

# **The Hero with a Thousand Faces Study Guide**

**The Hero with a Thousand Faces by Joseph Campbell**

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# Plot Summary

This book, published in the late 1940s, is an enlightening evocation of the power of myth and meaning to transcend time, place, culture, gender and spiritual perspective. The author, a noted mythologist whom some would call a philosopher, uses the archetypal story of the adventurous hero's journey as a springboard to explore essential human truths. As part of that exploration, the author develops themes relating to the universality of human experience, the nature of duality and harmony, and the function of symbolism in both story and life.

The book begins with a prologue, in which the author, noted mythologist Joseph Campbell, outlines both his core theory and the literary/analytical process he uses in the book to illuminate it. That theory is that there are three central truths at the core of the spiritual and psychological belief systems of all cultures in all times and in all places: that there is a spiritual world existing in parallel with the physical; that the ultimate goal of physical existence is to connect with that spiritual world; and that truth is both explored and defined through the universal human experience of myth. Campbell also indicates in the prologue that the purpose of the book is to explore the nature of that spiritual world, the ways in which it manifests in the physical world, and the ways in which myth illuminates those manifestations.

One of the main ways this happens, according to Campbell, is in the narrative of the Hero's Journey - the story of a mystically, physically powerful individual on a physical quest to retrieve some object or person, a story that is in fact a mythic, symbolic metaphor for the spiritual quest for union (re-union) with the spiritual. The main body of the book is made up of Campbell's detailed analysis of the various stages of the Hero's Quest, the various stages of his journey. A key component of this analysis is Campbell's cross-referencing of different myths of different cultures and historical eras, which clearly demonstrate the parallels between them - parallels that, Campbell contends, prove that the human experience is universal. Another component of this analysis is the way in which Campbell quotes at length from those different myths - he not only says that there are parallels, he demonstrates it by including stories (from socio-cultural experiences as broadly ranging Christianity, Buddhism, Ancient Greek, Native American, and Eskimo).

Campbell describes in detail each stage of the archetypal Hero's Journey, reiterating at several points that the archetype has both a clear basis and a clear echo in the actual living existence of each human being. These spiritual echoes are awakened by metaphor, the various uses of which Campbell also describes in detail. The ultimate purpose of both myth and metaphor, Campbell maintains, is to awaken in each individual human being an awareness of the spiritual aspect of life. This awakening, Campbell maintains, is the first step in the necessary journey away from resistance to the various inevitable physical and spiritual truths associated with being human (i.e., death and suffering) and toward an embracing of them as part of the universal progression towards enlightenment - living union with the world of the spirit.



At the book's conclusion, Campbell makes the clear statement that contemporary culture in general, and western culture in particular, have over the years moved further and further away from the self-understanding and self awareness to be found in myth. The human experience, he maintains, has become shallower and more superficial, becoming less and less what myth suggests it was intended to be - a true experience of harmony between the physical (that which we can touch, see, smell, hear and taste), and the spiritual (that which, through myth and symbol, we intuitively, psychologically and instinctively feel).



# Prologue: Section 1

## Prologue: Section 1 Summary and Analysis

This book, first published in the late 1940s, is an enlightening evocation of the power of myth and meaning to transcend time, place, culture, gender, and spiritual perspective. The author, a noted mythologist whom some would call a philosopher, uses the archetypal story of the adventurous hero's journey as a springboard to explore essential human truths. As part of that exploration, the author develops themes relating to the universality of human experience, the nature of duality and harmony, and the function of symbolism in both story and life.

"The Monomyth" In this section, the author introduces his theories about the importance and/or presence of myth in human culture, society, and individual experience.

"Myth and Dream" Campbell begins by stating that "... myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation." He suggests that those "inexhaustible energies" are in fact the energies of the sub-conscious, which Campbell says are defined by psycho-analysts Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung as the part of the human psyche in which the life experiences of the individual and the universal experiences of every human being combine. The products of this combination, Campbell suggests, are archetypes - experiences, ideas or beliefs that differ in specifics from individual to individual and culture to culture, but which in their broadest outlines manifest basic human truths.

Campbell offers several illustrations of this point, referring to dreams of contemporary individuals that seem to play out stories from classical myths. His prime example is of a man who dreamed of killing his father and taking care of his mother, which Campbell suggests is a variation on the Oedipus myth (man kills his father and marries his mother, with tragic consequences). This myth is grounded, according to Freud and Jung, in the male infant's physical and emotional attachment to his mother - an attachment which they suggest must be broken as the infant matures and becomes a man himself, otherwise the infant's emotional and spiritual development becomes stunted and/or misdirected into violence against the father figure. Campbell comments here that throughout the world and its societies, there are culturally sanctioned rituals to both signify and assist the breaking of the attachment, adding (in an aside) that such rituals have disappeared from North American society. He also comments that other similar rituals marking similar transitions define similar archetypes and manifest similar sub-conscious, mythically-oriented belief systems and experiences.

A second example offered by Campbell as an illustration of how archetypes manifest in dreams is the dream of a female musician, who envisioned encountering both a series of obstacles and the aid of a wise old man along a journey. Campbell suggests that the story of this dream is essentially an archetypal one found in mythologies and belief systems throughout history and in several different cultures. He then explores the



characteristics of that archetype, offering as an illustration a classical Greek myth (that of the Cretan Minotaur, the half-human/half-bull child of an enchanted queen, imprisoned by a fearful tyrant/king, slain by a warrior with the help of the king's loving daughter). He specifically points to the Hero, an archetypal character who manifests not only the musician in her dream but in many other stories in many other cultures and mythologies. The Hero, Campbell, writes, is given the responsibility of a quest to conquer an evil of some sort and then, once evil has been defeated and knowledge has been gained, is given the further responsibility of returning to the world with his new knowledge of himself and of evil. This, Campbell suggests, is the ultimate archetype - the journey of the hero with a thousand faces.

The first thing to note about this section of the book and of the book in general is the way Campbell seems to take great pains in expressing his point carefully and clearly. He guides his reader through every step of his deductive process, and this opening section is an excellent example of how he does that. He moves from broad strokes statements (like the statement he makes here about the pervasiveness of myth) through specific examples of the kind of myth he means (the Oedipus story) through examples of how myths manifest in the contemporary experience (references to Freud/Jung, and the dream examples). He finally concludes with a reference to the Monomyth, the one particular myth that is to be the focus of his progressively more detailed analysis - the Hero's Journey. (For a more detailed consideration of Freud and Jung, their theories and the relationship of those theories to Campbell's work here, see "Important People.")

The second thing to note about this section is the beginning of Campbell's technique of cross-referencing various cultures. He doesn't specifically do so in this section - that is, he doesn't specifically reference the different socio-cultural versions of, say, the Oedipus myth or the Hero's Journey, but in his comment about rituals, he does make reference to the broader psycho/sociological manifestations of myth, and humanity's responses to it. In other words, the passing reference here foreshadows more specific cross-cultural references that appear throughout the book - and, arguably, make up its most engaging, not to mention potentially controversial, argument.

The third thing to note about this section is the reference to North American culture. Campbell makes only a few direct references to North America and its belief systems. One is the reference here, the other main one is the reference at the book's conclusion to the way North American materialist culture has drifted away from a deeper awareness of itself that can be obtained through an awareness and understanding of myth and mythic experiences. There are a few glancing references to North American culture in other parts of the book, and while there is by no means a constant harping on the subject, there is a debatable question that arises from careful consideration of *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. That question is this: Is Joseph Campbell, as an American himself, writing not only with the intent of enlightening his readers about myth in general, but as a kind of indictment, a warning to his home society and culture that to continue without a deeper awareness is a danger to that society? There is little or no sense throughout the book that he is trying to awaken awareness in other contemporary cultures, but his emphasis (as limited and subtle as it seems to be) on North American culture is intriguing. It gives the impression that, at least on some level, Campbell urging

"the land of the free and the home of the brave" to look deep beneath the surface of the American dream and its manifestations for the deeper meaning of simply being human in this world and in this life.





# Prologue: Section 2

## Prologue: Section 2 Summary and Analysis

"Tragedy and Comedy" In this brief section, Campbell states that essentially, comedy and tragedy are both aspects of the same experience of living. He writes that all life, in spite of humanity's fondness for happy endings, has only one ending: death, the endless void of non-existence (see "Quotes," p 26). He also writes that while tragedy is essentially a narrative form anchored in the pain and fear of that ultimate truth, comedy is a celebration and manifestation of the joyous truth that exists alongside that pain - the truth that one way or another, life will continue. "Comedy," Campbell says, "[is] the wild and careless, inexhaustible joy of life invincible." Time, he writes, is ultimately glorious in life and celebrations of love and beauty, "the world sings with the ... angelic ... music of the spheres."

"The Hero and the God" Campbell sums up the mythic journey of the Hero (first discussed in Prologue, Part 1), in this way: "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder; fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow [gifts] on his fellow man."

Campbell recounts stories from various spiritual belief systems as examples of this essential myth. These include the story of the Buddha's temptation and transcendence (from which he returned with enlightenment), Moses' journey into the desert (from which he returned with the Ten Commandments), and Jason's journey to find the Golden Fleece (from which he returned with the power and knowledge to retake his rightful throne). Campbell outlines the course of the next several chapters, in which he will examine the mythic nature, archetypal function, and psycho-spiritual meaning of each aspect of the Hero's journey, and then briefly describes the character of the archetypal Hero.

The Hero, Campbell suggests, is usually gifted, either highly honored or utterly dismissed by his home community, and either brings enlightenment to that community (as in the heroes of fairy tales) or to the entire world (as in the founders of various belief systems whose faith-defined stories nonetheless have mythic elements, leaders like Buddha, Mohammed or Christ). He then outlines how Part Two of *Hero with a Thousand Faces* will explore the way myths and archetypes explore and define understanding of the world, as opposed to the human soul. He suggests that "the perilous journey [of the hero] was a labor not of attainment but of re-attainment, not discovery but rediscovery." In other words, he's had knowledge within him all the time; he's just had to undertake this physical and spiritual journey in order to connect with it (see "Quotes," p. 40).

Aside from the commentary on comedy and tragedy, the essential purpose of this section is to serve as an introduction for the work to follow, an outline of the theoretical



and evidential course Campbell intends to take. There are several important elements here. The first is Campbell's summing up or distillation of the Hero's Journey, the Monomyth referred to in the Prologue's title. The brief description here is the simple, broad-strokes outline of the story and is therefore important to understand and to keep in mind - as his analysis progresses throughout the rest of the book, Campbell becomes more and more detailed in his investigations of the specifics and variations within the various versions of the story. In other words, it's important to understand the basics as outlined here before delving more deeply into the particulars. Here again is an example of Campbell's carefully applied instructional technique, leading the reader carefully into the depths of his theories (is this, in fact, a representation of the Hero's Journey? Is Campbell the "enlightened guide" leading his reader on a Journey into an understanding of the world or himself?)

The second noteworthy element in this section is Campbell's reference to some of these versions, an example of his technique of cross-referencing several cultures that he applies throughout the book. In this context, it's also important to note that he includes mainstream religions (Islam, Buddhism, Christianity) in the same lists/contexts as classical Greek myths (and will later do so in relation to other ancient myths such as the Egyptian, Babylonian, etc.). This aspect of the book is, as previously discussed, among its most potentially controversial, particularly when considered in the contemporary context of the predominance of ultra conservative religions (i.e. certain sects within Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism, among others). Campbell attempts to defuse his point by suggesting that many faith-defined stories have "mythic elements" about them - he stops far short of suggesting that the stories of Christ, Mohammed, Moses and Buddha are pure myth. His point ultimately seems to be that the power of the stories of these great and inspiring leaders, their manifestation of universal truth, is enhanced by their drawing upon the power of mythic and symbolic imagery.

Campbell's comments on comedy and tragedy at the beginning of this section are a manifestation of one of his core themes. As he explores, throughout the book, the relationship between myth and life, the psycho-spiritual and the physical, he comments frequently that all existence functions on the level of duality - two aspects functioning at the same time, one giving depth and reason to the other. The same function applies here: comedy and tragedy, each in their theoretical form, functions as contrast to the other, offering a complete picture of existence. There can be no experience of pain without a parallel experience of pleasure, no life without death (and vice versa), no finite without the infinite.



# Prologue, Section 3

## Prologue, Section 3 Summary and Analysis

"The World Navel" Campbell writes in this section that throughout all the myths and stories of the world there is a central image - that of a center, a core, a source from which all truth flows, life affirming as well as life destroying. This is "the world navel," the center of existence - in various myths a fountain, a mountain, a tree or, as a Native American priest quoted by Campbell describes, the absolute middle of the land beneath the sky where the four directions (north, south, east, and west) all join and from which all four can be seen. Campbell writes that the great cities of the ancients were built around a symbolic representation of "the navel," usually a religious temple of some sort. He adds that many contemporary religions are spiritual manifestations of this same system; in the same way as the ancient city and its activities were centered around the temple, the worldwide spiritual "city" and its activities of the Muslim community are centered around Mecca (Muslims must face Mecca as they pray each day).

Campbell reiterates his point that all things - the beautiful and the ugly, the strong and the weak, the moral and the immoral - all emerge from "the world navel," the transcendent source "in which all is wonderful, and is worthy ... of our profound [respect]." He concludes this section, and indeed the Prologue, with the suggestion that mythology, in defining all things and all experiences as emerging from "the navel," in fact asserts that all reality, and all humanity's experiences of it, emerge from a transcendent, universal, sub-conscious and ultimately unknowable truth.

This section is essentially a distillation of Campbell's core theme relating to the unity of all existence. All things, all beings, all images, all feelings, and all experiences emerge from the same source. It's important to note here that Campbell does not give that source a particular name. He describes a few symbols of the source, but he doesn't name it. Later, however, he does, calling it, in the term used by the Eastern Taoist spiritual system, "the Unmoved Mover." He also calls it "The Great Spirit," "The Great Mystery," "God," etc. Ultimately, his point here and throughout the book is that every aspect of existence, even those which seem to function in utter contradiction to each other emerges from the same place, the same core of truth.



# Part 1: Chapter 1, Sections 1, 2 and 3

## Part 1: Chapter 1, Sections 1, 2 and 3 Summary and Analysis

"The Adventure of the Hero" - "Departure" - "The Call to Adventure" Campbell begins this section by relaying the first part of the fairy tale *The Frog Prince* in which a princess playing with a golden ball by a bottomless pond in a dark forest accidentally drops the ball into the pond. Her despair at losing her plaything is eased by the appearance of a frog, which offers to rescue the ball for her, as long as the princess gives him whatever he asks. The princess, desperate for her ball, agrees. The frog dives down, retrieves the ball, brings it to the surface, gives it to the grateful princess and demands that for his reward, he be taken into the palace with her and be treated as a human being, as her best friend. In spite of being repulsed by the frog's appearance, the princess agrees.

In this story, Campbell suggests, there are several characteristics of the typical Hero's Journey found so often in myths and fairy tales. The first is "The Call to Adventure," the beginning of the process of change which in this and many cases is caused by an accident (the dropping of the ball) or, in other cases, a deliberate change of circumstances. The second is the appearance of The Herald, a person/character/animal announcing the beginning of the journey (the frog). The third is the setting of the accident, a manifestation of The World Navel (the pond), which in Freudian/Jungian analysis represents the deep pool of the subconscious into which the Hero (the princess) is about to journey (psychologically, spiritually, emotionally). Campbell then offers examples of how these characteristics manifest in a variety of stories, including that of the beginning of the Buddha's journey of enlightenment, that of an Arapaho (Indian) maiden who exposes herself to danger in a quest for porcupine quills, and that of King Arthur as he begins his quest for the Holy Grail. In conclusion to this section, Campbell suggests that in the Call to Adventure, "destiny has summoned the [H]ero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown." Both treasures and dangers await.

"Refusal of the Call" Campbell writes here that in many stories, myths and fairy tales, the Hero initially refuses The Call to Adventure and ends up imprisoned. This can happen physically, as in the case of the nymph Daphne, who refused the advances of the amorous Greek god Apollo and was turned into a flower. It can also happen psychologically, as in the case of the Greek King Minos, who found himself trapped in fearful reaction to the world around him, as opposed to acting strongly to discover and assert his own destiny. Campbell suggests, however, that in many cases the Hero's acceptance of the Call is merely delayed until the right psycho-spiritual moment - the point at which spiritual intervention (the supernatural, as defined in the following section) is inevitable. This intervention in turn makes the mythic point that spirit (i.e., the subconscious truth emerging from The World Navel) is irresistible.



"Supernatural Aid" Campbell writes that at this stage of the journey, for the hero who has accepted the call either immediately or after a period of refusal, s/he encounters a supernaturally gifted individual who offers psycho-spiritual support in the form of guidance and wisdom and often offers physical/material support as well. Frequently, Campbell suggests, these characters are female (the Navajo Indian Spider Woman, the Virgin Mary, other manifestations of the entity commonly called Mother Nature). "What such a figure represents," Campbell writes, "is the benign, protecting power of destiny ... a promise that the peace of Paradise, which was known first within the mother womb, is not to be lost." Campbell also suggests that such mystical figures can also be male, usually representations of messenger/trickster gods like Hermes/Mercury in Greek mythology, the Holy Spirit in Christian belief systems, or even Devil characters, who lead heroes into temptation and trial. Campbell then narrates in detailed length an example from Arab mythology in which a questing prince is aided by supernatural guides, embodied powers leading the hero into a journey through external circumstances that is, in fact, a representation of the internal/spiritual journey into the soul.

Campbell begins his examination of the Hero's Journey in earnest here, continuing the instructive pattern established in the prologue - presenting a broad strokes theory, and offering cross-referenced examples of how that theory manifests in various myths from a variety of cultures. At this point, however, he also adds important elements to his analysis. The first is the inclusion of a so-called fairy tale - the story of the Frog Prince. He returns to this particular fairy tale on a couple of other occasions in the book, and also refers to others (notably, the story of *Little Red Riding Hood* in the following section), but for the most part their relationship to myth is explored at less length, and in less detail, than other stories. The point is not made to suggest that Campbell's consideration of fairy tales is of less value. On the contrary, his inclusion of such stories makes the important point that myths, their meaning and influence, are far more pervasive than might have been thought by many readers. Some readers might react with resentment to Campbell's implication that *The Frog Prince* and *Little Red Riding Hood*, et al, have as much psycho-spiritual depth as the stories of Buddha, Christ, and other figures. His point, however, is a valid one: just because a story is told primarily to children doesn't negate that it contains deep, possibly profound psycho-spiritual truths.

The second element of analysis added by Campbell in this section is his inclusion of a lengthy, detailed illustration of his point, an illustration taken from a particular myth—in this case, that of the Arab prince. This functions on three levels. First, and perhaps most important, this story (like the other, similarly utilized stories throughout the book) is simply an entertaining read. It's a clever technical tactic by Campbell to entertain his readers as well as inform them, and herein lies the second level of its function: the stories both prove the author's point and give the reader new knowledge—another story from another culture that s/he didn't have. On a third level, if these "word illustrations" (to coin a phrase) were not included, the book would run the risk of becoming quite dry and theoretical. In other words, the "illustrations" give the reader a mental break from theory by offering an example of practice.



The third element of analysis added by Campbell in this section is the inclusion of variation - the different ways in which the aspects of myth he's considering manifest in different cultures or societies. At this point, and in this context, it's important to recall the sketch he presented in the Prologue of the overall Monomyth of the Hero's Journey. In the same way that a woman's dress, for example, consists of a constant basic structure (the pattern) with an almost infinite number of variations (skirt length, sleeve length, neckline, etc.), so the Monomyth has an almost limitless number of ways in which its psycho-spiritual, transcendently human truths manifest.



# Part 1: Chapter 1, Sections 4 and 5

## Part 1: Chapter 1, Sections 4 and 5 Summary and Analysis

"The Crossing of the First Threshold" The next phase of the Hero's Journey, Campbell suggests here, takes place as the Hero enters the literal physical world of that which lies outside his home village - a physical manifestation of the psycho-spiritual circumstance of entering into new understanding of the self and the soul. In myths and stories throughout the world, Campbell writes, the Hero's first steps into that understanding, into both the physical and psycho-spiritual new worlds, are blocked by a Guardian, a "deceitful and dangerous presence" that challenges the Hero's determination to move forward and courage to face the dangers he finds there. Campbell offers several examples from several cultures - the African Hottentots (whose journeys are blocked by hideous spirits) and Russian peasantry (blocked by sensual, sexual, capricious female spirits). Campbell also cites the Ancient Greek god Pan, who was agriculturally generous to those who respected him but malicious and violent (both physically and psychologically - he drove several unwary people mad) to those who gave him trouble.

"The adventure," Campbell writes, "is always and everywhere a passage beyond the veil of the known into the unknown; the powers that watch at the boundary are dangerous; to deal with them is risky; yet for anyone with competence and courage the danger fades." This last is his principal point: he goes on to suggest that in many mythologies, the Hero counters the dangers posed by the Guardian not only with powerful physical weapons like swords, but also with psychological weapons like determination and persistence. It's these, Campbell suggests, that generally impress the Guardian more than mere strength and skill, leading him to allow the Hero to pass onto the next phase of his journey.

"The Belly of the Whale" In many myths, Campbell writes, after the Hero passes The First Threshold and its initial challenges to his physical and psycho-spiritual person, he is immediately swallowed, either symbolically or literally. There, in the belly of the beast that consumed him, the Hero again achieves new depths of courage, fights his way out, and emerges with a stronger sense of physical, psycho-spiritual power. The act of being physically swallowed, Campbell writes, is symbolic of a sudden descent into the realm of the sub/unconscious, where personal truth and courage are both encountered and drawn upon. He also writes that many Hero-characters in such stories discover new physical worlds inside that which swallowed them, worlds representative of the new spiritual worlds they are entering into. In other words, Campbell suggests, being swallowed is a symbol of a kind of spiritual death, the death of the overwhelming sense of ego or self that must be sacrificed if true enlightenment and/or transcendence is to be achieved.

The Irish hero Finn MacCool (swallowed by a giant monster), the classical Greek gods (all swallowed by their father Kronos), even Little Red Riding Hood (swallowed by the



wolf) are all, Campbell writes, empowered by their journeys into the belly of the beast. Campbell also suggests that the swallowing doesn't have to be literal - the ancient Egyptian god Osiris, for example, was "swallowed" by the ocean after being dismembered and cast onto the waves by his evil brother Set. The pieces of Osiris' body were gathered by his devoted wife Isis and magically put back together, resulting in Osiris' becoming more powerful than ever. In other words, he died to be born again - ready to embrace the next phase of his journey.

At times throughout *Hero with the Thousand Faces*, it's tempting to consider Campbell's points in the context of one's own psycho-spiritual context, both as an individual and as an individual with a particular spiritual/religious cultural background. For most in the West, that background could probably be defined as Christianity, and while Campbell on occasion includes references to Christianity in his analysis of various myth/symbol figures (and does so with considerable tact and discretion), it's far from being his primary focus. In this section, for instance, he makes no reference to Christianity and its myth symbols at all - yet for those considering his theories in a Christian context, it's difficult to escape the sense that there are, at the very least, parallels.

In terms of "Crossing the Threshold," according to Biblical teaching and Christian theology, Christ crossed several thresholds: from his home in Nazareth into the wild (where he was both baptized and tempted), from the wild into Jerusalem (where he was first greeted in triumph, then arrested, tried and executed), and from Jerusalem into death. In all these circumstances, Christ's journey seems to parallel that of the Hero. He encounters challenges from the strange new outside world, he triumphs by the use of spirit and will rather than force, and struggles with aggressive antagonists. He is tempted by the Devil, he is challenged by Jerusalem's conservative priests, tried by Pilate, and killed by Roman soldiers. In terms of "The Belly of the Whale" the parallel is perhaps less obvious, but when the essential characteristics of the "swallowing" are considered the parallel perhaps becomes more plain. The Hero leaves the world of the living and descends into a world of physical darkness and isolation, he discovers new truths about himself and his relationship to spirit, and emerges physically and psycho-spiritually reborn, preaching and living those new truths. All this can be seen as a manifestation of Christ's being taken from the cross and placed into the physical darkness and isolation of his tomb, where he is left for three days during which he spiritually connects with God his Father and from which he emerges, enlightened and transcendent ... literally reborn, risen from the dead.

The point is not made here to suggest that the Christ story should not be taken as grounded in historical fact, but to make two points. The first is a reiteration of the point made earlier (in this analysis and in Campbell's book) that the power of the stories of Christ, Mohammed, Buddha, etc. is strengthened by the inclusion of mythic elements. The second point is that there is value in considering cultural/spiritual/religious contexts in the light of the first point—in what way has the power of religion and faith in the reader's personal experience been shaped and/or enhanced by mythic elements? This is one of Campbell's secondary themes, the idea that myth has resonance and/or meaning in every socio-cultural and individual circumstance, if the reader (or any member of the human race) makes the effort to look for it.





# Part 1: Chapter 2, Sections 1, 2 and 3

## Part 1: Chapter 2, Sections 1, 2 and 3 Summary and Analysis

"The Journey of the Hero" - "Initiation" - "The Road of Trials" This is the stage of the Hero's Journey, Campbell writes, in which he encounters a series of challenges (physical or psychological) that must be overcome in order for his journey to continue. He may or may not be aided in these challenges by the gifts of the Supernatural Guide, or other individuals he encounters along the way. "And so it happens," Campbell writes, "that if anyone - in whatever society - undertakes for himself the perilous journey by descending, either intentionally or unintentionally, into the crooked lanes of his own spiritual labyrinth, he soon finds himself in a landscape of symbolical figures..." These figures, Campbell suggests, and the Hero's subsequent encounters with them, are necessary so that the Hero can get rid of his old sense of self, become "cleansed and humbled," and become "more concentrated on transcendental things."

Campbell then lists several dreams, taken from research and actual case studies, in which the dreamers have experienced exactly this sort of series of trials - the details as he describes them are different, but their essential content is the same ... the dreamer is challenged, must struggle, and must survive. In other words, Campbell suggests that contemporary lives face the same psycho-spiritual challenges as those who lived in the past. He comments that the healing, transformative, illuminative powers of the myths and stories of the past have generally been lost (see "Quotes," p. 104), but that an understanding of them can ultimately provide significant clues into an understanding of the human psycho-spiritual condition ... a condition which, Campbell suggests, is transcendent of time, place and culture.

"The Meeting with the Goddess" The next stage of the mythic Hero's Journey, Campbell writes, is with a woman, goddess-like in surpassing beauty or surpassing ugliness, spiritual generosity or spiritual violence, life-giving/affirming or life-destroying. "Woman," Campbell writes, "in the picture language of mythology, represents the totality of what can be known. The hero is one who comes to know." As he encounters the goddess, Campbell says, the Hero behaves in one of two ways: he acts disrespectfully and is punished (as was the case, in Greek mythology, of the young hunter Actaeon, who saw the goddess Artemis nude, was unrepentant, was turned into a deer by her, and was later hunted and killed by her dogs). Or he behaves respectfully and is enlightened (as in the case of the youngest son of the Irish king Eochaid, who gently kissed an old crone and was rewarded with her transforming herself into a beautiful woman who gave him power and guidance).

When the Hero is a young woman, Campbell writes (as in the case of the princess in the story of *The Frog Prince* - see Part 1, Section 1), it is the young woman's love and transcendent wisdom that brings about transformation. The princess, upon coming to understand the beauty in the frog's soul, kisses him and brings about his transformation



into the beautiful young prince who is destined to be her soul mate. Campbell concludes this section with references, taken from traditional prayers, to the transcendent wisdom and grace of the Virgin Mary.

"Woman as the Temptress" In this brief section Campbell first discusses the relationship between the troubles of contemporary society and a lack of psycho-cultural awareness (see "Quotes," p. 121). He suggests that an awareness of how the archetypal truths found in the Hero's Journey can inform and enlighten life might lead the human race into a better understanding of itself, an understanding that might aid in the transcendence of selfishness and lead to psycho-spiritual *selflessness*. He then suggests that that transcendence is difficult because for the most part, humanity's understanding of what it means to be human is tainted by the realization that everything "intolerant" to and of the spirit is grounded in the flesh. This taint, he goes on to say, this disgust with the flesh, with what inhibits humanity from truth, is projected onto woman ... the means (i.e., the womb) through which spirit becomes flesh. In the light of this belief, Campbell writes, "no longer can the Hero rest in innocence with the goddess ... for she is become the queen of sin." He goes on to say, "this is a point of view familiar to the West from the lives and writings of the [Christian] saints ..." He offers a series of examples (stories of St. Peter and his daughter, St. Bernard and various female healers, St. Anthony and various devils that appeared to him in the form of horned women).

The unifying theme of these three sections is the sense that the Hero (and, by extension, every individual human being) must be cleansed of old ways/thoughts/habits/knowledge in order to gain spiritual enlightenment. This, Campbell in fact indicates throughout the book, is myth's ultimate purpose: to provide signposts for this kind of transcendence, this drawing upon the source of knowledge and wisdom emanating from the so-called "World Navel." Later in the book he develops this theme in more, and varied, detail, but at this point it's interesting to note, meanwhile, the way Campbell explores the relationship of woman, or the female principle, to this process.

In the latter two parts of this section, Campbell writes that in myth, woman is the source of enlightenment, understanding and transformation, while in history woman has been portrayed as the source of the chief impediment to that transformation. To look at it in another way, woman's capacity to give birth has over the years and in different contexts taken on different symbolic values. She either gives birth to enlightenment, or she gives birth to flesh, the source of all sin. The point is not made to suggest that the reader come down on one side or the other, to adopt either belief as a core truth, but rather to suggest that Campbell is here reiterating his point about duality. In the same way as he states throughout the book that all existence is composed of a unity between opposites, that all opposites in fact spring from the same eternal transcendent source, he is stating that the mythic-symbolic value of womanhood (the female principle) is also a duality ... the creator and the destroyer.

Later in the book, he develops this idea in the context of a discussion of the Hindu goddess Kali, who is a representation of exactly that principle, creator and destroyer united in one being ... death and life united in one existence. It's interesting to note, meanwhile, that Campbell takes his examples of how woman is regarded as the source

of sin exclusively from Western/Christian sources - is he suggesting here that Christianity is the belief system ultimately responsible for the perception of womanhood being transformed from an essentially life giving/affirming one to something more destructive, subversive, and evil?



# Part 1: Chapter 2, Section 4

## Part 1: Chapter 2, Section 4 Summary and Analysis

"Atonement with the Father" Campbell begins this chapter with an extensive quote from an American Puritan preacher, Jonathan Edwards, in which he describes to members of his congregation the fate that awaits them if they stray from the true way: the violent wrath of a vengeful, patriarchal God. Campbell then suggests that the image of God expounded by Edwards is, in fact, a manifestation of the archetypal image of the father - more specifically, the ogre-father, the source of mighty power (as opposed to the goddess-mother, the source of compassionate strength). In terms of the Hero's Journey, Campbell suggests that in encountering that mighty power, the Hero's responsibility is to accept that part of himself and indeed become the Father, or face destruction. He cites two examples of young men who attempt to accept the Father-side of themselves - one from American Indian mythology in which his two young sons respect and come to terms with their father's power and therefore live, and one from Greek mythology in which the son of the sun god fails to respect his father's power and perishes. The lesson here, Campbell suggests, is that on the early stages of his Journey, the Hero must learn and grow from what he's experienced, otherwise he will be unprepared for the raw, dangerous power of the Father.

"When the child outgrows the [safety] of the mother breast," Campbell writes, "and turns to face the world of specialized adult action, it passes, spiritually, into the sphere of the [F]ather - who becomes, for his son, the sign, of the future task, and for his daughter, of the future husband." In other words, the encounter with the Father is a symbol of initiation - of leaving youth and safety behind. In this context, Campbell describes in detail several forms of initiation undertaken in various cultures throughout the world and throughout history, many of which involve ritualized leaving of the Mother and acceptance of the world of the Father. He states that such ritualized initiations and transitions form the basis of Christianity, in terms of the stories upon which it's built (specifically the Crucifixion and Resurrection) and the rituals that bring the universal truths contained in those stories into the realm of the personal (specifically the Communion Service, in which the Body and Blood of Christ are symbolically consumed). Campbell then uses the introduction of Christian theology as a springboard to discuss the other side of the dual-natured Father figure ... that of the generous, loving, peaceful god. In other words, the Father (like the simultaneously life-giving and bloodthirsty Mother) has two aspects, both of which must be embraced by the Hero if true enlightenment is to emerge.

As is the case with many other philosophers/spiritual thinkers, Campbell here breaks down the word "atonement" into its component parts: *at-one-ment*, or "at one" with God/the Great Spirit. In other words, this stage of the Hero's Journey is, as Campbell indicates, a key point in the transformation of the Hero (i.e., the human) from a being composed of physical/worldly desires and impulses into a being with the ability to shape those impulses in order to accomplish spiritual ends, one of which is transcendent



connection with God. The Hero/human is on a journey towards unification, *at-one-ment*, with the source of all things. The ultimate example of such unification, as Campbell implies with his reference to key aspects of Christian belief, is the story of Christ's death, resurrection and ascension into heaven - in other words, his leaving behind of the physical world in order to unite with the spiritual world of God the Father. In this context, it's interesting to examine an ages-old theological question relating to the nature of God.

For many years, theologians have divided Christian experiences of God into two broad categories - the vengeful, violent, judgmental God described in the Old Testament of the Bible, and the loving, compassionate, transcendent God described by Christ in the New Testament. There are times at which the two characterizations cross into the opposite book - Paul's understanding of God in the New Testament, for example, has a lot of the Old Testament God. But for the most part, this admittedly arbitrary division holds true. In that context, it's possible to see Campbell's interpretation of the two aspects of the father as described here - the Ogre Father (Old Testament God) and the Loving Father (the New Testament God). In any case, whether the division is considered valid or not, here Campbell again develops his theme of duality, two aspects of one spiritual truth - in this case, the psycho-spiritual manifestations of maleness.



## Part 1: Chapter 2, Sections 5 and 6

### Part 1: Chapter 2, Sections 5 and 6 Summary and Analysis

"Apotheosis" In this section, Campbell explores, in significant detail, the nature of duality - the way in which seemingly opposite characteristics or traits are in fact both parts of one whole. He uses the example of the Buddhist Boddhisattva ("he whose being is enlightenment") to develop this theme - the Boddhisattva is, for example, both of the world and of the spirit, both male and female, functioning both in time and in eternity. He then cites other examples of similar androgynous figures - the Christian Adam (the first man who, at the time of his creation, had in him the rib that eventually became Eve, the first woman), the Ancient Greek Hermaphrodite and Eros, and the Hindu Shiva, who is often portrayed as being at one with his spouse Shakti.

Also in this section, Campbell speaks at length about how several cultures, across the world and across time, have actually acted in opposition to the unity-oriented beliefs at the core of their mythic systems. He refers at specific length to Christianity, saying that "even the so-called Christian nations - which are supposed to be following a 'world' redeemer - are better known to history for their colonial barbarity and internecine strife than for any practical display of that unconditioned love ... taught by their professed supreme Lord." The lesson ultimately offered by that Lord, Campbell suggests, is that God is love, that all human beings are His children, and that all must be treated with respect. With that Campbell returns his narrative attention to the Boddhisattva, suggesting that his serenity and peace and transcendence are in fact the ideal, and that his awareness is not limited to anything associated with time or space. Campbell further suggests that this awareness is born from the symbolic, psycho-spiritual union between the Ogre-Father, whose semen initiates life, and the Goddess-Mother, whose womb nourishes life. He then adds that following the same principle of union there is no difference between life and transcendence, that the one is in the other, and that the one leads to the other.

Campbell then enters a re-examination of the relationship between myth and Jungian / Freudian psychoanalysis. He suggests that the aggressive, domineering aspects of the Ogre-Father and Goddess-Mother correspond to what Freud described as the ego (the life-destructive, self-oriented aspect of the psyche), while the nurturing, life-giving aspects of those archetypes correspond to the Freudian eros, or libido (the psyche's life-affirming, union-oriented aspects). In short, Freud separates these two aspects of existence - Campbell, however, suggests that myth/symbolism offers guidance on how to unite them, on how to integrate the psyche (manifested in myth-based dream imagery) with life. Here he returns to the main theme of this section - duality, the integration of apparently opposing forces. "Those who know," Campbell writes, "not only that the Everlasting lives in them, but that what they, and all things, really are *is* the everlasting ... listen everywhere to the unheard music of eternal concord ... the world of



time is the great mother womb. The life therein, begotten by the father, is compounded of her darkness and his light." In this union, in what Oriental philosophy terms the "yin/yang" of existence (see "Objects/Places"), can be found the core truth of almost all myths and stories, the goal of the Hero's Journey: union.

"The Ultimate Boon" The title of this section takes its name from what Campbell describes as the ultimate goal of any mythic Hero's journey - a connection with the eternal. He writes that while many myths and belief systems give that connection a physical, literal representation (the Fountain of Youth, the Body and Blood of Christ in the Christian communion service), the connection actually being sought is spiritual transcendence, union with the universe as achieved by such spiritually enlightened beings as the Buddha and Christ. Campbell discusses ways in which "the ultimate boon (gift)" manifests as the hard-won prize given to the striving Hero, as the unasked-for gift from the gods to the noble philosopher and seeker, as the trigger for eons-long struggles between angry, greedy gods. He also suggests that its appearance in so many myths (i.e., as a source of infinite nourishment sustaining physical and spiritual life) is a natural outgrowth of the infantile experience of infinite nourishment coming from the mother. He adds that many manifestations of quests and/or quarrels over similar infinite nourishments exist in myth, and in the universal human psyche, as the result of the experience of eventually being denied that nourishment. In other words, the separation from the mother comes to equal separation from "the eternal source" (of wisdom, life etc), and the quest for "the ultimate boon" manifests so archetypally throughout history and society because humanity craves re-connection (see "Quotes," p. 177), a craving that's rarely, if ever, satisfied.

This section contains Campbell's exploration of one of his core themes, the nature of duality - union within opposites, the principle embodied by the "yin/yang" symbol and the principle which, according to Campbell, lies at the heart of all spiritual teaching, psychological questing, and physical existence. Without actually saying so, Campbell is essentially suggesting that the ultimate point of the Hero's Journey, and indeed of all life, is to integrate the apparently contradictory sides of himself - aggressive/nurturing, physical/spiritual, male/female, etc. This is, in fact, the ultimate boon, the ultimate gift bestowed upon the individual undertaking the journey - enlightenment, the union of the life of the spirit with the life of the flesh as achieved by the figure of the Bodhisattva and as defined by the term "apotheosis," from the root "theo," meaning "god." In other words, the "ultimate boon" is enlightenment through union with spirit.

It's interesting to note here the emphasis Campbell places on the negative impact of two psycho-spiritual forces which he suggests have, while attempting to guide humanity toward deeper understanding or enlightenment/union, in fact proven to be obstacles - Christianity and Freudian analysis. In terms of the former, the reference here is one of the few occasions throughout the book in which Campbell directly and specifically challenges Christianity's psycho-spiritual hold on the Western mentality, pointing out how its particular limited perspective has prevented the spiritual growth it professes to be propagating. The reader might be inclined to wonder, while reading this section, whether Campbell in fact considers Christ to be a Bodhisattva figure - that is, the Christ whose teachings and experiences (as shaped by myth/symbol and recounted in



the Bible) are considered outside the context of the interpretations religion (the church) has placed upon them.

In terms of his consideration of Freud, Campbell here is somewhat less generous of opinion than he was in the Prologue, in which he linked Freud with Jung, whose experience and understanding of archetypes seems to correspond with Campbell's more positively and with less limitation. Campbell seems to be implying here that Freud's analysis is reductive and limited, limiting understanding of the human psycho-spiritual experience to a few rigidly defined areas as opposed to the more broadly varied archetypal experiences as defined by Jung. The point is not made to suggest that Freud's analysis ought to be discarded - on the contrary, Campbell himself suggests in *Hero with a Thousand Faces* that there is much to be gleaned from consideration of Freud's point of view. He (Campbell) does suggest, however, here and throughout the book, that true understanding of transcendence, or in fact true transcendent understanding, can only come into existence through consideration of broader, deeper perspectives.





## Part 1: Chapter 3, Sections 1, 2 and 3

### Part 1: Chapter 3, Sections 1, 2 and 3 Summary and Analysis

"The Journey of the Hero" - "Return" - "Refusal of the Return" In this brief section, Campbell comments how in several mythic tales the Hero, who has accomplished his task (rescuing the princess, retrieving the sought-after source of power, achieving long-sought wisdom or enlightenment, is faced with the responsibility of returning with what he has gained and sharing it with the world. Campbell also indicates, however, in many such stories the Hero decides to not return - to remain at the site/source of happiness, wisdom, etc. As examples he cites the stories of several saints who chose to die while in deep communion with God as opposed to returning to the world and preaching God's word. He also quotes at length the Hindu story of a warrior who achieved enlightenment, returned to his world and community, saw that his fellow human beings weren't ready for what he had to teach them, and withdrew even more deeply into the spiritual world to wait for the time that they were.

"The Magic Flight" Campbell writes here that when, in myth, the Hero does choose to journey back to the world, there are two sorts of journey. The first takes place when the Hero has done the bidding of a powerful god or goddess, and receives the protection and support of that god or goddess throughout the entire journey back to the world. The second, and more common, sort of journey takes place when the Hero has accomplished his goals against the wishes of another powerful being - a god or goddess, a king, a monster. On this sort of journey, Campbell writes, the Hero encounters increasingly challenging obstacles, sometimes even more challenging than those he faced on his way to accomplishing his goal. The Hero may also create obstacles for the pursuer, challenges for the angry god/goddess/king/monster to overcome, giving him (the Hero) a chance to escape. Campbell cites the Greek myth of Jason (who stole the Golden Fleece with the ruthless, mystical help of Medea, the princess/witch in love with him) and the Chinese father-god Izanagi (whose attempt to rescue his sister from the underworld failed, who was pursued by all kinds of demons, and who distracted them by continually sowing food in their path). In conclusion, Campbell suggests that "if the monomyth is to fulfill its promise [of inspiring humanity to better itself], not human failure or superhuman success [should be its focus] but human success is what we shall have to be shown." This, he states, is the more metaphoric, psychological truth behind the question of whether the Hero returns—whether the human being can bring enlightenment, or even self- transformation, into the world.

"Rescue from Without" Campbell writes here that in other circumstances, when the Hero is (for whatever reason) unable or unwilling to leave the place to which he's journeyed (the Underworld, the source of wisdom, etc.), he has to be rescued - by allies left behind in the real world, by messengers of his friendly god, etc. Campbell cites three stories from three diverse cultures as examples of this situation, one of which is the



Shinto-Japanese tale of the sun-Goddess Amaterasu, whose withdrawal from the world and the violence of her brother, the storm god Susanowo, came to an end as the result of a plea from both her fellow gods and from humanity. In the context of his discussion of his myth, Campbell takes a brief narrative detour to point out that Amaterasu is one of the very few sun goddesses in mythology - the sun, most often, is identified with a male persona. "In her adventures," Campbell writes, "may be sensed a different world feeling ... a certain tenderness toward the lovely gift of light, a gentle gratitude for things made visible..."

He also writes of the shimenawa, a rope placed across the mouth of the cave where Amaterasu was hiding to keep her from retreating again - in other words, to keep her from leaving the world in darkness, and to remind her to keep bringing light. (For an examination of further symbolic meaning of the shimenawa, see "Objects/Places.") Campbell suggests that in all three stories, there is psychological symbolism at work, writing that "consciousness having succumbed, the unconscious nevertheless supplies its own balances, and [the Hero] is born back into the world from which he came." In other words, the unconscious mind knows where life must be lived, and takes the responsibility for making sure the body and the soul return there.

The theme uniting these three aspects of the Hero's Journey is, once again, duality and harmony - two seemingly opposite aspects of existence uniting in one experience. The specific duality at work here is that involving the union of the spiritual life with the physical - that is, the spiritual enlightenment found by the Hero that he must somehow unite with the "reality" of his physical existence, living it or teaching it in the so called "real" world. The saints Campbell refers to in the "Refusal to Return" section manifest this unity by surrendering the physical body, allowing the balance of their existence to shift further towards the spiritual. It's important to note, as Campbell does, that these sorts of Heroes are the exception, rather than the rule - most Heroes return to their physical realities, bringing with them the knowledge they've acquired on their journey.

It's also important to note that the exception proves the rule - that the point of the Hero's Journey, the point of finding duality/enlightenment, is to find a balance, a relatively even sense of equilibrium between the opposing forces. For the saints who "refuse to return," their existence is tilted too far in the direction of the spiritual. For most of humanity, existence is tilted too far in the direction of physicality, materialism, and sensation. For myth in general, the Hero's Journey in particular, and Campbell's writing by implication, the balance must be more even, as it is in the yin/yang symbol (see "Objects/Places") in which both components are of equal size and shape. In terms of existence, therefore, to achieve balance the goal is to have physical and spiritual perspectives of equal psycho-spiritual weight and presence.



## Part 1: Chapter 3, Sections 4, 5 and 6

### Part 1: Chapter 3, Sections 4, 5 and 6 Summary and Analysis

"The Crossing of the Return Threshold" Campbell begins this section by posing the question of why the Hero, having achieved his goal (enlightenment, wisdom, etc.) would want to return to a world where his learning, and what he has to teach, will probably be rejected, and offers a simple answer - it's necessary. Human beings are, and have been throughout time, so caught up in their day-to-day lives and feelings and pettiness that they need to be constantly reminded of that which transcends it all. The Hero's problem, Campbell maintains, is two-fold, presenting what he's learned in such a way as to appeal to those who don't want to hear his message, and holding on to what he's learned. The true hero, Campbell maintains, acknowledges the necessity of doing so and strives to accomplish that goal.

As an illustration of the kind of rejection the Hero may well face, Campbell offers the tale of Rip Van Winkle, whose centuries-long sleep represents the Hero's psycho-spiritual withdrawal into the sub-conscious, and whose subsequent rejection by the world to which he returns represents the rejection faced by the Hero when he returns from his journey. He explains that Rip never knew or understood the knowledge he came back with, and so was unable to defend himself - the Hero, therefore (Campbell says) must maintain awareness of himself and of the results of his journey. As an example of the Hero's struggle to retain his knowledge and status, Campbell cites the Irish hero Oisín, who had journeyed to the realm of timelessness, learned much, came back to the world of time on the back of a mystical horse, and stepped off the horse to claim a trophy of worldly power. The minute his foot touched the ground, Campbell writes, Oisín aged into an ancient man and lost the totality of his wisdom.

He also writes that similar stories (keeping the enlightened one from connection with the physical world and/or the worldly) appears throughout history and culture, and indeed manifests in several symbols - the priest's collar, the Englishman dressing for dinner in the wilds of India or Africa, the artist proudly and perpetually appearing unkempt. In other words, these individuals maintain their psycho-spiritual separation from the world through the overt expression of symbolic difference. This, Campbell suggests, is an essential component of the Hero's Journey - the Hero must, both physically and spiritually, both maintain his power/knowledge and express it in symbolic terms. Campbell recounts, at length, the mythic story of one such hero - an Arab prince, who achieved union with his beloved (and therefore the symbolic, mystic union of male and female) through determined, strong maintenance of his newly found, hard one beliefs and powers.

"Master of the Two Worlds" In a few mythic stories, Campbell writes, the Hero is endowed with the ability to pass back and forth between the two worlds - that of spiritual enlightenment and connection with the way of the universe, and that of physical reality,



daily life, and human existence. He describes moments of such passing between as "a precious symbol, full of import, to be treasured and contemplated ..." In other words, such a moment is the ultimate goal of both the Hero's journey and the Hero's message - such connection, that such ease of movement, is possible for all. Campbell's first example of such movement is taken from the Bible - the story of Christ's transfiguration, his literal/physical ascent into Heaven and his subsequent reunion with God the Father. "Here," Campbell writes, "is the whole myth in a moment: Jesus the guide, the way, the vision, and the companion of return." Campbell here makes a point essential to the overall argument of the book - that stories like that of Christ's ascension are not meant to be taken literally, but as representative of transcendent, symbolic meaning (see "Quotes," p. 230). To illustrate this point further Campbell cites, at length, a tale from the Hindu "Song of the Lord," the Bhagavad Gita, in which the hero/god Arjuna is shown a vision of the infinite all-powerful Krishna, and is endowed with the ability to carry the wisdom associated with the vision and knowledge of Krishna into the world. In other words, Arjuna (like Christ) can move freely back and forth.

At this point Campbell again stresses that "symbols are only the *vehicles* of communication ... they must not be mistaken for the [meaning] of their reference. He also states that the meaning of such symbolic stories, and indeed of the Hero Journey as a whole, is that in order to connect with the universal spirit, the individual (like Christ and Arjuna) must (at least temporarily) abandon connection and/or identification with the worldly. "His personal ambitions being totally dissolved, he no longer tries to live but willingly relaxes to whatever may come to pass in him ... the Law lives in him with his unreserved consent."

"Freedom to Live" In the brief conclusion to this chapter, Campbell writes that the Hero's reward at this stage of his journey is freedom to live without attachment to the world and to daily life. The Hero, Campbell says, has returned from his journey with a connection to the transcendent, the universal, the spiritual, and in doing so has come to realize that the so-called "real" world is an illusion. He is therefore, Campbell writes, able to function in the world without ties to it - he is free to live because he has lived true freedom.

At first glance it seems that in these sections Campbell is contradicting himself. In previous sections, he has referred repeatedly to the necessity for duality, for both aspects of existence functioning effectively in harmony with each other, to bring deeper awareness and fuller living of each other to each other. Here he seems to be suggesting that the physical side of existence must be completely denied in order to achieve enlightenment - but this is not, in fact, what he's talking about. In fact, he's referring to attachment to physical existence, to the belief that the physical/material life is all that is, and all that matters. Campbell is suggesting here that the balance between physical and spiritual (discussed in the previous section) involves moving through the physical with an awareness/experience of the spiritual - a deeper, broader awareness than that which identifies solely with the physical. This is the point made in his references to the stories of Christ and Arjuna - they, along with countless other heroes, saints and/or believers, have left behind not their physical bodies but their identification with their physical bodies. In other words, they have truly realized and come to truly live the principle that their existence, not to mention their ongoing well-being, does not depend upon their



bodies alone. They are nourished by food and by spirit. They are guided by knowledge and by instinct.

On the other hand, Campbell's point in the first part of this section about the need for the enlightened to symbolically indicate himself as being so is, in many ways, a debatable one. There is the sense in what he's saying that there is a certain status to be maintained by presentation of such symbols, a certain "holding themselves separate" that heroes who have achieved enlightenment must maintain if enlightenment is itself to be maintained. Is it truly necessary, though? Does it not defeat the purpose of enlightenment (the balance between the spiritual and physical) to in fact make the symbolic statement that the balance is tilted in favor of the spiritual? Is there not a degree of ego/arrogance/status proclamation here? On the other hand, is the Hero/Enlightened One able to truly accomplish his/her secondary goal of bringing enlightenment into the world if no one IN that world knows s/he is enlightened? Or is that particular mission better accomplished more purely by example? Ultimately, the symbols and stories referred to by Campbell in the "Crossing the Return Threshold" section can be interpreted as referring to the dangers of becoming too much involved with the physical world. If read carefully, the story of the Irish hero Oisín is, in fact, a story of the dangers of too much longing for connection with that world. Again, myth (and Campbell) are making the point that for enlightenment to continue and deepen, balance must be maintained.



# Part 1: Chapter 4

## Part 1: Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

"The Keys" Campbell begins this brief conclusion with a summary of the Hero's Journey, complete with references to all the previously discussed variations on purpose, complication, support of supernatural powers, etc. He discusses how over time, the core myths have evolved to incorporate symbols and meanings more relevant to those that hear them. He then makes the strong suggestion that it's dangerous to interpret myths solely as manifestations of historical events and circumstances. "Wherever the poetry of myth is interpreted as biography, history or science," Campbell writes, "it is killed. The living images become only remote facts of a distant time or sky ... when a civilization begins to reinterpret its mythology in this way, the life goes out of it, temples become museums, and the link between the two perspectives is dissolved."

He cites the particular example of how Christianity has, over the centuries, moved away from the symbolic meanings of the stories in the Bible into a shallow literalism. In support of this contention, he describes in detail a ritual of baptism in the Roman Catholic Church, in which the masculine element of fire (in lit candles and incense) is united with the feminine element of water (the Holy Water in the baptismal font) in a ritual that has its origins in similar ancient rituals uniting male and female. He suggests the Christian perspective on baptism, that it "washes away original sin," is "a secondary interpretation." It is, he maintains, a ritual of marriage, of union between male and female, physical and spiritual. "Mythological symbols," he concludes, "have to be followed through all their implications before they open out the full system of [meanings] through which they represent ... the millennial adventure of the soul."

Here again, Campbell's points might easily be interpreted as having a particularly anti-Christian bias. It must be remembered, however, that he's writing as a citizen of the western, mostly Christian world, from a context of having been raised in a culture steeped, even for non-Christians, in Christian perspectives and attitudes. It's natural, therefore, for someone like Campbell - who has evidently put a great deal of time and psycho-spiritual effort into considering his faith and culture in the broader context of the world as a whole - to have a strong perspective on the culture that's had the strongest influence on him. In other words, he's not stating that Christianity is wrong, or that those who believe in it are flawed; he is suggesting, however, here and throughout the book, that Christianity is a broader, deeper, more universally relevant spiritual experience than many who practice it are aware of. Christianity is not just Christianity. In its truest, deepest form, Campbell suggests, Christianity has more to say about life and spirituality than most Christians seem willing and able to consider. The "keys" referred to in the title, therefore, can be seen as referring to the keys to more profound spiritual experience. The rituals of the Roman Catholic Church Campbell refers to, for example, are "keys" to a larger, psycho-spiritual context, a richer psycho-spiritual life. They unlock the doors not only to harmony between the individual and the broader world of spirit, but also to harmony between individuals of the broader spiritual world. Ultimately, Campbell

suggests that Christianity is, at its core, not just Christianity but Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Greek Myth, American Indian Myth, etc. All are laneways to an ultimate, psycho spiritual truth.



## Part 2: Chapter 1, Sections 1 and 2

### Part 2: Chapter 1, Sections 1 and 2 Summary and Analysis

"The Cosmogonic Cycle" - "Emanations" - "From Psychology to Metaphysics" Here Campbell develops another of his core themes, the relationship between psychology (as exemplified in dream analysis) and mythology. He suggests that evidence for the relationship is fairly conclusive, citing the psycho-analytical work of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and other analysts to prove his point. "With their discovery that the patterns and logic of fairy tale and myth correspond to those of dream," Campbell writes, "the long discredited [fantasies] of archaic man have returned dramatically to the foreground of modern consciousness."

At the same time, however, Campbell suggests that myths can't be directly compared to dream - their language, the vocabulary of symbolism, is similar, but dreams have a direct relationship with the individual experience of the dreamer in that they affect, or at least have the potential to affect or illuminate, every day life. Myths, on the other hand, have a direct relationship with the universal experience of humanity. That experience, Campbell writes, is essentially a statement that "all things and beings ... are the [manifestations] of a ubiquitous power out of which they rise, which supports and fills them during the period of their manifestation, and back into which they must ultimately dissolve." In other words, humanity emerges, it lives, it returns to that from which it emerged. This process, Campbell suggests, is the cosmogonic cycle.

That from which humanity emerges and to which it returns, Campbell then suggests, is defined in different words and in different symbols in different cultures. Intellect and language, he continues, are too limited; symbols and myth, however, are boundless in their capacity for meaning, both universal and individual. They all, he concludes, essentially amount to the same thing: the paradoxical statement that the world without is also within. The subconscious exists in the conscious, the conscious opens itself to the subconscious. In Christian terms, the kingdom of God is both within and without. The Hero's Journey, Campbell writes, is a symbolic/mythic manifestation of the journey towards that union.

"The Universal Round" Campbell suggests here that the cosmogonic cycle is the overall term for the process of emergence, living, and return, "world without end." The "universal round," on the other hand, is Campbell's term for a sequence within the cycle - one emergence, one living, one return. In psychological terms, Campbell asserts, the cycle has a similar three-part pattern but slightly different content within that pattern. There is waking experience (the experience of the outer world), the dream experience (the connections made, through symbol, between the lived experience and their deeper, more universal meaning), and the deep sleep/dreamless experience, in which the human being in question is at one with the source of human energy (God, the Great Mystery, etc.) Here again, Campbell says, is manifest the core principal of duality -





within the noise of life and the symbolic "noise" of dream lies the silence of unity, from which emerges the "noise" of dream and the noise of life. All is in the one, the one is in the all. God is detached from life, yet God is within all life.

In this section Campbell begins an examination of what might be described as the more metaphysical aspects of his theory, and it's here that his arguments can become difficult to follow. Essentially, he's saying that the process of life is endless - physical existence and psycho spiritual awareness emerge from the one source of all things, they continue that existence (with varying degrees of relationship between the two aspects) for a period of time, and then are re-absorbed into the source. "The cosmogonic cycle" is Campbell's umbrella term for the process, while "the Universal Round" is his term for an individual experience of that process. A planet, a rosebush, a human being, a solar system, a butterfly, an amoeba - all undergo "the universal round".

There is a third level of analysis here that Campbell doesn't define with an umbrella term, the experience of meaning inherent in both "the cosmogonic cycle" and "the universal round," in both its physical and psycho-spiritual manifestations. It's tempting to see this third level as applying only to human beings, but it must be remembered there's much about the animal or physical world that humanity has yet to comprehend. For a while it was stated with absolute certainty that there was no way a dolphin, for example, had any kind of intelligence, yet recent scientific analysis has proven there is, in fact, a great deal of intelligence there. Who's to say that that intelligence isn't accompanied by some sort of spiritual awareness or connection that we humans, in our arrogant belief that we are unique in our potential for spirituality, can't even begin to comprehend? It could be argued, in fact, that animals, plants, and other elements of the physical world have a deeper, more immediate and more connection with the life of the spirit than humanity. For us, conscious thoughts and beliefs and desires have a tendency to get in the way. Who's to say that, freed from (for example) concerns over which country has the most land or which neighbor has the bigger car, dolphins aren't better able to connect with the source from which they sprang?

Ultimately, however, it's the experience of being human that Campbell is focused on, and it's that experience (not to mention the deep questions associated with it) to which he turns his attention in the following sections.



## Part 2: Chapter 1, Sections 3, 4, 5 and 6

### Part 2: Chapter 1, Sections 3, 4, 5 and 6 Summary and Analysis

These four sections examine the process of emergence (creation) from a mythic/symbolic perspective.

"Out of the Void - Space" Campbell suggests in this section that cultures, religions and societies throughout the world (cultures as diverse as the Maori from New Zealand, the Hebrews in the Middle East and the Chinese in the Far East) have all created mythologized explanations for the process of life/noise emerging from nothingness/silence. These, he says, are the stories of how the universal power, God's will, the Great Mystery, the Unmoved Mover (see "Important People"), the source of all things, manifests and/or incarnates as the world and its basic physical components (day / night, earth/water/fire/ metal/air, etc.).

"Within Space - Life" "The first effect of the cosmogonic emanations [of universal power]," Campbell says, "is the framing of the world stage of space; the second is the production of life within the frame ... male and female." In other words, the establishment of the physical context for life, followed by the establishment of life itself. There are several myths/stories of this second stage, many of which also contain the symbolically-rich product of their union; the egg, representations of which are found, according to Campbell, in "Greek, Egyptian, Finnish, Buddhistic and Japanese" myths. Separation of male and female, Campbell writes, is a universal symbol for the separation from the spirit/mystery inherent in having physical being. Before emergence, spirit was all one. After emergence, spirit became separated from itself. At re-emergence, spirit becomes one again. The egg, in that context, can be seen as a symbol of the spiritual unity from which all things emerge and upon which all life is built - this is why, Campbell suggests, so many myths and cultures describe the physical world as being built upon eggshell remnants left behind by the emergence of life.

"The Breaking of the One into the Manifold" Campbell states here that in most myths, the process of emergence (the separation of the Great Mystery's manifestations into its various identities) is either a graced, blessed, easy transition or, more commonly, a process fraught with tension between forces of nature. He cites as examples Egyptian, Maori, Greek, Icelandic and Babylonian myths in which the life-nurturing spirit of the earth is forced to become separate from the life-bestowing spirit of the sun and sky so that life can live safely and freely in the realm between. Here, Campbell suggests, is another unity paradox - in the same way as God is both separate from all things (to which he has given independent life) and in all things (as the source of that life), physical life is lived in eternal struggle but surrounded and filled with God's eternal peace (see "Quotes," p. 288.)



"Folk Stories of Creation" Campbell writes in this brief section of local folk tales of how the world and life came into being. He comments that such tales, relatively light-hearted stories (of, for example, how the various animals came to being) seem to make little or no attempt to understand or explain the larger, spiritual, archetypal meaning and source of existence. He adds, however, that the manner of their telling can't disguise that they ultimately do contain references to archetypal truths - the manifestation of death in life, the relationship between good and evil, etc.

Campbell's concern here is genesis - not in terms of the first book of the Bible (which is named Genesis), but in terms of the fuller meaning of the word, beginnings. That said, the Book of Genesis is aptly named, given that the stories contained therein are stories of creation similar to those discussed here. It's interesting to note how Campbell (deliberately?) here avoids references to the Book of Genesis - is he leaving the relationship between the stories he's discussing and Christianity for the reader to determine, having suggested (quite explicitly) in other parts of the book that the connection is there to be found?

In any case, the book's core theme of duality-in-harmony is developed through all four of these sections. The harmony between the one and the many, the noise of life and the silence from which it springs, life and death, the solid surface of the egg and the flowing life it protects (when whole) and frees (when shattered) are all portrayed, here and in myth, as embodying the universal principle of balance between source and manifestation. Campbell seems to be suggesting there that in fact, the goal of the Hero's Journey (enlightenment, awareness of/living that balance) is readily available - all we have to do, as individuals living our version of that journey, is open ourselves to the experience. The Hero's Journey is merely a representation of that opening - a mythic roadmap, as it were.

That said, a new manifestation of the key theme of duality is introduced here - the idea that all things come from God (the source), so there is a sense of separation, but at the same time God (the source) is still *in* all things, so there is union. This is perhaps the ultimate manifestation of this theme - spirit-in-all, all-in spirit - again, a seemingly complex psycho-spiritual truth that becomes ultimately fairly straightforward as long as the basic premise (that there is only one source) is accepted.



## Part 2: Chapter 2, Sections 1, 2, 3 and 4

### Part 2: Chapter 2, Sections 1, 2, 3 and 4 Summary and Analysis

"The Virgin Birth - Mother Universe" Campbell opens this section of his analysis with the statement that "The world-generating spirit of the father passes into the manifold of earthly experience through a transforming medium - the mother of the world." In other words, the male-generated life impulse (semen) of the father is given form by the female-generated life nurturing qualities (the womb) of the mother. "She is virgin," Campbell writes, "because her spouse is the Invisible Unknown [the Unmoved Mover, the Great Mystery, etc.]" He quotes at length from the opening books of the Kalevala, a Finnish collection of myths, in which the great mother (the sea) gives birth to all things, including the god-hero Vainamoinen.

"Matrix of Destiny" Campbell here describes this maternal figure as "the universal goddess" and suggests that in many mythologies she manifests in several forms - she is the bringer of life and also the bringer of death, she is the virgin and the harlot and the old crone, monster and queen of sensuality ... ultimately, the "personifications and precipitators of ... destiny." In other words, the future of each life is contained in the various manifestations of the universal goddess.

"Womb of Redemption" One of the main functions of the virgin/goddess figure in myth, Campbell writes, is to serve as the medium through which a new consciousness (new awareness, new life) can be born. He writes that stories of such a circumstance can be found throughout history and culture, citing the Western/Christian story of the birth of Christ to the Virgin Mary as a well-known example. "In an inconspicuous village," he writes, "the maid is born who will maintain herself undefiled ... a miniature in the midst of men of the cosmic woman ... her womb, remaining fallow as the primordial abyss, summons to itself ... the original power that fertilized the void." In other words, the life-nurturer is ready for to be impregnated by the life-giver. At this point, Campbell discusses how Christian missionaries traveling through the South American home of the Aztecs saw that community's goddess/virgin myths as deliberate, hostile perversions of the Virgin Mary story. He then recounts yet another similar goddess-virgin story from the Hindu tradition - that of the goddess Parvati, who went to extreme measures in order to prepare herself for union with the all-powerful god Shiva.

"Folk Stories of Virgin Motherhood" As he did with "Folk Stories of Creation" in the previous section, Campbell suggests here that in localized, varied stories on the same theme (in this case that of virgin birth), the details of how the ready womb is fertilized vary enormously. "The Buddha descended from heaven to his mother's womb in the shape of a milk-white elephant. The Aztec [maiden] was approached by a god in the form of a ball of feathers ... nymphs [were] beset by ... [Zeus] as a bull, a swan, a shower of gold. Any leaf accidentally swallowed, any nut, or even the breath of a breeze may be enough to fertilize the ready womb. The procreating power is everywhere." In



other words, there is the possibility for rebirth in every situation, in every moment - and, Campbell adds, there is the possibility that "a hero-savior or a world-annihilating demon may be conceived - one can never know." He then cites a story from the African nation of Tonga, a complicated multi-generational tale of birth, death, fear, and survival.

While the connections Campbell makes in this section (between the various mytho-symbolic representations of virgin births, between those representations and their psychological meanings) are made clearly and effectively, there is one connection that, perhaps strangely, he doesn't make. This is the connection between the image of the life-giving womb, developed here, and that of "the world navel," developed in the Prologue and referred to throughout the book. Both "the womb of the goddess" and "the world navel" are portrayed here and in myth as being sources of life, awareness, and physical union with the spirit. It's not unreasonable, therefore, to suggest that "the womb of the goddess" is in fact another symbolic representation/manifestation of "the world navel," with perhaps this key difference. "The world navel" is essentially portrayed as something to which the Hero must journey, while "the womb of the goddess" is essentially portrayed as something from which the Hero must emerge. In this difference, however, can be seen another manifestation of what Campbell refers to as "the cosmogonic cycle" and "the universal round," the endless succession of emergence and return, both physical and psycho-spiritual, that is the ultimate process of all existence.

Aside from the fascinating historical "factoid" about the deliberate misunderstanding between the Spanish explorers and the Aztecs about their respective beliefs about the Virgin Birth, the other important element of this section is the reference in "Womb of Redemption" to the idea that the "womb of the goddess" can be fertilized under almost any circumstances. The symbol/metaphor here suggests that human beings can awaken their own enlightenment under any circumstances, as long as they open themselves to the possibility.



## Part 2: Chapter 3, Sections 1 and 2

### Part 2: Chapter 3, Sections 1 and 2 Summary and Analysis

"Transformations of the Hero" - "The Primordial Hero and the Human" Campbell comments here that as human society and culture evolves, so do its mythic archetypes - from the spirit figures of the Father and Mother to the more human, more legendary, more fact-inspired figures of the Hero-Emperor. These figures, Campbell writes, are defined at least in part by their presence in time - by the fact that some of what they accomplished, according to legend, actually came into existence. As an example, he cites the legend of an ancient Chinese Emperor, who was conceived in under supernatural circumstances but ruled with a strong connection to the "real" world - he discovered the use of various farm and/or household implements, he delved into mathematics and science, his wife was the discoverer of the process for making silk. In other words, god is becoming man, and teaching other men how to become more like him (the god).

"Childhood of the Human Hero" Campbell here suggests that while stories of the god-hero of Part 1 are anchored in psychology (revelation of the Divine, the Great Mystery, the True Source through a journey into the sub-conscious), stories of the man-hero in Part 2 are anchored by spirituality (God, the Divine, etc. is already present, there's no need of journeys). The first task of the man-hero, therefore, is to break down the physical barriers to union with God inherent in having been given a physical body, while his second is to transcend that self spiritually, bringing that spirit to the surface of his life. Campbell cites several examples from Finnish, Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, Medieval, Hebrew, and Native North American myths/legends in which the pattern of exile/return is repeated. The hero-man's third task, Campbell then writes, is to manifest the destined power of his spirit, citing at length the story of a Celtic warrior hero whose power/destiny manifested when he was four years old.

The key point to note here, as Campbell examines the nature of a different kind of hero more anchored in the real world than in the world of myth (like the archetypal hero of Part 1), is that ultimately, both sorts of heroes are undergoing the same process - a striking of the balance between the physical and spiritual worlds. There are perhaps fewer "monsters" for the man-hero to conquer, fewer apparently supernatural guides and/or guardians for the man-hero to learn from, but the ultimate goal remains the same ... the embodiment of what Campbell maintains is the universal principle of harmony and one-ness with God.



## Part 2: Chapter 3, Sections 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8

### Part 2: Chapter 3, Sections 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 Summary and Analysis

"The Hero as Warrior" At the beginning of this section, Campbell writes that "the place of the hero's birth, or the remote land of exile from which he returns to perform his adult deeds among men, is the mid-point or navel of the world ..." (see "Objects/Places - The World Navel"). As such, the hero-man can be seen as an incarnation of the wisdom contained in the world navel - "he is," Campbell writes, "the champion ... of things becoming." He is destined to remove the negative influence of the past (manifested in such symbolic forms, Campbell suggest, as dragons in the countryside, aged tyrants, disease, etc.) and bring his home and his world into newness of life. Here he cites several examples from legend, including that of the Christian St. Martha (who vanquished a dragon) and the Babylonian king Sargon, who destroyed the civilizations of the race that had conquered his own.

"The Hero as Lover" Campbell writes here that "the freedom won from the malice of the monster [slain by the hero] ... is symbolized as a woman." In other words, the hero wins freedom, and thereby wins love - another manifestation of the ultimate spiritual goal of humanity, union between the male and female principles. The difficulties encountered by the man-hero as he slays the (metaphorical) dragon of the past are, as they were in the case of the god-hero, tests of his courage, strength, and worthiness for that union.

"The Hero as Emperor and as Tyrant" The next stage of the man-hero's journey, Campbell writes, is a quest for the identity of his father - the god/spirit that filled his mother's womb with the spiritual semen of life. "Who is my father?" the man-hero asks, and is eventually, inevitably, told. In some myths, Campbell writes, knowledge of the father-identity corrupts the man-hero, leading him to a determination to use his father's power and a tyrannical use of that power - in other words, the man-hero becomes that which he had defeated, and the cosmological cycle continues.

"The Hero as World Redeemer" Following connection with and recognition of his father, Campbell writes here, the man-hero returns to the world either as an emissary/prophet, preaching the truth of the spirit father, or as an embodiment of that truth - "I and my father," the man-hero says, "are one." The function of the man-hero, Campbell writes, in legend as in the life that inspired the legend, is to "slay the tenacious, [conquering] aspect of the father (dragon, tester, ogre king) and release from its control the vital energies that feed the universe." In other words, the man-hero must break the tyrant's control and release his spiritual power - the tyrant/father, like so much else in Campbell's analysis, being a single entity composed of a duality, life-restricter and life-bestower. Campbell then writes that in order to break the cycle discussed in the previous section (man-hero himself becoming tyrant), the man-hero has to sacrifice the



life-restricting side of the father in himself. "The hero of yesterday," Campbell says, "becomes the tyrant of tomorrow unless he crucifies himself today." There may, he adds, seem to be something nihilistic (anti-humanist) in this perspective, but it is in fact a fundamental dichotomy of existence. "This is the wisdom," he claims, "of the end (and the beginning) of the world."

"The Hero as Saint" The last manifestation of the man-hero, Campbell writes, is that of the saint, the man-hero whose revelation of the truth of the universal spirit is so profound and so intense that there can be no relation with the living world. The only option is to withdraw, in the hope/faith that the relationship can and will deepen even further.

"Departure of the Hero" Here Campbell writes that the final stage of the man-hero's journey is death, passing back into the realm of the spirit. He suggests that the first thing the man-hero has to accomplish in order to make this final journey is to reconcile himself to its inevitability. He refers to several examples (Abraham in the Bible, the serpent-hero Quetzalcoatl in Aztec legend, the Irish hero Cuchulainn, the Buddha) as illuminations of how this reconciliation takes place and how death is ultimately lightly embraced.

As Campbell begins to bring his analysis of myth, and the hero's place in myth, to a close, he examines the different ways that "the hero spirit" (to coin a phrase) manifests in relationship to the physical, so-called "real" world. The various forms of hero-ness discussed in this section can, in fact, transcend the analytical boundaries placed around them by the author - in other words, myth heroes can be saints, tyrants, lovers and warriors in exactly the same way as the man-heroes Campbell contemplates. The point is made to draw a parallel, perhaps even create a sense of unity between the two different sorts of hero. As Campbell himself comments throughout the book, god/myth heroes came into existence because of the fundamental human need for inspiration. Man-heroes came into existence as the result of that inspiration. This, therefore, raises the question of who are the contemporary man-heroes? How do their heroisms manifest - in different ways to those that Campbell cites here?

Worthy of particular note in this section is Campbell's commentary on "The Hero as World Redeemer." Once again, without Campbell explicitly making the point, there is a clear parallel between the myth-form he's discussing and Christianity. Careful reading of the commentary clearly suggests there is a definite relationship between the way Christ has become perceived/venerated as a redeemer of the world and the pattern of other man-heroes whose legends have evolved in a similar pattern. An interesting question to consider, as it has been throughout the book, is whether Campbell deliberately avoids making the obvious connection between his subject and Christianity, perhaps in the interest of avoiding an accusation of being anti-Christian, or whether he leaves the making of the connection to the reader. It's reasonable to assume that the latter is at least a strong possibility - Campbell's intent in writing the book is on some level to inspire his reader to think, and to draw his/her own conclusions about his/her belief systems. The question again arises in relation to Campbell's commentary on "The Departure of the Hero," the pattern of which can be seen in the Biblical story of Christ's



bodily ascension into heaven. Here again, Campbell points out (by implication, rather than by explicit definition) that Christian theology, like other spiritual belief systems, is strengthened by the inclusion of mytho-symbolic elements.



## Part 2: Chapter 4, Sections 1 and 2

### Part 2: Chapter 4, Sections 1 and 2 Summary and Analysis

This chapter discusses mythological representations of death - of both the individual and the universe, which are both inevitable and both manifestations of the cosmogonic cycle.

"Dissolutions" - "End of the Microcosm" Death, for the man-hero as well as the ordinary man, is portrayed by Campbell in this section as an opportunity for re-union with the Unmoved Mover (God, the Great Mystery, Great Spirit, etc.). The journey into that re-union, according to many myths, can be as dangerous and full of challenges as the journey into life - indeed, as dangerous as the Hero Journey into enlightenment. Here, Campbell suggests, is the reason why death is, and has always been, marked by detailed, mythically grounded prayer and ritual. He includes a lengthy excerpt from the Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead, in which specific references are made to the parts of the human body that become one with the parts of the gods. Equally specific references are made to the way in which the spirit of the deceased is to become one with the spirit of the gods - to transcend the shell of the cosmic egg and reunite with the life it contains.

"End of the Macrocosm" While the inevitable end of individual life is portrayed in myth as a transcendence of the physical, the end of the life of the universe is portrayed as a return to the state in which life and consciousness came into being—the ultimate reunion between the physical and spiritual worlds. Here Campbell includes few of his own words, quoting at length the end-of-the-world mythologies found in Mayan and Scandinavian myths as well as Jesus' prophecies from the bible about the end of the world.

Campbell's point here is essentially a very simple one and is in fact a reiteration of a point he has made several times throughout the book, albeit in different contexts. That point is this: that at the end of every journey, the Hero's Journey, the man-hero's journey, the journey through existence of every individual and every element of the universe, there is a return to the single source, the fertile oblivion from which life emerged in the first place. Here again can be found a reference to one of Campbell's key themes - that of harmony in duality. From Campbell's perspective, death is the ultimate manifestation of that duality. As he himself puts it, it's the ultimate reunion between the physical and spiritual worlds. The excerpt from *The Book of the Dead* develops this theme to an extreme, as each body part is defined as reuniting with the same body part of a god or goddess, each a manifestation of pure spirit. Body and soul return to that from which it came, and the cosmogonic cycle continues.



# Epilogue: Section 1

## Epilogue: Section 1 Summary and Analysis

"Myth and Society" In this part of the book, Campbell analyzes the various relationships between myth and the world/culture/society in which it came into existence, and the nature/truths of which it attempts to illuminate.

"The Shape-shifter" In this section, Campbell suggests, "there is no final system for the interpretation of myths," suggesting that its meanings, roots and manifestations are all vastly different depending on who's considering them, and why. He offers several examples of how philosophers, analysts and psychologists from a wide range of cultures view myths, and suggests they're all valid (see "Quotes," p. 382).

"The Function of Myth, Cult and Meditation" Campbell writes here that the characteristics of the physical world (gender, appearance, job, nationality) are ultimately a kind of clothing, what a soul wears while functioning on this plane of physical existence - "costumes which we wear for a time on the stage of the world." He also writes that cult, the various initiations, rituals, and ceremonies entered into by the peoples and cultures of the world are attempts to embrace, rather than control, the natural and cosmogonic cycles. He adds that meditation is another way in which human beings can, and do, separate themselves from their "costumes" in an attempt to re-enter and reconnect with the Unmoved Mover, the Great Mystery from which we all emerge and to which we all return. "The aim," he writes, "is not to see, but to realize that one *is*, that essence; then one is free to wander as that essence in the world ... the world too is of that essence. The essence of oneself and the essence of the world: these two are one."

"The Hero Today" Campbell closes this section and the book with an extended commentary on how far humanity, and the individuals functioning within it, have moved from an awareness of the nature of existence as defined by myth. Humanity, he suggests, has become too materialistic and too individualistic to have room for that which transcends the physical world and/or separate, personal identity (see "Quotes," p. 387). Human beings, he writes, have lost awareness of the fact there is darkness and mystery - or has run in fear from that awareness, creating a society focused on false light, artificial meaning, and desperate activity. The gods of contemporary society, he claims (national/religious identity, financial/political power, science and knowledge) are in fact analogous to the monsters encountered, and ultimately overcome, by the heroes of myth.

He then suggests that every individual member of the human race has a responsibility to become a hero him/herself, conquer those monsters for him/her self, and take themselves on their own journey into awareness. "The ideals and temporal institutions of no tribe, race, continent, social class, or century can be the measure of the inexhaustible and multifariously wonderful divine existence that is the life in all of us."



Society, he concludes, has nothing to offer the Hero - it is the Hero who has much to offer society, and must do so (see "Quotes," p. 391) if society and humanity are to survive and thrive.

In the first two parts of this concluding section, Campbell reiterates his point that humanity is ultimately united across cultural, spiritual, linguistic and economic boundaries by a shared mythic experience. Throughout the book he has made this point by example, presenting parallels between various myths of various cultures - here he makes the point explicit, stating it outright. Myth is itself the shape-shifter, as referenced in the title to Part 1 of this section, in that the truth at the core of its existence (the common experience of being human) takes different forms/shapes depending on the culture in which it develops.

The third part of this section contains Campbell's strongest indictment of the culture within which he's writing; a culture essentially dominated by western materialism and focus on sensation rather than meaning. The human experience, in Campbell's opinion, is becoming shallower and narrower, but at the same time presents the same opportunity as human experience has always had, whether in the cave, the castle, or the condominium. That opportunity, Campbell maintains, is the chance to look beyond the physical. Every encounter between person and person, person and object, person and self, is a chance to seek spiritual connection, unity in the face of difference.

It's interesting to consider here that Campbell was writing in the late 1940s, only a few years after World War II, which was simultaneously a source of great division and great unity (and perhaps an example of the duality/harmony principle Campbell refers to so often in this book). In other words, contemporary society in all its self-centeredness seems to consider the movement towards enlightenment and transcendence to be its own invention. However, it was happening almost half a century ago, it was happening a millennium ago (as indicated by the myths and stories of the time), and, it's reasonable to assume, it will be happening a millennium from now. Even when the universe dies (as it will, according to Campbell's principle of the cosmogonic cycle), the physical will continue to strive, perhaps in spite of itself, for union with the spiritual. This is, in fact, is the true core of the cosmogonic cycle, the movement back and forth between spiritual and physical and back again.



# **Characters**

**The Author (Joseph Campbell)**

**Sigmund Freud**

**Carl Jung**

**Archetype**

**The "Unmoved Mover"**

**The Hero**

**The Herald, the Supernatural Guide, the Guardian, the Beast**

**The Goddess-Mother, the Ogre-Father**

**The Boddhisatva**

**Amaterasu**



# Objects/Places

## Myth

Myth is the term used to describe a story, generally with some kind of spiritual overtone, offering either an explanation for why an aspect of the natural world is the way it is, an exploration/explanation of human nature, or both. Often played out by archetypal characters (see "Important People - Archetype"), myths exist in most cultures and in all historical periods. They are often the foundations for religious or moral teaching.

## The Monomyth

This is the term used by Campbell to define the one myth that he suggests lies at the core of the human experience in both its physical and psychological aspects: the myth of the journey. This journey might be summed up as a movement from darkness (pre-birth existence), through birth, life/struggle, accomplishment, and teaching, to the return to the darkness (death, or at the very least leaving the world of the living).

## The Hero's Journey

The Hero's Journey is a specific version of the monomyth, an archetypal story incorporating the various aspects of the monomythic journey of transformation into a more detailed, more psychologically varied and more spiritually revelatory narrative. In other words, the Hero's Journey is the journey of life, heightened and deepened, given dramatic impact in order to increase psychological impact.

## The World Navel

This is Campbell's term for the place from which the energy of life and enlightenment flows. He writes that it manifests in a variety of ways in a variety of myths - when the Hero is swallowed (by a whale, for example, or an angry monster), the belly of the beast (from which the Hero must emerge through a feat of strength or cunning) is the trigger for a new awareness of power. Other manifestations include symbolic trees of life / knowledge, deep caves or pools, eggs, etc.

## Yin/Yang

This is the term given to the ancient (and contemporary) Chinese symbol of unity and oneness. In the symbol, light and dark exist in perfect relationship and balance to/with each other, an example of the ultimate unity between physical and spiritual, conscious and sub-conscious, that Campbell theorizes is at the heart of the quest motivating the



Hero's Journey and, indeed, all religious/spiritual pursuits. This theory is one of the core themes of *Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

## The Cross and the Shimenawa

According to Campbell, both the Cross and the Shimenawa are symbols of faith, sacrifice, and relationship between spiritual leaders and those they are striving to teach. The cross (a representation of the means by which the life-and-wisdom bestowing Christ was killed) is the Christian version, the Shimenawa (a representation of the means by which the Japanese life-giving sun goddess Amaterasu was prevented from hiding in a cave). In other words, both the cross and the Shimenawa represent the way to enlightenment. Christ transcended the death he experienced on the cross; therefore, the cross represents the death that must be transcended by any individual if the ultimate union of God experienced by Christ after he died is to be realized. Amaterasu, meanwhile, was forced by the Shimenawa (a rope crossing the entrance to her cave/hiding place) to face the dangers from which she wanted to hide. Therefore, the Shimenawa also represents the "death" (fear) that must be transcended in the name of life. The likening of the cross and the Shimenawa is, in Campbell's analysis here, another manifestation of the way different specific aspects of different myth manifest the same universal, archetypal truth.

## The Life Force

This is Campbell's term for the universal spirit and/or energy at the core of all existence. It is the aspect of the Unmoved Mover (see "Important People") that motivates all life, and is the trigger for the Cosmogonic Cycle (see below).

## The Cosmogonic Cycle / the Cosmic Round

This is Campbell's term for the universal cycle of life/death/rebirth followed by all aspects of conscious existence. The universe goes through it, galaxies go through it - solar systems, planets, humans, animals, plants, insects, single celled organisms, all living things go through it. The cosmogonic cycle is constant and endless. The one aspect of the universe that doesn't go through the cycle is the Life Force - it manifests in the cycle and in every being/entity living out the cycle, but it is not the cycle itself. The Universal Round is Campbell's term for one individual's experience of the Cosmogonic Cycle. An entity is born, it lives, and it dies - it emerges from the world of darkness and mystery, inhabits the world of light and growing knowledge, and returns to the world of darkness and mystery. The Universal Round is a manifestation of the Cosmogonic Cycle. The Hero's Journey is a specific version of the Universal Round.



## **The Physical World**

This is the world of living things, of living beings, and of living relationships. One of myth's purposes is to explain and illuminate how the various aspects of the physical world relate and came into being. Its main purpose, however, is to illuminate ways in which the physical world can be transcended in order to gain greater unity to the spiritual world.

## **The Spiritual World**

This is the world to which all living things are connected through manifestation of the Life Source. All life, all awareness, all truth ultimately emerges from the spiritual world. The Hero's Journey is a metaphor for the ultimate human journey to deeper connection with the spiritual world.





# Themes

## Universality of Archetypal Experience

This is one of Campbell's core themes, the contention that all humanity is linked by certain universalities - birth, maturing, experience of a mother or father figure, experience of sexuality, experience of aging and death. He first explores this theme by linking mythic stories and the various aspects thereof with psychological analysis. At several points throughout the book, for example, he uses dream imagery taken from actual case studies of individuals undergoing dream analysis as examples of how dream imagery (i.e., a manifestation of an individual's psychological/spiritual state) is similar, in both manifestation and meaning, to that of mythology.

Campbell further contends that this universal connection between individual members of the human race is also made manifest in the similarities of all the stories of all the cultures of all the world (fairy tales, myths, dreams, fictional narrative, etc.) that explore these universalities. He supports this contention by drawing parallels between various myths, stories and spiritual teachings - for example, the Biblical story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the Ancient Egyptian story of the resurrection of the god Osiris. Both individuals were leaders, both proclaimed a spiritual relationship with God (the Unmoved Mover, the Great Mystery, the Life Force, etc), both were brought to death by manifestations of evil, and both were reborn. Indeed, further parallels are drawn throughout the book between these myths and several others in which the central archetypal figure returns from death (or the spiritual equivalent thereof), as Christ and Osiris did, with new knowledge and wisdom - a further awareness of connection between the world of the living and the world of the spirit. He even draws a parallel between such stories and the fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood*, who emerged from death (being swallowed by the Wolf) with new strength and courage (to skin the Wolf and wear the skin as proof of her ability to transcend death). This theme is in fact a manifestation of the book's second core theme, a focus on the relationship between the dualities and unities of experience.

## Duality / Unity

According to Campbell's analysis of myths and mythology, the experience of life is filled with dualities: physical/spiritual, conscious/subconscious, universal/individual, male/female, nurturing/destructive, and others. As a result of this analysis, he contends that many myths and/or stories, while essentially dramatizing the nature of these dualities, are in fact attempts to awaken awareness of the essential reality behind them - that there is, in fact, unity. In other words, Campbell asserts that duality is, in fact, a manifestation of unity - for example, that the way to win is to learn from losing; that the way to knowledge is to discover what you don't understand; that the way to understand spirit is to live in the physical world. It's all part of the same process of growth, the journey towards ultimate awareness.



Unity, Campbell further contends, emerges from the Unmoved Mover - the Life Force, the Great Mystery, God, however it's referred to in one of an infinite number of cultures. All experiences, all activities, all love/hate, all strength/vulnerability, all femaleness/maleness - mythology ultimately teaches, according to Campbell, that they're all manifestations of that unnamed and at the end of the day unnamable energy that fills, defines, and motivates all existence. He also suggests that all religious teachings (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.) are, in spite of their specific differences in how they view life, manifestations of myth's teaching. Christ, Buddha, Mohammed, and the Hindu prophets all, in their various ways, embody and preach about routes to transcendence of the physical body and ultimate union with the Source. In other words, myth and religion (and ultimately life) are all about the journey - from a realm of spirit, through a plane of physical existence, back to the realm of spirit. The steps along that journey, and indeed its ultimate destination, are explored through development of Campbell's third core theme.

## The Function of Symbolism

For Campbell, myths and stories are not to be taken as actual representations of history. They are, on the other hand, intended to suggest meaning - they are not stories of events, but rather illuminations of the meaning of those events. Campbell illustrates this point through a highly varied selection of myths taken from an array of sources - the Ancient Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Chinese, Japanese, Buddhist and Babylonian; more contemporary African, Far Eastern and North American; even more contemporary fairy tales like *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Cinderella*. All these stories contain symbols of meaning. No one truly believes, for example, that a girl in a red cloak was actually swallowed by a wolf, in the same way as no one truly believes the son of the Ancient Greek sun god recklessly drove his father's chariot (the sun) across the sky and died because he didn't listen to instructions. The stories (myths) of the girl in the red cloak and the boy in the chariot, however, both contain universal truths. On a smaller level, both are warnings about the dangers of irresponsible, incautious behavior. On a more universal, archetypal, psychological level they reveal universal truths about the potential for transcending death (being swallowed by a wolf) and the necessity for youth to transcend the power of the domineering father figure. In the case of the example cited the youth dies in the attempt, but that doesn't diminish the story's point that the attempt is always necessary.

It's important, though perhaps controversial, to note here that Campbell maintains, throughout the book, that the Christian Bible is to be regarded in the same light as, for example, the myths of Ancient Greece, China or Egypt - as a collection of myths/stories illuminating spiritual truth, rather than as a literal documentation of historical events. At the time the book was first published (1949), and perhaps even in contemporary Western society, this perspective comes across as revolutionary, and perhaps heretical. The point is not made here to suggest that Campbell is anti-Christian. It is made, rather, to suggest that Campbell, on some level, is suggesting that truths espoused by the Bible and Christianity are ultimately universal, that they (in what some might say is a

Christ-like point of view) point to the presence of God (Spirit) in all things and in all lives regardless of how they live and what they believe.

# Style

## Perspective

It's evident from the book's opening phrases that Campbell has spent a great deal of time and energy, both physical and intellectual, exploring his subject. In addition, the variety of the myths/stories he includes as examples, the variety of cultures from which those examples are taken, and the details he cites in those examples, indicate that his efforts have been painstaking and thorough. In short, it's clear that he knows what he's talking about - or, at the very least, that he's prepared to back up his theories with extensive research. His reasons for using this research in the way he does, however, are not immediately apparent. On the one hand, he seems to be making a plea for universal compassion and understanding - he never makes the point explicit, but in his multiplicity of illuminations from various myths and in his development of the theme of duality/unity, he does seem to be asking for a broadening of perspective.

Perhaps a more overt clue to his intent can be found in the book's epilogue - specifically in its final chapters. Here he comments, with what seems to be barely restrained passion, on how society (western society in particular) seems to be oriented towards accumulating material wealth, power and knowledge, as opposed to developing wisdom and awareness of the spiritual world. In this context, then, it's possible to see his intended audience as those who have focused on the former sort of world, which he seems to think would be the vast majority of people (a possibility perhaps even more relevant in contemporary culture than it was at the time the book was first published in 1949). Whether anyone in his intended audience heard or hears what appears to be his message is debatable. There is certainly a more openly professed movement towards a broader psycho-spiritual understanding in contemporary culture than there has been in the recent past (perhaps even since the book was published). However, whether Campbell's writing played a role in that movement's development, or whether that movement will have any lasting effect on culture and/or society as a whole, is uncertain. What is certain is that anyone who reads *Hero with a Thousand Faces* intelligently and with an open mind will certainly find, in its pages, a great deal to think about and perhaps even marvel at.

## Tone

The book's tone is, in general, relatively academic. Campbell presents his arguments systematically, in clear and unemotional language. He effectively avoids the book becoming too academic or dry by the including a considerable number of examples, of dreams, stories, fairy tales and myths, some at considerable length. In other words, he interrupts his sometimes dangerously intellectual theorizing with emotionally engaging storytelling - perhaps as an illustration of his core thematic point, that myth and story dress up (potentially boring) lectures about human truth with plot, character, humor, symbol and subtext. In short, the book's tone is generally as objective as such an



extensive development of a theory can be - the author of such a book must care deeply (if not passionately) about his/her subject if the effort to research it in detail and write it at such length is to be sustained. There are points at which Campbell's fascination with, enjoyment of, and passion for his subject become evident, but these in no way hinder the clear presentation of his point - in fact, they enhance it. In other words, Campbell's passion for his subject, while carefully restrained and moderated, is undeniably infectious.

All that said, in the previously discussed final sections of the book (in which Campbell refers to the way society has drifted from a myth-based exploration and understanding of itself) a certain sadness creeps quietly into his writing. His analysis and commentary becomes faintly less objective. There is almost a sense of pleading about his final words, as though he's begging society to return to its own Hero's Journey, its quest to understand and care for itself. Does this reduce the overall impact of his work? For some readers it might; for other readers, however, it might in fact awaken them to a sense of connection with his themes and awareness of their own relevance to their individual lives.

## Structure

The book is set out in a clear, almost rigid structure. Following the Prologue, in which he discusses, in very broad terms, the subject he's exploring, the first part of the book is presented in the context of the Hero's Journey. Each stage of that journey, as well as the way in which each stage manifests and varies throughout the myths of the world (and the world of the myths), receives its own section in the chapter. This pattern, of clearly delineating what subject is discussed in which section, continues throughout the book, and indeed manifests in the multiplicity of headings and sub-headings Campbell uses to anchor his structure. The second part of the book is also defined by headings and sub-headings, with Campbell using them as structural anchors for his exploration of the macrocosmic context of the Hero's Journey - in other words, its larger cultural resonances and meanings. Throughout the book, Campbell's theories are broken down into what some might call "manageable chunks." If presented without the guideposts of headings, and subheadings, not to mention the careful focus on the specific subjects discussed under them, the book's ideas and meaning might well become overwhelming. Defined by structure as it is, *Hero with a Thousand Faces* is ultimately not only effective in conveying its theme, but is also engaging as an intellectual narrative moving a reader carefully along the path of increased knowledge, understanding, and awareness. It is, in fact, something of a map for the individual reader's Hero's Journey.

## Quotes

"The latest incarnation of Oedipus, the continued romance of Beauty and the Beast, stand this afternoon on the corner of Forty-seventh Street and Fifth Avenue, waiting for the traffic light to change." p. 4.

"Dream is the personalized myth, myth the depersonalized dream; both myth and dream are symbolic in the same general way of the dynamics of the psyche." p. 19.

"The happy ending is ... a misrepresentation; for the world, as we know it, as we have seen it, yields but one ending: death, disintegration, dismemberment, and the crucifixion of our heart with the passing of the forms that we have loved." p. 26.

"The ... hero and his ultimate god, the seeker and the found - are thus understood as the outside and the inside of a single, self-mirrored mystery, which is identical with the mystery of the manifest world. The great deed of the supreme hero is to come to the knowledge of this unity in multiplicity, and then to make it known." p. 40.

"The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand." p. 51.

"...the psychological dangers through which earlier generations were guided by the symbols and spiritual exercises of their mythological and religious inheritance, we today ... must face alone, or, at best, with only tentative, impromptu, and not often very effective guidance. This is our problem as modern, 'enlightened' individuals, for whom all gods and devils have been rationalized out of existence." p. 104.

"...every failure to cope with a life situation must be laid, in the end, to a restriction of consciousness. Wars and temper tantrums are the makeshifts of ignorance; regrets are illuminations that come too late." p. 121.

"...the grace that pours into the universe ... is the same as the energy ... that annihilates and is itself indestructible; the delusion-shattering light of the Imperishable is the same as the light that creates ... the fire blazing in the sun glows also in the fertilizing storm; the energy behind the elemental pair of opposites, fire and water, is one and the same." p. 146.

"... the infantile fantasies which we all cherish still in the unconscious play continually into myth, fairy tale, and the teachings of the church, as symbols of indestructible being ... the mind feels at home with the images, and seems to be remembering something already known. But the circumstances is obstructive too, for the feelings come to rest in the symbols and resist passionately every effort to go beyond." p. 177

"...we are concerned ... with problems of symbolism, not of historicity. We do not particularly care whether Rip van Winkle, [the Arab Prince], or Jesus Christ ever actually lived. Their *stories* are what concern us: and these stories are so widely distributed over



the world - attached to various heroes in various lands - that the question of whether this or that local carrier of the universal theme may or may not have been a historical, living man can be of only secondary moment." p. 230.

"Wherever the poetry of myth is interpreted as biography, history or science, it is killed. The living images become only remote facts of a distant time or sky ... when a civilization begins to reinterpret its mythology in this way, the life goes out of it, temples become museums, and the link between the two perspectives is dissolved." p. 249.

"Where the inherited symbols have been touched by a Lao-tse, Buddha, Zoroaster, Christ or Mohammed - employed by a consummate master of the spirit as a vehicle of the profoundest moral and metaphysical instruction - obviously we are in the presence rather of immense consciousness than of darkness." p.257.

"From the perspective of the source, the world is a majestic harmony of forms pouring into being, exploding, and dissolving. But what the swiftly passing creatures experience is a terrible cacophony of battle cries and pain. The myths do not deny this agony (the crucifixion) they reveal within, behind and around it essential peace (the heavenly rose)." p. 288

"...when scrutinized in terms not of what it is but of how it functions, of how it has served mankind in the past, of how it may serve today, mythology shows itself to be as amenable as life itself to the obsessions and requirements of the individual, the race, the age." p. 382.

"...a transmutation of the whole social order is necessary, so that through every detail and act of secular life the vitalizing image of the universal god-man who is actually immanent and effective in all of us may somehow be made known to consciousness." p. 389.

"It is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse. And so every one of us shares the supreme ordeal ... not in the bright moments of his tribe's great victories, but in the silences of his personal despair." p. 391.



## Topics for Discussion

Consider specific examples of narrative from contemporary narrative - a film, a novel, a television program. Analyze their stories in the context of Campbell's analysis of the Hero's Journey. What are the various counterparts between Campbell's archetypal stories and situations and those of stories such as, for example, - *The Lord of the Rings*, the *Harry Potter* books, or even a classic film like *The Wizard of Oz*?

Examine your own cultural or religious background for comparisons to Campbell's mythic stories - the Monomyth, the story of the virgin birth, etc. What are some of the specific points of similarity? What are the differences?

Debate whether Campbell's commentary on the similarity of stories between various belief systems (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, ancient myths) challenge or strengthen those systems. Does a similarity between, for example, the various virgin birth stories invalidate them all as a focus of belief and behavior? Or do they strengthen that focus by illuminating how the story is, in fact, a belief shared (in some way or another) by large numbers of people transcendent of time and/or culture?

At the close of *The Hero with the Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell writes that "the social unit is not a carrier of religious content, but an economic-political organization ... in hard and unremitting competition for material supremacy and resources." He also writes that "within progressive societies ... every last vestige of the ancient human heritage of ritual, morality and art is in full decay ..." Debate whether this is true: Has society become that which Campbell describes? Has this form of society in fact developed its own myths to replace the more spiritually oriented myths of the past? What is the future of such a society, and the individuals who inhabit it?

Create a myth-based story based on a personal experience of transformation, change or learning. Use the characteristics of the Hero Journey, as defined by Campbell, as a pattern or template for your work. Feel free to either use specific details from your personal experience, or those of others, to create an archetypal story illuminating a universal human value.

Consider the relationship between your home society/culture, myth, and Campbell's point at the end of the book about the importance of a healthy society's connecting with its myths. How connected is your society to its own particular myths, and myths in general? Is the current state of connection healthy or unhealthy? What would be the benefit of deeper, more mythic/psychological, less superficial perspective on your culture? What would be the detriment?

Consider the life/nature of two people in your life whom you consider to be a hero - one, someone you know personally, the other a political/social/spiritual/military leader. Examine their lives and actions for Campbell's patterns of heroic behavior and/or perspective and/or experience. Write a biography of those persons in the form of the Hero's Journey.