the document.
2. What is specific about Joseph Campbell's research?
 - How did he call his discovery?
3. Who is the main character of the monomyth?

Why is the Hero's Journey relevant to us?

4. Why is it interesting to study and understand the theory of the monomyth?
 - What does it reveal about most people?

Campbell's legacy to the film industry

5. In what way has Joseph Campbell's work influenced our modern way of telling stories?
 - Quote examples of filmmakers who have been using his method.
6. According to Christopher Vogler, what is Joseph Campbell's contribution to the storytellers?
7. Why is the hero's journey appealing to so many people?
 - What kind of questions does it raise?



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17-STAGE MODEL

Separation/Departure

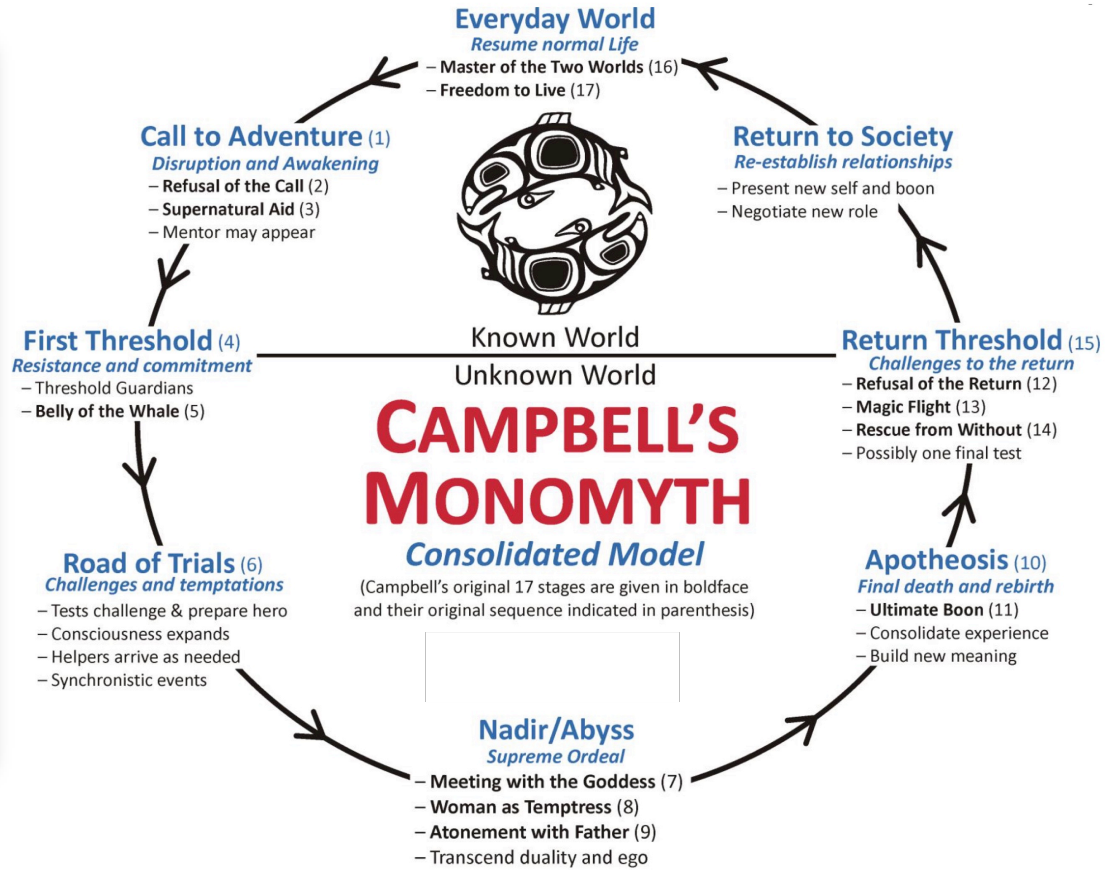
1. Call to Adventure
2. Refusal of the Call
3. Supernatural Aid
4. Crossing the First Threshold
5. The Belly of the Whale

Initiation/Transformation

6. Road of Trials
7. Meeting with the Goddess
8. Woman as the Temptress
9. Atonement with the Father
10. Apotheosis
11. The Ultimate Boon

Return

12. Refusal of the Return
13. Magic Flight
14. Rescue from Without
15. Crossing the Return Threshold
16. Master of the Two Worlds
17. Freedom to Live



17-STAGE MODEL

Separation/Departure

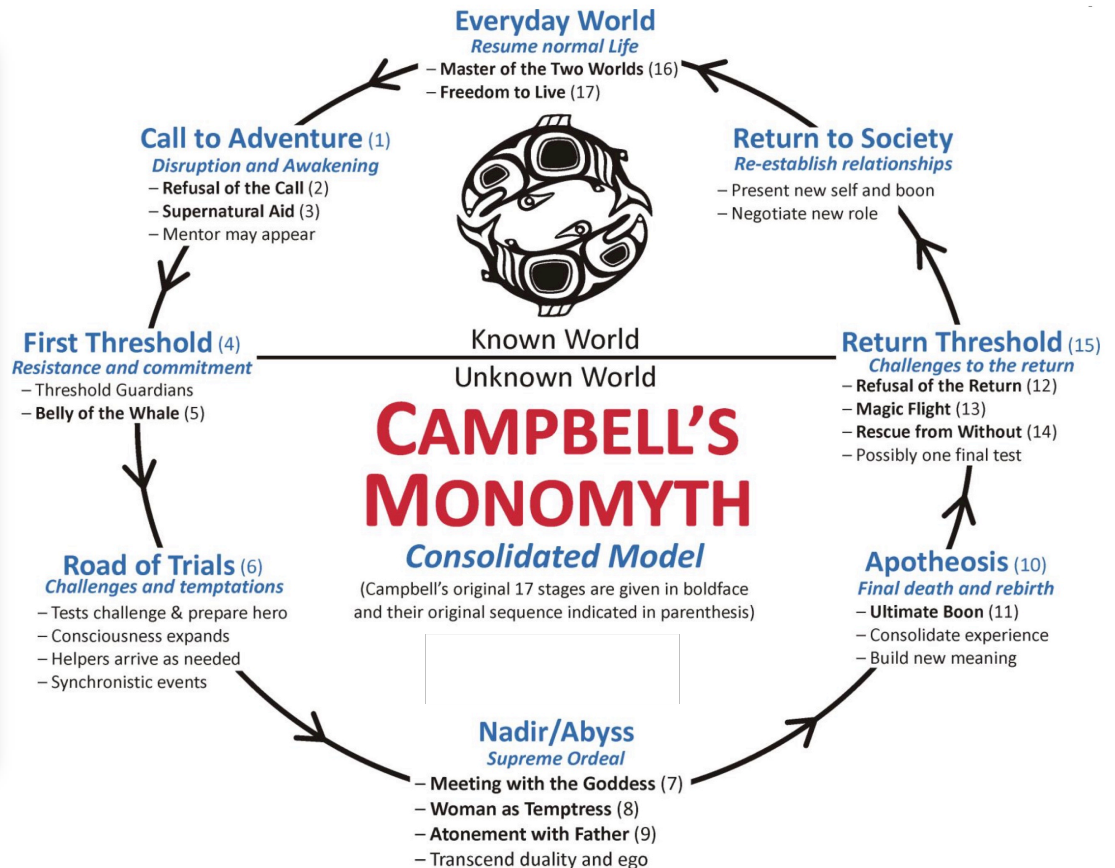
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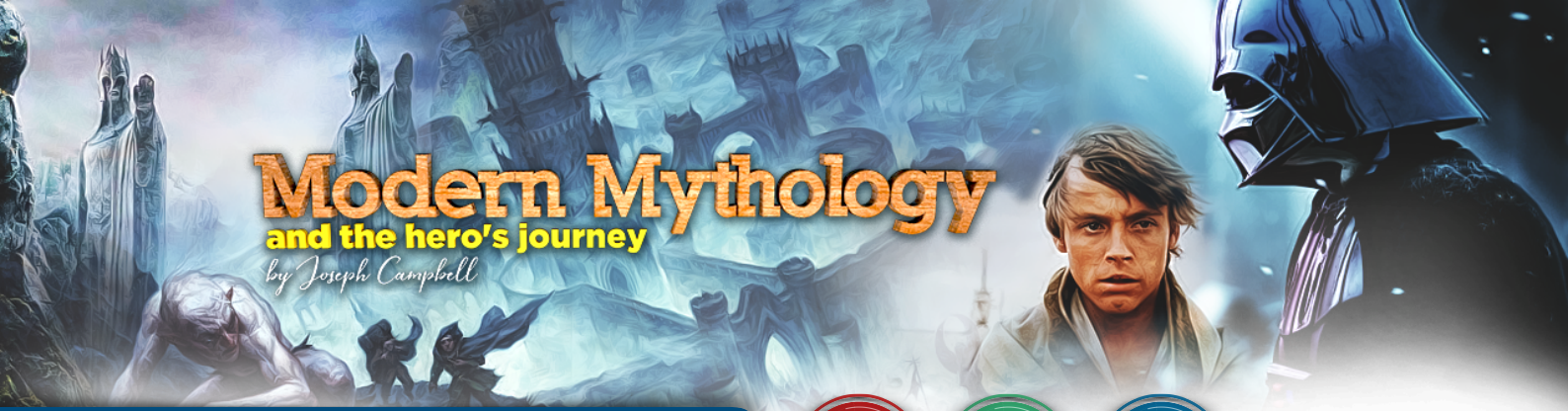
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Shadow of the past



The day Frodo is confronted with his destiny



'Yes, alas! through him the Enemy has learned that the One has been found again. He knows where Isildur fell. He knows where Gollum found his ring. He knows that it is a Great Ring, for it gave long life. He knows that it is not one of the Three, for they have never been lost, and they endure no evil. He knows that it is not one of the Seven, or the Nine, for they are accounted for. He knows that it is the One. And he has at last heard, I think, of *hobbits* and the *Shire*.

'The *Shire* – he may be seeking for it now, if he has not already found out where it lies. Indeed, Frodo, I fear that he may even think that the long-unnoticed name of *Baggins* has become important.'

'But this is terrible!' cried Frodo. 'Far worse than the worst that I imagined from your hints and warnings. O Gandalf, best of friends, what am I to do? For now I am really afraid. What am I to do? What a pity that Bilbo did not stab that vile creature, when he had a chance!'

'Pity? It was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need. And he has been well rewarded, Frodo. Be sure that he took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity.'

'I am sorry,' said Frodo. 'But I am frightened; and I do not feel any pity for Gollum.'

'You have not seen him,' Gandalf broke in.

'No, and I don't want to,' said Frodo. 'I can't understand you. Do you mean to say that you, and the Elves, have let him live on after all those horrible deeds? Now at any rate he is as bad as an Orc, and just an enemy. He deserves death.'

'Deserves it! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement. For even the very wise cannot see all ends. I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it. And he is bound up with the fate of the Ring. My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many – yours not least. In any case we did not kill

him: he is very old and very wretched. The Wood-elves have him in prison, but they treat him with such kindness as they can find in their wise hearts.'

'All the same,' said Frodo, 'even if Bilbo could not kill Gollum, I wish he had not kept the Ring. I wish he had never found it, and that I had not got it! Why did you let me keep it? Why didn't you make me throw it away, or, or destroy it?'

'Let you? Make you?' said the wizard. 'Haven't you been listening to all that I have said? You are not thinking of what you are saying. But as for throwing it away, that was obviously wrong. These Rings have a way of being found. In evil hands it might have done great evil. Worst of all, it might have fallen into the hands of the Enemy. Indeed it certainly would; for this is the One, and he is exerting all his power to find it or draw it to himself.'

'Of course, my dear Frodo, it was dangerous for you; and that has troubled me deeply. But there was so much at stake that I had to take some risk – though even when I was far away there has never been a day when the Shire has not been guarded by watchful eyes. As long as you never used it, I did not think that the Ring would have any lasting effect on you, not for evil, not at any rate for a very long time. And you must remember that nine years ago, when I last saw you, I still knew little for certain.'

'But why not destroy it, as you say should have been done long ago?' cried Frodo again. 'If you had warned me, or even sent me a message, I would have done away with it.'

Modern Mythology and the hero's journey

by Joseph Campbell



'Would you? How would you do that? Have you ever tried?' 'No. But I suppose one could hammer it or melt it.' 'Try!' said Gandalf. 'Try now!'

Frodo drew the Ring out of his pocket again and looked at it. It now appeared plain and smooth, without mark or device that he could see. The gold looked very fair and pure, and Frodo thought how rich and beautiful was its colour, how perfect was its roundness. It was an admirable thing and altogether precious. When he took it out he had intended to fling it from him into the very hottest part of the fire. But he found now that he could not do so, not without a great struggle. He weighed the Ring in his hand, hesitating, and forcing himself to remember all that Gandalf had told him; and then with an effort of will he made a movement, as if to cast it away – but he found that he had put it back in his pocket. 50

Gandalf laughed grimly. 'You see? Already you too, Frodo, cannot easily let it go, nor will to damage it. And I could not "make" you – except by force, which would break your mind. But as for breaking the Ring, force is useless. Even if you took it and struck it with a heavy sledge-hammer, it would make no dint in it. It cannot be unmade by your hands, or by mine. 55

'Your small fire, of course, would not melt even ordinary gold. This Ring has already passed through it unscathed, and even unheated. But there is no smith's forge in this Shire that could change it at all. Not even the anvils and furnaces of the Dwarves 60 could do that. It has been said that dragon-fire could melt and consume the Rings of Power, but there is not now any dragon left on earth in which the old fire is hot enough; nor was there ever any dragon, not even Ancalagon the Black, who could have harmed the One Ring, the Ruling Ring, for that was made by Sauron himself.

'There is only one way: to find the Cracks of Doom in the depths of Orodruin, the Fire-mountain, and cast the Ring in there, if you really wish to destroy it, to put it beyond the grasp of the Enemy for ever.' 65

'I do really wish to destroy it!' cried Frodo. 'Or, well, to have it destroyed. I am not made for perilous quests. I wish I had never seen the Ring! Why did it come to me? Why was I chosen?'


'Such questions cannot be answered,' said Gandalf. 'You may be sure that it was not for any merit that others do not possess: not for power or wisdom, at any rate. But you have been chosen, and you must therefore use such strength and heart and wits as you have.' 70

'But I have so little of any of these things! You are wise and powerful. Will you not take the Ring?'

'No!' cried Gandalf, springing to his feet. 'With that power I should have power too great and terrible. And over me the Ring would gain a power still greater and more deadly.' His eyes flashed and his face was lit as by a fire within. 'Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself. Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good. Do not tempt me! I dare not take it, not even to keep it safe, unused. The wish to wield it would be too great for my strength. I shall have such need of it. Great perils lie before me.'

80 He went to the window and drew aside the curtains and the shutters. Sunlight streamed back again into the room. Sam passed along the path outside whistling. 'And now,' said the wizard, turning back to Frodo, 'the decision lies with you. But I will always help you.' He laid his hand on Frodo's shoulder. 'I will help you bear this burden, as long as it is yours to bear. But we must do something, soon. The Enemy is moving.'

J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of The Rings, 1954

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1. Introduce the document.
 2. Who are the people present?
 - Say everything you can about them.
 3. How did Frodo get the ring?
 4. Explain Frodo's feelings towards Gollum.
 - What is Gandalf's opinion about it?
 5. What is his first intention about the ring?
 - Can he do it? Explain.
 6. What happens to Frodo when he's looking at the ring? Can you compare it to another character of the story?
 7. What is Frodo's second intention about the ring?
 8. So, what is Frodo's fate?
 - Do you think he can do it alone?
 - Can you imagine what he will need?
 9. According to the monomyth, what step is it in the hero's journey? Identify the clues and discuss them.

Answer the online quiz

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Star Wars and modern mythology



Cinema as the new way to spread myths

Joseph Campbell, arguably the most influential force behind the original *Star Wars* trilogy, asserts that « Freud, Jung, and their followers have demonstrated irrefutably that the logic, the heroes and the deeds of myth survive into modern times. » If this is true, cinema has surely taken the place of mythic cave paintings, temple carvings and shaman storytellers in offering a contemporary visual metaphor for the experience of life. Myths at their core are cautionary tales, a way to make sense of the Universe and our place within it; in modern times the archaic values of mythology don't seem to have a place in society, at least until they are reinterpreted. The original *Star Wars* saga is modern mythology at its best, full of trials, adventure, love, danger, and at its center a story about the very nature of humanity. *Star Wars* has become a touchstone for countless fans and continues to reach across societal barriers of age, race and sex.

Plenty of fan-generated vitriol has been leveled at George Lucas since the release of the three prequels; many fans feel that the prequels take the focus of the saga away from Luke (the hero we grew up idolizing) and instead make the overall story Anakin's. From a certain point of view this might be true, but if one understands that Luke's and Anakin's destinies have always been intertwined, and that it is because of Luke's journey that Anakin is able to find salvation. *Star Wars* becomes a cyclical monomyth. It is also important to note that Lucas believes in the importance of the individual but is not limited by it; although Luke is the main hero of the saga he is surrounded by exceptional characters who all undergo their own transformations and heroic journeys.

There are countless themes and subthemes within the Lucas narrative that both reinforce and illustrate lessons that have been handed down to us across the ages: humanity vs. machine, good vs. evil, light vs. dark, archetypes of the mentor, shapeshifter, earth mother, trickster, shadow, and hero. One person can make a difference even when opposed by the relentlessness of technology: in the Lucas universe, humanity will always triumph over the machine. *Star Wars* seamlessly fulfills the function of myth: opening our hearts and minds to the mystery in our lives.

Douglas Brode and Leah Deyneka, *Myth, Media and Culture in Star Wars*, 2012

