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The Perennial Journey Home

The elemental [myth] for spiritual instruction is called *marga* which means "path." It's the trail back to yourself.

—Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, p. 59

To view an American film is to witness the dreams, values and fears of the American people, to feel the pulse of American culture.

—Sam Grogg and John Nachbar, *Movies as Artifacts*, p. 5

Joseph Campbell and other theorists of myth argue that the collective development of human consciousness (Perennial philosophy) parallels the developing consciousness of the individual (Jungian psychology). Both types of evolution are explained in myth as an individual (hero's) journey. This journey moves the individual out from known territory (the parochial/the home/ego-consciousness) to unknown territory (often a descent into strange or terrible lands/unconsciousness) where the individual is sometimes aided (mentors/gods/shamans/dreams), and is often sorely tested (demons/Shadow-self), in a search for a treasure or boon (gold/grail/enlightenment/individuation) that the individual then shares with the culture upon returning home (cultural enlightenment/awareness of the undivided nature of being/transconsciousness). Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* explains that the nuclear units of this hero quest, which he refers to as the monomyth, are separation, initiation, and return.¹

This movement outward, downward, inward, and homeward, although teleological or evolutionary, as Campbell also points out, is ultimately cyclical or mandalic since the home to which the hero returns, although the "same," cannot be truly known or grasped until the journey outward. Such a departure from home, which ultimately constitutes the birth of drama,

only becomes necessary with our movement out from preconsciousness (caused in mythic time by our expulsion from the Garden/paradise—a place before time or consciousness). Such an expulsion creates the profound feeling of loss or lack and provides the motive for the journey “home.” For what else is a journey but an attempt to discover something that is missing or lost, something dimly intuited but not yet fully grasped? Such a journey offers a chance for change, growth, and possibly transcendence, that although evolutionary, ultimately represents, as Zen Buddhism tells us, a longing to be reunited with an energy or way of being always already present; a longing, in other words, for home.

This chapter details at greater length this relationship among the hero quest, the journey home, and cultural and individual evolution. Specifically, the chapter provides a working definition of myth, discussing myth’s origins, purpose, and relationship to dreams, art, film, and culture. It then develops a model of the perennial journey home in quest mythology, discussing a number of permutations of the hero quest as they appear in the various films analyzed at greater length in later chapters.

What Are Myths?

According to Campbell, myths are “the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestations.”² They are “the world’s [archetypal] dreams.” Myths “deal with great human problems” while providing “clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life.”³ They “offer a way of experiencing the world that will open us to the transcendent that informs it, and at the same time forms ourself within it”;⁴ the transcendent, in Campbell’s usage, referring to “that which is beyond all concept . . . beyond the categories of being and non-being.”⁵

Although myths may vary somewhat from culture to culture, they draw on a surprisingly universal storehouse of archetypal information about what it means to be human and how to live a meaningful human life. And although these archetypal stories offer dark and unsettling images and recount difficult and often terrifying experiences,⁶ they ultimately affirm the value of life and provide a primer, a set of instructions, for living. As Curtin notes, when myths “are epic—that is, when they express the crucial experiences, ideals, and aspirations of any culture—then they help to keep that culture alive and

healthy, in touch with its values and hopes. Living myths become the antidote to cynicism.”⁷

Myths, contrary to the common understanding of a myth as a falsehood, are neither true nor false in the traditional sense of those terms. Versenyi, for example, explains that in Homer’s era mythos “did not mean fable . . . the tale was not something mythical, fabulous, fictional, and therefore untrue. Myth meant simply word of mouth, a story told rather than written down, winged words not fixed in an enduring medium but orally related and transmitted from generation to generation.” He goes on to explain that “that is why living myth is always true; true, that is, to the experience, ideals, and aspirations of each generation.”⁸ Myths, therefore, neither true nor false, are instead more or less functional for interpreting the “truth” of human experience and giving life shape, substance, and meaning. Jung goes so far as to argue that myths, or more specifically the “archetypal foundations” of the unconscious upon which they are based, are so important for a culture that “in reality we can never legitimately cut loose from them. . . unless we are prepared to pay the price of a neurosis, any more than we can rid ourselves of our body and its organs without committing suicide.”⁹

Where Do Myths Come From?

Campbell explains that “the earliest evidence of anything like mythological thinking is associated with graves. . . . There was a person who was alive and warm before you who is now lying there cold, and beginning to rot.”¹⁰ Faced with such an event, premodern humans were compelled to ask such essential questions as, if there was something there that isn’t there now, “Where is it now?”¹¹ If there is such a thing as a soul that makes the body lively, where did it come from? Did someone create it? And if there is a creator or creators, does that mean that humans have a divine purpose? If so, what then is that purpose? From such questions as these, many mythologists assert, religion and myth were born.

A particularly fascinating question for many mythologists relates to the universal nature of many myths. Five strains of theory have developed to account for these universal qualities.

The first is experiential; because we all are born, mature, face questions of procreation, unification, and separation, because we all eventually face

death, myths speak to these elemental human experiences. As a result, we have creation stories, coming-of-age stories, stories of death and life after death, and stories of humanity's fall from grace and of the hope in resurrection/reunification with spirit/God.¹²

A second theory for explaining the universal qualities of many myths is diffusion; myths that effectively accounted for the human experience were told again and again and eventually spread around the world and throughout time from culture to culture. This would mean that most contemporary cultural permutations of myths can be traced back, in some form or another, to a set of elemental mythic stories told in antiquity.

A third theory is environmental; a culture's specific geographical environment and their experiences of that environment shapes the stories they tell. To the extent, for example, that all agricultural cultures have faced similar experiences—the cycle of sowing the crops in spring, their growth, maturation, and harvest, dormancy in winter, and regrowth in spring—they have responded with similar stories about fertility, creation, and the resurrection of life from death. And by comparison, to the extent to which all hunting cultures have faced similar experiences—the wandering of the tribe in search of food, the power of the animal as both threat and source of life, the vagaries of the hunt—they have responded with similar stories about animal deities as creators, similar cleansing rituals in preparation for the hunt, and similar rituals of thanks for the life of the animal as willing sacrifice.¹³ More recently, to the extent to which contemporary cultures have been impacted by the rapid development of technology—from the Industrial Revolution onward—they have responded with a cultural myth about the relationship between technology/science and humanity/spirituality. This myth has been played out most predominantly in science fiction, from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

A fourth explanation for the existence of archetypic myths is biological. Just as human beings are "hard-wired" to do many things, such as breathe, suck mother's milk, and recognize shapes, they are also "programmed" to articulate and respond to certain archetypic material, such as mandalas, "ascent" and "descent" motifs, and images of lightness and darkness, the sun, the sea, and fire. Advocates of this position argue that archetypes are ahistorical and transcultural and are not tied to experiences, environments, or cultural diffusion.¹⁴ Although this is the most controversial position, it has a number of adherents in the communication field.¹⁵

A fifth explanation is spiritual. Proponents of this position assert that

mythic structures articulate divine inspirations from God/spirit. Mythic archetypes thus represent the language of God. Nonliteral Bible scholars, for example, assert that Old Testament stories such as the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden and the slaying of Abel by his brother Cain are spiritual truths conveyed to the people by God through prayer or divine inspiration.¹⁶

What Purposes Do Myths Serve?

Related to the question of where myths come from, is the question of the functions they serve. Mythologists argue that there are two different, although related types of myths—universal and cultural/sociological—and that these two types serve different, although related purposes.¹⁷ The universal myth, according to Campbell, is the "mythology that relates you to your nature and to the natural world, of which you're a part."¹⁸ Universal myths transcend cultural and historical conditions to speak to the elemental and identical nature of the human condition. The hero quest, for example, is a universal story that appears in numerous cultures across time. By contrast, the cultural/sociological myth relates the individual to his/her particular society and "affirm[s] that you are an organ of the larger organism."¹⁹ The American myth of "settling the West" or "manifest destiny" is an example of a cultural myth. Although cultural myths may vary widely from culture to culture, they are usually grounded in a larger or deeper universal mythic structure that informs them and gives them power. So, for example, the western expansion myth is grounded in and draws upon such myths as the universal hero quest and the Garden of Eden myth.

Both universal and cultural myth can serve diverse functions.²⁰ Theorists and critics who specifically view myths from a functionalist/structuralist perspective often talk about their sociological or "sociofunctional" role. Robert Rowland, for example, argues that myths perform three interrelated functions: they offer pragmatic, "how to live" advice, they help make intellectual sense of the world, and they provide cultures and individuals with psychological adjustments to change (for example, growth and maturation) and crisis (for example, murder or social upheaval).²¹ Other theorists who take this structural/functionalist approach to myth include Claude Lévi-Strauss,²² Bronislaw Malinowski,²³ and Theodore Gaster.²⁴ Other theorists of myth, such as Houston Smith,²⁵ Mircea Eliade,²⁶ Aldous Huxley,²⁷ and Ken Wilber²⁸ focus on the sacred or religious functions of myth, while others, like Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, focus on myths' psychological functions. Still others—critics,

such as Roland Barthes²⁹ and Jacques Ellul,³⁰ view myths, particularly political myths, as “false consciousness,” or ideology in the negative sense of the word. These critics focus on the way myths limit freedom, assert power relationships, and maintain inequalities.³¹ And finally, there are theorists like Joseph Campbell and critics like Janice Rushing and Thomas Frenz who take a multifaceted approach to understanding the functions of myth.³² Theorists and critics applying this multiperspectival orientation often integrate insights from Perennial philosophy, Jungian psychology and the structural study of myth in order to illuminate the rhetorical power and evolutionary thinking of mythic structures while also acknowledging the ideological implications of certain cultural constructions of myth in discourse.³³ My approach, in the analysis of films in this book, falls into this last camp.

How Are Myths Related to Dreams, Art, and Film?

According to Campbell, although “myths and dreams come from the same place . . . from realizations of some kind that have then to find expression in symbolic form,”³⁴ he then goes on to say that “a dream is personal experience of that deep dark ground that is the support of our conscious lives, and a myth is the society’s dream. The myth is the public dream and the dream is the private myth.”³⁵

Consistent with Campbell’s distinction between myth and dream is Jung’s elucidation of two types of dreams, the personal dream and the archetypal or mythic dream. According to Jung, the personal dream arises from the personal unconscious, which consists of repressed personal memories and experiences, including the shadow. The mythic dream, by contrast, arises from the collective unconscious, which is made up of archaic or “primordial types,” “universal images that have existed since the remotest times” and which are shared by all.³⁶ The collective unconscious is made available to the culture and the individual through archetypes that are expressed in myths, fairy tales, and dreams.³⁷

Myths, however, like the unconscious, have a life of their own. They are “spontaneous productions of the psyche” and, as such, “cannot be ordered, invented, or permanently suppressed.”³⁸ As Campbell explains,

The unconscious sends all sorts of vapors, odd beings, terrors, and deluding images up into the mind—whether in dream, broad daylight or insanity; for the human king-

dom, beneath the floor of the comparatively neat little dwelling that we call our consciousness, goes down into unsuspected Aladdin caves. There not only jewels but also dangerous jinn abide: the inconvenient or resisted psychological powers that we have not thought or dared to integrate into our lives. And they may remain unsuspected, or, on the other hand, some chance word, the smell of a landscape, the taste of a cup of tea, or the glance of an eye may touch a magic spring, and then dangerous messengers begin to appear in the brain. These are dangerous because they threaten the fabric of the security into which we have built ourselves and our family. But they are fiendishly fascinating too, for they carry keys that open the whole realm of the desired and-feared adventure of the discovery of the self.³⁹

Psychoanalysis, the “modern science of reading dreams” Campbell asserts, is primarily responsible for drawing our attention to these unconscious impulses and images. Campbell explains, however, that myths are more than simply manifestations of the unconscious in conscious life. Myths are also manifestations “of certain spiritual principles, which have remained as constant throughout the course of human history as the form and nervous structure of the human physique itself.”⁴⁰

The mythic unconscious not only reveals itself through dreams, visions, and psychoanalysis; it also asserts itself in various cultural art forms. Despite the universal qualities of the unconscious, myths must constantly be reborn and reinterpreted for every generation or they will die. “Myths,” Campbell asserts, “are so intimately bound to the culture, time, and place that unless the symbols, metaphors, are kept alive by constant recreation through the arts, the life just slips away from them.”⁴¹ Accordingly, it is the artists and writers of a culture who are responsible for keeping myths lively and relevant for a people.⁴² Jung, in fact, argues that the primary role of art is to “dream the myth outward,” to continually find new interpretations of the archetypes of the collective unconscious.⁴³

The initial inspiration for the creative act—the artist’s muse—can even be attributed to myth. As Campbell notes:

Anyone writing a creative work knows that you open, you yield yourself, and the book talks to you and builds itself. To a certain extent you become the carrier of something that is given to you from what have been called the Muses, or in biblical language, “God” . . . Since the inspiration comes from the unconscious, and since the unconscious minds of the people of any single small society have much in common, what the shaman or seer brings forth is something that is waiting to be brought forth in everyone. So when one hears the seer’s story, one responds, “Aha! This is my story. This is something that I had always wanted to say but wasn’t able to say.”⁴⁴

Film, in particular, can be a powerful conduit for archetypal material. Davies, Farrell, and Matthews, for example, claim that film sequences can take the form of "memories, reflections, or dreams, where images combine, fade, or dissolve, contrary to physical restrictions of time, space, object constancy, and causality."⁴⁵ As a result, they argue that "stylistic elements inherent in cinema make it especially amenable to the communication of archetypal material."⁴⁶

According to Jung, archetypes "arise in a state of reduced intensity of consciousness (in dreams, delirium, reveries, visions, etc.). In all these states the check put upon unconscious contents by the concentration of the conscious mind ceases, so that the hitherto unconscious material streams, as through from opened side-slucies, into to the field of consciousness."⁴⁷ The film-viewing state is also marked by passive receptivity. One's body is relatively inert while one's mind is open to the audio-visual stimulation presented. As such, the viewer, like the dreamer, may be more conducive to the unconscious and its archetypes.

The entire film-viewing experience can actually be seen as a metaphor for dreaming. For example, just as the viewer moves from light to dark as he enters the cinema, so does the dreamer as sleep begins. When the lights come up on the screen/inner eye, the dream/film begins. The viewer/dreamer often finds himself in a liminal world where fantasies or fears can be played out before his eyes—voyeurism (the pleasure in secret looking), scopophilia (the vicarious pleasure in being "looked" at), fetishism (the investing of objects with special powers), nightmares (the harbingers of deep-seated fears)—all are possible. The viewer's/dreamer's visions are also realized in a drama that is visual, auditory, and often viscerally moving. At its best the cinema can invoke either the cold sweat and rapid pulse of the dream or the critical reflection that often renders dreams psychic guides to life. And, just as the dreamer feels that he cannot control the direction in which the dream takes him, the same is obviously so for the filmviewer. Both can only decide whether they want to hang on for the ride. Even the movement of the camera in the film can be likened to the point of view experienced by the dreamer. The camera's mobility mimics the dreamer's, which can be omniscient or naive, have a bird's-eye view or a ground-level perspective. Time is also fluid and relative for both the dreamer and the viewer, who can experience, for example, slow motion, flashbacks, flashforwards, repeated sequences, and rapid, montage-like shifts in time and space. To the extent, then, that films are like dreams, and dreams,

as Jung argues, are windows to the unconscious realm of the archetypal, films can also tap the latent mythic energy of the unconscious.

Myths, then, neither true nor false, are instead portals to the unconscious realm of archetypes that are continually produced and reproduced in all cultures in all ages. Manifest in dreams and psychoanalysis as well as in art and film, myths—whether universal or cultural—speak to human experiences while providing guides for living the fully human life. What, then, are some of these archetypal stories? How have they evolved? To what urgencies do they speak?

The Cosmogonic Cycle in Myth

Perennial philosophy, Jungian psychology, and much of the scholarship on myth asserts that humanity is collectively experiencing a teleological evolution; a movement, in other words, toward a more perfect state of being.⁴⁸ The history of this evolution, according to Janice Rushing and Thomas Frenz, is the history of the emergence of consciousness from preconsciousness and the contemporary striving of humanity toward transconsciousness.⁴⁹

In psychological terms, as Rushing and Frenz point out, this evolution is the process both of "becoming an individual" and "becoming undivided."⁵⁰ For the developing individual, this involves the emergence of ego from a pre-egoic state of being. The child, for example, develops a growing sense of herself as separate from the mother as she moves from childhood into adulthood. Erik Erikson refers to this as the achievement of ego-identity. It represents the "comprehensive gains which the individual, at the end of adolescence, must have derived from all of his preadult experiences in order to be ready for the task of adulthood."⁵¹ Ego-consciousness, however, is not a final stage in the individuation process, simply a stop along the way. Full adult maturity implies a movement beyond ego-identity toward awareness of the collective, undivided nature of being and our unity with all things.⁵² According to Jung, "As the individual is not just a single, separate being, but by his very existence presupposes a collective relationship, it follows that the process of individuation must lead to more intense and broader collective relationships and not isolation."⁵³

In the evolution from one stage to the next it is often the heroes of myth, as I argue elsewhere, who are best "able to try out the next stage of human con-

sciousness—to act as philosophical test pilots for an entire culture.”⁵⁴ In order to do this, however the heroes of each age are depicted as needing to slay or overcome the gods or goddesses of their age. In the era of preconsciousness, for example:

the hero's main feat is to overcome the monster of darkness: it is the long-hoped-for and expected triumph of consciousness over the unconscious. So in the Golden Age of heroes in Greek mythology . . . male figures such as Pericles, Jason, Achilles, Hector and Odysseus had to face the monsters and villains of preconsciousness in order to liberate the ego identity just beginning to emerge. These monsters or villains were represented by the “Great Mother” or “Great Goddess” worshipped during the era of preconsciousness. These female figures became the dragons to be slain, however, because they represented obstacles impeding the emergence of ego consciousness and thus the rise of civilization.⁵⁵

In the modern era of consciousness, when the age of great heroes has passed, the gods of rationality and science—the saviors of the previous age—become the demons and monsters that must either be overcome or better integrated into our collective psyche. The ego, no longer the hero, is now the villain to be defeated. This is because science, technology, and rationality, which represent the ego phase of development, separate us from the irrational, the mythical, and the spiritual—the realm with which we must be reunited in order to advance to the next phase of teleological development.⁵⁶

The emergence of consciousness from preconsciousness, argues Jung, was most likely a “tremendous experience for primeval times, for with it a world came into being whose existence no one has suspected before.”⁵⁷ Jung asserts, however, that since the first act of the emerging individual consciousness from preconsciousness was matricide, this act brought with it a profound sense of guilt or longing for the loss of the mother and the irrational realm she represents. As a result, what may have only been an inkling of guilt or sin over the loss of the irrational and the matricide of the “Great Mother” or “Great Goddess” of preconsciousness in Homer's era, in the contemporary era has become a profound longing or angst over the meaninglessness of the modern condition. The realm of ego-consciousness, dominated by First World cultures' reverence for, even worship of, the “sovereign rationale subject” has resulted in our inability to explore the archetypal realm of the unconscious in order to “go home.”⁵⁸

There may be multiple reasons why individuals and cultures fail to explore the realm of the unconscious in order to complete their trip “home” to transconsciousness. The first is guilt over our loss of the Mother and the realm of the unconscious. In the Christian tradition, this guilt translates

as sin related to our expulsion from paradise and our separation from God. It is not only guilt or sin, however, that has separated us from the realm of the unconscious and the Mother. Fear of the loss of ego identity also provides a powerful deterrent to experiencing the transcendent. The central event, in fact, of modernism is “the perfection of the ego until it becomes strong enough to dominate the rest of the psyche. Thus, instead of becoming one with Spirit, the ego tries to substitute for Spirit; as Wilber put it, ‘instead of becoming one with the cosmos, he [egoic man] tries to possess the cosmos.’ ”⁵⁹ According to Perennial philosophy, as I argue elsewhere, “although the individual or the culture may desire transcendence, this transcendence implies the ‘death’ of the isolated self. [As a result,] instead of attempting evolution, in the age of ego consciousness we repress or sublimate our awareness of transconsciousness to ego identity by finding ways to leave our mark, build bigger buildings or claim our fifteen minutes of fame.”⁶⁰ Despite this, as Campbell asserts, the hero's real task, and hence that of the culture at large, is “losing yourself, giving yourself to some higher end, or to another.”⁶¹ He goes on to explain that “when we quit thinking primarily about ourselves and our own self preservation, we undergo a truly heroic transformation of consciousness.”⁶²

Rushing and Frenz assert that this “truly heroic transformation of consciousness,” or the hero's “return” to unity with the cosmos, is not a regressive return to preconsciousness in which the ego is destroyed or infantilized. Instead, rather than being dissolved, in a transmodern view, the ego is simply displaced from its central position “in favor of recentering the psyche in a larger, transcendent self that encapsulates the ego . . . a transmodern view posits a level of the psyche beyond the ego which is not unconscious, not conscious, but *transconscious*.”⁶³

In this view, transconsciousness is not, nor can it ever be, identical with unconsciousness/preconsciousness. Because the hero is changed by his descent into the realm of unconsciousness, when he returns “home,” paradoxically it is to a place he has never been. Because he has changed, it has changed as well. Hence, because we have known sin, death, and separation such a return to preconsciousness is no longer possible. Because we have known self (ego), such a return is no longer desirable. What is possible, indeed what may be necessary, as Rushing and Frenz assert, is a displacement of self (the sovereign rationale subject that modernism canonizes and postmodernism vilifies) that allows us to consider the soul rather than the ego as “the seat of the self.”⁶⁴ Thus transconsciousness, or the state of unity with Spirit sought by

the heroes of all ages, is an evolution, paradoxically to a place that has always existed (soul-knowledge) but which could never be fully realized without our questing in the realm of consciousness (ego), unconsciousness (pre-ego), and imperfect human activity (Shadow/sin, death, and separation).

Birth of the Hero and the Quest

The birth of the hero quest, according to Campbell, occurs with a historical and mythological "shift of consciousness from the consciousness of identity to the consciousness of participation in duality." For then, as Campbell puts it, "you are in the field of time."⁶⁵ In the beginning of most creation myths, for example, the world is undivided or undifferentiated, there is no good or evil, male or female, darkness or light, past or future. But with God's first act division takes place and time begins, immortality for humanity ends, and, in Western mythology, death, sin, sadness, and separation enter the world. The darkness is separated from the light, the day is separated from night, the man is separated from the woman, and, in Judeo-Christian mythology, in the betrayal and expulsion from the Garden of Eden the man and woman are separated from God.

At this point a dramatic change has occurred, a new consciousness of duality (male/female, mortal/immortal, good/evil) and separation from God has emerged, time and becoming come into existence, and the first quest, or journey outward, begins. In Campbell's words:

It started with the sin . . . moving out of the mythological dreamtime zone of the Garden of Paradise, where there is no time, and where man and woman don't even know that they are different from each other. The two are just creatures. God and man are practically the same. God walks in the cool of the evening in the garden where they are. And then they eat the apple, the knowledge of the opposites. And when they discover that they are different, the man and the woman cover their shame. You see, they had not thought of themselves as opposites. . . . Then comes the idea of good and evil in the world. And so Adam and Eve have thrown themselves out of the Garden of Timeless Unity, you might say, just by that act of recognizing duality. To move out into the world, you have to act in terms of pairs of opposites.⁶⁶

The Garden of Eden, then, a mythic representation of the realm of preconsciousness, in Campbell's words, "is a metaphor for that innocence that is

innocent of time, innocent of opposites, and that is the prime center out of which consciousness then becomes aware of the changes."⁶⁷

But "life really began with that act of disobedience"⁶⁸—metaphorically speaking, it is the eating of the apple. This tension of opposites, or the duality of being, becomes the catalyst for drama and the hero quest since the primary task of the hero and the culture at large will be seeking unity from a place of separation, transcendence from duality.⁶⁹

According to Campbell, there are two types of quests: intentional and unintentional. An intentional quest would be Telemachus in search of his father, sent on the quest willingly by the goddess Athena. An unintentional quest would be that undertaken by Han Solo in *Star Wars*, when Han, initially against his will, is thrown into the "thick of things" by a series of mishaps and adventures.

Just as there are two types of quests, according to Campbell, there are two types of deeds, physical and spiritual. The physical deed often involves the slaying of a dragon, a courageous act in battle, or the saving of a life. The spiritual deed is the experiencing of transcendence in the face of duality and the sharing of this message with the culture. Popular tales usually emphasize physical acts of bravery and strength while the higher religions tell the story of the hero facing moral and philosophical challenges and tests. Despite the differences in the two types of quests, however, "there will be found astonishingly little variation in the morphology of the adventure, the character roles involved, the victories gained."⁷⁰

Campbell, in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, explains that the nuclear units of the hero quest, which he refers to as the monomyth, are separation, initiation, and return; "a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return":⁷¹

The usual hero adventure begins with someone from whom something has been taken, or who feels there's something lacking in the normal experiences available or permitted to the members of his society. This person then takes off on a series of adventures beyond the ordinary, either to recover what has been lost or to discover some life-giving elixir. It's usually a cycle, a going and a returning.⁷²

Examples of such a cycle of separation, initiation, and return are Prometheus ascending into the heavens, stealing fire from the gods, and returning to bestow this boon upon mortals; Aeneas descending into the underworld, conversing with the shade of his dead father, and returning with a new knowledge

about the destiny of souls and the destiny of Rome, the city he is about to found; Jason sailing through the Clashing rocks, circumventing the dragon who guards the Golden Fleece, and then returning with it, giving him the power to regain his throne.

Decent and initiation into some source of power is always a significant element in the hero quest. A cave or a womb-like space is often representative of the underworld to which the hero descends. According to Jung, "The cave is the place of rebirth, that secret cavity in which one is shut up in order to be incubated and renewed. . . . Anyone who gets into that cave, that is to say into the cave which everyone has in himself, or into the darkness that lies behind consciousness, will find himself involved in an—at first—unconscious process of transformation. By penetrating into the unconscious he makes a connection with his unconscious contents."⁷³

Although the unconscious represents a liminal space of growth, change, and enlightenment, and the hero must descend into it, as does Odysseus when he enters Hades to speak with the shades of his mother and other dead heroes, the individual must not dwell there indefinitely. To remain in the unconscious is to lose touch with reality and the world of human activity and events. Dwelling in the unconscious, in other words, represents the abandonment of the human evolution project and the infantilization/destruction of the self. A descent into the unconsciousness, therefore, must be followed by an ascent into consciousness if the hero is to share her boon with the culture at large and if the culture is to move to a new level of enlightenment or transconsciousness. As a result, the end of the hero's journey is not the aggrandizement of the hero, rather "the ultimate aim of the quest must be neither release nor ecstasy for oneself, but the wisdom and power to serve others."⁷⁴ The goal of the hero quest, or the boon provided by the hero to the people, is to see beyond the division of the here and now of consciousness and to realize, as Campbell explains, that "You and [the] other are one, that you are two aspects of one life, and that your apparent separateness is but an effect of the way we experience forms under the conditions of space and time. . . . The hero is the one who has given his physical life to some order of realization of that truth."⁷⁵ The hero of the hero quest, in other words, "suggest that behind that duality there is a singularity over which this plays like a shadow game."⁷⁶ Just as Christ, in Judeo-Christian mythology, provides Christians with the ability to recognize unity in the face of the separation represented by the Fall, Mohammed does the same for Muslims as does Buddha for Buddhists.

Essentially, it might even be said there is but one archetypal mythic hero whose life had been replicated in many lands by many, many people. A legendary hero is usually the founder of something—the founder of a new age, the founder of a new religion, the founder of a new city, the founder of a new way of life. In order to found something new, one has to leave the old and go in quest of the seed idea, a germinal idea that will have the potentiality for bringing forth that new thing.⁷⁷

Campbell provides a more complete summary of the hero quest and the events that occur along the way:

The mythological hero . . . is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark (brother-battle, dragon-battle, offering, charm), or be slain by the opponent and descend in death (dismemberment, crucifixion). Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be represented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world (sacred marriage), his recognition by the father creator (father atonement), his own divinization (apotheosis), or again—if the powers have remained unfriendly to him—his theft of the boon he came to gain (bride-theft, fire-theft); intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being (illumination, transfiguration, freedom). The final work is that of return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under protection (emissary); if not, he flees and is pursued (transformation flight, obstacle flight). At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir).⁷⁸

In sum, the hero quest, or the monomyth as Campbell often refers to it, is the central universal story in which the archetypic events of separation, initiation, and return are acted out. The hero, acting as cultural visionary/prophet/messiah, moves through these phases with the primary goal of healing the culture by her ability to transcend the dualities of human existence, seek unity from separation, and move culture to the next level of consciousness.

Types of Quest Myths

Myths, then, are about the elemental experiences and desires in life such as birth, growth, separation, death, rebirth, and redemption. All myths, accord-

ing to Campbell, draw on the monomyth or the universal quest myth. But, as Campbell notes, "Many tales isolate and greatly enlarge upon one or two of the typical elements of the full cycle (test motif, flight motif, abduction of the bride), others string a number of independent cycles into a single series (as in the *Odyssey*). Differing characters or episodes can become fused, or a single element can reduplicated itself and reappear under many changes."⁷⁹ Extrapolating from Joseph Campbell's writing on mythology in an application to contemporary American film, we can identify four different permutations of the quest myth: the creation/re-creation quest, the father quest, the sacred marriage quest, and the Grail quest. All of these permutations, however, still focus on an individual's journey outward (often downward), inward, and homeward. The remainder of this chapter briefly discusses these four versions of the quest myth and illustrates them with examples from a number of films.

Creation/Re-creation Myths

Cultures often have myths and rituals, which are the enactments of myths, about birth; not only about the birth of the individual, but the birth or creation of the culture and world.⁸⁰ These creation myths often explain the origin of the universe or the planet, where the particular culture came from, and the role of the creator(s) in the lives of his creations. They ask such questions as where did we come from? Where are we going? Is there intrinsic value to being human? Are we mortal or immortal?

Campbell argues that creation/re-creation stories not only attempt to explain primal origins, but they also deal with the first crime of killing in order to live, what Campbell calls the "brutal precondition of all life, which lives by the killing and eating of life."⁸¹ The snake, in particular, is a central image in creation myths and points to the life/death element of the circle of life. The snake often symbolizes resurrection or transformation. In ancient Crete, for example, the serpent was often depicted on burial stones. In Greek mythology, the soul was said to leave the body in the form of a snake, thus emphasizing its connection with the afterlife and immortality. As Campbell explains:

The serpent sheds its skin to be born again. . . . Sometimes the serpent is represented as a circle eating its own tail. That's an image of life. Life sheds one generation after another, to be born again. The serpent represents immortal energy and consciousness

engaged in the field of time, constantly throwing off death and being born again. . . . Life lives by killing and eating itself, casting off death and being reborn.⁸²

The film that best illustrates a creation/re-creation component in the quest myth, and which will be explored at greater length in a Chapter 5, is *The Lion King*. The by now famous phrase "circle of life" directly acknowledges the birth, death, rebirth cycle central to the condition of all living things. Significantly, the film begins and ends with a birth: the film opens with Simba the lion cub, as he is proudly displayed for all the animal kingdom to see, and finally, the birth of Simba's own cub ends the film, as she is heralded as the next link in the chain of life. In between these two births, however, are a series of deaths—that of Simba's father, Scar, and the Pride Lands through a wasting away disease of neglect and overconsumption. Simba's father also represents a type of messiah figure who dies not only to save his son, but also to ensure the future of the Pride Lands. After his death he is resurrected in the form of a vision that appears to Simba and guides him in his quest to save the Pride Lands from destruction. As is particularly obvious in the "circle of life" example from *The Lion King*, creation/re-creation myths are clearly mandalic and often tell the story of a cyclical journey home.

Some other films discussed in this book that employ versions of the creation/re-creation myth, and that will be discussed in Chapter 7, include *2001* and *Contact*.

Coming-of-Age Myths

Just as cultures tell myths about creation/re-creation, they also often have myths and rituals about growth and separation, or "coming of age," as the individual is initiated into her culture and/or is separated from society and sent on a quest for maturation. The father quest and the sacred marriage quest are often predominant myths told in reference to growth and coming of age or sexual maturity. In the specific telling, both quests are usually composed of a separation, an initiation into a source of power, and a return home.

The sacred marriage quest for males involves the hero's sexual union with a goddess figure who represents the culmination of his quest. For a female hero, the union is usually with a godlike figure who also offers her the same blissful triumph.⁸³ The marriage quest in myth and literature is often different for men and women. Males are often the active seekers of their identity,

which is usually achieved in more public and extroverted ways. For females, the coming of age, as Anthony Stevens points out, is often "an introverted dawning of awareness of herself as a woman. In many cultures this new feminine consciousness is marked by no rites at all, for it is the initiated male who brings it about by his recognition and pursuit of her womanhood; it is the man who puts the child to rest and awakens the woman." This helps to explain, Stevens adds, "the ubiquitous existence, in myth, legend, and fairy-tale, of the heroine who lies sleeping until her prince comes to waken her."⁸⁴ Fairy tales, such as Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and Rapunzel best exemplify the conservative enactment of women's sacred marriage quest in literature. Joseph Campbell, in his interpretation of the sacred marriage quest in myth and legend, gives a somewhat more positive spin to this seemingly passive (read, negative) interpretation of the female's role. As he explains:

Women, in the picture language of mythology, represents the totality of what can be known. The hero is the one who comes to know. As he progresses in the slow initiation which is life, the form of the goddess undergoes for him a series of transfigurations: she can never be greater than himself, though she can always promise more than he is yet capable of comprehending. She lures, she guides, she bids him burst his fetters. And if he can match her import, the two, the knower and the known, will be released from every limitation.⁸⁵

Some contemporary films that best illustrate the sacred marriage quest for both men and women, and which are discussed at greater length in Chapter 5, include *The Natural*, *Bull Durham*, *Thelma and Louise*, and *The Piano*.

A second coming-of-age myth is the father quest. This quest requires the hero to find the father, or to find the father-potential existing inside of him or even her. The core assumption of this myth is that to truly know oneself, the individual must come to recognize the father or to be atoned (to become "as one") with him.⁸⁶

The father quest, for example, is a central motif in the "Star Wars" trilogy, where Luke Skywalker, although he may not know it at the outset, is questing to find his father, and thus to find himself. In *The Natural*, Roy Hobbs is also questing, in part, to find the father figure inside him. In *Contact*, although Ellie's explicit quest is to discover extraterrestrial life by scanning the heavens for radio signals, her implicit quest is to "find" her father and mother. Since her father died when she was eleven years old, the film can be viewed, in part, as her attempt to rediscover her father, as she ultimately

does when she is transported to the solar system Vega. It is on Vega that the alien she meets takes the form of her father as the easiest way for her to cope with this strange new reality. The father quest also appears in the film *Field of Dreams* where Ray Kinsella, needing to reconcile his relationship with his long-dead father, is offered a chance to do so on the magical field of dreams. In *The Lion King*, although Simba the lion already knows his father, upon his father's death, Simba rejects his destiny and refuses to take his father's place. Simba's quest, therefore, is to find his father again and thereby find his own father-potential.

Some of the films, discussed at length in Chapter 5, that best exemplify the father quest include *Field of Dreams* and *The Lion King*.

The Grail Myth

Cultures also often have myths about redemption from evil, sin, or destruction. The Grail quest or stories of crucified and resurrected heroes, such as that told in the Christ story, are representative of these types of myths.⁸⁷ In the Christian tradition, Jesus Christ, a Grail king in his own right, also offers the literal origin of the Grail quest. Indeed, legend has it that the Grail vessel, the object of all Grail questing in Western literature, is the cup of Joseph of Arimathea, the chalice of the Last Supper and the chalice that caught the blood from Christ's wounded side as he hung on the cross. Perhaps the most well-known Grail quest in Western literature is the myth of King Arthur, in which the Knights of the Round Table go in search of the Holy Grail, first witnessed by Percival in a vision. Their hope is that the Grail will restore Camelot to its ancient glory and will remove the magic spells that have devastated the land. As Evola puts it, "The Grail is the symbol of that which has been lost and must be found again."⁸⁸ Thus, on a larger level, Arthur himself is the Grail (or wounded Grail king) who attempts to heal a divided Britain (a "wasteland" of rival tribes). In his battles abroad to create a just empire, however, his nephew Mordred, who remains at home, usurps Arthur's rule and steals his wife Guinevere. In the ensuing battle between the forces loyal to Arthur and those loyal to Mordred, Arthur is mortally wounded. He is taken to the island of Avalon where he is healed by the magic wrought there by the women of the island. In the legend, however, his wounds open again every year while his people wait anxiously at home for his return. Thus, the hope remains that Arthur will one day return, resume his reign, and restore peace and tranquility

to the land.⁸⁹ The triumphant return of Jesus Christ in the Christian tradition (known as the Second Coming) can also be likened to the long hoped-for return of the wounded Grail king. In Campbell's words, "the theme of the Grail romance is that the land, the country, the whole territory of concern has been laid waste. It is called a wasteland. And what is the nature of a wasteland? It is a land where everybody is living an inauthentic life."⁹⁰ It is a land longing for the redemption that only an enlightened hero or savior can provide.

An obvious modern-day example of the Grail quest is *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. In this film Indy is questing for the cup of Joseph of Arimathea. The country that is a wasteland is Hitler's Germany where everyone is living an inauthentic life, following orders, creating a world order based on discipline and lack of individual courage or initiative. The Grail is needed to change the wasteland. Indy succeeds in finding the Grail, however, only when he is able to walk the higher spiritual way, to take a literal "leap of faith" and to negotiate the narrow path between fear and desire (represented by greed) and good and evil (represented by the difference between the devout and the nondevout man).

A number of the films discussed in the book employ the Grail quest in a somewhat less obvious fashion. In *The Lion King*, for example, the Pride Lands have become a wasteland under the dominion of Scar, Simba's evil uncle, and peace, tranquility, and bounty are restored to the land only when Simba returns and fights for his rightful place as leader. The "Star Wars" trilogy also tells a version of the Grail quest by its use of Arthurian legend and by the pending destruction of the universe by the forces of the evil Empire.

It is possible, indeed it is often likely, that various representations of the universal quest myth tell more than one version of the myth. The Star Wars trilogy, for example, tells a version of the father quest, the Grail quest, and, to a lesser degree, the sacred-marriage quest. As such, this trilogy is the focus of Chapter 8.

Probably one of the earliest Western models of the hero's perennial journey home, however, is Homer's *Odyssey*. The *Odyssey* not only provides an exemplar telling of the journey home, encompassing versions of the sacred marriage, the father quest, and the Grail quest; it also offers an explicit model for analyzing *The Natural* and an implicit model for many of the other films discussed in the book. Finally, the *Odyssey*, from an optimistic perspective, offers a significantly new way of thinking about the evolution of human consciousness, a move from a tribal worldview to a more global or ethically complete worldview. If, in other words, the history of evolution is the history of

the emergence of consciousness from preconsciousness,⁹¹ then the *Odyssey*, historically speaking, documents humanity's movement from preconsciousness to consciousness and presages, in many ways, our contemporary search for meaning and growth in an era of separation and fragmentation. More pessimistically, however, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* document the raging battle between two contrasting ways of life, the order of Mother Right, in which the goddess was "venerated as the giver and supporter of life as well as consumer of the dead" and the order of father rule, "with [its] ardor for righteous eloquence and a fury of fire and sword."⁹² Ultimately, the *Odyssey* celebrates the triumph of patriarchy and father worship over matriarchy and mother worship and anticipates Western culture's collective guilt over such a matricide and their fear that although demoted or dismissed, the goddess-mother of the world, as Campbell explains it, "is to remain as an ever-present threat to their castle of reason, which is founded upon a soil that they consider to be dead but is actually alive, breathing, and threatening to shift."⁹³ The next chapter, therefore, reads the *Odyssey* in light of scholarly literature about the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, quest mythology, and Perennial philosophy.